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Does the Cogito Have (a) Sex?

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Abstract

This thesis begins with a critique of Quentin Meillassoux's *Après la finitude*. Chapter One argues against Meillassoux's injunction to abandon the "transcendental," while putting forth a Lacanian solution to the "correlationist" problem. Chapter Two expounds the meaning of the Cartesian subject, with a Lacanian twist. Under this view, the subject is split, and this split carries the name "sexual difference." The *cogito* is "split" *qua* sexual difference, whereby sexual difference names the structural antagonism/impossibility that exists in language and bears on all speaking subjects. The second chapter focuses primarily on explaining how sexual difference marks the *cogito*, by expanding on Alenka Zupančič's "What *is* Sex," and Lacan's *Seminar XX*. Finally, Chapter Three discusses the Cartesian phenomenon of love, in looking at Descartes' most obscure text, *The Passions of the Soul*. The third chapter serves as a "testing site" for the theses of the first two chapters, such that the experience of love makes explicit the argument that *the cogito is split*.

Keywords: Philosophy, Theory, Cogito, Unconscious, Sexual Difference, Transcendental

Summary for Lay Audience

This thesis investigates the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's reading of René Descartes' *cogito* (the argument that my thought necessarily implies my being) against the backdrop of contemporary French philosophy. Why is this important, you might ask? What is striking about psychoanalytic theory is how it comes to bear on how we conceive of identity and our relation to others. For the purpose of this thesis, we will venture to understand what psychoanalysis, early modern philosophy, and "sexual difference," share in common. The wager of this thesis is that the *cogito*, the figure that issues from the supposed dualism (the assertion that one's mind and body are separate), provides insight into the contemporary cultural situation, specifically pertaining to questions of "sex" and "love." While the cogito has been presumed responsible for a myriad of harms, from male domination to environmental catastrophe, this thesis argues that what we claim to know about the cogito is misleading. In contrast to this assumption, this will argue that there is a subversive kernel within the philosophy of Descartes.

Acknowledgment

To my Masters.

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Chapter 1

1 *Prolegomena to Any Future (Continental) Philosophy*

The perdurance of philosophy and the question of (Continental) philosophy's relation to futurity is a concern that subtends and organizes the research of this thesis. This question determines the partnerships that are forged, or forced, in herein. That is to say, the speculative partnership between René Descartes and Jacques Lacan bears on the debate that surrounds the philosophy, or theory, of the subject. To this end, this thesis draws attention to the arguments and consequences of formulating a philosophy of the Cartesian subject, with a Lacanian twist. Thus, we will venture to re-visit the Cartesian "wound," the unyielding site of modern philosophy's beginning, which has produced what a certain philosopher has termed the "specter" of the Cartesian *cogito*: a haunting, ubiquitous hum that plagues Western philosophy and academia more broadly.[1] Not only does this thesis intend to revisit the site of the cogito's emergence, it also puts forth a reading of the cogito that challenges the aegis of the philosophical enterprise "at both ends" of the academic tradition.

"Sexual difference" is not what comes to mind when most of us think of the *cogito*. Rather, the cogito solicits the figure of a self-transparent thinking substance, an epistemic subject who relies on the guarantee of a non-deceiving Other. It is the intention of this thesis to "desynonymize" the cogito from its proverbial cage, and to clear a way for a discursive opening whereby it can be thought with psychoanalysis.[2] Accordingly, this thesis strings together Lacan's most explicit readings of Descartes in the *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, Seminar XX: Encore,* and *Seminar XIV: The Logic of Phantasy*.

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[1] The "specter" of the Cartesian cogito which haunts 'Western Academia" is Žižek's formulation in *The Ticklish Subject*.

[2] I have borrowed the term "Desynonymize" from Tilottama Ragan's *Deconstruction and the Remainder of Phenomenology*.

Chapter One ("The World Descartes Left Us") begins with a challenge to Quentin Meillassoux's indictment of Kant in *Après la finitude*, in order to demonstrate how the more radical critique of "correlationism," already exists in Lacan. In this chapter, Meillassoux is considered at his most speculative, while attention is drawn to his presuppositions, namely the presumed homogeneity between "subject" and "reality." Through Lacan, the formulation of the "correlation" is inverted, and a "negative correlation," is postulated: the correlation of the split subject who straddles the Impossible/Real, thus boring a hole in the concept of reality. This (re)formulation poses a fundamental challenge to Meillassoux's argument, thus introducing a new task: to relate the inaccessible In-itself to the split in the subject herself. What will break the solipsistic circle of correlationism is the hole that bores from *within* the subject, which marks the very presence of the Thing. Otherwise put, this chapter focuses on highlighting the meaning of the subject *qua* object, and how this formulation links Descartes to Lacan. Chapter Two, the eponymous chapter of this thesis, seeks to bore a deeper hole in thinking through the structural problem of sexual difference. Here, Descartes is put into dialogue with Freud and Lacan, in order to respond to the question that organizes the inquiry of this thesis. Thus, this chapter argues that it is possible to postulate a "masculine" and "feminine" cogito, and the effort of the second chapter is to defend this claim. Finally, Chapter Three ("Cogito in Love") functions as testing site, whereby the previous theses can be "tested" in parallel with the Cartesian concept of love. This chapter argues that the experience of love makes explicit the claim that the cogito is split, a split that is supported by the logic of sexuation.

What is *sui generis* about this thesis is that it takes up previous arguments and conjectures, while engaging with contemporary philosophy, in order to further these theses/hypotheses; namely, that the cogito can be conceived of as "split," thus, it bears the mark of a schism that is structured by sexual division. This claim was put forth by Slavoj Žižek in the late nineties (and it somewhat elaborated on in *Less Than Nothing*), and is supported by the incursion of Alenka Zupančič *What is Sex?* (2017), a text which forces us to rethink sex as an ontological question. While Zupančič does not engage Descartes explicitly, this thesis will demonstrate how the developments put forth in *What is Sex?* enable us to read Descartes in relation to the formulas of sexuation, which affords

us the possibility to postulate that the Cartesian subject is the subject of the unconscious. Furthermore, apropos the challenge posed by Meillassoux's *Après*, rather than softening the Kantian blow, it enables us to respond to Meillassoux's critique of correlationism, venturing further than he aimed. Thus, the double incursion of *What is Sex?* and *Après la finitude* serve to present (despite the latter's intention) a novel defense of the subject of philosophy, conceived along Lacanian lines.

The World Descartes Left Us

"I don't much like hearing that we have *gone beyond* Hegel, the way one hears we have *gone beyond* Descartes. We go beyond everything and always end up in the same place/ Hence, an ever more elaborate mastery."

Lacan, *Séminaire II*, 71

The incursion of Quentin Meillassoux's *Après la finitude* has forced us to rethink philosophy's relationship to Kant. Those whose work is firmly grounded in German Idealism are less enthusiastic about this emphatic leap into realist terrain. Apropos of the key argument in *Après,* Meillassoux contends that, since Kant, philosophy cannot overcome the "correlation" of subject and world. His polemical *bon mot*, "correlationism," claims that thinking the world can only take place subjectively. Otherwise put, there is a philosophical straitjacket between thought and being. Meillassoux sets out a philosophical task for himself that is characteristic of all courageous thinking: utterly lacking in humility and seeking a violent breach with previous thought "is the relinquishing of transcendentalism" (Meillassoux, 27).

Among Meillassoux's critics is Catherine Malabou, who, in her provocative essay, "Can We Relinquish the Transcendental?" responds to Meillassoux's call to abandon the transcendental and the (finite) subject of philosophy. As Malabou notes, in the French, the actual word used by Meillassoux is not "relinquish," as it appears in the translated text, but *abandonment*: "*l'abandon du transcendental*" (Malabou, 243). She notes that Meillassoux, and others who follow his theoretical steps, are not seeking a "negotiated rupture," as previous philosophers have, but rather, a total abandonment of the transcendental. To this end, Malabou raises a question that pertains to the future of Continental philosophy: can we relinquish the transcendental (Kantian philosophy) and still call ourselves (Continental) philosophers?

At this juncture, it seems important to gloss what is meant by "the transcendental." The transcendental is a philosophical concept that issues directly from Kant's critical philosophy. In attempt to overcome the Humean problematic of an irreducible contingency and the dogmatic metaphysics of Christian Wolff (and Leibniz), Kant's critical project transformed philosophy, launching what we now call "Continental" philosophy. Kant's philosophy was assumed to be a fortified knowledge—in the sense of "indestructible" knowledge—as Lacan qualifies the indestructibility of Freud's discovery. By this, I allege, following Malabou, that Kant's critical philosophy has stained all of philosophy which has followed in its wake. In his *Critique of Pure Reason,* the transcendental is coextensive with the *a priori* (independent of all experience), and it is synonymous with questions that concern the condition of possibility of knowledge.

Meillassoux's argument focuses on deduction in the Kantian armature, arguing that the structure of the *a priori* and condition of possibility is circular. Thus, there can be no transcendental deduction of the transcendental. It remains a "presupposition" without demonstration. Deduction, as a formal operation, is supposed to be leached of uncertainty, and without presupposition. Meillassoux puts Kant on the rack for failing to deduce, and demonstrate absolutely, the categories, ideas, and principles that ground the transcendental deduction. He argues that there is no deduction of the transcendental deduction in Kant. Meillassoux's horror issues from the fact than Kant *posits*, rather than demonstrates, these facticities. Indeed, from Descartes to Kant, these "presuppositions" protrude and, in doing so, reveal gaps—*but are they, the presuppositions, not the very seduction of deduction*? Descartes' recourse to the Big Other (God) and Kant's positing of categories, principles, and ideas without absolutely demonstrating them is suggestive of a certain gap or hole that organizes philosophy as such.[3] The horror of what is philosophically unaccounted for; the "presuppositions" that haunt philosophy are certainly not of novel concern. Malabou reminds us of Hegel's critique of Kant, and the

[3] In the *Écrits*, Lacan writes: "In the *ego* Descartes accentuates through the superfluousness of its function in certain of his Latin texts (a subject of exegesis I leave here to the specialists), one must grasp the point at which it continues to be what it presents itself as: dependent on the God of religion. A curious scrap [*chute*] of *ergo*, the ego is bound up with this God. Descartes' approach is, singularly, one of safeguarding the ego from the deceitful God, and thereby safeguarding the ego's partner, going so far as to endow the latter with the exorbitant privilege of guaranteeing the eternal truths only insofar as he is their creator," 865.

contemporary reverberations that can be found in Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida (Malabou, 244). In *Glas*, Derrida describes the transcendental viscerally, as the "vomit of the system," as that which imposes itself somewhat arbitrarily, while remaining "outside." For her part, Malabou focuses on Foucault's engagement with the transcendental in *Archeology of Knowledge,* as well as in *What is Enlightenment*?

Malabou argues that we must distinguish between the operative gestures of relinquishing and abandoning. She argues that Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida (the "previous philosophers") *relinquished* the transcendental (a negotiated rupture). What remains in their system is a Kantian residuum, a "quasi" transcendental remainder, which, according to Malabou, is the trace of the "transcendental," and whether this term exudes metaphysical orthodoxy or not, "[it] circumscribes what may be seen as the minimal creed of continental philosophy" (Malabou, 245). She finds refuge in Foucault's definition of the transcendental in *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* which, she argues, is emblematic of the posture associated with a negotiated rupture (relinquishment), rather than abandonment. As a "play of forms," the transcendental "anticipates all contents," as they have "already rendered them possible" (Foucault, 421). Foucault's description is not an attempt to abandon the transcendental *tout court* but should be conceived as a critical (re)elaboration.[4] Conversely, Meillassoux and others like him, seek to abandon *tout court* the transcendental and its consequences, which includes its "minimal creed," and any residuum. Specifically, Malabou argues that Meillassoux seeks to abolish irreducibility as such (Malabou, 246). The philosophical master concept of irreducibility, Meillassoux argues, is not borne of what could be deduced, but rather it remains purely factual: it is decisionary. As Meillassoux writes in the opening pages: "*Correlation* is of course another name for synthesis," by this, he argues that the synthesis of correlation is the inextricable bond between subject and object, such that each becomes unthinkable

[4] Foucault's discussion of the "play of forms" can be found in his responses to the questions from the *Cercle d'Épistémologie*. Details of this discussion and its context can be found here: http://cahiers.kingston.ac.uk/synopses/syn9.2.html.

without the other, and is thus "irreducible" (Meillassoux, 5). Irreducibility is thus coextensive with the transcendental.[5]

As a possible "way out" of the inherent contradiction of the Kantian system, Meillassoux posits the concept of "ancestrality," which attempts to think the world's anteriority, its existence prior to synthesis, which necessarily confers a propertarian relation over the world. The notion of ancestrality invites us to think a world where the subject is necessarily absent, and to explore a crevice of speculation that is prior to experience or judgment. Meillassoux suggests that this concept affords attempts to unlike the subject from the "world," to de-substantialize subjectivity. Malabou describes this concept as dependent on a *desert world*, which is "deserted, neutral, dispossessed," a world that is "indifferent to the fact of being thought" (Malabou, 248). Malabou argues that the concept of the absolute put forth by Meillassoux—*a world absolutely bereft of the subject*—becomes another word for indifference. In seeking to link this modality of indifference to Meillassoux's concept of alterity, it seems necessary to understand why Meillassoux rejects the supposed necessity of the world. It follows that Meillassoux must reject the modality of necessity as the a priori synthesis in Kant is essentially a transcendental guarantee of the universality of the "order of things." By contrast, he posits the necessity of contingency, a point we will return to in what follows.

Why begin with *this text about Descartes* with Meillassoux? As mentioned above, the incursion of *Après* challenges the future of Continental philosophy, or to put it less dramatically, it aims to radically upend what was hitherto accepted as philosophical truth since Kant. Psychoanalytically inclined philosophers, and others working in what is called "Transcendental Materialism,"[6] have responded to Meillassoux's call to abandon

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[5] Indeed, when thinking the "union" (of body and soul) in a novel way, it is the irreducibility between pure corporeality and pure thought that forces Descartes to invent a "third primitive notion," that he expounds in *The Passions of the Soul.* A text that is often ignored, and is rarely considered to be canonically expressive of Descartes' philosophy, despite the fact that some Cartesian scholars consider it to be the acme of Descartes' philosophical enterprise. As Geneviève Rodis-Lewis writes: "From metaphysical roots, through physiology and its action in the union with the soul, and through the soul's reaction to it, the treatise offers the most complete branch of the Cartesian philosophy, and its ripest fruit," Rodis-Lewis, *The Passions of the Soul*, xxv.

[6] For an overview of this movement in thought see Adrian Johnston's work, in particular, his Prolegomena *to Any Future Materialism* (2013).

the transcendental, with a defense of the subject. Yet, to understand Meillassoux, it is important for us to understand *how* he reads Kant. This question enables us to pin down which register Meillassoux is working in. Malabou's critique, which is only briefly outlined here, belongs to the portion of "Transcendental Materialist" critics who are involved in this debate. The following section will address the particular partisan twist that Lacanian philosophers offer us in their critique. In response to how Meillassoux reads Kant, he assumes the first of the Kantian approaches to the transcendental, such that this first approach, or interpretation, is *opposed* to the Copernican turn, in the sense that Kant's position is actually against the Copernican "decentering" of the subject in the cosmos. By contrast, a second approach places its emphasis, on the *status* of the subject, not the shift (or lack thereof) in the "substantial Center" (to use Žižek's formulation). This passage from the *Critique of Pure Reason* makes clear the second approach:

> We here propose to do just what Copernicus did in attempting to explain the celestial movements. When he found that he could make no progress by assuming that all the heavenly bodies revolved round the spectator, he reversed the process, and tried the experiment of assuming that the speculator revolved, while the stars remained at rest (Kant, 21).

Kant argues that it is the subject *qua* spectator who must revolve around the stars. Žižek interprets the approach in the above passage as introducing Kantian apperception: an operation that erodes the substantive (self)identity of the subject, whereby the subject is reduced to a substanceless void, as Descartes formulates with *res cogitans*, reducing the subject to a minimal point.[7] The thesis of this section holds that it is against Meillassoux's reading of Kantian transcendentalism that we can qualify Lacan's *return* to Freud as *precisely Kantian* insofar as Freud's "Copernican turn" is not a simple

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[7] Recalling Kant's argument from the *CPR*: "Of this I or he or it (the thing) which thinks, nothing further is represented than a transcendental subject of the thoughts= x," Kant, A346, 414. Žižek's interpretation in *Tarrying with the Negative* articulates in a salient way Kant's criticism of Descartes in a perspicuous way: "This gap which separates the empirical I's self experience from the I of transcendental apperception coincides with the distinction between existence qua experiential reality and existence qua logical construction i.e, existence in the mathematical sense ("there exists an X which…"). The status of Kant's I of transcendental apperception is that of a necessary and simultaneously impossible logical construction ("impossible" in the precise sense that its notion can never be filled out with intuited experiential reality), in short: of the Lacanian real. Descartes' error was precisely to confuse experiential reality with logical construction *qua* the real-impossible," 14.

displacement of the subject, or a "decentering," but rather transforms the very concept of the subject as such. Furthermore, Lacan radicalizes the Freudian position with the *sujet barré*, or "split," that is constitutive of speaking subjects. The barred subject is borne out of the maelstrom of self-relating negativity that divides the subject in language. What is striking is that Lacan argues that this split subject originates in Descartes. This chapter's aim is to demonstrate how Descartes, Freud, and Lacan are imbricated theoretically and more specifically, to uncover the impetus behind Lacan's claim that *the Freudian subject of the unconscious is Cartesian*.[8] Curiously, Meillassoux's reading of both Descartes and Kant sidesteps the more speculative aspects of the French and German traditions. What is missed in his reading is the kernel which links Descartes to Lacan. The wager of this chapter is to assert that, it is not enough to consider "the world Kant left us," we must go back further, and begin our inquiry with the subject of modernity that is inaugurated by Descartes.[9]

Before moving into Lacanian territory, it seems necessary to take Meillassoux seriously at his most speculative. While his critique of "correlationism" centers on the limitation that Kant places on the (un)knowability of the Thing-in-itself, he criticizes Kant's emphasis on experience. In a "Hegelian *tour de force*,"[10] Meillassoux argues that the presumed limitations are actually "experiences of absolute facticity," such that we must sidestep the "perennial deficiency in [the] thought" about reason as such. Meillassoux argues that what we thought to be an experience of limitation (i.e., self-limitation) is actually the ultimate property of the Thing-in-itself, or the noumenal, to which Kant forbids the subject access: "he [Kant] annuls every idea of an in-itself that differs from the correlationist structure of the subject" (Meillassoux, 56). Meillassoux claims that the

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[8] For Lacan, the unconscious is a central concept, hence the title of *Seminar XI*. To briefly remind us of its particular definition and function: "The unconscious is constituted by the effects of speech on the subject, it is the dimension in which the subject is determined in the development of the effects of speech, consequently the unconscious is structured like a language," 149.

[9] In "The World Kant Left Us," Hannah Arendt designates the "world" as the existential void left by Kant, a world that is picked up by Heidegger, Sartre and so on. The play here seeks to signal that the void is always already in Descartes, and concerns not only the existential "being," but the logic of being (which includes fantasy).

[10] Apropos "Hegelian tour de force," this is Žižek's qualification, which is highly "charitable," and reminds us to take Meillassoux's speculative gesture seriously, and to venture beyond him. This section is indebted to Žižek's critique of Meillassoux in *Less Than Nothing*.

Idealist makes the In-itself structurally impossible for the subject to access, thus placing upon himself a limitation as such, rather than positing that, under this aegis, the In-itself is unknowable for-us *as* Idealist subjects. When the speculative philosopher (the "final disputant") speaks in the text, Meillassoux argues that neither the dogmatist nor the idealist have "identified" the absolute, which he describes as "the capacity-to-be other," a "possible transition" (Ibid.). The crux of the argument holds that, in order to trespass against the correlation, one must be able to think beyond the subjective horizon. Meillassoux's "speculative thesis" (which he opposes to the "metaphysical thesis") is most profound when he argues that:

> The correlationist does the opposite of what she says, she says that we can think that a metaphysical thesis, which narrows the realm of possibility might be true, rather than the speculative thesis, which leaves this realm entirely open; but she can only say this by thinking an open possibility, where no eventuality has any more reason to be realized than any other. *This open possibility, this 'everything is equally possible', is an absolute that cannot be de-absolutized without being thought as absolute once more* (Meillassoux, 58 emphasis mine). Here, an epistemological deadlock becomes an ontological thesis.

When Meillassoux asks: "How are you able to think this 'possibility of ignorance,' he argues that "The truth is that you are only able to think this possibility of ignorance because you have actually thought the absoluteness of this possibility, which is to say, its non-correlationist character" (Meillassoux, 58). In *Less Than Nothing,* Žižek unpacks Meillassoux's move which grants the subject access to the absolute. If it is possible, writes Žižek, for us to "think our knowledge of reality (the way reality appears to us) as having radically failed, as radically different from the Absolute, *then this gap* (*between the For-us and In-itself*) must be part of the Absolute itself" (Žižek, 636). What appears (to us) as radically inaccessible to experience is in fact a feature of the Absolute as such. Under this view, "the very feature that seemed forever to keep us away from the Absolute is the only feature which directly unites us with the Absolute" (Ibid.). Žižek's intervention is decisively Lacanian when he argues that Meillassoux's central claim—that contingency is the only necessity—issues from the position of enunciation that belongs to

the “masculine side” of the Lacanian formulae of sexuation. Such that “according to the logic of universality and its constitutive exception: everything is contingent—with the exception of contingency itself, which is absolutely necessary” (Žižek, 636-7). However, Žižek’s second critique is more important for our purposes here, because he argues that Meillassoux remains trapped within the Kantian problem of inaccessibility; the inaccessibility of the Thing looms over his argument such that he fixates on the subjective barring by experience. Žižek argues that there is a “third” option, which radicalizes the speculative aspect in Meillassoux.

