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Jouissance and Being in Lacanian Discourse

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Graduate Program in Theory and Criticism

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts

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Jouissance and Being in Lacanian Discourse

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Mazen Saleh

Graduate Program in Theory and Criticism

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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Abstract

This thesis discusses the theoretical implications Lacanian psychoanalysis may have on any articulation of historical experience. It takes as its starting point the Lacanian dictum that “the big Other does not exist”, and then attempts to find a way that allows us to go beyond historicist discursive regimes diagnosing these regimes as a refusal to accept the nonexistence of the big Other. The research focuses as well on the discourse of being Heidegger articulated in *Being and Time*, and how its “failure” may be read from a Lacanian perspective. It is here that the discourse of being is opposed to the discourse of jouissance and what Lacan later called *Le Sinthome*.

Keywords

Lacan, Heidegger, history, jouissance, being, Other, signifier, sinthome, historicist, psychoanalysis.

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Chapter 1

The Barred Other

1.1 Introduction

Walter Benjamin said that historical experience proper begins when we observe an object that is no longer part of our culture because it has been taken over by nature¹. What results from this disjunction, between that which was previously embedded in our economies of desire and their remainders, is perhaps an image of the destiny of desire and even of desiring beings. Consequently, the natural process of erosion that takes over the object of desire is certainly not posterior to its being propped up by culture. For what gnaws at cultural objects is the essence of all objects, i.e. they are destined to fail, as Lacan points out². One could add “to fail their cause” on the condition that insofar as they are objects of reality, i.e. of desire operating in fantasy, they are not caused by this failure; rather, they are ‘there’ only because their place is there; that is to say, where they are given a relational position to other objects. But insofar as they are objects at all, and this is a dimension of desire’s perpetual dissatisfaction, they can only continue to fail to be an object. In this latter sense, their cause is nothing but the mapping out of their failure. In other words, causes have effects not because of a process of insemination³, but because they are searched for. From a Lacanian view, if an object thrown out of culture and left to erode under the sun symbolizes anything, then it is not the result of the symbol’s failure to completely kill the

¹ Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings. Vol. 4, 1938-1940* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 2003), 96.

² “The object is a failure. The essence of the object is failure”. Jacques Lacan, *Encore: On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge* (New York: Norton, 1998), 58.

³ Emanation+Insemination. (My neologism).

thing, but rather the spittle of the operation of the signifier itself, insofar as it is there that desire is articulated. It is the supplementary materiality of the signifier, an extra one⁴.

Lacan's analytic discourse also aims at approaching history by way of a disjunction: "The aim of my teaching...is to dissociate *a* and A by reducing the first to what is related to the imaginary and the second to what is related to the symbolic...And yet, *a* has lent itself to be confused with S (A)...and it has done so by means of the function of being. It is here that a scission or detachment remains to be effectuated"⁵. By *a* Lacan means the image that is formed around the real the void that causes desire. It is what plugs the lack of being in fantasy and on the basis of which a sexual relation is inscribed. The object *a*⁶ is the object invented by the subject that stands for the fact of desire maintains itself only through its dissatisfaction. If one wants to represent desire by a vector, then *object a* is not ahead of desire, an unmoved mover that desire can never reach by virtue of its metonymy. As Jacques-Alain Miller points out, it is rather 'before' the vector, in other words, closer to the subject than the vector itself⁷. Moreover, the A stands for the Other⁸ in so far as the latter is the locus of speech. For Lacan, for whom no

⁴ Jacques-Alain Miller, "Mathemes", *Lacan: Topologically Speaking* (New York: Other, 2004), 29.

⁵ Lacan, *Encore*, 83.

⁶ The unsurpassable gap between the unconscious object cause of desire, the "IT", and the empirical object embodying it is the reason behind desire's eternal dissatisfaction. The little *a*, therefore, stands in opposition to the transcendent symbolic order. The former is at the core of the reflexivity that is characteristic of the ego. See Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject," *Écrits*, 701.

⁷ Miller, "Mathemes", 31.