Žižek brings to the fore an example concerning the relationship between desire and drive, which may help us understand this “third” option. He writes:

> The object of the drive is not related to the Thing as a filler of the void: the drive is literally a counter-movement to desire, it does not strive toward impossible fullness [...] the drive is quite literally the very “drive” to break the All of continuity in which we are embedded, to introduce a radical imbalance into it, and the difference between drive and desire is precisely that, in desire, this cut, this fixation onto a partial object, is as it were “transcendentalized” (Žižek, 640).

Desire, which Žižek links to the Kantian position, is disturbed by the “Hegelian” drive. At this point, it should be clear that the subject of Meillassoux’s critique of correlationism is not the subject of Lacanian psychoanalysis, or even contemporary (Continental) philosophy. This subject has no relation to the pre-subjective Real that curves the symbolic space that is “always already” inscribed without us; thus, the subject is symbolically inscribed prior to its emergence on the (correlationist) scene. Žižek argues, “It is not enough to oppose to transcendental correlation a vision of reality-in-itself—transcendental correlation itself has to be grounded in reality-in-itself…” Conversely, Meillassoux remains trapped in the Kantian concern for the inaccessible Thing in itself, rather than to locate the very Thingness within reality as such, which is “pre-subjective,” in the precise sense that it is antecedently imposed onto the subject. Žižek puts it pointedly when he says: “the true problem that follows from Meillassoux's basic speculative gesture (transposing the contingency of our notion of reality into the

Thing itself) is not so much what more we can say about reality-in-itself, but how our subjective standpoint and subjectivity fit into reality" (Žižek, 643). The problem is no longer how the objective reality of the Thing-in-itself is inaccessible to us, but rather how this Thing permeates reality, and how subjectivity is already inscribed by this operation. Thus, Meillassoux's critique of correlationism—that the subject, in order to think reality, must be locked into the correlate (subject-reality)—misses the mark of the Lacanian "Real." As Žižek puts it, "This is what truly escapes correlation, not the In-itself of the object, but the subject as object" (644). The way that Meillassoux fashions his critique assumes a homogenous link between subject and reality. In contrast, the Lacanian position holds that there is an inaccessible kernel within the subject herself that is blotted out for the Meillassouxian subject. The split that Lacan introduced is forfeited, in order to posit a normative subject (as One, or Whole) of philosophy. The problem of the subject in Meillassoux is that he fails to properly account for the "theory" of the subject since Lacan, which is surprising, considering Alain Badiou's prefatory essay. Continental philosophy cannot emerge unaffected from this attack, whereby its central discursive formations, its Master concepts, are put on the rack, and ordered to be destroyed. What it can do, however, is to go further than Meillassoux, to open the wound borne out of Meillassoux's challenge, and to bore a deeper hole. Thus, one finds that a more radical critique of "correlationism" can already be found in Lacan. The split introduced by Lacan demonstrates how the philosophical task is not to overcome the inaccessible In-itself, but rather to relate the In-itself to the split in the subject: *to locate the kernel of the Thing within us.*

If we abandon the transcendental, we lose the irreducible kernel of negativity that is constitutive of both the subject and reality. This (non)relation is what Žižek terms the "non-correlationist" aspect that Meillassoux misses. The third position that Žižek sketches seeks to include the Impossible/Real as "principles" of reality as such. What will break the solipsistic circle of correlationism is the hole that bores from within the subject, which marks the very presence of the Thing. Thus, we find the emergence of the non-substantive cogito, which requires a radical shift in the subject (position) of enunciation and marks the inauguration of the subject of modernity. Following Descartes' enunciation of the cogito, the cogito becomes a "spectral impossible object," which

haunts philosophy, carrying with it a logic that has been scarcely understood. The aegis of this thinking will enable us to understand the constitutive redoubling, and thus re(positing) of the correlation *qua* negative correlation: the split subject and the Impossible/Real (Žižek, 645). Lacan's (re)formulation of Descartes' "*cogito ergo sum*" into "*I am at that impossible piece of the real where I cannot think,*" reveals that the subject is not carefully situated between two lacks (constitutive/Other), but rather emerges by way of a much more paradoxical space (of the Real).[11] It is in the place of the subject that speaking about the unconscious takes form. This is the place whereby the inquiry into the precise meaning of the subject must begin. How should we "open" the question of the subject? By foreclosure. If we follow Descartes, is it not the foreclosure of the subject, the emptying out of particular content that makes possible the emergence of the cogito? Lacan is correct to note that Descartes did not have a conception of the subject (or "theory" as Badiou puts it).[12] What Descartes did know is that the "subject" involved a plunge into certainty, and the destruction of previous knowledge. Descartes sought to erect a new edifice: the universal mathematics accessible to all thinking subjects, the *res cogitans*. Descartes' introduction of the cogito has proven to be somewhat indestructible *qua* subjective formation. To this end, it is important to instill—to register—the essential point that the Cartesian cogito is a formulation that shifts the (subjective) position of enunciation. This instance represents the "rarity" of such subjective formations, as Badiou reminds us. The decision to read Descartes in this light affords the possibility of launching the speculative inquiry of this project. The task of reading the cogito with, or through, Lacan, requires a demonstration, and perhaps a deepening of the relation between the cogito and the unconscious.

Lacan's *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1964) introduces the central discursive formations that make psychoanalytic theory possible: the unconscious, repetition, transference, and the drives. This text, despite Lacan's elliptical tendencies, is in no way a propaedeutic. Lacan seizes the opportunity to posit what is, for

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[11] Lacan's formulation in *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 20.

[12] See Badiou's 1982 *Théorie du sujet* (*Theory of the Subject*).

his system, the head, heart, and torso of psychoanalysis: the structure of signification. In order to bolster this structure, Lacan uses the above-mentioned conceptual elaborations to pose, and simultaneously answer the question, what is the status of psychoanalysis? This question can be further qualified to specify whether psychoanalysis is science, or not. For our purposes, emphasis will be placed on the concept of the unconscious, though repetition and the drive will also be discussed in some detail. Furthermore, what is *sui generis* about this text is that Lacan explicitly takes up Descartes and brings to light a previously unthought partnership between Cartesian philosophy and Freudian psychoanalysis. To this end, Lacan seeks to understand both the subjective formation and what precedes it, so that, before any experience of "individual deduction," certain relations are (always) already determined. This claim must be understood as a structural claim. Lacan notes that when we can think about the phenomenon of the count, the operation of counting includes the retroactive moment of recognition whereby I (the one who thinks) recognize myself as the one who counts, and thus, I am counted. To make this point more clearly, Lacan writes: "The important thing for us, is that we are seeking here-before any formation of the subject, of a subject who thinks, who situates himself in it- the level at which there is counting, things are counted, and in this counting he who counts is already included. It is only later that the subject has to recognize himself as such" (Lacan, 20).

This point suggests that there is a retroactive or belated aspect to subjective formation. If we consider the relation between the subject and the unconscious, we may find some clarity. What is the unconscious, that is, what is its status and/or function? To arrive at this point, Lacan refers to the concept of *cause*, as understood by Kant. For Kant, there is a constitutive gap that attaches itself to cause. To speak of cause means to carry forward something that is indefinite and anti-conceptual. Lacan closes the discussion with an enigmatic statement: "In short, there is cause only in something that doesn't work" (Lacan, 22). As Lacan notes, *c'est depuis toujours ce problème de la cause qui est l'embarras des philosophes*…Cause, like masochism, is linked to embarrassment (what Kraft-Ebbing termed "masochism" was something more fundamental to the structure of

bondage and humiliation, notes Deleuze).[13] Cause is the bondage of philosophical thought.

However, in terms of causality, the unconscious does not simply determine neuroses, but rather reveals a gap: "For what the unconscious does is to show us the gap through which neurosis recreates a harmony with a real—a real that may well not be determined" (Lacan, 22). Lacan describes the function of neurosis, not as filling the gap, but of covering the surface, like a scar "covers" a wound. However, the scar, and its irreducible remainder, the tissue, is not the neurosis itself, but the unconscious. As Lacan notes, the scar belongs to the "order of the non-realized." How the unconscious operates is described rather obliquely, as that which is held in suspense, which remains "unborn" (non-née), intermingled with repression which surges forward in this in-between space. Lacan writes*: c'est le rapport aux limbes de la « faiseuse d'anges »*; *It is the abortionist's relation to limbo* (Ibid, 23). This difficult phrase makes explicit the structural relation with the order of the "non-realized;" there exists, within the space of this particular topology entities which are "unborn," or dwelling between modalities. To invoke this enigmatic space, the "zone of shades," as Lacan puts it. When we speak of subjects in the psychoanalytic register, we attempt to puncture the "navel of the dreams," as Freud puts it, the unknown center of the subject, the constitutive gap. Lacan warns that this discourse is disruptive, and invokes Nietzsche's "pathos of distance," to illuminate this point. The severity of Lacan's tone for this seminar is relative to its context, for it was given following Lacan's "excommunication," which he dramatically, though not unreasonably links to Spinoza's excommunication. This messy unknown, as Freud insisted, "had been forgotten," and thus it is against positivist psychology that Lacan is working in order to make space for this abyssal dimension of the subject. At this juncture, it seems incumbent to pin down precisely what Lacan means by the subject.

The Cartesian Subject

[13] For a discussion of masochism, see Deleuze's 1967 text *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*.

Early Lacan was undoubtedly influenced by Heidegger, and other philosophers who sought to tear down any philosophical system, or trace, that issued from the cogito. We must take notice that the introduction of the "indestructible" distinction between the ego's "I" and the subject, marks the instance where Lacan makes room for the cogito in his thought. As Mladen Dolar notes, the splitting of the ego and the subject coincides with the distinct registers of the Imaginary (the place of the ego) and the Symbolic (the place of the subject) (Dolar, 12). Dolar traces the discursive scene brought to the fore which is at odds with Lacan's (re)introduction of the subject, whereby structuralism, in searching for anterior causes, snuffed the subject, considering this formation as self-deceptive, a "necessary illusion." Structuralism was hunting for the conditions that produce the subject, while also breaking away from the humanism of previous philosophy. Conversely, Lacan situates the subject, inextricably linked to the unconscious, within a structure; as the dictum goes, "the unconscious is structured like a language." Psychoanalysis, against the anonymous world of historicism posits that any process, structure, or system must necessarily be linked to the subject. As Dolar notes, for Lacan, that which is "non-subjective" is "always already subjectivized," meaning that the presuppositions of philosophy that issue from the cogito, are stained by subjectivity, though lacking the particular language, or moment to designate the subject. But, as Lacan notes in *Seminar XI*, the subject was "waiting there since Descartes," which is what enables him to claim that the cogito is the subject of the unconscious. The return to Freud carried with it an implicit—now made explicit—corollary: a return to Freud necessarily implicates Descartes. The subject that psychoanalysis takes up is the subject of modern science. Thus, Freud's subject is Cartesian.[14]

What is particular to Lacan's notion of the subject is that, unlike previous conceptions of the subject, non-recognition is the point of the subject's emergence. As Dolar notes, all formations of the unconscious follow this thread: "they are accompanied by a 'this is not

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[14] In *Seminar XI,* when Lacan says that Freud's method is explicitly Cartesian, this suggests that Freud, following Descartes, reduces the relation between subject and knowledge manifest in the figure, or the name, of the *cogito*. The reduction of subjectivity to consciousness has continued since Descartes (with Husserl, and Sartre for instance), and Lacan argues that psychoanalysis attempts to re-establish the essential gap between these two entities. However, the ruptural nature of this discovery—of the unconscious—reveals that the truth of the existence of the subject (for both Freud and Descartes) requires an Other, or something other than the transparency secured by reason.

me,' 'I was not there,' although they were produced by the subject him/herself (or to put it in the terms of the *cogito*: they cannot be followed by a 'therefore I am')." Here, Dolar emphasizes that the topology of the subject contains an "alien kernel," which disrupts the space of the subject; there is a "breakdown, in certain points, of the constituted horizon of recognition and sense" (Dolar, 14). If psychoanalysis is indeed a science, its "object" is the subject in its objectal dimension.

There are two Lacanian accounts of the subject, the first being the subject of illusion. If we follow Descartes' procedure in the *Meditations*, the cogito self-evacuates, leaving a "pure vanishing point without a counterpart." Furthermore, Dolar writes:

> It is questionable whether this yields the subject of thought—Descartes himself considered alternative suggestions of "I doubt, I err, I lie," etcetera, *ergo sum*, the minimal form of which is "I enounce, *ergo sum*." One has to entrust oneself to the signifier, yet the subject that is at stake has no signifier of its own, it is the subject of enunciation, absent from and underlying what is enunciated.

Dolar is correct to note that Lacan attempted to avoid the mess of the cogito in *Seminar XI*, but highlights a "fact that Descartes forgets," namely, that the Cartesian "I think" can only be formulated by saying (Ibid.). The empty spot that is produced by the subject's self-evacuation affords the positing of the universal that reduces the subject to a minimal point of certainty. This is the subjective form that (positivist) science strives toward. A subjectivity that is empty, universal, and leached of any substantive content. However, Descartes did not leave this space empty. As Dolar reminds us, he covered over the gap with the *res cogitans*, his act of "substantialization." Lacan, by contrast, aims to pin down the subject in the emptiness of the "set" (a point I will return to in discussing formalization in the Second Chapter), while Descartes' concern primarily issues from the question of how one can proceed from the vanishing point. As we know, his decision was a recourse to the big Other, God, and thus, knowledge is always God's. God becomes the decisionary subject, the "vaster" subject, "the subject supposed to know, God" (Lacan, 224). In Lacanian terms, the guarantee afforded by the big Other makes possible the de-

barring of the subject. Descartes was, in his time, highly criticized for the circularity of his argument, a *circulus in demonstrando*…

Lacan describes two possible readings of the cogito in *Seminar XI*, and we will begin with the subject in relation to a "forced choice," which engenders a loss of being. Choice is subtended by loss. When one chooses x, one loses y, and vice versa. What Lacan is suggesting that choice itself is stained by loss. The cogito, rather than standing in for the humanist subject, is without freedom of choice. Lacan's example of the "*la bourse ou la vie*," drives this point. The "choice" is "your money or your life," which entails a loss of being despite what the subject chooses. The cogito's (forced) choice is coloured by an asymmetry and irreducible loss which could be articulated as: "your thought or your being," as Dolar puts it (Dolar, 18). Thinking, according to Lacan, entails a certain loss of being, and thus the corollary is: being requires that one does not think. From this, we can articulate being in terms of pretension. The forced choice is thus: *cogito* or *sum*. Lacan ultimately sides with thought. However, his later accounts of the cogito are highly suggestive of the *other* side; he might eventually side with being.

Descartes chooses the loss of being in pursuit of the "I think," such that being is (presumed to be) deduced from thought. However, as previously mentioned, being does not follow from thought, but is diminished by it. Without the support of the signifier, the subject becomes an empty point of enunciation. Conversely, the subject that chooses being can no longer claim the status of subject in the *stricto sensu*. As Lacan writes, "if we choose being, the subject disappears, it eludes us, it falls into non-sense. If we choose sense, the sense survives only deprived of that part of non-sense that is...the unconscious" (Lacan, 211). Thus, if we choose being (an "impossible" choice), we lose the signifier; if we choose "sense," i.e., reason, we lose the constitutive element of subjectivity that issues from the unconscious. Thus, we are left, in the Cartesian scheme, with a sense (reason) that is cut off from the unconscious, though necessarily stained by it. The decision ultimately rests on two seemingly unsavoury qualities force or impossibility. However, the subject's "place" is in the formal empty set that issues from the impossible choice. Things become paradoxical here. Dolar clarifies the wager noting that, if the subject belongs to the empty set, "[...] the forced choice is not simply an absence of

choice: choice is offered and denied at the same time, but its empty alternative is what *counts* for the subject" (Dolar, 20, emphasis mine).[15]

The Lacanian cogito turns out to be the repressed side of thought, which "haunts it." The lament against the cogito as alienated from its being, in this instance, misses the mark. The point, for Lacan, is that the cogito can maintain itself, only by maintaining this lost aspect. As ever, Dolar makes things much clearer: "it is maintained only through this repression. It emerges only through the impossibility of integrating this lost part, the intersection where sense and being would seemingly coincide and ground the subject" (Dolar, 21). This impossible integration emerges with the cogito, as its *l'envers invisible.* To this end, the Lacanian subject is indeed structured like the cogito.

Yet there are two conceptions of the cogito within Lacan's discourse. I have now outlined the first sense of the cogito that appears in Lacan, from *Seminar XI*. The second sense is opposed to the cogito as the subject of the unconscious. This "other" cogito is found in *Seminar XIV*, *La logique de la fantasme* (*the Logic of Fantasy*, 1966-67), a scarcely translated text. In shifting from the Symbolic register to the Imaginary, this seminar focuses on the logic of fantasy, which confronts the subject with being. If the unconscious is understood as the locus of "thought without being," an empty place whereby universality slips in, the "I," which follows from this empty universality is void of subjective content. Conversely, the logic of fantasy produces a different wager, and the fundamental choice for the subject becomes: by choosing being I must forfeit thought. *Je ne pense pas pour être*; I don't think, therefore I am. To be, I must not think. However, the trouble of the unconscious does not resolve. In choosing being without thought, the exclusion of thought comes to be "the exclusion of thought as unconscious, of the unconscious as thought" (Dolar, 28). It is worth noting that fantasy is the only portal to the Real, and thus the incursion of *jouissance* becomes functions in a similar way to the unconscious. As being takes center stage in this conception of the cogito, it is important

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[15] Formalization may be useful here: the "cogito as the subject of the unconscious" can be formalized as: $ (sujet barré)/ S1 (Master signifier).

to understand what being means in this case. Being is not ontic for Lacan, it is not the "being" of scientific objectivity that can be manipulated by the "naughty thumb of science," but rather, it belongs to a certain philosophical finger, less prurient than the empiricist's.[16] It is being that is irreducible to objectivity, and to the (imaginary) counterpart of consciousness that we are dealing with (Dolar, 26). This being, as it confronts a piece of the Real, attempts to cover itself with fantasy. To this end, what is "at stake" in fantasy is the "choice of being" that manages to grasp, or "pin down," one's *jouissance* (Ibid.). This realm of fantasy lacks the operations of signification that provide the subject with the requisite signifying support, and thus the status of this being is *non signifiable*. The name for this being is termed "*le complement d'être*," which carries lack and object, two sides which do not form a whole.

As previously mentioned, the unconscious slips in despite the shield of fantasy. As Dolar puts it: "the choice of being relegates the 'I' to the underpinnings of the Imaginary (the false being of fantasy) and to the drives, while the emergence of the subject results from the second step, the intrusion of the unconscious" (Dolar, 35). The incursion of the unconscious is where the subject becomes subject. The subject is alienated from herself, in the precise sense that the Imaginary being of the "I" is supported by the "grammar of the drives." It is true that the unconscious is the thing who speaks (*ça parle*); however, the drives, in their "silent manner," have a particular way of staining the field, as with the signifying order. By grammar, Lacan refers to a kind of syntactical relation that structures the field of being. Masculine being takes form as *res cogitans*, the pure thinking thing, which turns out to be "a false being of the 'I' framed by fantasy"; yet, this acknowledgement does not suffice; we must locate what is prior to being, the "stain of the *sum*" (36).

To locate this "prior" moment, is to look at both instances of the cogito as united at a certain point, where the spheres or registers overlap. What unites the seemingly opposed readings of the cogito is their meeting place: the impossible intersection of thought and

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[16] A reference to E.E Cummings poem *O Sweet Spontaneous; https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/148505/o-sweet-spontaneous-5bf31932ce110*

being "in" the Real. This shared point of convergence will provide a model for us herein, and in particular this model will enable us to think through the formulas of sexuation and the philosophical problematic of sexual difference. The Real suggests that no entity, which includes both conceptions of the cogito, can avoid castration as such, thus uniting them in this paradoxical space. The Real unites the drives (the two aspects that pertain to the "I," the space of the Imaginary) and desire (that which pertains to the unconscious, the Symbolic). Lacan argues that it is the *objet a* that marks the medial point which unites both desire and the drives which orbit around it. While I would like to venture further into this discussion, it will suffice to say (for now) that the seemingly "opposed" cogitos should be read as revealing a progression in Lacan's thought, a movement toward the discoveries that can be found in *Seminar XX*, pertaining to feminine sexuality and the formulas of sexuation. We will explore these issues in more depth in the next chapter.

Is Psychoanalysis a Science?

In order to broach the question of whether psychoanalysis is, or is not, a science, I will respond with Lacan's own formulation, that psychoanalysis is a "conjectural science of the subject" or a "science of the unconscious."[17] Lacan will later qualify (specifically in *Seminar XX*) that psychoanalysis is a discourse, and indeed, a praxis. Freud himself was unambiguous on this point. Freud affirmed the status of psychoanalysis as a science of the unconscious.[18] For him, the lines of demarcation are not drawn in the way that Lacan distinguishes between "conjectural" and "positive" science. The former is akin to the Foucauldian concept of the "human sciences," and the latter is the domain which purports to have the sole access to truth: the "objective sciences." Critique of the "positivist" science can be found throughout the twentieth century, whereby rationalism is distinguished from positivism. It is important to note that both Freud and Lacan affirmed the status of psychoanalysis *qua* science. The need to return to Freud is subtended by a return to Descartes, as the discourses that issue from their respective works concern the

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[17] This formulation Lacan puts forth in *Seminar XI*, wherein he also describes the particular science that psychoanalysis is as a "conjectural" science.

[18] Freud, Sigmund. *An Autobiographical Study*, 1925a: SE XX, 70

modern subject. Lacan goes so far as to claim that psychoanalysis operates only as the subject of science.[19]

Freud, *avant la lettre*, understood the significance of the operativity of the signifier in relation to the unconscious. Lacan remarks that Freud discovered the signifier before the scientists (the linguists). It is from this, that Lacan seeks to radicalize his position, and to push it to its discursive limit. Freud's concept of the unconscious is *sui generis*, insofar that it does not belong to the Romantic notion of the unconscious (linked to the imagination), nor the psychological. Rather, Freud's unconscious (as there are indeed competing conceptions of the unconscious) can be found in its inextricable relationship to the miasma of fractured concepts that ground the theoretical system of psychoanalysis that we have discussed: unconscious, desire, split, inhibition. As Lacan writes in *Seminar XI*: "What occurs, what is produced, in this gap, is presented as the discovery. It is in this way that the Freudian exploration first encounters what occurs in the unconscious" (Lacan, 25). Lacan introduces two further concepts to prime the pedagogical scene, namely discontinuity and loss. There is a dimension of loss that is constitutive of the unconscious as such, as Lacan writes: "one lost, ten to be found again," which exemplifies the oscillatory movement of the unconscious. The discontinuity at play is the operative vacillation, which slips between recovery and loss. However, one is correct to wonder, discontinuity from what? What provides the backdrop to this analysis, if not totality? This question necessarily bears on ontology: "is the One anterior to discontinuity?" Here, Lacan breaks with the ontology that figures the "closed One" as the proper beginning for metaphysical inquiry. This break cannot be underestimated and will figure predominantly in discussing the formation of the subject. The *One* for Lacan (*un*) becomes the German prefix *Un,* a negation of oneness (Lacan, 26). Lacan introduces the notion of *Unbegriff*, which should not be understood as a non-concept, but rather as lack, understood as not-One.

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[19] "To say that the subject on which we operate in psychoanalysis can be no other than the subject of science, may appear as a paradox." *Logic of Phantasy*, translation of this passage is by Mladen Dolar, from "Cogito as the Subject of the Unconscious." Dolar, however, notes that he will "leave aside the cardinal problem of the relationship between psychoanalysis and science," 38.

In discussing the breach with the "closed One," psychoanalysis is concerned with the subject *qua* indetermination: it concerns what takes place at the level of enunciation (the subjective symbolic space), which makes possible, "in an operatory way, for something to take on the function of barring" (Ibid.). The function of barring represents an effacement, which we will explore in the Lacanian algebra. The barring function should be understood as an act of effacement, whereby it strikes out the signifier as such. This space, whereby effacement is enacted, is the "here" which Lacan designates as the place of the unconscious and its "dynamism" (Lacan, 27). Lacan concludes: "Thus, the unconscious is always manifested as that which vacillates in a split in the subject, from which emerges a discovery that Freud compares with desire […]" The space of this conjuncture affords us to situate this concept of "desire" in the "denuded metonymy" of the discourse "in question" (28). This "space" leaves room for the subject to encounter the experience of surprise, a delight in confusion, and non-transparency. Lacan writes, at this juncture, that we may situate the concept of the unconscious as that which "vacillates" in a split in the subject producing a desire. Desire can thus situate itself within the "denuded metonymy" of the discourse in question (psychoanalysis). This enigmatic phrase, Lacan notes, entails something of a surprise for the subject (Ibid.).

Freud escapes idealism by focusing his attention on the discourse of the other, the hysteric's discourse. The discourse of the unconscious and desire is inextricable from the question hovering around sexual difference. Freud's provocative, and for him, irresolvable, at least in his lifetime, question—*Was Will Das Weib?* It is through the analysis of the Other's desire, as supported by the discourse of the hysteric that Lacan follows this thread, radicalizing the Freudian position, which ultimately fortifies his own, emboldening him to postulate that *Woman does not exist*.

We should understand the postulation of the non-existence (non-relation) of Woman, in parallel with Lacan's articulation of the structure of the gap that bores holes in the symbolic space. In *Seminar XI*, the section "Of the Subject of Certainty" elaborates on Lacan's argument of the structuring function of lack. In relation to desire, which Lacan designates for speaking subjects as a *manque-a-être* (want-to-be). *Manque* becomes the word for lack, signaling both at once a desire to be and a lack of being (what one desires

to be). This structure (the structuring function of lack) has a subjectivizing force, which is precisely why Lacan calls it "ontological," lack is an ontological function.

Lacan writes: "The gap of the unconscious may be said to be pre-ontological" (Lacan, 29). The gap is pre-ontological as it is situated in the liminal space between being and non-being; the gap "belongs" to the order of the un-realized, a modality of the possible, but not (yet) actual. Freud's infernal discovery, which Lacan notes, draws out and makes actual the line from Virgil: *Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta move.*[20] Freud's discovery raised the waters of "this world," the infernal river threatening to spill over. Discovery tends toward dis-order. Lacan reminds us that we should not underestimate the opening caused by Freud's discovery, which has now been absorbed, or "asepticized." This site of infernal opening is where the element of surprise still lingers, which begs us to continue our questioning.

In response to the question, "what may be left to chance?" Freud's response is: "nothing." Freud's method is Cartesian in the precise sense that it begins with the *subject of certainty*. To arrive at this proposition, Lacan guides us through Freud's text. In the chapter on forgetting (XII) in the *Interpretation of Dreams* Freud's *bon mot* is not truth, but certainty. This *Gewissheit* comes to be through doubt. Doubt emerges from the transmission of the dream as the split between the experience of the dream and what is recounted. Upon waking, doubt is the sign that suggests that there is something worth preserving from the dream. Here, Lacan suggests that there is a dialectical relation between *Gewissheit* (certainty) and *Verkleidung* (disguise). This invites us to think about how the subject, through the process of analysis, uncovers what was "disguised" as forgetting, as propped up by doubt. For Freud, doubt is a sign of resistance. To put it this way: by speaking the dream *qua* omission, the gaps in the memory that the subject experiences come to the fore *qua* resistance. However, these holes in the memory may be recovered through the repetition which occurs in analysis. The holes in the subject's memory are both the cause of doubt and the signal that there is something worth preserving, and this is precisely what enables Lacan to say: Freud's method is Cartesian.

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[20] Virgil's *Aeneid* that Freud used *qua* epigraph: *If I cannot bend the Heavens above, I will move Hell*.

Freud's doubt, as revealed in his own analysis, mirrors the scene of the *Meditations*; it is *his* dreams that are cast into doubt, *his* memory that is perforated by holes; like Freud, for Descartes, it is *his* own body that he casts into doubt. This enables us to say that Freud's method is precisely Cartesian in the instant whereby he doubts the transmissibility of his own dream. At this juncture, we can also say that doubt assures that a thought is "there." The "I am" of the dream ensures that there is being.

What Descartes and Freud share is a formal relation, a method that concerns certainty and begins with the subject. It is *my* doubt that reveals that a thought is there. Yet, there is dissymmetry between their respective positions: for Freud, thought belongs to the unconscious. The subject is "displaced" through the lapse between the hole/gap of the dream that thwarts the self-identity of the subject. This is why Freud declares that certainty can be found in the unconscious, thus he hands back truth into the "hands" of the Other, the rightful owner. Descartes asserts, albeit in a radically different way, that truth is always God's truth. In the Cartesian system, truth is guaranteed by a non-deceiving (big) Other. This rhetoric, which is scientific, is not simply about setting forth facts, but persuading an audience. Aristotle knew this well.[21]

Science et la verité

Throughout the seminars, Lacan refers to the concept of science. This concept, as it pertains to the status of psychoanalysis, is most carefully elaborated in *Seminar XIII*, "The Object of Psychoanalysis" which straddles the two ventures that expound Lacan's competing conceptions of the cogito. At this point, we may conclude that the question of the status of science is necessarily linked to the question of the subject. The subject is, after all, the subject of science. Yet, this subject is irreducible to the coordinates commonly associated with science, such as biological or psychological phenomena, and thus, Lacan's conception of the subject, and of science, constitutes an "epistemological break" with both concepts. The essay that I will read and tarry with most closely in this section is *La science et la verité*, an essay that was published in the *Cahiers*, and later

[21] See Aristotle, *Rhetoric*.

appeared in the *Écrits*, patched together by way of the conceptual labour of Seminars XI-XIII. To arrive at the definition of subject, a certain reduction is necessary. The same reduction was necessary in order to deduce the object of psychoanalysis *qua* science. As Lacan writes in the *Écrits*: "A certain reduction that is necessary that is sometimes long in completion, but always decisive in the birth of a science; such a reduction truly constitutes its object" (Écrits, 855). Lacan places himself within the discourse, and thus history, of science. To this end, we will venture to unearth the features of modern science, Galilean and Cartesian, which have made possible the modern subject, which culminate in Freud's discovery of the unconscious. Lacan argues that, without the antecedent discoveries of seventeenth science in particular, Freud's discovery would be "unthinkable." Here, the object of psychoanalysis *qua* science is unequivocally the subject. Lacan corrects the view that Freud was opposed to the science of his time, a maverick that found himself in the mar of myth rather than scientific activity. Lacan places him precisely in the lineage of "scientism" that runs from Galileo to Freud's own contemporaries. Save for Newton (a point that Lacan takes from Koyre's development of modern science), modern science concerns a subject who has an ambiguous relation to knowledge.[22] This ambiguous relation of the subject (of science) to knowledge is radicalized in Freud, who introduces the relation of *not-knowing* as crucial to the science of psychoanalysis. Freudian science comes to designate "the subsistence of the subject of not-knowing," his concept of the unconscious could be translated as such. Lack becomes a concern for science, a discourse that seeks to suture holes of the world in order to be Whole.

Lacan's continued engagement with the cogito appears in the essay, drawing attention to the cogito's reduction to a minimal point (*res cogitans*), which "marks a break with every assurance conditioned by intuition" (Lacan, 832). The truth that Descartes finds, does not really belong to him, but a non-deceiving Other. The subject is not "fully there," nor does his knowledge belong to him. This dislocation of the subject is highlighted by Freud, who, in following Descartes, starts out from the "subject of certainty;" their methods

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[22] For a detailed account of Lacan's relation to science, see Lorenzo Chiesa's 2016 text *The Not-Two: Logic and God in Lacan.*

differ, yet they both conclude that the "subject is at home" in the field of the unconscious. This enables Lacan to note that there is no "Man" which could fit the proper role of scientific object, because the ideal "Man," in the sense of the subject of the "human sciences," does not exist. Thus, there are subjective sciences, such as linguistics, set theory, and logic, which can be employed to formulate the subjective impasses; as speaking subjects we can verbalize "open sets," "knots," we are "castrated," and so on. It is not simply that the subjective sciences represent what happens in the world, but rather there is something already "imprinted" in the symbolic space prior to our speaking. The mode that Lacan employs in linguistics is particular to the level it contains, such that there is a distinction between the statement and the position of enunciation. The latter is significant, as the saying of a particular thing may (in the rarest instance) inaugurate an age, as the paradigmatic case of the cogito suggests. In the "everyday" sense of the position of enunciation, it concerns the location of the subject in the symbolic realm, and it is possible for this position to shift in regard to the enunciation. Otherwise put, there is something possibly emancipatory about this level of speech.

In returning to science, the argument becomes more complex, surrounding the issue of cause. Freud's incursion into the scientific domain attempted to close the space between knowledge and its transcendent truth, precisely by opening a gap, by the subject could emerge. Science, when it abandons this gap, takes on the character of a subject that "does not want to know." This denial is the cause of sexual difference, which makes the "relinquishing of the transcendental" a problem for philosophy, as we have seen. What makes Freud "indestructible" is the imperative he forces upon us. Freud's dictum: *Wo es war, soll Ich werden* functions as a permanent call.[23] Psychoanalysis is tasked to enter the spaces previously abandoned by science, and to o take for its object the excluded entities.

This brings us to another juncture, that is, the function of truth in relation to science. When Lacan says, "I, truth, speak," should we read him as a sophist—in the sense of*« Je*

[23] In discussing the relation of conscious/unconscious "material"—roughly translated as "where it was, shall I be…"

parle, donc, je suis », as Barbara Cassin puts it in *Jacques le Sophiste*[24]—or shall we read him *qua* philosopher, as Badiou insists?[25] This formulation draws our attention to the absence of a "meta-language," whereby truth could say something truthful about itself ("telling the truth about truth"). Furthermore, it enables Lacan to say that the unconscious is "structured like a language," which reveals, in turn, the "lack of truth about truth." This discovery was, according to Lacan, made by Freud, in his conceptualization of *Urverdraengung* (primal repression). As Lacan insists, there is nothing "noumenal" about this lack of truth about truth; we do not need to be granted access to the noumenal space that we have been barred from since Kant. Conversely, we must embrace this lack, and attempt to negotiate what it means for us, as speaking subjects. . Lacan argues that the causal aspects of truth are "veiled" in science. Thus, psychoanalysis is tasked to put forth a novel conception of truth. When the unconscious tells "the truth about truth," this means the causative aspect of truth may be redressed, by way of its foreclosure. This "forgetting" of the cause, which discourses such as Marxism and psychoanalysis seek to redress, distinguish between truth as cause and knowledge as operation. In *Écrits,* Lacan makes a detour away from this point, but it is a point to which he returns. The cause is the "whole effect" which stains the structure. By this, one must understand cause in terms of "material cause." This is a difficult concept to grasp, not least because it relies on Aristotle. The attempt to commensurate a discourse based on speaking subjects with material causality requires a defense. The example of the phallus might clarify things:

> "The signifier is defined by psychoanalysis as acting first of all as if it were separate from its signification. Here we see the literal character trait that specifies the copulatory signifier, the phallus, when–arising outside the limits of the subject's biological natural–it is effectively (im)printed; it is unable, however, to be the sign representing sex, the partner's sex-that is the partner's biological sign…" (Écrits, 876).

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[24] Cassin's famous defense of Sophistry and its particular relation to Lacan can be found in *Jacques le Sophiste.* Regarding the Debate between Cassin and Badiou, see Zupancic (2017).

[25] See Badiou's seminar *Lacan,* 40.

This passage indicates how psychoanalysis is compatible with materialism, though it does not so appear at first glance. Thus we can think about the phallus as having a "mark," such that it imprints the symbolic space. In terms of thinking the signifier in relation to human life and historical unfolding, the imprinting of the symbolic space may sound rather abstract, nevertheless it adjudicates the position of the subject (of enunciation). As such, it is causative and effective, in the sense that structural (non)relations issue from this function. The structural relation of sex will be the focus of the next chapter. Thus, the material cause is a kind of "guise": we are not interested in sex as a form of genital-biological organization, but in sex as an ontological, and therefore philosophical problem.

Chapter 2

2 *Does the Cogito Have (a) Sex?*

Does the *cogito* have (a) sex? This question, which serves as a starting point for this chapter, and cannot be addressed expeditiously, concerns the possibility or *topos* of thinking sex in relation to the cogito. Is there a place of, or for, sex in Descartes' thought: The thought of sex? The sex of thought? This chapter will present two seemingly counterintuitive theses in attempting to grasp why "sex" has been left out of philosophy, and specifically, where Descartes places it, or doesn't. Firstly, the cogito, like sexual division, or difference, concerns what is *common* to all human subjects; secondly, the "de-sexualization" of reality which takes place within (early) modernity, beginning with Galileo, is precisely what (early) modern philosophy, science, and psychoanalysis share. It is by way of this gesture that we will explore whether the cogito has (a) sex. This chapter is heavily indebted to the work of the Slovenian philosopher Alenka Zupančič, whose inquiry concerning sex and ontology forces us to rethink sexual difference as a philosophical problem. While Zupančič does not engage Descartes in *What is Sex?*, this chapter—in its mode of thinking and style of questioning—is inspired by her text, which inaugurates a return to the question of ontology and the relationship to sexual difference, as division.

For Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, sex is, first and foremost, a concept and not an empirical object, and it is by looking at sex as a concept that we may effort to understand the fundamental antagonism that psychoanalysis locates in sex *qua* sexual division.[26] For Zupančič, the antagonism—this describes the contradiction inherent to

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[26] Sexuality precedes sexual difference in Freud, in the form of the "sexual drive." As Zupančič says, "in other words, at the level of the libido there are not two sexes" (46). The sexual thing (autoeroetic polymorphous perversity) and its indifference, coupled by the structural gap in the signifying order "produce" sexual difference. Indeed, following this "causality" sexuality precedes sexual difference, not as a sexed entity however; the "thing" is indeed a-sexual, like the *cogito.* It is the socio-symbolic order that "matures" and "splits" sexuality, and also produces sexual difference. One can understand the process through the following formula: "What splits into two is the very non-existence of the one." Sexual difference exists because there is no "second sex," but rather because sex is the splitting into two of the non-existent One. Sexuality and sexual difference are inextricably and irreducibly linked to the signifying order.

sex—is explicitly ontological and penetrates the core of being qua being. Thus, sex cannot be circumscribed or reduced to the *ontic* level, as sex represents something more primary, and thus requires philosophical resources. This "something," must be considered in addition to reality, as that which structures it, or contributes to the structural reality wherein we find ourselves, prior to being. The push toward de-sexualization, the epistemic tie which links psychoanalysis and philosophy, will be discussed in more depth in regard to the second thesis.

Sexual difference, which is the name we will use for the fundamental negativity of sex (though Lacan uses the term "division") is, counter-intuitively, what binds the so-called sexual "poles" of "masculine" and "feminine," and their respective discursive placeholders, be it "man," "woman," "male," or "female." Otherwise put, sexual difference is precisely what is *common* to men and women. We can conclude, from this analysis that there is no "second sex," but rather, a shared fundamental negativity which concerns *how* the subject *subjectivizes* this primary negativity.[27] This thesis already troubles many understandings of what sex, or sexual difference is. In contrast to the discourse on gender, the psychoanalytic account articulates how sexual difference is coextensive with the symbolic register (language), and it does not suffice to state that subjects are not "produced or constructed," nor does it suffice to pin down "woman" as an abbreviation for a set of overdetermined historical coordinates. The difficulty of this question is grounded in the fact that sex is, for psychoanalysis, an ontological problem, which, however paradoxical it may seem, bears on the political in interesting ways. From the standpoint of psychoanalysis there is a demand which indicts philosophy's

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Cont. Zupančič is correct to highlight that this irreducible link does not mean that sex is a "symbolic construction" (apropos gender). Rather, it is "real" because it "marks an irreducible limit (contradiction) of the signifying order." There is an absence (gap) at the heart of the presence of the signifier. This "produces" sexual difference, 49.

[27] This is not a rejection of Simone de Beauvoir, whose work (specifically *Le deuxièm esexe*, 1949) no doubt influenced Lacan. The tension between Lacanian psychoanalysis and de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* lies in the understanding of the socio-symbolic in relation to the (onto)logical status of sex. This is all to say that I think there remains theoretical amity between these two thinkers. The issue at hand concerns the logic of sexuation, as formulated within the "formulas of sexuation," which will be discussed at length in this chapter.

abandonment of sex (as an ontological question), and this includes the recent incarnations of "new ontologies," which fail to account for sex in a properly philosophical manner, or at all.[28] In discussing sexual difference as a relation, or non-relation, the analysis of sexual difference is figured as a split "of the same world." If we understand sexual difference as belonging to the "same world," that splits the subject (into "two"), this allows us to think through the tropes associated with divided spheres and domains, and otherwise masculinized and feminized "divisions" within the social and cultural milieu.

This is the premise of a sexualized homogeneity, which not only requires Woman to exist, but also relies on the notion that these separate "worlds" come together to form a totality, or unified Whole; thus their division must be properly sexualized for the function of this homogeneity. One could say that a male dominated society necessarily requires Woman to exist. Yet, there is nothing "natural" about these divisions which situate Woman in a particular place. Rather, these divisions are borne out of the construction of the mythologizing of sexual difference as coextensive with and belonging to a sexual cosmology. By rejecting the notion of a world divided in this particular way, where women, as the "second sex," occupy the particular domain of mythologized femininity (which is of course is, or was, troubled by feminist theory), philosophy has abandoned the question of sexual difference and its sexual cosmology in favour of a proto-liberal humanism, a portal to Enlightenment, which obviates the "woman question," (as an ontological question) by abandoning it *tout court*. Conversely, psychoanalysis offers a different entry point for thinking about sexual difference. Rather than thinking sexual difference as something that is particular to women, it may be understood as a brutal universalism, which is prior to being and structures the symbolic universe of speaking beings to such an extent that, when we ask, "What is sex?" it slips away; still, the question remains, "What *is* sex?"