⁸ The Other for Lacan is initially the trans-individual locus of speech, the network of linguistic and symbolic structures ruling over the interactions between speaking beings. The unconscious is therefore the discourse of the Other since the subject's speech is predominately determined by an Other that cannot be reduced to imaginary identification. The incompleteness of such an "objective spirit" was later represented by Lacan through the symbol \bar{A} , the barred Other. The

metalanguage exists, A is the place that is simultaneously posited with the act of enunciation, with lack. That is why A is barred. It is the jouissance⁹ of this barred A , which Lacan calls feminine jouissance, that results once *object a* is separated from its image, which ensnares the speaking being in his suffering. It is from the locus of the Other as barred that approaching the facticity of existence cannot be read as totally idiotic; rather, the jouissance of the barred Other is the constitutive point of exception to phallic jouissance. For if the Other is the place, the locus, of combinatives where we are duped by jouissance, then one can intervene in history only if one stands in that place according to which all other forms of jouissance are decadent substitutes. In other words, approaching human existence in its historical dimension is a question of jouissance first and foremost. It is from the point of view of the jouissance, repression, and the lack of being, that is to say, from the criterion and limits that are imposed on and by the jouissance of the Other, that one can say something about how historical discourses are condemned to deal with the same barred A , even if they do not confront it directly. Otherwise what one will see in the Other (and for Lacan there is no Other but the Other sex) is only one's own image. In such a situation, one will see only objects of desire so to speak, and fail to take the signifier in its liberating function, i.e. as that which allows a reference beyond human existence, or beyond the Symbolic.

barring of the symbolic Other means that real Other, as a traumatic encounter, is eminent to the structure of subjectivity.

⁹ Jouissance for Lacan is fundamentally transgressive in relation to the pleasure principle. Whereas the latter is a function of homeostasis and a telos of pleasure, jouissance is beyond the pleasure principle, it is suffering and a pleasure in pain. A renunciation of jouissance is thus correlate with entering the symbolic order, and the jouissance that operates on the gaps and failures of the big Other is phallic jouissance. Feminine jouissance is Lacan's attempt to articulate a non-transgressive jouissance that is related to the Other in non-symbolic way. See Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII* (Norton, New York, 1997), 184.

The question, however, of effecting such a disjunction between a and $S(A)$ remains a difficult one. Not simply because truth is not propositional, in other words, that one can repeat to infinity that ‘desire sustains itself through its dissatisfaction’ without any change in the habits, “the fundamental habit of the mind”¹⁰ as Lacan calls it, taking place, but also because even after traversing the fundamental fantasy and the realization of the nonexistence of the big Other, the subject is left with its object a , its cause of desire, insisting at the points where the real irrupts into the symbolic. Because of this deadlock, Lacan elaborated his notion of the *sinthome*¹¹ as a new articulation of the subject’s relation to object a . It is in the *sinthome* that the extra materiality of the signifier is worked out in a form of writing that takes the letter literally, a form of writing that Lacan thought is best represented by the writing of James Joyce.

It is thus on the basis of these topological mathemes $S(A)$ and a , the object cause of desire, that we will attempt to articulate the position from which psychoanalysis can say something about historical experience. First, we shall try to explicate Lacan’s aphorism “there is no Other of the Other”¹². Here the consequences of the subject’s direct contact with the real will be elaborated in relation to the decline of the Oedipus father, or rather that there never was an Oedipus structure except in Freud’s dreams. Lacan’s re-thinking of increasing status of the plurality of the names-of-the-father in relation to the structure of disavowal and perversion will

¹⁰ Lacan, *Encore*, 105.

¹¹ Lacan later introduced the term *sinthome* as a way of organizing one’s jouissance that is ‘beyond’ the efficacy of the symbolic order. Whereas the symptom was initially a signifier, the *sinthome* is a new articulation of the symptom as unanalysable. The task of the analyst does not so much become a task of deciphering signifiers according to an unconscious message, but helping the subject identifies with his *sinthome* as a modality of jouissance. See Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1996), 191.

¹² Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition In English* (New York: Norton, 1998), 688.

be discussed. A brief section on the letter and its function as a messenger of the jouissance of “whoever makes use of it” will be also included. The significance of the letter comes in as a consequence of the relativization of the name(s)-of-the-father and its particularization in the structure of perversion. Since the subject can only instantiate the name-of-the-father in his\her particular Other due to the subject’s direct contact with the real, the letter is an attempt to rethink this relation with the real outside of the symbolic law. Second, there will be section on the semblance and its relation to the baroque as effecting the separation of the imaginary identification, a , from the $S(A)$ through the void that sustains the image. Here an account of the function of being and being-there as dependent on object a , and consequently, on semblance, will be discussed. Third, a full chapter then will be devoted to a close *reading* of Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, reading, that is, defined in the Lacanian sense of being “the signifier of demand”¹³. In other words, it is a perverted reading, and consequently subversive, that will, so to speak, “push reality back into fantasy” by reading ‘Dasein is always mine’ to the letter. Such a reading, therefore, will have absolutely nothing to do with the jouissance of being-there, since here a is coalesced with $S(A)$ ¹⁴, and traces, perversely, the contours where sense points towards the direction of its failure. A discourse of being can only lend itself to the confusion of $S(A)$ with a . Following the logic of the symbolic to the end means here an attempt to anchor the phallus in the real, and what articulation provides a better template than the so-called transcendental schemata? (This is because the schemata are by definition an attempt to connect two

¹³Véronique Voruz, “The Topology of the Subject of the Law: the Nullibiquity of the Fictional Fifth,” *Lacan: Topologically Speaking* (New York: Other), 290.