It bears repeating that for Lacanian psychoanalysis, sex is first and foremost a *concept* and not an empirical object. If we are to think sex philosophically it must be thought as a

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[28] As I do not have time/space to take up a discussion of these "new ontologies," my intention is rather to signal the resurgence of ontology, yet the lack of engagement with the question of sex. See Zupančič's critique of Object-Oriented Ontology in *What is Sex?*

concept, one which bears the mark of a fundamental negativity/antagonism. For Zupančič, the fundamental antagonism is ontological, and penetrates the core of being *qua* being. It cannot be circumscribed or reduced to the ontic level, as sex represents something more primary. This "something" that is more primary is that which structures reality, and contributes to the symbolic world wherein we find ourselves (the symbolic order and its social ties). In order to understand sex as a discursive and ontological disruption, it is necessary to venture into an analysis of how psychoanalysis conceives of ontology. For Lacan, ontology is the discourse of the Master (M'être; *maître*). This claim posits the existence of a hierarchy, a ubiquitous asymmetry, which pervades the discursive space. This enables Lacan to put forth many paradoxical propositions, such as: there is no sexual relation. What Lacan suggests by putting forth this statement is that the (ontological) non-relation makes the empirical relation impossible. Furthermore, there is no signifying relation (no signifying binary; i.e., "Man" "Woman"). However, the absence of the binary signifier (the relation) does not prevent the tie, but rather, it deepens the antagonism. This absence (of the binary signifier) dictates the conditions of what ties us together and how we might negotiate the tensions therein. This "therein" includes sexual, political, and social ties. This account is highly abstract, yet one can see the privileged position allotted to sex within psychoanalytic discourse. It is precisely when sex enters the discussion that paradoxicality and contradiction are put into formalization. This point I will return to in discussing Lacan's formulas of sexuation.
To reiterate, the starting point for thinking sex ontologically is that of split subjectivity, whereby sexual difference (division) is precisely what is shared. This commonality, or shared antagonism, repudiates the effort to posit equality, for this shared antagonism is precisely what has been ignored historically. The exclusion, or "privileging" of women is predicated on the belief that woman exists, in the precise sense that a relation can be posited. Yet, it is precisely the positing of the relation in terms of a pre-political identity, exemplified by recourse to the pre-critical sexual cosmology, which leads to political exclusion. It is not sufficient to dispute the content of the identity, but we must *reformulate* the relation as such. Here, one can see that woman exists in the sense of the identity of femininity. This identity is predicated upon the exclusion of Woman from the political realm. Perhaps, one could say that the political exclusion of Woman is

demonstrative of liberal humanism as such. Rather than filling up or injecting the identity of Woman with new content, as certain theoretical imperatives suggest, we ought to think about exclusion as predicated on forcing the relation to exist; the corollary of this injunction holds that: thinking multiplicity is insufficient. In the case of sex, the split, which prevents a numerical multiplicity (a singular identity which "becomes" multiple) from taking place does not concern the empirical half (of the female species).[29] Conversely, and somewhat paradoxically, this view suggests that what must be included is in fact the very core of the split subjectivity, *the non-relation*. Zupančič's analysis is suggestive of a highly unintuitive thesis (for those dwelling in a permissive social space): that the symbolic realm must inscribe the political with the non-relation. This thesis is primarily concerned with *how* the antagonism is inscribed into the political realm. Societies based on harmony, the ideals of (permissive capitalist) democracy, which purport to operate relationally ("equally"), are premised on political principles of equality; yet, these societies are in fact subtended by histories, and in some cases present use, of slavery, brutal exclusion, oppression; otherwise put, liberal societies are necessarily riddled by antagonism between "positive" entities.[30] In each case, the relation is affirmed, whether it is "man," "woman," "Black," "worker." Conversely, the non-relation is not a simple absence, but a constitutive curving (subversion) of the discursive space as such. The curve results from the missing element (the non-relation) which perverts it, by curving the symbolic space. So, the notion of an original or neutral (or, even equal) ontology is not possible under this view. The social order is grounded in this operative negativity, and any attempt to disavow this antagonism will subvert the

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[29] Why "curving?":"Apropos the notion of the Real as the substantial Thing, Lacan accomplishes a reversal which is ultimately the same as the passage from the special to the general theory of relativity in Einstein. While the special theory already introduces the notion of the curved space, it conceives of this curvature as the effect of matter: it is the presence of matter which curves the space, i.e. only an empty space would have been non-curved. *With the passage to the general theory, the causality is reversed: far from causing the curvature of the space, matter is its effect, i.e., the presence of matter signals that the space is curved.* What can all this have to do with psychoanalysis? Much more than it may appear: in the way exactly homologous to Einstein, for *Lacan, the Real – the Thing – is not so much the inert presence which curves the symbolic space (introducing gaps and inconsistencies in it), but, rather, an effect of these gaps and inconsistencies.*" Zizek in *How to Read Lacan* (italics are mine), 70.

[30] In thinking the non-relation, I think that Simone Weil's critique of liberal "rights" discourse is very relevant (see *the Need for Roots*). In terms of the "positive entity," this suggests the existence of numerically whole, self-identical beings that are in contradiction, rather than emerging from the primary negativity which allows us to situate the (non)relation between entities which are always already split.

political potential of thinking this ontology in a productive way. Otherwise put, thinking ontology in this way invites us to uncover the morass of what is (asymmetrically) shared. It seems necessary to state that this re-thinking of ontology affords us a re-thinking of the political. However, it is not my intention to discuss at length what the political prospects for such a theory of sexual difference might be, but rather to give a sense of the possibilities that are coextensive with thinking sexual difference in this precise (ontological) way.

The frame put forth by Zupančič argues that social antagonism cannot be conceived of as simply existing between individual elements within the social realm, but rather, the antagonism is inscribed into the asymmetry of the social space itself. The social realm bears the mark of non-relation. The antagonism is persistent; however, this does not mean that political intervention is not possible. Conversely, the disavowal of the non-relation attempts to smooth over this fundamental negativity. This smoothing over can be found in early modern and Enlightenment *discourses on the equality of the sexes.* In the case of Descartes, the antagonism is disavowed in favour of a positive thesis: reason is held in common (*sensus communis*) irrespective of sexual difference.[31] In keeping with the Cartesian hierarchy, it seems necessary to pin down the metaphysics first (if one can posit this naïve causality).

Making space for the "non-relation"

In order to "locate" the non-relation, it is necessary to gloss the Lacanian purchase on language and the symbolic order. The signifying order negates, or forecloses, the possibility of a "binary signifier," such that this "non-relation" (of the binary signifier) reveals that the signifying order does not begin with One, but rather a "minus one" (Zupančič, 42). At this juncture, a double emergence takes place: the emergence of the signifying order and the non-emergence of the One signifier. Zupančič notes how it is in the place of this gap, of the emergence of the "minus one," that both a gap (ontological

[31] First outlined in Aristotle's *De Anima*; Descartes, despite his desire to break the Aristotelian-Thomist stronghold, continues to engage many Aristotelian motifs and concepts. *Sensus communis* is a structuring principle for Descartes. Descartes, despite acknowledging differences in strength of soul and intellectual power, argues that everyone, all thinking subjects, do share the "power to judge well" (*Discourse on Method,* Part 1: VI, 2: CSM I, 111). Furthermore, the possibility to be morally inclined is also available to all subjects, as "generosity" is a universal passion.

minus) and surplus-enjoyment appear within the discursive field. The appearance of enjoyment is not simply produced but *is* the trace of the structural antagonism. Under this view, psychoanalysis locates sexuality not simply "within" the symbolic, but rather as a "being" that is constituted solely *as* the contradiction of the discursive symbolic space. Thus, sexuality cannot exist without this antagonism, this dragging minus one, which is its "condition of possibility," so to speak. What can be inferred from this proposition is not that one must go searching for the missing signifier of sexuality, but rather that this "missing" *is its very existence*, its being. This is to say, the existence of sex depends on this primary lack. Furthermore, it is precisely this primary instance of the "gap" and of the missing signifier that makes possible the emergence of the signifier. The importance of sexuality for psychoanalysis can thus be understood not as an attempt to fill the missing signifier with a new content but as avowing the gap that is constitutive of sexuality, which makes it an ontological issue, and so an issue for human beings and for philosophy. Through this antagonism, a "space" is produced by the symbolic order and is "populated" by beings and entities. However, there is something else, in addition to what is "produced" by the symbolic order, "inseparable but not created." This extra something is described by Zupančič in the following way: "it is not a being: it is discernible only as a (disruptive) effect within the symbolic field, its disturbance, its bias. In other words, the emergence of the signifier is not reducible to, or exhausted by, the symbolic" (Zupančič, 41). This is to say that not only is symbolic reality produced by this discursive space, but also what Lacan calls the Real.

The "Real" can be understood as a reclaiming of what traditional ontology previously cut off in its quest to capture being *qua* being, namely the fundamental antagonism that makes being possible to begin with. The assumption is that being is possible, that it is numerically "one" engenders a discourse that enables a movement from ontology to social, historicist, or deconstructive concepts, such as "gender" and the discourses of multiplicity. Inversely, the Lacanian wager hinges on thinking sex as an ontological question, which requires a primary negativity in order to be thought. This primary negativity is lost in translation from "sex" to "gender" because it assumes that a passage from one gender to two, or, a multiplicity is philosophically possible, or even emancipatory, such that "gender trouble" is reduced or dissolved when multiplicities are

be enacted, and thus these symbolic entities become less troubling philosophically. Yet, Zupančič is correct to assert that, when one "removes sex from sex" as a way of neutralizing ontology, the problem of sex persists out of sight. Zupančič invites us to "see" the issue in a different light, not in the sense of phenomenality (that one can see difference), but in a philosophical sense: through a dark light.

Mind the Gap: Sex and Sexuality

In *Encore* Lacan writes: "Discourse begins from the fact that there is a gap here […] but, after all, nothing prevents us from saying that it is because discourse begins that the gap is produced. It is a matter of complete indifference toward the result. What is certain is that discourse is implied in the gap," (Lacan, 16). It could be argued that the particular ontological status of sex and of sexuality thought together with question of sexual difference, originated in Freudian thought. Freud enables us to answer the question: what is the causal relationship between sexuality and sexual difference? Freud tells us that the sexual drive is, in the first instance, independent of any object. From this, one can conclude that sexual attraction (toward a particular object) is not (self) evidenced by the existence of a sexual drive. Freud's controversial discoveries are far too numerous to list here. For our purposes, we will discuss the discovery of the autoerotic (polymorphous) infantile sexuality, and the de-naturalization of sexuality (breaching with the reproductive imperative), with a further push toward the de-sexualization of the libido, in the precise sense that Freud asserts that the libido is always (already) "masculine," that will be discussed in order to try to make sense of the "causal" relationship between sex, sexuality, and sexual difference. This is indeed a very *modern* discovery and theoretical advance; it is Cartesian in the sense of a scientific thrust toward de-sexualizing a universal. The scandal of Freud's inaugural text *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* was to posit a *sameness* within or prior to, sexual difference. He writes, "The auto-erotic activity of the erogenous zones is, however, the same in both sexes, and owing to this uniformity there is no possibility of a distinction between the sexes such as arises after puberty" (Freud, 141). Though, Freud goes on to inscribe libido as properly "masculine" or, as he says, "of a masculine nature," one can see that, again, what is *common* to the sexes is what is problematic; it is not that libido "occurs" in men and not women, but

rather, that libido is *operatively masculine* and does not have a particular object in mind. This discovery, not only involves sameness, but an upending of the teleology of sexuality as such. Freud introduces the notion of infantile sexuality that essentially thwarts the singularity of heterosexuality by introducing a distinction between "sexual object" ("opposite" sex) and "sexual aim" (action impelled by the drive toward an object/end), thus making space for deviations from the scientific discourse. The audacity of Freud, which he makes clear in the rhetorical strategy of the opening pages, was to launch a theory of sexuality that breaks with the analogy of what is "natural" or purely corporeal. The analogy between sexuality and hunger no longer holds under this view, and Lacan will later remark that an animal repeatedly satisfies itself because *it does not know* the pleasure of hunger. The textual evidence in favour of Freud's distancing is further propped up by the fact that the medical discourse was clearly driven to subordinate "sexuality" to genital reproduction. However, Freud's predecessors were not blind to the symbolic function of sexuality and the discursive and polemical context that surrounds his work was no doubt influential. It was Freud, however, who radicalized the "anthropological" or cultural significance of sexuality. In *Three Essays,* one finds a distinction between terms which were previously collapsed or employed interchangeably, most notably in regard to "*Geschlechtstrieb*" and "*Sexualtrieb*," the genital and sexual drives. This distinction makes possible a discussion of the "indifference" of the "Freudian Thing" as Lacan calls it. Freud's notion of the "Thing," the "sexual thing" articulates a polymorphous autoerotic sexuality, which is emphatically, and "enigmatically" indifferent toward any sexual object. Indeed, this cluster of terms and their relation to one another sounds "pre-sexual" if one considers how the sexual drive, genital drive, and reproductive drive were coextensively linked (and indiscriminate) before the Freudian incursion. It is at this juncture that "sexuality" is plagued by what it is not (supposed to be), namely, the Freudian thing.

To connect the Freudian insight with the philosophical imperative of this inquiry, the term "missing," discursively speaking, refers to the botched attempt to identify sex or sexuality in the Platonic key (as an Idea). Therefore, the courtship of "ontology" incited by Zupančič, can be understood as a philosophical rescue mission: to find, or name, what is missing in the discourse on sex. To drive Freud's point in a somewhat oblique way,

Zupančič insists that, what structures civilization (and its discontents), what provides the motivating force behind it, is not that which is, *but that which is not*. To this end, sexuality (if it is thought relationally) is not a philosophical problem because it exists but, rather, it is plagued by what does not exist, hence the non-relation of the sexual relation. When Lacan says: "*Il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel*" he is speaking of a structural impossibility pertaining to the problem of the signifying logic. This is a key example of a statement (*énconé*) which radically shifts the position of the "subject of enunciation, meaning the point of view of the speaking subject" (*énconication).* The formulas of sexuation must be understood as a subjective response to the structural impossibility of the sexual relation. In a paradoxical sense, contradiction is precisely why Lacan writes (formulates). Within the seminar…*Ou Pire* he introduces the formulas of sexuation as an attempt to: "to fix that which makes up for the impossibility to write the sexual relation" (Lacan, 31).

It is from the standpoint of sexuality as a structural impossibility (hence, the non-relation) that Zupančič points out how we can understand Freud as clearly demonstrating how the sexual (split) is *a priori*, and thus precedes sexual division (difference). In terms of how the libido is operative in the symbolic register, we can understand what Freud means by "masculine" by looking at a passage from Zupančič:

> If pure Masculinity and pure Femininity existed (if we were able to say what they are), they—or, rather, their sexuality—would be one and the same ("masculine"). *But since they do not exist, there is sexual difference*" (Zupančič, 45).

This paradoxical formulation tells us that sexual difference does not arrive from there being two sexes or sexualities, but rather emerges as a "missing sex" (the "missing" signifier). This position upends the notion of there being a primary sex (male) which makes possible, or regulates, a derivative "second sex."[32]

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[32] "Missing sex," for Zupančič is a logical statement: "if the "second sex" is missing, this does not imply that we have only a 'first sex' (masculinity), since one sex does not amount to 'sex' at all: if there is only one sex, it is not a 'sex' in any meaningful sense." *What is Sex?* 46

When we speak of "masculine" and "feminine," it is oft understood that we are speaking of "ideals" with no corresponding reality as such. Furthermore, that no singular person is purely masculine or feminine, but a mélange or variation of both. This view, despite any attempt to register a sense of individuality or multiplicity, incarnates the whole only to "deconstruct" it. Now, an even more paradoxical formulation is introduced by Zupančič: "what splits *into two is the very nonexistence of the one* (that is, of the one which, if it existed, would be the Other)" (Zupančič, 46, my emphasis). Zupančič's enigmatic formulation enables us to understand the formulas of sexuation: displacing the discourse of the "second sex," Simone de Beauvoir's eponymous 1949 text, and "name" for woman, the Lacanian lexicon places woman in the category of "Other," and in particular the Other in the sexual relationship.

Formulas of sexuation: What we (don't) talk about when we talk about sex

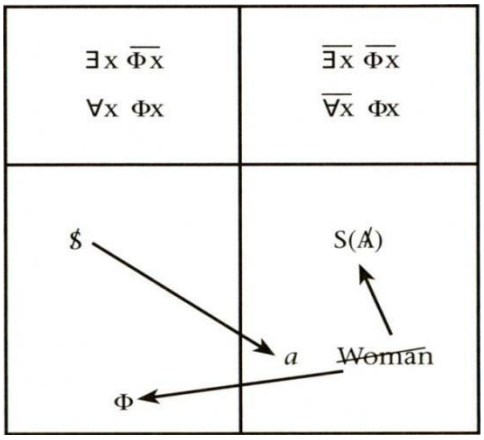

Figure 1: A simulacrum of what Lacan wrote.[33]

Lacan presented, as if unveiling a painting, the formulas of sexuation during his 1972-3 seminar *Encore*. One might wonder, why sexuation and not sexuality? The logic of

[33] This image has been retrieved from the following public domain website: https://nosubject.com/Formulas_of_Sexuation

sexuation is not coterminous with biological sex. Rather, it concerns the subjective responses to castration. The "feminine" and "masculine," as per Lacan's typical use, refer to subject positions (of enunciation) and their relationship to castration; formulated as a division, or cut, as one can see in the visual representation. Again, like sexual difference, for speaking subjects, castration is a universality, and is precisely what each "side" shares, albeit in quite distinct ways: *Castratio ergo sum*. I am castrated therefore I am (split). If one views castration in the sense of "desexualization," then it is the signifier that takes precedence over an organic (in the sense of organs) distinction. In the graph, the left-hand side represents the "masculine" side, and the right, the "feminine." Without belabouring a reading of this figure *in toto,* I will focus on two elements. The "masculine" subject of castration represents a moment of "exception," such that there is the possibility for an ideal man. The "ideal" is not split, as with the "feminine" subjectivity (one can think of the Mother-Whore split, Jean Eustache's film *La maman et la putain* comes to mind). The second reference point is the Lacanian "pas-tous" (not-whole, or not-all) in relation to phallic *jouissance*.

The conceptual cluster for "A Love Letter" (Seminar VII) concerns what Lacan terms the "four discourses," and the relationship between the formulas of sexuation, in respect to the "analytic" and "scientific" discourses. As Lacan notes, the "social link" (or tie) is based on "the inscription of the four discourses." Lacan demonstrates how social links come to be through visual representations, and this is how one should understand the formulas of sexuation, as an attempt to formulate how speaking beings (all of us) who are enmeshed within the social space are *inscribed* by discourse. Put very clearly, the formulas of sexuation demonstrate how sexual difference *qua* division, is symbolized (how it is inscribed). Analytic discourse, to which this graph and this text (*Encore*) belong, "aims at meaning"; however, it is a meaning that is constituted and oriented by failure. The formulas of sexuation demonstrate how man and woman ("masculine" and "feminine") acquire their inscription, and this inscription is necessarily replete with tension, the tension that forms the social link. Furthermore, Lacan argues that all speaking subjects necessarily belong to one side or the other. Within Section XII of *Encore,* Lacan provides a close reading of the graph. For our purposes herein, I would

like to draw out certain emphases and their respective consequences that will drive my argument.

A key difference between the respective sides is the presence of the "father function" on the left. Here, "man" does not refer to the universal human, but rather "masculine" subjectivity or "man." The existence of the father figure should be understood as a moment of exception, such that this figure manages to evade the universal imperative of castration and thus presents a singular case. The graph reads: there is at least one (the Ideal man) who manages to escape castration. Conversely, on the "feminine" side ("the woman portion of speaking subjects"), there is no subject (no "x") who manages to escape castration. The asymmetry of what drives the operativity of the exception is grounded in the non-existence of a singular feminine Ideal, such that the feminine ideal is always already split (hence, the Mother and the Whore; outside of fantasy, it is prohibited to be "both"). If we move from the formulas of sexuation toward the enigmatic proviso "*il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel*," one must bear in mind what Lacan argues is the purpose of analytic discourse: "the aim [...] insofar as it pursues what can be said and enunciated" (Lacan, 82). This argument presents a mise en cause: what does Lacan mean by "rapport?" Guy Le Gaufey has contributed to the discourse on the "rapport" with his text *Lacan and the Formulae of Sexuation: Exploring Logical Consistency and Clinical Consequences.* Therein, he argues that it is a "stupidity" to translate "rapport" simply as "relationship," which signals the negation of the sexual relationship. Bruce Fink, in his footnotes to *Encore,* demonstrates the ambiguity of this term. The movement of thought that culminates in the formulas of sexuation is described by Le Gaufey more or less in the following way. Lacan puts into words the logical conclusion of the formulae of sexuation with the provocative affirmation according to which "il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel": there is no sexual *rapport*. Rapport in the sense of relationship: a structural, logical, mathematical point, not an empirical "sexual" relation; ratio, such that there is an incommensurability at play, a lack of equal measure.[34]

[34] This section is indebted to Guy le Gaufey's pathbreaking text *Lacan and the Formulae of Sexuation: Exploring Logical Consistency and Clinical Consequences* (2019).

To drive this point, I will focus on the "feminine" side of the graph. The graph tells us that all women are subject to castration. This lack of exception is what motors feminine subjectivity as such, as one can see with the splitting of the feminine ideal. However, what enables us to understand the incommensurability is the existence of the enigmatic "pas-tout" (not-all), which could also be translated as "not-whole." In contrast to the first statement, that no x on the feminine side escapes castration, the enigmatic "not-all" is riddled by antagonism and cannot escape it. When Lacan says that: "*la femme n'existe pas,*" it is not the noun that is thrown into question, but rather the definite article: *the* Woman does not exist. What the "the" suggests is that there is a closed set of women (the Woman) represented by a singular ideal. If this were the case, feminine subjectivity would not be split and women would remain a closed set bound by the exceptionality of the external figure of the ideal (of non-castration); because this is not the case, the Woman (as exception to castration) does not exist.

To return to the "missing" entity in the discourse on sex, we will now venture to demonstrate how the "desexualization" of reality links early modern philosophy to psychoanalysis. In moving from pre-modern science as a "primitive sexual technique," sex as constitutive of being *qua* being necessarily involves the process of subjectivation. The subject is not a prison-house of discursive limitations, but is, rather, a speaking subject who belongs to the symbolic order by which we are constituted. This necessarily implicates ontology. Materialism without a subject cannot escape the symbolic order wherein it is brutally entangled. If we speak of the "sexual" as the thrum of biological mechanisms, something becomes lost, something "human," and, at the same time, "non-human": the missing signifier. Scientific discourse and the positivist account of sexuality fail to capture the ontological minus and cannot explain the missing signifier: what we (don't) talk about when we talk about sex. It must be stressed: we are dealing with *signifiers*, not *sexual organs*.[35]

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[35] As Owen Hewitson reminds us: "the signifier is a sign without any referent. It does not refer to anything, although it shares with the trace absence as its fundamental feature," from the digital source: https://www.lacanonline.com/2010/06/what-does-lacan-say-about-the-signifier. Furthermore, although the descriptions of the signifier are dispersed, this early description is useful: *In Seminar V: The Formations of the Unconscious*, Lacan

Zupančič offers a fascinating instance of the failure to "represent" sex in painting, the crisis of representation for (pre)modern painting which struggled to represent "the human being" in the form of Adam and Eve. Should the human body be represented as such, meaning with a navel, or without? The representation of Adam and Eve with a navel would, biologically speaking, signal a body produced through sexual reproduction rather than divine creation. If one looks at Reuben's *Adam and Eve*, it is clear that the artist portrayed the body as analogous to the human body, with exact anatomical proportions (navel and all). The existence of the navel necessarily implies a link (umbilically) to sexual reproduction and a prior being (the mother). This bodily opening implies a gruesome origin; to borrow from the Enlightenment's gothic lexicon, the "gruesome" body stains the "sublime" origin of divine creation, which is "above" nature. The gruesome body is a troubled locus for philosophy. Recalling Augustinian poetics: *inter faeces et urinam nascimur* (we are born between urine and feces). It is no doubt that sexuality, in Augustine's view, was tantamount to a punishment or curse.

The early modern physician and theologian Thomas Browne attempted to address the issue of the protruding navel in *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1646), a text often referred to as "vulgar errors." Therein, he discussed the figuring of Adam and Eve "with" navels. As he argues: "Now the Navel being a *part*, not *precedent*, but subsequent unto generation, nativity or parturition, it cannot be well imagined at the creation or extraordinary formation of *Adam*, who immediately issued from the Artifice of God; nor also that of *Eve*, who was not solemnly begotten, but suddenly framed, and anomalously proceeded from *Adam*." [36] The representation of Adam and Eve struggles to maintain the appearance of being both a deviation and exception to the human being, and representative of the first (human) beings. Browne's example is one that makes explicit how philosophy (*qua* theology or science) tarries with the messy origin of being.

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writes: "That there are in the unconscious signifying chains which subsist as such, and which from there structure, act on the organism, influence what appears from the outside as a symptom, this is the whole basis of analytic experience,"

[36] This quote by Browne has been pulled from the following digital source: Source: https://penelope.uchicago.edu/pseudodoxia/pseudo55.html

Why not cover this embarrassing "mark" with a fig leaf? This question enables us to ask: is the cogito a fig leaf?—an attempt to cover up the messy origin of being? This final section argues that the cogito is the positive (in the double sense of the word) counterpart to sexual difference; it is the affirmation of "what is shared," a "disavowal" of the split, and an attempt to cover up what is "missing." This effort to breach with the sexual cosmology of primitive science and ancient philosophy enables Descartes to posit a universal, de-sexualized account of the human being as *res cogitans*, with an accidental, or at least secondary, (sexual) origin. Psychoanalysis emerges from the same (epistemological) "break" with traditional metaphysics (as cosmology)—or rather, it is inaugurated by the same gesture, that is, the thrust of the de-sexualization of reality. However, the navel represents the hole in knowledge, or the gap that separates what we can know and the corollary gap in knowledge that is coextensive with the gap in being. This gap is the space of the unconscious.[37] How science responds to this gap is what interests us.

The process of de-sexualization can be understood as "scientific" in a particular sense. We might understand the cogito and the formulas of sexuation as two different "attempts" to formalize impossible junctures. Each attempt requires the further labour of predicates and conceptual elaborations, and is not self-evident. However, Lacan's critique regarding the absence of the symbolic within positivist science also holds in regards to the cogito. Descartes' *mathesis universalis*, a universal model of science propped up by mathematics, is a pursuit shared by other early modern philosophers such as Leibniz. However, to read these figures speculatively, one needs to inject the symbolic dimension retroactively into their works. Psychoanalysis can only be a "scientific vocation" if the symbolic order fits. Science "as a vocation" is preoccupied with truth, and therefore attempts to ward off metaphysical dogmatism which claims access to the privileged domain of the noumenal. This breach is what characterizes all post-Cartesian philosophy.

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[37] Zupančič draws our attention to Freud's formulation in the *Interpretation of Dreams*: *der Nabel des Traums*, "the dream's navel," which points to the gap in knowledge. As Freud writes of the "dream's navel" as "the spot where it reaches down into the unknown." 671, Freud

However, the scientific pose of Descartes leaves room for the sublime "big Other"—that is, God—while remaining dogmatically rationalist, such that God's truth is always the truth as such. Discussing very briefly the psychoanalytic concept of truth will enable a discussion of the link between the cogito, Christianity, and the prohibition of the unconscious, all of which have a direct effect upon knowledge as truth.

Wittgenstein's final aphorism in the *Tractatus* states: "Whereof one cannot speak, therefore, one must be silent." However one might interpret this aphorism, psychoanalysis rejects *tout court* any prohibitions on impossibility, and this necessarily involves the (im)possibility of what can be said (or written). To interpret this aphorism as a positivist (who rejects logical impossibility) or an existentialist (dwelling in the mystery of being; "*that* the world is") would be to miss the mark of the Real. The Real is not a logical prohibition, but rather a proximity, or "stumbling block," that prevents us from having knowledge about it in a strict sense. Alain Badiou considers the Lacanian prohibition that "we cannot speak about the real" as recourse to sophistry, though Zupančič is convincing in her rerouting of this critique.[38] Her argument is the following: It is not the case that Lacan prohibits the impossible (speaking about the Real), but rather, it is precisely at the juncture of impossibility, that one can formalize it, which means write it. One can see very clearly how Lacan departs from the "anti-philosophy" of Wittgenstein or the sophists, which by consequence brings him closer to Hegel, and therefore a dialectical thought which seeks to think through moments of foreclosure and profound contradiction. As Zupančič writes: "The Real is not some realm or substance to be talked about, it is the inherent contradiction of speech, twisting its tongue, so to speak. And this is precisely *why there is truth*, and why, at the same time, it is not possible to say it all" (Zupančič, 42). To this end, one could say that philosophy via psychoanalysis, speaks truth, but with *a forked tongue*. The concept of "truth" that one finds in Lacan is not straightforward, but it remains a central motif through his oeuvre. Truth cannot be revealed all at once, or in full, only in partialities, through paradoxes and slips, the most enigmatic concept being the already discussed feminine "*pas-tous*." If formalization

[38] Zupančič (2017) outlines the debate between Cassin and Badiou, whereby Cassin defends the figure of the Sophist, and Badiou the Philosopher.

happens at this limit (the prohibition against the impossible) or impasse of the discursive space, then philosophical propositions or formalizations can be understood as "universal" attempts to cover up the dark spot of the Real. "*Cogito, ergo sum*," "*je pense, donc je suis*," "*ergo sum, ergo existo*"—these formulations emerge as "positive" counterparts, as attempts to formalize what is impossible. The subject of enunciation and the statement remain split, however.

When we say "I," the I becomes a placeholder for the signifier; this is not to say that it is correctly indexed in acts of speech; what belongs to the "index" does not signify, despite granting the illusion of unity. In light of this split, we may say that logic begins "in" or with paradox, as Lacan reminds us in *L'Étourdit.* The relation between logic (as formulation) and speech is necessarily dialectical for Lacan; the negativity that plagues the verbal is inextricable from it, it produces it. To speak is to verbalize "knots," to necessarily fork your tongue: "I do not use knots because they are non-verbal. On the contrary, I try to verbalize them" (Lacan, 35). In the final analysis, analytic discourse is not about accepting contradiction as such, but rather, as Zupančič puts it, "taking one's place in it" (Zupančič, 71). Under this view is not a shift in truth as such, but in our position, in the *position of the subject of enunciation*. In the final analysis, what Zupančič says of the Lacanian Real, that it "bind[s]the realism of consequences to the modality of the impossible," is of consequence for philosophy as such (Zupančič, 81). And thus, the possibility of "Deus quidam deceptor" (a God who deceives)—a frightening thought.

The problem of metaphysics is shared by (early) modern philosophy and psychoanalysis. To take hold of sexual difference as a philosophical problem entails a rupture with traditional ontologies. The sexual cosmology or cosmogony of pre-modern philosophy was structured around sexual difference; pre-modern philosophy and its attendance practices (mathematics, logic) demonstrate how active/passive, light/dark, form/matter, are linked to sexual difference as such. On the side of each split, the "masculine" side is predicated on activity, light (of reason), and form, whereas the "feminine" side is predicated on passivity, darkness, and matter. One finds everywhere from Pythagoras to

Scholastic thought a "table of categories"[39] that is explicitly marked by sexual difference. These "essences" were thought to ground the very nature of being and thus can only be understood as structuring reality as such. However, taking distance from traditional cosmology does not obviate the question of sex as ontological. Rather, it is only by way of a de-sexualization that sex can be understood in a properly ontological, modern sense.

To return to the crisis of the representation constituted by the navel and the gap which it attempts to cover (the ontological minus), the more timid artists employed fig leaves and other foliage to cover up the traumatic hole of the navel. The fig leaf covers up not only "what is there," (the gruesome and irrational body) but also what is not there, namely the lack.

In this final section, I will argue that the cogito can be conceived as a positive veil that attempts to cover up the inherent antagonism that is proper to the human being. Furthermore, this attempt to cover up the messy origin does not necessarily mean that the cogito succeeds. In turning to the cogito, I analyze the cogito as carrying with it a set of beliefs, insofar as "masculinity" is predicated on the pretense or belief in a self-identical existence. Is the cogito a "closed set," in the sense that the "masculine" side of the formulas of sexuation closes the set of "all men?" Paradoxically, for Descartes, the "exception" to the messiness of castration (which implies non-identity) is afforded to all thinking beings. It attempts to de-sexualize the messiness of human beings by positing a neutral, and thus neutered, thinking subject. The unexceptional exceptionality of the thinking subject is also found in Kant's propulsive imperative within "What is Enlightenment?" (1784): "*sapere aude*," to find courage to use one's reason; that which is already available to us as thinking subjects. This thesis will now make a case for the "masculine" and "feminine" cogito, a *contradictio in adjecto* if we consider the asexual cogito. However, sex in the ontological sense opens the space for thinking the cogito as a gesture that is proper to speaking subjects, and these subjects are necessarily split and

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[39] Anne Carson,in "The Gender of Sound," draws our attention to the Pythagorean table of opposites, which links femininity ("female") with darkness, passivity, limitation. Similarly, Alenka Zupančič, "Sexual Difference and Ontology," makes the argument that "new ontologies," fail to consider sexual difference in light of the Lacanian concept of the "Real," or sexual difference as an ontological problem.

"placed" in the symbolic order. While the splitting of the cogito does not necessarily exculpate Descartes (from the accusation of "dualism"), it enables us to answer the question: does the cogito have (a) sex? (in an oblique way).[40]

Castratio ergo sum: the "masculine" and "feminine" cogito

The formulas of sexuation demonstrate how the "masculine" and "feminine" modalities negotiate their respective positions in relation to castration. The term "position" cannot be underestimated here, as the subject's relation to castration is the universal subjectivizing force which determines the position of the "subject of the enunciation," as discussed in the previous chapter.[41] It is from this standpoint (of the subject of enunciation) that we should effort to understand where to situate the cogito. Is the cogito a pretense or belief, masquerade or imposture (the feminine and masculine subject positions par excellence)? At this juncture, it should be clear what, along Lacanian lines, is meant by "masculine" and "feminine"; they are subjective responses to the "ontological minus." Lacan's concept of difference makes clear his explicit break with structural linguistics. Such that, when we speak of sexual division, it is not that we ought to look for a differentiating feature, but a "universal parallax inscription." If we think of subjectivity as a geometry, it concerns "points" of view, and these points determine the subject (position) of enunciation. When Lacan says "I am not where I think," this intervention holds that there is a cut within the discursive space that literally splits the subject, or, for our purposes, the cogito.

In terms of understanding Lacan's interpretation of Descartes, Žižek writes in "Cogito and Sexual Difference" that we must read the cogito through Kant (and his critique of it).[42] He argues that two "opposed" readings of the cogito can be found in Lacan's

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[40] The problematic of Cartesian dualism is not the focus of my inquiry herein. In terms of the Cartesian body, and the relationship between body and soul, my reading of Descartes is heavily indebted to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception* and Jean-Luc Marion's *On Passive Thought: The Myth of Cartesian Dualism.* It is this reading that subtends my understanding of the Cartesian (myth) of dualism. To read Marion with Lacan would be a fascinating endeavour, but alas, this is not what I try to do here.

[41] Chapter One presents an in-depth analysis of the significance of the subject of enunciation in (on the Cartesian "subject")

[42] This section is absolutely indebted to Žižek!

seminars, which, despite their divergence, can, and ought to be, read "synchronously." This approach is interesting, as it invites us to dwell with Lacan's formulation "I am not where I think." Such that, the "I think," and thought are non-identical. The analysis herein will attempt to address Lacan's double interpretation of the cogito, and Žižek's analysis thereof. The two "opposed" Lacanian readings can be found in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* and the *Logic of Phantasy*. Lacan "breaks up the unit" of *cogito ergo sum* in order to grasp the respective parts and put (force) them into new relations. Žižek reads Lacan as figuring the cogito and its respective postures or choices as (being) coextensive with sexual difference (division). The "two" cogitos are presented in the following way: cogito as a "forced choice" (which entails a loss of being), and cogito as a "choice" that relegates thought to the unconscious. Otherwise put, thought without being and being without thought. Žižek further qualifies these positions in terms of a Kantian "I think"—an apperception founded on the inaccessibility of the I's being (the *res cogitans*)—and the Cartesian "affirmation" that is founded on the exclusion of thought. These positions represent the feminine and masculine cogitos respectively Žižek's speculative advance is to suggest that we read these opposing interpretations concomitantly "as a duality that registers sexual difference" (Žižek, 10). For "each" cogito asks (begs) the question: "what am I?" albeit in a different register.

The masculine cogito is a "forced choice" that engenders a loss of being. Otherwise put, in choosing being, the masculine cogito has being that is leached of real being. This enables him to qualify Meillassoux's conception of the subject as the "masculine" cogito, such that the Meillassouxian subject *presumes* it exists (as a homogeneous subject) at the expense of thinking the Real. As Lacan puts it: "ergo sum" I think, "therefore I am."[43] With this statement, Lacan ascribes "fantasy-being" to the masculine cogito. Fantasy-being presumes the possibility of reconciliation, such that the decentered thought that "correlates" to the subject's being can be mended through self-conscious reflection. This position holds that conscious thought is correlative to the subject's being. To put this more clearly, the masculine cogito requires that self-consciousness necessarily leads to

[43] Lacan, *Logic of Phantasy*, 66.

self-transparency. One could say that the Descartes of analytic philosophy embodies the masculine cogito, the self-transparent subject, which makes a parody out of Cartesian philosophy.[44] The masculine cogito attempts to re-direct castration away from being. Under this view, the masculine cogito diverts thought away from castration, thus masking the dubiousness of "all x" which marks the existential "Man" as really existing.

By contrast, the feminine cogito "chooses thought," the pure "I think," which can be understood in relation to Derrida's argument concerning hyperbolic doubt—that the cogito (must) pass through a point of madness—which hinges on the pre-existence of a void, the "pure void," that colours the opaque space between thought and being, though it belongs to neither.[45] What Derrida refers to as a "pure void of the I think" is radicalized through Lacan's conception of feminine *jouissance* as the non-existent point.[46] It is not the case that feminine subjectivity has an obliquely fulfilling access to jouissance that male subjectivity does not. Rather, the paradox of feminine jouissance suggests that the feminine cogito as the "pure I think" is only possible if the subject passes through the sheen of jouissance and of senselessness. The feminine cogito is coterminous with "pure impossible thought" and must be understood in terms of the subject of enunciation (that is decidedly feminine *qua* subject position). From the standpoint of the opposed figures of the cogito, one gleans Lacan's critique of self-transparency, such that self-consciousness requires an external object. If the cogito is an enunciation that "belongs" to the ego, the fig leaf that conceals the loss of the masculine cogito's being can thus be understood as the "guise of existence"—the masquerade of being that confuses the masquerade with real being.

By contrast, the feminine cogito is a portal to the Lacanian Real. This position demonstrates how it is precisely through non-recognition of the *res cogitans,* such that

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[44] This "parody" happens at "both ends" so to speak. The "specter" of the Cartesian cogito can be found across Western Academia, as Žižek argues in *The Ticklish Subject.*

[45] See Derrida *Cogito and the History of Madness.*

[46] See Lacan *Seminar XX*; Ecrits. As Lacan reminds us endlessly— The relation of the subject to the phallus is "[…] established without regard to the anatomical difference between the sexes" (Écrits 282). Thus, the relation does not exist because anatomical difference is there, but rather, it is grounded in what is not there... and this "not there" happens to be shared by men/women. A discussion of the "rapport" is masterfully rendered in Guy Le *Gaufey's Lacan and the Formulae of Sexuation: Exploring Logical Consistency and Clinical Consequences.*

the subject cannot "find" herself (her being) in thought. This moment of non-recognition demonstrates how reality, perceived from the perspective of the male cogito, requires a non-visible stain (the illusion of a Whole). By contrast, the feminine cogito is oriented toward a making-visible of this stain, which necessarily requires an Other (who says for me "*I am* where I think"). This shift in gaze, or point of view, is constitutive of the feminine position, whereby recourse to the Other grounds the way toward self-consciousness. The feminine position reveals that self-consciousness as such is always already decentered. Self-consciousness "comes into being" from the "outside," an external "place," that is the place of the Other. As Žižek puts it: "I am aware of myself only insofar as there is, outside of me, a place in which the truth about me is articulated" (Žižek, 13). This articulated truth comes from an Other. From this description, one can see how these two "places" are unable to coincide, such that one cannot abolish the stain, but can only "look" toward the other for the articulation (the making visible) of this stain. *A contrario* the fantasy of the male cogito, the perspective of the feminine cogito does not seek to reconcile the gap between self-consciousness and self-transparency, but rather brings us closer to the Other: the space of impenetrable opacity that is constitutive of symbolic reality as such.

If we begin with the premise that we cannot abolish the stain (the gap), we may find a way to negotiate the cogito as symptom or *sinthome*; the latter being the correlative stain that marks the non-being of the subject. There are fundamental asymmetries that must be addressed in order to proceed. First, the cogito must acknowledge the existence of an Outside that is irreducible to intersubjectivity—the lack of resolution concerning lack itself—such that we must understand this externality as constitutive of the symbolic, the structuring principle of reality. Otherwise put, there is a modality of exclusion at play that is constitutive; one is barred from the access point of self-consciousness without recourse to the other. This is a Hegelian move in the precise sense that mediation is necessarily linked to subjectivity (the doubling of self-consciousness). As Žižek puts it, "[the] object is *stricto sensu* the correlate of self-consciousness" (Žižek, 13).

The feminine cogito is a vehicle for understanding the Kantian "gaze," which introduces to subjectivity a subject bereft of pure reason, which is the empty form of "self-

apperception." If one follows Kant through Lacan here, the empty form of self-apperception requires an Other. The belief that one can—as *res cogitans*—participate in some common substance, in the mode of non-symbolic identity, is the pose of the masculine cogito. The masculine cogito is, in the final analysis, self-consciousness without a symbolic identity. The "symptom" of this choice is that the subject loses his entire symbolic identity. As a being leached of real being it has no particularity. In this respect, the masculine cogito can only "be" through (symbolic) absence, by trading one's being for symbolic compensation. This absence ensures the possibility that the traumatic incursion of the real is inhibited; thus, the loss of being is linked to masculine prohibition. I think we can locate the Cartesian exclusion of sex through the masculine cogito, insofar as, in order to philosophically advance the project of "equality" (a Christian doctrine that pertains to souls), one must abolish the symbolic identity that is produced through sexual difference. Thus, we may conjecture that the attachment to the symbolic Whole must be thought as symptomatic of the masculine cogito.