¹⁴ Lacan contends that “ a has lent itself to be confused with $S(A)$...by means of the function of being”, *Encore*, 83. In other words, a reading which does not presume to grasp the transcendence being is supposed to bestow. The conflation between transcendence and reality results in a reading that maps out the discourse of the master, the discourse of the unconscious, insofar as the latter is indexed by S ¹.

heterogeneous elements.) This shall demonstrate Lacan's contention that being-there is present only in the semblance and is exclusively a function of the object cause of desire. Finally, we shall return to the *sinthome* as an attempt to write the support of the Borromean knot, to the *sinthome* that knots itself between the real and the imaginary, "the self-image that envelops the object cause of desire"¹⁵, as a way of articulating an "ego-like" dimension as an alternative to the symbolic name-of-the-father. This articulation of the *sinthome* is perhaps a way to reorient the perverse tyranny of the superego, since a decline of the function of the father means the subject no longer finds it easy to accept castration. Consequently, the *sinthome* is also closely related to the perverse plurality of the names-of-the-father in our contemporary subjectivity and its correlate of one's particular Other. This shift has occurred because, in so far as 'Dasein is always mine' is concerned, the *da*, the function of being, is pushed towards the real, twisted, and reorganized.

1.2 No Other of the Other

It was Lacan's theorization, in the 1960's and 1970's, of the notion of the real and its intimate presence in the other registers of the symbolic and the imaginary that ultimately distanced him radically from phenomenology. For example, in the 1938 text of "Les complexes familiaux," he defines the task of psychoanalysis in unmistakably phenomenological terms. The aim of psychoanalysis, he writes, is to "consider all experience lived before any objectification as

¹⁵ Lacan, *Encore*, 92.

well as before any reflexive analysis that mixes objectification with experience”¹⁶. One can clearly see the affinity this statement bears to the philosophical tradition of phenomenology: not only the most decisive feature of the psychoanalytic project lies in an anti-objectifying gesture, one might say an attempt to untangle the metaphysico-grammatical prejudices of philosophy and language, so too does an implicit privilege of a zero-level passivity that precedes the reflexive machinery of consciousness. One might say that lived experience is opened, initially, primordially, to a “pure percipi” that is constantly obfuscated, blurred by the objectifying capture of the ego in an image¹⁷. If one takes into account only this early Lacan of the imaginary then that task of philosophy (and of psychoanalysis) is to liquidate the imaginary fixations of the ego and prepare it to enter into a dialectic....of what? Of the figure of the big Other. Teresa Brennan exemplifies this logic and its consequences in her book *History After Lacan*, where she places the emphasis of the fundamental fantasy in the imaginary register. The obstacle to re-writing the past is in the ossifying ego, a process which has its origins in the foundational fantasy. Beyond appearances, which are the result of the ego’s objectifying drive which reduces the “lively heterogeneous difference” to a scale of greyness, resides the source from which the symbolic must be re-written¹⁸. This source lies beyond the homogeneity of the ego, and we could add, is the phenomenological site of “pure percipi”, pure difference as it is presented passively to the subject before the machinery of the ego colonizes it and transforms it into a piece within the hegemonic symbolic apparatus.

¹⁶ Quoted in Lorenzo Chiesa. *Subjectivity and Otherness: A Philosophical Reading of Lacan* (London: MIT press, 2007), 26.

¹⁷ Ibid, 27.

¹⁸ Teresa Brennan, *History after Lacan* (London: Routledge, 1993), 36.