The correspondence between Descartes and Elisabeth of Bohemia may assist us in understanding the interplay of masculine/feminine subject positions. The case of Elisabeth, or the challenge of a (woman's) migraine, can be drawn from the involved correspondence between her and Descartes, and will serve to illuminate this point.[47] Therein, Elisabeth indicts Descartes' insistence on substance dualism. I will briefly gloss her argument, in order to reveal how the "portion of women speakers," as Lacan puts it, serves to challenge the *belief* that self-mastery can eclipse doubt. One could say that Elisabeth's question assumes the form: "What am I, if not a *throbbing substance*?" How can the pure *res cogitans* become subordinate to madness, migraine, or illness, such that it becomes disoriented? For our purposes, we will focus on how she frames her question. If the feminine cogito is closer to Kantian apperception (the void of the "pure I think"), then Elisabeth's attempt to bring negative qualities into philosophy can be read as an

[47] A case could be made that Elisabeth represents the figure of the hysteric—in the precise Lacanian sense—as the subject who appropriates the desire of the Other. In this case, she appropriates Descartes' "search for truth," and other vocational aims that he enunciates in epistolary exchanges.

attempt to reveal the gap in the function of "cause." This gap affords a symptomatic experience of language, of rifts and lost "causes."

What Elisabeth is saying, is that Descartes, when speaking as a substance dualist, cannot account for phenomena such as headaches or bodily disruptions that would render the cogito confused and unable to *think* clearly. She writes to him during 1645, experiencing a "persistent illness," in this exchange Descartes prescribed a Stoic remedy that seems to undermine his own explanations of a materialist account of the passions (in the *Passions of the Soul*). In suggesting that her fever was caused by sadness, his remedy is reflection; she must reflect on her soul, which will ultimately clarify for her *why* she was in pain, and thus, can overcome it. Descartes asserts that Elisabeth must "make reason her Master," and so, would the corollary to this argument be—in the Baconian key—to make nature her slave, meaning *her own* nature? I argue that, despite his original prescription (which was rejected), this intervention forced Descartes to think about the irreducibility of phenomena to pure thought or corporeal experience, which forces him to invent a "third primitive notion." [48]

However, the ambiguity of the feminine cogito *qua* desiring is eclipsed by the emergence of early modern empirical science. The possibility of a model of sexual difference q*ua* subjectivity is replaced by a cerebral model (the positivist cogito *avant la lettre*) that pricks feminine subjectivity for not being empirical enough. The medical translation of the feminine modality of questioning demonstrates natural philosophy's move toward empiricism, leaving behind a metaphysics that could, in principle, tarry with "third" notions, such as traumatic incursions that shift the subject's position of enunciation. This is precisely the de-sexualization (in the sense of cosmology) that links (early) modern science and psychoanalysis, albeit paradoxically, as it purports to posit a doctrine of (spiritual or mental) equality, while clinging to (meta)physicalist accounts of inferiority. Medical or empirical science misses the mark, yet the ambiguity of the "third" space that Descartes attempts to articulate remains. This impasse affords us the possibility to think

[48] The third primitive notion, rather than being a third created substance presents a novel way of understanding the ego, as a thing that cannot think without a body, meaning that *union*—the union of *men* sand *meum corpus*—indicates a primordial mode of existing for the ego, that is characterized by passive thought.

through Descartes *avec* Lacan, with their shared aporetic qualities and commitment to knowledge as truth. The following section will explore the possibilities of this speculative partnership.

Chapter 3

3 *The Cogito in Love*

"Love is infinite potentially—not in actuality—for it is impossible to love with an end in sight. In other words, the desires of people in love are infinite, and they can never settle down after achieving something. This is because after obtaining it, they long for something else, and something else again, and something more after that."

Tullia d'Aragona, *Dialogues on the Infinity of Love*

"Say I may wait for you […] I waited a long time—Master—but I can wait more—wait till my hazel hair is dappled […] I want to see you more —Sir—than all I wish for in this world … Could you come to new England this summer […] Would you like to come—Master?"

Emily Dickinson, *Master Letters*

A Very Obscure Definition

Depending on whom you ask, the philosophical passion *par excellence* is love. Wonder is a prime contender. The philosophical concept of love bears on psychoanalysis, which has developed its own novel conceptualization. This chapter will not belabour a philosophical genealogy of love with footnotes to Plato, but rather, we will discuss the Cartesian concept of love and its modern incarnations, which will include the arguments of post-Cartesian philosophers such as François Poullain de la Barre and Mary Wollstonecraft.[49] The definition of love that we will explore herein is given by Descartes in *The Passions of the Soul* (1649). The argument of this chapter rests on linking Descartes' conception of love to the modern subject of psychoanalysis, such that the experience of love makes explicit the previous chapter's thesis: that the cogito is split, and this split can be further qualified as divided through sexual difference. Furthermore, the analysis the Cartesian

[49]As Badiou writes in *In Praise of Love*: "As you can see, philosophy struggles with huge tension. On the one hand, love seen as a natural extravagance of sex arounses a kind of rational suspicion. Conversely, we see an apology for love that borders on religious epiphany. Christianity hovers in the background, a religion of love after all. And the tension is almost unbearable," 15.

concept of love demonstrates a shift that is inaugurated by modern subjectivity, namely, the emphases placed on (self)esteem and recognition. To begin, it seems necessary to gloss the definition put forth by Descartes in *Passions*: "Love is an excitation of the soul, caused by the motion of the spirits, which incites it to join itself in volition to the objects that appear to be suitable to it" (*Passions*, §49). To understand why Descartes arrives at this definition, some provisional notes are required. Following the Cartesian advance on love, we will venture into the works of the Cartesian and post-Cartesian Enlightenment thinkers, which will then enable us to arrive at Lacan, and to test the thesis of the Second Chapter: that it is possible to conceive of a masculine and feminine cogito, and how love makes explicit this split.

The Passions of the Soul (1649) is borne out of correspondence, and in particular, the questioning of Elisabeth of Bohemia, who provokes Descartes to think through the philosophical—in the sense of moral—phenomenon of the passions. This was difficult to flesh out for the geometer, but Descartes holds that he writes and speaks "*en physicien*" (as a physicist) and not "*en philosophe morale*" (as a moral philosopher).[50] Drawing from his previous philosophy, the passions require the union of body and soul and thus, Descartes considers the consequences of this union in a novel way. The text brings to the fore a fundamental point: the case of the passions reveals that the mind is not always principally active, that there is a degree of *submission* involved. However, to arrive at what we might call the "subjective," or the subjectivizing aspects of the text, which explicitly pertains to the experience and function of love, we will attempt to understand why Descartes begins as (though does not remain) a physicist. The structure of the text builds upon Descartes' previous metaphysical thinking: it begins with the essential truths of God and the nature of the soul that was previously established in the *Meditations*, before turning to a physicalist account of the passions, such that he gives physiological descriptions to account for the passions. In this text he speaks *qua* "natural philosopher," yet there is something peculiar about the metaphysical enterprise. For the purpose of this chapter, we will focus on the concept of love for finite speaking subjects.

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[50] This enunciation is observed by Geneviève Rodis-Lewis, *Passions*, xvi.

While Descartes' conception of love attempts to extend his previous metaphysical thinking, the *Passions* is unique in its approach. Previously, Descartes attempted to explain truth in relation to the Whole. By contrast, his account of love in *Passions* is bound to the ego and tends toward what is "practical," a more subjective account of ethical consideration. In this text, the passions, and love in particular, are considered in a different register in *Passions*, predicated on the notion of consideration and (self)esteem. What is it about love that makes the subject "think small"? It seems that, if one begins with the I, which is (supposedly) coextensive with the greater Whole, it drives the subject away from the universal. In a letter to Elisabeth, Descartes writes: "one must […] think that one […] is, in effect, one part of the universe and, more particularly even, one part of this earth, one part of this state, and this society and this family" (VIII:291-3). There is, accordingly, a contradictory demand on the subject: to see the goodness of the universe as Whole, rather than in any particular subject. The subject is small, thinks small, and in the final analysis, is imperfect. It is only by thinking the Whole that the subject can understand goodness. How does love "fit" within this scheme? There seems to be a strong element of self-effacement, or abandonment at play. Again, as Descartes writes to Elisabeth concerning what man ought to do: "abandoning himself altogether to God's will, he strips himself of his own interests and has no other passion than to do what he thinks pleasing to God" (Frigo, 1103). If love is grounded in metaphysics and is anchored in God's perfection, as Descartes argues to Elisabeth in another letter, what takes place when the subject turns his affection toward the utterly imperfect human love object? In an early letter to Elizabeth, Descartes suggests that God's perfection is sufficient to justify such love: "Since the true object of love is perfection, when we elevate our minds to considering God as He is, we will find ourselves naturally … inclined to love him" (VIII:291-2). As botched imperfections, our love belongs not only to God, but to other subjects that draw us in. However, the question remains: must the subject *qua* love object be thought in relation to the Whole to justify loving them at all?

How can we move from a love of God to the love of his imperfect creations? It seems unlikely that Descartes will manage to defend the love for others with his metaphysical defense of reality. The *Passions* attempts to defend the love of others based on the structure of the passions and the good they provide. Again, in a letter to Elisabeth, he

attempts to link the love of others to some greater Whole: If we think only of ourselves alone, we can enjoy only those goods that are particular to us. On the other hand, if we consider ourselves as part of some other body, we may participate in the goods held in common, without being deprived of those that are proper to ourselves. Furthermore, Descartes argues that the subject should consider the joy she is experiencing as connected to the greater Whole, in order to augment the sensation of joy. However, Descartes does not provide a demonstration of the subject's connection to the greater Whole. It must be noted that these are practical, not metaphysical arguments. Thus, the cogito in love must maintain that he is both a distinct substance (*res cogitans*) and always already a "part" of the Whole, despite the absent demonstration of this. We may say that the subject's place in the world is a presupposition.[51]

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza gripes that Descartes' definition of love was very "obscure."[52] Spinoza takes issue with the notion that Descartes would ground love in a "wish, a "volition" that excites the soul. As Alberto Frigo notes, there are two rather peculiar aspects that subtend this "quite baroque" definition. First, that the lover thinks of himself as joined to the lover "from the present," and second, that Descartes posits an "imaginary whole encompassing the lover and the beloved as an essential component of this passion." Regarding the temporal dimension of the argument, Frigo reminds us of Descartes' distinction between desire, which is oriented toward a future, and love, which is anchored to the present: "The temporal divide between love and desire is confirmed by the enumeration (*dénombrement*) and the "orderly list" of passions at the beginning of the second part of the treatise" (Frigo, 1101). Yet, what makes love the passion of the present? While Frigo notes how the orderly consideration of the passions is not better understood by recourse to the temporal distinction, one must better grasp the context in

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[51] In a letter to Chanut (around 1645), Descartes writes: "It is the the nature of love [l'amour] to make one consider oneself and the object loved as a single whole of which one is but a part; and to transfer the care one previously took of oneself to the preservation of the whole." (IV:611; cf. IV:308; IX:387)

[52] Spinoza's critique of Descartes' definition of love in the *Ethics:* "The definition given by writers who define love as 'the lover's *wish* to be united with the object of his love' expresses not the essence of love, but a property of it; and these writers have not sufficiently grasped the essence of love, neither they have succeeded in forming any clear conception of its property. This has led to the universal verdict that their definition is very obscure" 313, *Spinoza: Complete Works* (emphasis mine).

which Descartes was enmeshed. There is a thickness, which Descartes seeks to underplay, that permeates the notion of presence that is borne out of the Thomistic account of temporality. Aquinas defines love as "the relation or co-adaptation (*habitudo vel coaptatio*) of the appetite in respect to the object which the desiring creature covets" (Frigo, 1101). When looking at the love object, one can infer that it is (at present) united to the subject, by affinity or relation of some sort. Aquinas' argument is predicated on the distinction between pleasure and longing which corresponds to presence and absence, respectively. The notion of *habitudo* or *proportio* suggests that not only do we inhabit the goodness of the relation, but the passion and its effect (goodness) is commensurable (*proportio*). This perspective suggests that "real presence" is the cause of "joyful passions." Frigo's analogy is useful here, not only because it reveals how philosophers "in their time" are scarred by a previous Master, it further demonstrates how Descartes' conception of love is marked by the perfume of Christianity.

Love, for Descartes, seems to suggest the unity of the subject with his beloved, but this is not necessarily the case. The notion of unity that Descartes is working with is worth bringing to bear. Oddly, this union does not necessarily imply physical togetherness. There is, in the Thomistic account of presence and union, two conceptions: real union (which is physical) and emotional union (which is abstract). As Aquinas writes in the *Summa Theologiae*:

> The first of these unions is caused 'effectively' by love, because love moves man to desire and seek the presence of the beloved, as of something suitable and belonging to him, the second union is caused 'formally' by love, because love itself is this union or bond.[53]

Frigo's engagement with Aquinas reveals that the presence of love is actually independent of the presence or absence of the lover, it persists *et in absentia et in praesentia*. Thus, it is indifferent to the "flesh and blood" presence of the subject. This

[53] Quoted in Alberto Frigo's text: "A Very Obscure Definition." British Journal for the History of Philosophy 24 (6):1097-1116 (2016), 1101.

generalization stitches up what otherwise bores a hole in the concept of love, such that the place of longing and desire (the absentia) no longer provides a gap. Following Aquinas, who posits equivalence between *praesentia* and *absentia,* will help us understand Descartes' argument. This "stitching up" of what bores a hole in the presence of an absence can be understood in relation to Descartes' *sensus communis* (as discussed in Chapter Two) and his belief in the Whole. By this, I mean to say that Descartes' modern philosophy is characterized by an optimistic Christian worldview, which subordinates desire to love and situates each subject as part of a Whole, despite a lack of demonstration of the existence of said Whole: It is presumed *qua* "cosmic unity."[54]

This brings us to Lacanian wager of whether one can say anything sensible about love. Descartes becomes less philosophical in the precise sense that he posits practical arguments which are subtended by Thomistic theology. While the language of "appetite" is not present in Descartes (as that which strives to give matter form) it is replaced by the metaphysically neutered notion of "consideration." Subjective consideration (that is, how to measure esteem) and the "formal unity" of the subject and love object, becomes indispensable for Descartes. This unity is predicated on the existence of a Whole to which the subject as lover and his beloved object belong. As previously mentioned, this Whole is never demonstrated and thus we can see the workings of the imaginary at play.

Descartes attempts to challenge Lacan's proclamation that nothing sensible can be said about love, by positing an overly abstract treatment of love. By consideration, Descartes argues that to love a person or a thing means holding them or something in the space, or presence, of love according to an affection that exists independently of whether the love object is present or absent. This implies that the subject must conceive of the love object (such as when they are absent) and consider them in relation to the subject himself and the Whole. Frigo puts it succinctly: "In love, I think of myself only from the perspective of this conceit that reveals me to myself as already (from the present) united to another, irrespective of whether he is actually present or not" (Frigo,1103). This conception of

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[54] An assumption that also marks sexual difference is the presupposition of cosmic unity, as discussed in the Second Chapter.

love rests on a fantasy: that the lover can produce, through "imaginative representation" an illusion whereby he is already united to the beloved object within the Whole, without losing his substantive separateness from the beloved, the "unity" is abstract and requires a formal distance.

In a letter to Pierre Chanut, Descartes writes:

> It is the nature of love to make one consider oneself and the loved one as a single whole *of which one is a part*; and to *transfer the care* one previously took of oneself to the *preservation of this whole*. One keeps for oneself only a part of one's care, a part which is great or little in proportion to whether one thinks oneself a larger or smaller part of the whole to which one has given one's affection. (Descartes to Chanut, 1 February 1647,CSM III, 311, italics mine)

The definition is representative of a calculus of affection, which will eventually mark the conception of modern love as such. Indeed, under this aegis one can "love too much," as the contemporary therapeutic literature tells us. To borrow from Frigo's lexicon, this description offers a "*vrai usage*": a normative claim which bears on the subject's comportment, a *Regulae* for lovers. Descartes thus introduces a concept of love as self-regulation. This position is radically different from Aquinas, if one considers the difference between order (the long tradition of the "order of charity") and degree. Now, we are speaking about the regulative aspect and *how* (and how much) one ought to love. The idea of self-regulation is necessarily linked to the narcissistic ego: as Descartes writes in §82 of *Passions*, "Nor is there any need to distinguish as many species of love as there are different objects which may be loved," on the contrary, we may distinguish in terms of "distinctions within love may more reasonably be made in terms of our esteem for what we love in comparison with ourselves." Thus, the proportion of our love relies on the judgment the subject has about himself (self-esteem) and how the love object can be measured in comparison to the subject. Thus, the cogito in love encounters the Freudian account of the narcissistic ego. However, it is too early to draw such a comparison. Descartes' account of love is modern in the precise sense that the order of the universe is not central to his argument, it is rather the subjectivity of the ego and how

the love-object "relates" to it. The notion of the Whole to which the subject belongs is refracted subjectively insofar asit relies on subjective *consideration*.

This is a modern argument, in that Descartes decisively breaks with the Medieval hierarchy and the "order of charity" that is predicated on the order of the universe (cosmos) in order to posit a subjective account of the passions. The notion of self-esteem usurps the hierarchy of order to postulate that the subject as *res cogitans* is equally capable of esteeming for himself what is good.[55] Thus, Descartes "rewrites" the rules about love. A passage from Frigo may be useful to emphasize this point: "the principles allow for the distinction of different sorts of love is not the nature of things, but the esteem of the lover: in other words, it is not a matter of how to love things which are above, close to, and below us. Rather, Descartes instructs us regarding how to love things we esteem less than, equal to, or more than we esteem ourselves." Frigo is correct to note how Descartes inaugurates a novel conception of love based on a subjective account of love between subjects and their (love) objects. Love no longer belongs to the cosmic order of things, but rather the social order of the symbolic. The novel conception of love put forth by Descartes is decidedly rational and modern in the sense that self-regulation is central to his formulation, which ultimately rests on the "true idea" that is described in the definition of love within the passions. The subject in love is situated in the social order, and this placement entails a certain responsibility: to esteem correctly and apply one's reason appropriately. This relation is not merely solipsistic, however, as the social order remains centre stage. Descartes' correspondence reveals how he came to understand how one ought to consider this relation: in a letter to Elisabeth from 1645 he writes:

> After having thus recalled the goodness of God, the immortality of our souls and the greatness of the universe, there is also one more truth the knowledge of which

[55]As Alberto Frigo writes:"Thus, Descartes transforms the fixed and hierarchical order of charity into an open and non-hierarchical one, by making it rely on the judgement of the loving subject and his esteem of everything compared to his self-esteem," 1108.

> seems to me to be quite useful. This is that, even though each of us is a person separate from others, and by consequence, with interests that are in some manner distinct from those of the rest of the world, *one must, all the same, think that one does not subsist alone and that one is, in effect, one part of the universe and, more particularly even, one part of this earth, one part of this state, and this society, and this family, to which one is joined by his home, by his oath, by his birth.* It is always necessary to prefer the interests of the whole of which one is a part, to those of one's person in particular.[56]

The textual evidence makes clear that Descartes' conception of love requires that the subject thinks of himself as part of a whole, in relation to others, institutions, systems, and the universe. There is an order to things and the subject must measure himself and his beloved accordingly. While the former passage may seem to posit a generality, it requires the subject's judgment, as he further qualifies:

> It is always necessary to prefer the interests of the whole, of which one is a part, to those of one's person in particular, *though with measure and discretion*. For one would be wrong to expose oneself to a great evil in order to procure only a small good for one's parents or one's country. If a man is worth more on his own than all the rest of his city, he would not be right to sacrifice himself to save it. (AT IV, 293 = Shapiro, 112, italics mine)

In order to subordinate oneself to the state, society, the "cosmos," and so on, one must live in a society whereby the societal mores "were not corrupted."[57] The moral consideration of the subject relies on the stability of the social order; thus, she can decide how much she ought to consider others, including her beloved. The subject must perform a delicate calculus, which Descartes found difficult to formulate. He writes to Chanut:

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[56] Descartes to Elisabeth, 15 September 1645, AT IV, 293, Italics mine.

[57] [T]his is not a matter in which it is necessary to be very exact. It suffices to satisfy one's conscience, and one can in this manner give a lot to one's inclination. For God has so established the order of things and conjoined men together in so tight a society that even if each person related himself wholly to himself, and had no charity for others, he would not ordinarily fail to work for them in everything that would be in his power, so long as he used prudence, and principally, if he lived in a time when mores were not corrupted. (Descartes to Elisabeth, 6 October 1645, AT IV, 316–7 quoted in Shapiro, 121–2)

"But … when an individual is joined in volition to his prince, or to his country, if his love is perfect, he should esteem himself as only a tiny part of the whole which he and they constitute." (1 February 1647, CSM III 311). The passion of love pertains not only to the love object, but to society, nation, and the world at large; thus, it would seem narcissistic to esteem the love object in such a way as to make the lover the subject's world. This calculus is based on a deduction of the principal definition of love that Descartes puts forth in the text, the very "obscure definition," that irked Spinoza. However, the definition, in the final analysis, does promote the bolstering of the ego. The narcissism that is intrinsic to the love relation (if we take Freud or Lacan seriously) does indeed seem to reify the solipsism of the ego: *the lover becomes my world*, yet this world is simply the world of the subject. Before submitting the Cartesian conception of love to psychoanalysis, we will discuss what makes this conception of love explicitly modern.

From Exalted Soul to Rational Ego

At this juncture, it seems necessary to advance the thesis of the first and second chapters: that Descartes inaugurates the modern subject, and to elaborate on how this modern subjectivity is made explicit in the case of love. In her book *Why Love Hurts* (2012) Eva Illouz presents a social genealogy of love, which includes pre-modern courtship practices, while discussing at length the subjective incursion that begins with modernity, at the precise juncture where Descartes founds the subject of modernity by enunciating the cogito. Illouz considers the transformation of love as a key instance of modernity's inauguration, such that "the formation of a reflexive emotional self" radically upends the concept of romantic love (Illouz, 12). While historicism is not central to the argument herein, it is noteworthy that Illouz links the emergence of the modern emotional self with the Protestant reformation, a transformative event that subtended the life of Descartes and his peers.[58] Illouz's text highlights the lack of attention paid to "the pleasure the ego takes in being able to constitute itself as the object of certainty," and this extends to eroticism. Furthermore, she notes that there is a jubilatory pulse at play in the positing of doubt

[58] In his book, *Abolishing Freedom*, Frank Ruda links Descartes with Protestantism and its ideological formations, by putting forth a novel reading of Descartes' *Passions*, and in particular the notion of fatalism.

while simultaneously anticipating certainty. Following Jean-Luc Marion, she argues that in addition to "epistemic and ontological certainty," the ego (*le moi*) requires "erotic certainty" (Illouz, 110).[59] This view holds that what the lover seeks is not (self)certainty, but something more radical. The lover seeks assurance of her existence, such that the question of "do I exist," can only be confirmed by the lover. If we may craft an aphorism from Marion's thesis: *The other loves me, therefore I am*. Perhaps this is too Lacanian for Marion, but Lacan's insight, which builds upon his life's work of rejecting Cartesian dualism through Descartes (his textual edifice), gestures toward the fact that one does not "exist" in any certain way without the Other confirming that I exist. This reformulation or rerouting of Cartesian certainty is specific to the demands of modernity, which bears on the subject's "ontological security," such that the recognition of the other (whom I love) becomes equivalent to loving them. The possible aporiae of the self now include this demand. Illouz is able to link her nodes: from Descartes, Goethe, and Nietzsche, to online dating and self-help manuals. While the latter genres are glutted with pop wisdom and contrived generalities, there is a kernel of a shared desire that seems to permeate culture, whether "high" or "low": the need to be recognized. Illouz's argument hinges on the difference between pre-modern (class) recognition and the modern (social) recognition that is tied to the emotional (egoic) self. Otherwise put: *the cogito in love*. This demand for recognition is formulated as explicitly social, for it concerns the *social worth*. Love is thus no longer the terrain of a purely economic calculus, but rather, it becomes a densely saturated social phenomenon that is inseparable from the constitution of social worth as such. Furthermore, this worth requires the recognition of the Other.

There is an operation at play in modern love, such that the demand for recognition is also a demand for transparency. The operation of suffering is liquidated in the modern conception of love. This is a breach with pre-modern conceptions of love, for which Illouz enumerates fourfold: the aristocratic, Christian, Romantic, and medical. For our purposes we will discuss the phenomenon of courtly love. The aristocratic eros is

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[59]*The Erotic Phenomenon* by Jean-Luc Marion; Marion's thesis herein is quite radical. Not only does he deny the possibility of the ego's certainty, but he argues that the can only confirm our existence (being) through love/loving.

inseparable from the figure of the troubadour or the chivalric poet. The poetic *jouissance* of courtly love privileges the experience of suffering as purifying, such that unrequited love should not be repudiated, but lauded as an experience that exalts the subject. The belief is that the subject could be magnified by the tear of love. Courtly love is not irrational; it has a particular logic, a logic which interests Lacan. Conversely, the medical conception in the seventeenth century sought to pathologize and medicalize suffering. The term "love sickness" was taken seriously as a medical category. Richard Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* lists the many possible effects of "too much" love. There are moments when Descartes seems to enter the medical register in the *Passions,* when he speaks as a "natural philosopher."

Courtly love

Lacan discusses the phenomenon of courtly love, or chivalric romance, in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (*Seminar VII*). Courtly love is considered a sublimatory venture. As a form of poetic expression (lyric), courtly love is a highly regulated and coded practice, an aesthetic craft which is imbued with a complex semiotics. Lacan reminds us of Freud's position that the effects of an artist's work might serve the subject himself, but only retroactively. Freud argues that the subject may derive "fantasmic satisfaction" from aesthetic pursuits, post-factum. Lacan picks up this thread, and argues that, in order to understand the "secondary benefits" that the subject derives from aesthetic ventures, we must first understand the operation of the poetic function. Lacan writes, "What needs to be justified is not simply the secondary benefits that individuals might derive from their works, but the originary possibility of a function like the poetic function in the form of a structure within a social consensus" (Lacan, 145). Courtly love provides insight into "social consensus," in that it is a genre which emerges in a restricted social space: the aristocratic court. At the core of the highly stylized and morally explicit behaviours, measures, services, and so on, one finds "an erotics." Why have we forgotten the games of the troubadours? Included in these games is a technique that must be qualified as erotic and links the Freudian *Vorlust* from the *Three Essays on Sexuality,* with an explicitly inaccessible object choice. Thus, courtly love is a painful and interminable process which centers on *das Ding*, or, Woman as Thing.

What was Woman for the courtly lover? The feminine object of courtly love was the woman of feudal society who, regardless of class position, was ultimately stripped of substantive content and reduced to "[...] nothing more than a correlative of the functions of social exchange, the support of a certain number of goods and of symbols of power" (Lacan, 147). As an object without content, the feminine object functioned as a vessel for courtly love. From this emerged the figure of the Lady, which Lacan argues is "[a] systematic and deliberate use of the signifier as such" (Lacan, 148). The feminine object is introduced through privation, and therefore becomes an allegorical—sensual, mystical—object. What the progenitors of courtly love invented was the Thing, or what Lacan terms the vacuole. This enables us to ask "where, in effect, is the vacuole created for us?" To which Lacan responds: "It is at the centre of the signifiers—insofar as the final demand to be deprived of something real is essentially linked to the primary symbolization which is wholly contained in the signification of the gift of love" (Lacan, 150). Because the Thing tends to locate certain "discontents" of the culture, the Lady functions as a membrane, a bracketing, wherein fantasy can inject itself. It is essentially an artifice, this invention. The suspicion of the Enlightenment thinkers concerning the artificial production of love, is not wholly unjustified, a point to which I will return. What is important to note, is that this invention is borne out of a narcissistic desire of the subject, a desire for subjective exaltation produced by an irreducible and inaccessible idealized object. The question of ethics is thus centered on prolongment and delay: an interminable struggle, or foreplay, the Freudian *Vorlust*. As Lacan writes: "Freudianism is in brief nothing but a perpetual allusion to the fecundity of eroticism in ethics, but it doesn't formulate it as such" (Lacan, 152). The ethics of courtly love teaches us that love is both an art, and a kind of military service, as Ovid describes it in the *Art of Love*. To briefly return to Freud's point: the inaccessible core of the Thing functions as a portal to ethics. This bulwark retroactively fulfills a moral imperative for the artist, it [*das Ding*] is the "cause of the most fundamental passion," this *noblesse oblige* is, in the final analysis, directed back toward the subject.

Democracy with/without Woman

François Poullain de la Barre (1647-1723) addresses the "Woman question" in a seventeenth century Cartesian treatise which deals explicitly with the issue of sexual difference and equality.[60] In this text, Poullain argues that it is not *qua* reason (and the supposed lack thereof) that women are subjected to civil subordination (which makes them the "second sex" in the de Beauvoirian sense). Instead, it is a matter of *belief* in Woman's inferiority. Poullain, following Descartes, uses general principles to deduce the equality of the sexes. It could be said that Pollain's text is a radical and proto-Enlightenment treatise, yet as the introduction demonstrates, Poullain's intention was not to disrupt the social fabric by postulating this claim. For him, sexual difference was not a stain or a structural problematic; it was simply a matter of archaic beliefs.[61] For him, positing equality among the sexes does not necessarily disrupt the economic conditions. Though Poullain interviewed "commoners" and peasants, his audience was indeed the class of speakers known as "ladies." Poullain's polemic is addressed to the philosophical authorities of his time, philosophers who, in their "scholastic" register—degraded by Poullain as frivolous—can only produce abstractions and beliefs. Like Descartes, Poullain saw Scholastic philosophy as contradictory to the scientific pursuit of truth: the true object of philosophy. Poullain attempts to draw upon commonsense with the principles of reason: he manages to argue that needlepoint requires the concentration of physics, and he attempts to give women credit for making the most of their situation, while arguing that they must be given the right to pursue higher ends. Poullain postulates principles that will surge forth in the Enlightenment (feminist) discourse of Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) which holds that the "mind" is characterized as a universal organ without a sex.[62] For our purposes, we will venture into the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century conception of mind, but rather posit a few conjectures. The

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[60] *De l'Égalité des deux sexes, discours physique et moral où l'on voit l'importance de se défaire des préjugés*, Paris, Chez Jean du Puis, 1673; Fayard, 1984.

[61] This argument can be found in the writings of the fourteenth century Christine de Pizan (1364-1431), who argues *In the Book of the City of Ladies*, that women, since they have not written about themselves, have thus been falsely represented. De Pizan is a fascinating figure for she was both a writer of courtly love (especially with her text, *Le Livre du duc de es vraisamants* from 1403, and a proto-rationalist.

[62]Feminist is in parenthesis here because Wollstonecraft is first and foremost a philosopher, in the text she is explicit in claiming that she speaks as a "philosopher" and "moralist". When one reads her closely, one finds that she is a "reluctant" feminist. Perhaps her reluctance is a posture we should return to, against the current grain of optimism.

(proto)Enlightenment discourse of Descartes and Poullain posits that sexual difference is a social phenomenon and not linked to "nature." The cogito, under this view, "has no sex." Poullain's text is an elaboration of Descartes' formulation of "*sensus communis*" is without sex, and thus that men and women are equally capable of its virtue.[63]

Poullain argues that the mind is not an organ of sex, however this claim is subtended by recourse to arguments that do in fact rely on Woman's "nature," such that he argues that women's natural virtuousness grants them reason to study moral philosophy. However, he also argues that all the sciences ought to be available to women. The tension to reduce the sexless cogito to pure *res cogitans* chafes against the social fabric. Poullain's focus on the text is not on bodily differences but intellectual aptitudes that tend toward sameness. This emphasis is possible as he follows the emphasis Descartes places on the primacy of thought. Poullain cannot help but indulge trope for his cause: when women speak "their heart is on their lips," and they are "much more animated in the gestures that accompany their speech." However, these tropes are used to serve the cause for sexual equality: "All of the above makes me believe that if women studied law they would be at least as successful as men. They obviously love peace and justice more than we do, they dislike quarrels and are pleased to intervene and resolve them successfully" (Poullain, 66). While Poullain's treatise does not deal with romantic love, he does discuss the Christian doctrine of equality of souls and the love of God, which tends toward de-sexualization of the subject; as previously discussed, scientific and rational philosophy always tends toward the de-sexualization of the world. In line with the Cartesian philosophy of his time, Poullain's focus remains anchored within a discourse on equality/rights.

More than a hundred years later, Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) addresses a similar audience, which includes any reasonable and spirited woman who desires emancipation from her self-incurred tutelage, as Kant insisted for all

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[63]As Madeline Alcover writes in *Poullain de la Barre : une aventure philosophique* : "Savoir, libre-arbitre, volonté, c'est ce qu'il a retenu du message de Descartes. Il a vu que cette philosophie, contrairement à l'autre, était une philosophie ouverte et c'est pourquoi il a poussé des portes que Descartes avait laissées closes" (Knowledge, free will, choice, are what Poullain has retained from Descartes's message. He saw that Descartes's philosophy, contrary to every other, was open, and that is why he has pushed open some doors that Descartes had left closed), 72.

thinking subjects in 1784.[64] While other philosophers have tasked themselves with enunciating Romantic love as a philosophical problem, Wollstonecraft explicitly links romantic love to women's subordination. She is opposed to the "noble" morality that treats woman as Thing (the position of courtly love). She argues that women must become "independent of the casualties of life," which includes the trappings of romantic love. She writes: "Love, in their bosoms, taking place of every nobler passion."[65] Love ensures that women maintain their "spaniel-like affection," and fragile constitutions, privileging beauty over strength and love over reason. She takes issue with Rousseau and Swedenborg for clinging to tropes that laud women's "submissive charms," which make her the delicate object of man's affection. Wollstonecraft argues that Rousseau and others like him advance the belief that women ought to be loved for their puerile nature. The position Wollstonecraft seems to be criticizing is the "feminine masquerade,"[66] a posture "prettily drawn by poets" and carefully curated and esteemed by women themselves (Wollstonecraft, 165). This position holds that women are "absolute in loveliness," as Milton puts it. Every poet and philosopher of the eighteenth century seems to have a take on the woman question, yet Wollstonecraft is the first to enunciate that this masquerade is simply that: a vain performance of one's social being. For Wollstonecraft, the question of whether "Woman exists" is complex, and it is her brutal, unsentimental prose that presents a novel way of confronting sexual difference. With that said, she is unable to present her argument without recourse to the possible (innate) irrationality of women: if a woman fails to act reasonably when she is presented with a sound argument it may be due to "defective organs," or "mistaken education." Wollstonecraft ultimately seems to rely

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[64] The genre of the political treatise appropriately deals here with the discourse of "rights," which has been criticized by later philosophers (see Hannah Arendt's *Human Condition* and Simone Weil's *on Liberty*). Despite the emphasis on civil rights and education, Wollstonecraft's text deals extensively with trope, fantasy, and theological/literary myth-making.

[65] The passage is rather breathtaking and demonstrates the stakes of Wollstonecraft's wager; thus, I think it should be read in full: "Love in their bosoms, taking place of every nobler passion, their sole ambition is to be fair, to raise emotion instead of inspiring respect; and this ignoble desire, like the servility of absolute monarchies, destroys all strength of character. Liberty is the mother of virtue, and if women are, by their very constitution, slaves, and not allowed to breathe the sharp invigorating air of freedom, they must ever languish like exotics, and be reckoned beautiful flaws in Nature," Wollstonecraft, 147.

[66] The concept of the "feminine masquerade" first appears in Joan Riviere's "Womanliness as a Masquerade," published in 1929.

on an Ideal Woman who does not (yet) exist. Still, for our purposes, her critique of romantic love will provide an opening for further discussion. When she enunciates that she is speaking "as a philosopher," her critique of romantic love suggests that love impedes our ability to reason, especially for the female portion of speaking subjects: "they are made to be loved, and must not aim at respect [...]", she continues, "lest they should be hunted out of society as masculine" (Wollstonecraft, 144). While we cannot deduce what the Ideal Woman might be for Wollstonecraft, we can deduce *a contrario* what she is not: facile, vain, and subjugated by male authorities. She has "no sex," insofar that she is free to use her reason. Yet this "I," the speaking subject who emancipates herself in choosing the *res cogitans* does not escape the throes of symbolic reality.

Modernity's violent arousal from its pre-modern state laid bare the social conditions of the Whole.[67] This coarse awakening has led to a certain "disenchantment" of reality, to use Weber's *bon mot*. What is important for our purposes is that the hyper-rationalization of modern existence is commensurable with the ideology of self-esteem (rational self-love) and hedonic permissiveness. Love becomes a rational game for the pleasure seeking cogito *qua* autonomous subject, who seeks an Other, or others, or things, for shared (albeit as autonomous subjects) monadic bliss. The rational posture that saturates our modern conception of love is utterly incommensurable with pre-modern conceptions. Courtly love is the most salient example. The ecstatic surge that is recounted by Guillaume de Loris, posits both a sacred object and an inexplicable desire.[68] The figure of cupid and the motif of "piercing," is demonstrative of the arbitrary and jubilatory nature of love. The concept of love that issues from the courtly tradition is "enchanted love," the commotion of the soul that is at odds with the light of reason. There is a heightened idealization which requires an irreducible and incommensurable love object. Conversely, disenchantment leads to a de-sexualization of reality and the de-idealization of the love object, the object becomes merely one possible choice among many other

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[67] Marx's famous passage from *The Communist Manifesto:* "All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and men at last are forced to face with sober senses the real conditions of their lives and their relations with their fellow men."

[68] *Why Love Hurts*, 159.

commensurable choices. Suffering and other "useless" affects become pathologized under the aegis of love, which bears on the "medical" conception of love that plagues the cogito (recall Burton's love sick subject). Trapped between rational choice and pathology, the cogito *qua* rational ego pursues the utilitarian-hedonic love object measured against itself. The axiom "freedom of choice" surges forth with modernity.

The modern subject would find the notion of "dowry" obscene yet, in actuality, the criteria for love has become *more* rational, as Illouz demonstrates. The operativity of the masculine cogito cannot be divorced from the rational processes of modernity, whereby the rational subject is situated within the Whole, as an autonomous part. The overt pecuniary nature of love has become more stylized, volatile (the exhaustive criteria), but it is no less dictated by the vicissitudes of liberal capitalism. As Illouz writes: "a hyper-cognized method of selecting a mate goes hand in hand with the cultural expectation that love provides authentic, unmediated emotional and sexual experiences" (Illouz, 180).[69] The emphasis on equality, reciprocity, self-sameness, and the superfluity of suffering are decisively modern attitudes. With choice comes freedom. The desire to "liberate" sexuality within modernity is paradoxically inextricable from the prohibition of language. The rhetoric of sexual liberation can be understood as the other side of "politically correct" sartorial, bodily, and linguistic practices. Explicitly sexualized sartorial practices that draw attention to the body, share a common aim with minimalist, androgynous silhouettes that attempt to eliminate erotic ambiguity. The attempt to expose the body, or to eliminate its surface, seeks a common end: to make the body "equal." For example, "freeing the nipple" is an attempt at Universality: the slogan implies that there is nothing particular about one's bodily assemblage; it is the body in general that must be exposed. Descartes found himself in a similar conundrum when theorizing the body in particular (one's own body) and the body in general.[70] The attempt to obviate sexual difference through sartorial practice is a mirror operation that endeavours to smooth over gaps borne

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[69] In her text, Illouz enumerates and describes the mechanisms that contribute to love's rationalization: intellectualization, rational management of the flow of encounters, visualization, commensuration, competitiveness, maximization of utilities, 181-2.

[70] Jean-Luc Marion draws attention to this problem in *On Passive Thought: The Myth of Cartesian Dualism*.

out of sexual difference while positing a generality, "the body," which cannot account for sexual difference. Recall Roland Barthes' *Lover's Discourse* which locates erotic uncertainty, "where the garment gapes." In this formulation, "what" is erotic is not given; the sign carries ambiguity. Conversely, the formalism of minimal, androgynous silhouettes is indicative of the process of visual rationalization. It is not a coincidence that the Antwerp Seven (the designers of androgyny *par excellence*) are from the Protestant countries![71] Androgyny produces semiotic certainty: there can be no question about whether a particular garment is erotic or not, it is a formalism which seeks to flatten out what is erotic concerning bodily surfaces. Furthermore, androgyny as a sartorial practice is decisively masculine, for it carries the presumption that "feminine" silhouettes are *de fact*o sexual. The presumption of sartorial practices is that, as autonomous subjects ("parts" of the Whole), we participate in an intersubjective context, which presupposes a semiotics and the possibility of mutual recognition. Thus, to be "in love" is to be recognized: to have my transparencies recognized by the other, and this includes my aesthetic presentation. However, as Jean-Luc Marion notes, recognition is, rather than a desired outcome, *an obstacle* to the erotic, and love as such.[72]

The Big Other in Love

To speak sensibly of love might be impossible. Despite this, let us seek to understand what is in the cogito that lends itself to "falling" in love? For Freud and Lacan love is linked to a narcissistic zone, associated with autoeroticism, idealization, and projection. The example of courtly love is paradigmatic for Lacan, for it discloses love at its most

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[71] Renata Salecl has commented on the phenomenon of sartorial practices in her book *(Per)versions of Love and Hate*. As for the Antwerp Seven, I have in mind specifically the brilliant designer Ann Demeulemeester. While not from the Antwerp scene, Jil Sander is also paradigmatic in her pragmatic, minimal approach ("German minimalism"). Philosophy and sartorial practices is discussed, mostly notably in Ulrich Lehmann in her book *Tigersprung*, who argues that far from being a frivolous consumer phenomenon, fashion may reveal (hidden) truths about a particular zeitgeist. We can also look at sartorial practices from the Catholic countries (Versace and Gucci come to mind) by comparison; however France is a particular case that does not have the "gaudy" excess of Italian fashion. And of course, WASP fashion in America ("Ivy" style), the Puritan lifestylism and its elegant semiotics of class and sexual difference.

[72] Marion writes in *The Erotic Phenomenon*,: The obstacle that obstructs the opening of the amorous field—an erotic obstacle, not an epistemological, or ontic one—consists in reciprocity itself; reciprocity only acquires this power to set up an obstacle because one assumes, without proof or argument, that it alone offers the condition of possibility for what the ego understands as a "happy love," 69-70.

illusory and extreme posture: an amorous relation predicated on absence. Indeed, this absence extends to the sexual relationship. The imagined reciprocity between loving and being loved provides an entry point for our inquiry. This reciprocity is constitutive of the imaginary pulse of love, such that the subject who loves is pining to be loved, and thus loving is not a pure activity; it is racked by passivity. In contrast to Freud or Lacan's discourse on the drives, this *modus operandi* of love is far from pure activity. Love is conditioned by fantasy, primarily the possibility of unity, whereby two wholes make One. What might appear as a gesture of cynicism—that is, to link love to deception—is actually an attempt to situate love in a psychoanalytic register. Love is deception because it is predicated on the subject's wholeness. For Lacan, love is necessarily linked to the narcissism of the subject; the idealism of the object produces the feeling of love, and the profundity of loss, when the idealism is stripped away.

If the proposition that the cogito is split and this split is borne out of the originary ontological minus of sexual difference holds, then it must be tested against the Lacanian reading of the subject. Thus, the wager of this section is to demonstrate that sexual difference is made explicit through the experience of love. To arrive at this point, it will serve us to recall Lacan's argument regarding sexual difference. When Lacan argues that sexual difference is "real," it is precisely because it is impossible. Thus, in order to become "man" or "woman" the impossible barrier of the Real must be overcome. One loses the abyssal core of the impossible in becoming either/or.[73] Contrary to what we might assume, this loss is precisely what men and women share, and what Lacan terms "symbolic castration" is universal. What enables us to differentiate man and woman, masculine and feminine, is the particular subjective response to castration that marks the

[73] The Real of sexual difference is enunciated by Zizek in *The Ticklish Subject*. Therein, he criticizes the possibility of positing a binary signifier. He writes: "When Lacan claims that sexual difference is 'real,' he is therefore far from elevating a historical contingent form of sexuation into a transhistorical norm [...] the claim that sexual difference is 'real' equals the claim that it is 'impossible'—impossible to symbolize, to formulate, as a symbolic norm." Furthermore, "[...] the problem with the accusation that sexual difference involves 'binary logic': in so far as sexual difference is real/impossible, it is precisely *not* 'binary,'but, again, that because of which every 'binary' account of it (every translation of sexual difference) into a couple of opposed symbolic features: reason versus emotion, active versus passive…) always fails", 273-4.

"masculine" and "feminine" subject positions.[74] The respective subject takes his or her particular place in the field of enunciation, and this is where we must locate "sexual difference," as belonging to the symbolic realm, that issues forth in speech. Neither sexual difference, nor the sexual act (as instances of a "*rapport*") unites the subject with his beloved. While the "sexual relationship" that Lacan speaks of is not to be taken literally, it recalls the many instances of the sexual non-relation in the films of Chantal Akerman, such as *Je, Tu, Il, Elle* (1974). For example, when, after hitchhiking with a truck driver who briefly becomes her lover, Julie, the film's idle protagonist, attempts to sleep with her ex-girlfriend, the result is a drawn out, somewhat violent struggle between the two women. Something happens, but at the same time there is "nothing" that can be said: the relation is broken, there can be no *rapport*. There is also something "else," beyond the conclusion of the relationship, that makes this scene so painful (and amusing) to watch. Each subject is utterly alone and incapable of meeting the other's border. What we find in the film, is torsion: the spectacle of partial objects and a failed (re)union. Indeed, one is alone in pleasure and in pain. Akerman's films trouble the narcissistic structure of love, a structure that is subtended by the imaginary. Love is revealed to be the (imagined) idea that something may successfully fill the subject's void, a void that produces the non-relation. The desire for unity is thwarted by the partial operation of the drives, though a full discussion of the relationship between love and desire would require a chapter of its own.

Consequently, we are permitted to say: there is no "love language," only botched formulations, hence the saliency of the enunciation, "I love you." This proposition is not meant to be simply provocative; rather, this formulation reveals a fundamental insight of psychoanalysis: one cannot say anything sensible about love.[75] Lacan's famous dictum that "the unconscious is structured like a language" reveals that the unconscious itself *is* the constraints of language. As Renata Salecl writes in *(Per)Versions of Love and Hate*: "the unconscious is the constraints that are at work in this discourse, this constraint is the

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[74] Recalling the argument that is made explicit by Lacan's formulas of sexuation, and the essential interpretation of Guy Le Gaufey from the Second Chapter.

[75] This sentiment can be found in *Le Transfert* (VIII) and *Encore* (XX).

very existence of the unconscious—there is no unconscious hidden behind the discursive constraints that "express" themselves in the discourse." The effect of the unconscious, and of "passions," according to Salacl's reading of Lacan, is that there is nothing exterior to this space, the "mechanism produces the effect." Thus, "the effect is nothing other than the discourse itself" (Salecl, 191). The effect of the discourse of the unconscious is the libido, and in the case of ideological discourse, the effects of (mis)recognition. The paradox for speaking subjects is that these discursive obstacles are what "produce" love. For Lacan, the big Other—"the divine place of the Other"—confers a "consecrated status on the relationship between subjects, as long as the fortune of the desire of the loved one inscribes itself in this divine place" (Ibid.).

To recall the argument regarding the Other: the other is a symbolic structure which embeds the subject. It is not a positive social fact, but rather, as Selecl reminds us, it possesses a "quasi-transcendental nature," which produces a structure. The Other structures reality and stains the subjective field, which is why Lacan insists that the unconscious is the discourse of the Other. Furthermore, "it" has a normative status—after all, we are contending with the social symbolic order which functions to order the social space and to code our interactions. It is "quasi-transcendental" because it is irreducible to the individual psyche or the Whole of society, and thus it remains "radically external." Accordingly, the position put forth by Lacanian psychoanalysis is irreducible to psychology or social construction. As Salecl argues, the reduction of the Other to either domain flouts the importance of language: "by doing this we miss the fact that language is in itself an institution to which the subject is submitted" (192). The emphasis placed on language, and how subjects are embedded in language *qua* speaking subjects is the legacy of psychoanalysis. To this end, there is no love without speech. It is only speaking beings who can love. What kind of speech does love constitute? Love, like other "needs" issues forth as a demand and, as we have discussed previously, the subject, belonging to other signifiers, carries the stain of lack. As such, love introduces the *sujet barré* and, like sexual difference, it affirms that we are not Whole—that we are not fully "there," that we are not "One," in the sense of fully-transparent (autonomous to ourselves) subjects without gaps. In the space of the lack, love emerges. Lack is the cause of our desire, it

orients us toward objects. The object of desire takes on a paradoxical status, as it reveals lack while simultaneously covering it.

To return to the discussion of "enchanted" love, this model reveals how the subject deals with his or her lack, and the lack in the other. There are rituals, opacities, and stylized gestures that attempt to simultaneously reveal and cover over lack. Conversely, in our hyper-rationalized zeitgeist, the subject cannot bear to let "the beauty remain mute," insofar as that uncertainty creates unbearable anxiety. Doubt, which cannot be divorced from the modern subject, is the cause of much anxiety. The masculine cogito avows doubt, only if it ultimately necessitates self-certainty. Love marks a difficult case for the cogito, as it cannot be fully understood under the aegis of reason. There is a profound incursion by way of the imagination, as Salecl notes: "The fact that love does not expect an answer can be understood as bearing witness to its imaginary, narcissistic character: any possible answer from the beloved object would undermine this narcissistic relationship, it would disturb the mirroring of the subject's ego in the beloved object" (Salecl, 192). If the ego (the I) is self-sufficient, even in the case of love, perhaps the cogito is fundamentally narcissistic. Descartes' emphasis on (self)esteem seems to suggest that the sentiment comes from within the subject, rather than the object. What draws the subject toward the beloved is the presence of an object in him or her, rather than the subjective force of the beloved. In response to the subjectivizing force of love, one can either use the object "as a stopper," which renders invisible the lack in the Other, or we can approach the object through sublimation, "of a circulation around the object that never touches its core" (193). The latter is undoubtedly the domain of courtly love. This position involves a confrontation with the object as *das Ding*, "the traumatic foreign body in the symbolic structure." The subject can only orbit around the object, for she is aware of the object's inaccessible core. As Lacan said about the inaccessible core of the other: "concerning sublime love that the subject realizes that [he can] only enjoy a part of the body of the Other[...] That is why we are limited in this to a little contact, to touch only the forearm or whatever else—ouch!" Lacan makes light of the fact that one can

never access the Other fully, and this drives one toward narcissistic disavowal which attempts to cover over lack, or toward the spinning plate of sublimation.[76] Thus, love reveals the impossibility of the sexual or love relation; and not only this, it also discloses the missing gap whereby the subject's own lack emerges. The Freudian dictum serves to remind us: "love for oneself knows only one barrier—love for others, love for objects" and can thus be paraphrased into "love for others knows only one barrier—love for oneself, love for the object in oneself" (Salecl, 192).

Let us turn to the feminine cogito. If the feminine subject "woman" identifies with Woman, the subjective response tends toward psychosis or hysteria. For our purposes, we will discuss the latter. The hysteric probes the Other's desire, attempting to answer the fundamentally narcissistic question: does he love me? This formulation hinges on the anterior question: "What am I for the Other?" The questioning of the hysteric reveals a desire for certainty: to overcome the subject's self-doubt and to access the truth about the Other's love for me. The hysteric's desire for certainty breaks with the modality of (self)doubt that marks the masculine cogito; certainty can only be accessed by way of the Other, and self-doubt cannot be rescued by self-certainty. There is no space for self-sufficiency in this model. The hysteric spins plates, hunting for a sign: "In the meantime, she becomes devoted to the cult of Woman ... in the hope that this signifier will someday appear" (Salecl,192). The answer to the hysteric's question, as one can imagine, does not arrive. The subject must then seek "proofs" outside of words. Salecl draws upon the work of Colette Soler who argues that the hysterical subject position requires that the subject is an interpreter (Salecl, 202). When the answer does not arrive, it must be interpreted, invented. Thus, the hysteric can obsess over the "meaning" of a look, how words are arranged in an email, how the lover "signs off" or says goodbye. This subject position, while in the first analysis might appear as profoundly unenlightened, is in fact less invested in maintaining the illusion of wholeness, the presupposition that the subject is "fully" there.

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[76] Salecl highlights the "supreme paradox of love and institution": sublime love can only emerge in contradistinction to a contractual, mediated "symbolic exchange,"

The emergence of the figure of the hysteric functions as an index for modernity, in which the hysteric responds to the operation of choice, and in particular to the "forced choice." The forced choice has a profound subjectivizing effect: it changes the subject's position of enunciation. We assume that "loving" our contingent existences (family, state, neighbours, and so on) amounts to a substantive (free) choice, yet the injunction to "love" our situations simply affirms our lack of choice. However, the subject of the enunciation (as discussed in the previous chapter) is altered in this process. The concept of forced choice is described by Mladen Dolar in *Voice as Love Object*, in the following way: "the forced choice is not simply an absence of choice: the choice is offered and denied in the same gesture, but this empty gesture is what counts for subjectivity" (Dolar, 130). When the subject enters the social space, this entry is marked by "forced choice." Love is a salient example of this exchange; when the subject enters the symbolic domain of love, the choice available to him is "forced." As previously discussed, the love relation of marriage was highly overdetermined in pre-modernity yet remained less intellectualized and ultimately less rationalized. There are of course exceptions to this overdetermined relation, namely, the erotic self-abandonment that one finds with unrequited love, as the courtly ethos demonstrates. Under the aegis of erotic abandonment, the force of love's demand tends toward necessity; the subject is pulled toward self-abandonment and the surrender of will to the Other.

Perhaps this is what it means to "fall" in love. As Dolar writes:"Falling in love means submitting to the necessity—there is always the moment when the Real, so to speak, begins to speak, its opacity turns into transparency, the senseless sign becomes to embodiment of the highest sense, and the subject is reduced to recognizing it after the fact" (Dolar, 123). For Dolar, this description is the moment of erotic love. One must note his use of "after the fact." It is not the case that the subject who "falls" in love has immediate access to what is taking place; there is retroactivity at play, whereby the subject can reorganize the sequence of meanings to make sense of them. This seems to disrupt the order of what Descartes carefully circumscribed. However, it is no less narcissistic. Dolar reminds us of one of the oldest, and perhaps shared dictums of philosophy and psychoanalysis: "Know thyself." However, this knowledge carries a

particular caveat: "There is a part of non-knowledge, an essential ignorance, which appears as the condition of a long and happy life, or simply, life—a part of fundamental loss that one has to incur. Narcissus will come to know himself, he will prefer the philosophical maxim to the prophet's warning" (Dolar, 138).[77] Knowing oneself can lead to a certain fatality. The mirror that is the Other for myself in love entails a certain loss of being, a loss that is experienced as traumatic for the subject, specifically the masculine cogito, whose identity involves the forfeiture of being for thought. We might even say that one becomes "enlightened" only by having knowledge of one's symbolic castration. As Dolar writes: "to put it simply: when I recognize myself in the mirror, it is already too late. There is a split: I cannot recognize myself and at the same time be one with myself" (Ibid.). The loss is the subject's self-being, what can be understood as the "immediate coincidence with myself in my being and *jouissance,*" is the juncture whereby the pleasure one derives in having the "gaze returned," by the lover. This "exchange" comes at a cost: the mirror image of self must be paid for, and at the same time has already been paid for in advance. The operation of doubling is play: I see myself in the other, and this, as Dolar writes "entails the loss of that uniqueness one could only enjoy in one's self-being—only at the price of being neither ego nor a subject" (Ibid.).[78] Love, as an effort to disseminate the subject's lack, necessarily implies a loss of being. Recall Lacan's formulation in the *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis:* "I love you, but, because inexplicably I love in you something more than yourself—the *objet petit a*—mutilate you" (Lacan, 263).

The suspicion of the moderns is not wholly unreasonable. The seductive sheen of love is marked by mechanicity. There is a mechanical and seemingly automatic operativity involved in falling in love, and thus one finds in the era of Enlightenment certain contempt of romantic love. As we saw in Wollstonecraft's treatise, the subject is indicted

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[77] There is a moment in the legend of Narcissus where the blind seer Tiresias gives the prophecy to the beautiful boy's mother: "Narcissus will live to a ripe old age, provided that he never knows himself," Graves quoted in Dolar, 139.

[78]As Freud writes in his essay on the Uncanny: "This invention of doubling as a preservation against extinction has its counterpart in the language of dreams, which is fond of representing castration by a doubling or a multiplication of a genital symbol," quoted in Dolar, 138.

for endorsing the frivolity of love's mythos. Dolar's reasoning suggests that it is due to the notion that love can be artificially produced. Dolar's examples are superb, in drawing from Mozart's *Cosi fan tutte* (1790) he writes: "If the new love of the two ladies was so easily provoked synthetically by simple devices, contingency and fate so easily counterfeited, then this second love casts long shadows over the original one, before the wager, when everybody seemed happy: it retroactively makes the first love just as artificial and arbitrary [...]"[79] Dolar's reading reveals how the pre-modern belief in love of the ecstatic variety, as well as the customary (contractual) love, is laid bare to analysis (aesthetic or philosophical) to reveal the commensurable, easily manipulated, fact of love.[80] This critique was certainly apparent to Wollstonecraft, yet it does not carry the traumatic weight that Dolar seems to imply. It seems, in contrast to Wollstonecraft's sobriety, traumatic for the masculine subject who thus invents the figure of *les femmes machines*, female automatons or puppets, to hide the narcissistic wound and the suspicion that one's lover may not be in love with him after all, but only herself. This suspicion one finds in Marivaux, Mozart, and previously in Moliere (his pleasure in making parody of "learned ladies") who, in their brilliance are nonetheless exemplary of the masculine cogito. It is *their belief* in love that is shattered, which seems to contrast the sobriety of early modern treatises on love—and especially in Wollstonecraft. While many women likely fell for the romantic mythos (as Wollstonecraft makes clear *her belief:* most women are utterly frivolous due to social imperatives), it is particularly interesting to see the masculine subject confront the "extimacy" of the love relation. While a shared suspicion of feminine frivolity might link these poses (which seem to be explicitly phallic), the subject positions (feminine/masculine cogito) approach the shattering of love's seductive sheen quite differently. By this, I advance the thesis of the previous two chapters, that the subjective responses to castration is what marks sexual difference as

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[79] The title could be roughly translated as: "So do they all," (using the feminine *tutte*; signalling Woman)

[80]Another brilliant example that Dolar brings to mind is Hoffman's short story, *The Sandman*, whereby a young man falls in love with an automaton (one could read this story as a precursor to Jonze's *Her*) Dolar writes: "Hoffmann's ironical twist, the social parody implied in the episode, highlights the role assigned to the woman: it is enough to be there, at the appropriate place, at the most to utter an "Oh!" at the appropriate time to produce that specter of Woman, the figure of the Other. The mechanical doll only highlights the mechanical character of love relations. Both the subject falling in love and the object can be reduced to an automaton: we have the perfect love machine," 149.

such. Modern subjectivity struggles against its own epistemic desires. Enlightenment's *causa sui* of freedom, conflicts with its interest in automata, an interest that began in early modernity (in Descartes and Pascal). The mechanical doll, which connotes femininity, becomes the counterpoint to the rational ego. The imperative to "leave the doll's house," however, is not so straightforward for it entails a fight against the machinations of determinism, only by finding one's place in it.

3.1 « Coda: *Dissatisfaction*»

Our modern romantic conundrum can be summarized in the following way: we desire the Big Other's symbolic regulation, which includes the superego's ubiquitous injunction to "enjoy." Yet, this enjoyment is utterly banal and permissive. The circuits of endless choice that one finds in pornography (with a multiplicity of genres), and relationship "formations," like polyamory and other "creative" contractual assemblages, ultimately cause dissatisfaction, rather than pleasure. All "transgressive" tendencies have been absorbed into the insatiable symbolic structure.[81] If one wants to thwart "production," and the "sexual" production of subjectivity as such, how might this come to be? Is (social) apostasy even remotely meaningful in our current juncture? If the *forced choice* of abstinence, which is the posture of the current "incel" zeitgeist, is an attempt to rupture the (sexual) production of subjectivity, does this have any meaningful effect?[82] Is this not simply the other side of hedonic permissiveness? Our cultural ethos is marked by the double operation of regulation and guarantee. Pleasure, despite being permissive, remains highly regulated (is permissiveness or "unregulated" pleasure not itself a kind of regulation?), while the rational culture of romantic love promises a transcendental guarantee of the subject's safety and self-certainty. Under the rubric of a hyper-rationalized romantic calculus, the antagonism reaches beyond the conflict of Kantian antinomies; yet, the subject does not have the adequate concepts to make sense of this "split." This is where psychoanalysis comes to bear.

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[81] The malaise of hypermodern eros has been gloomily (yet marvelously) articulated in Byung Chul Han's *The Agony of Eros.*

[82] A good reading of "online culture that has spawned the figure of the "incel" can be found in Angela Nagle's *Kill All Normies* or more recently, a text by Nina Power https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-art-of-the-incel

The example of the love object in transference provides a unique purchase on subjectivation. Love emerges at the juncture where words are missing. The subject offers her being to fill the lack and to give herself to the Other. The unreturned gaze stains the field of desire when the subject is forced to come to terms with the absent reciprocity. As Dolar writes, “So love emerges at the point of a lacking word, and one offers one's being to fill the lack, to sustain the Other, to seduce him” (Dolar, 149).[83] Psychoanalysis produces love as a symptom, the prime example being the lack of reciprocity that takes place in the relation between analyst and analysand. However, it is precisely when the Other does not return the gaze that one may begin to question, when the repetition is thwarted, and the silent wall obviates the subject’s desire for reciprocity. The moment of “the falling out of object *a*” is embodied by the unreturned gaze. Thus, what transpires is the boring of a hole, which creates a distance between the I (ego ideal) and the *a* in the formulation proposed by Lacan in *Seminar XI*. This moment could also be described as the “crossing” of the fundamental fantasy, andcan be read subjectively and through sexual difference. One might find freedom in this “closure,” recalling Freud’s use of *Übertragungswiderstand.* Transference is resistance precisely because it closes the unconscious, rather than laying it bare. Thus, the cogito is presented with a “choice”: to traverse the fantasy of being in pursuit of the Other’s desire (the hysteric’s questioning and traumatic conclusion) or to remain stuck in the open circuits of fantasy being that marks the masculine cogito. It seems that we can sufficiently conclude, that the enlightened position is, in the final analysis, castration; and *this* position of enunciation belongs to the *feminine cogito*.

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[83] Speaking of seduction, this brings to mind a favourite example of Lacan’s: As Lacan says, “[T]he Other whom we long for is anything other than love, it is something that literally causes the love to decay—I want to say, something that has the nature of object.” (Lacan, 183). The realization, or refusal of the beloved one to be the object of desire produces a traumatic incursion for the subject. Lacan’s example is the failed courtship of Alcibiades (of Socrates) in the *Symposium*, whereby Socrates rejects the becoming-love object. He affirms his worthlessness; he cannot be what the Other desires.

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---. with Giulio Preti, in "The Question of Culture," debate with Giulio Preti, in Michel Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961–1984, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (1972; New York: Semiotext[e], 1996). Cf. Colin Koopman's important article "Historical Critique or Transcendental Critique in Foucault: Two Kantian Lineages," Foucault Studies 8 (February 2010): 100–121

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