It is only with Lacan's later elaboration of the real that the image is no longer perceived as an unwanted obstacle that must be gotten rid of, purely and simply. The image now points to the non-existence of any figure of the big Other by virtue of a little object *a* that resides both in the subject nor in the Other. Thus in *Seminar VII* Lacan says that "man, too, is interesting for the hollow the image leaves empty- by reason of the fact that one does not see in the image, beyond the capture of the image, the emptiness of God to be discovered"¹⁹. There is something in the image that is more than the image itself, something that cannot fit the dialectic of specularity that ultimately ossifies the ego. This something is the "real remainder, a void that resides at the frontier between the Imaginary and the Real"²⁰. Whereas it might very well be true that the fault in postmodernism, according to Brennan, is that "it refuses to identify any source of this egoistic homogeneity"²¹ (one might say a lack of theorization of the fall of Dasein into the Das Man finds its elaboration in psychoanalytic identification), yet it is not the case that this simple lack of theory, once amended, will lead to the same conclusion, to the same place phenomenological reflection defines as prior to reflexivity. In other words, the gap, the cut, which, according to Lacan, situates the unconscious (and thus gives psychoanalysis a space to enter into dialogue with philosophy, as opposed to the unconscious being the non-accessible irrational part of the psyche that forever threatens philosophy by virtue of the latter's dependence on consciousness) is not to be located in a primordial receptivity to the sensuous manifold²². Any symbolic

¹⁹Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII* (Norton, New York, 1997), 196.

²⁰ Chiesa, 106.

²¹ Brennan, 36.

²² Heidegger always remained loyal to this attitude of passivity, exemplified in the inaugural gesture of phenomenology "to the things themselves". In his reading of Kant, he always searched for that passivity that precedes the incorporation of the sensuous manifold into the a priori

interconnections that are veiled to the rigid ego would amount to no more than another figure of the big Other, no matter how much emphasis is laid on their heterogeneity. The theorization of the real as a hollow in the image puts the subject in direct contact with the real. One could say, according to the logic of the signifier, that Brennan's emphasis on dislodging the ego in order to allow the heterogeneity of things to manifest itself risks treating the real as originally one, whereas in fact the real was no-thing before it was holed by the signifier²³. Claims of pre-symbolic heterogeneity, no matter how radical, still fail to accept, and draw the full consequences of, the fact that there is no Other of the Other.

Now things get interesting: how should we read "there is no Other of the Other", or in its other formulation, "the big Other does not exist"? More importantly, are these two statements the same? I think an important distinction must be drawn between them. The first denies the existence of a transcendent entity that governs the network of signifiers, or, since reality for Lacan is ultimately governed by the signifier, the phenomenal realm of causality, to use a Kantian term. To use Alenka Zupančič's words: "no Other of the Other, no Cause behind the cause"²⁴. Whereas the second statement ("the big Other does not exist") seems to imply more radical consequences. It appears to forbid any transcendence whatsoever. One might claim, it is a sort of a skeptical statement in which the subject is forever barred from ascertaining anything his

concepts. One of the consequences Lacan draws from the non-existence of the big Other is that the "to things themselves" is but a fantasm, in other words, the real thing-in-itself is no-thing, l'achose.

²³ See Chiesa, 121.

²⁴ Alenka Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan* (London: Verso, 2000), 40.

own “anticipated image- which he had caught of himself in his mirror-coming to meet him”²⁵. In fact, one can even postulate the hypothesis that Lacan’s two statements, before and after his *kehre*, are a response and a solution to the same question: How is history possible? Why do things happen at the level of the symbolic, imaginary, and the real? How do societies function? Or to put it more aphoristically, how do people not go mad? If desire has no object (in the sense of reality), but only an object-cause, then is not human desire, insofar as it is stolen from the subject, and arrested in objects, completely mystical? The Lacan of “there is an Other of the Other” could be said to have been *transcendental*, if one is permitted to use this term with liberty. In *Seminar V* (1957-1958), he says, “analytic experience shows the us the indispensability of the background provided by the Other with respect to the Other, without which the universe of language could not articulate itself”²⁶. The *empirical* fact that people speak, that they enter the symbolic and constitute history, is justified on the presupposition that the Oedipus complex has been resolved for them. In other words, there is here a classical transcendental move, in which one starts from an empirical observation (that there is Borromean knot) and an inference is made about its condition of possibility, so to speak, i.e. that a paternal metaphor must be presupposed so that “the universe of language can articulate itself”. History is possible because there is a successful paternal metaphor that moves the subject beyond the imaginary destructive dyad with the mother; that is to say, the subject is constituted by the threat of castration, of yielding up the fantasy of being the phallus for the mother. Yet, less than a year later, Lacan claims, “there is no such signifier that would guarantee the consequence of the

²⁵ Lacan, *Écrits*, 684.

²⁶ Quoted in Chiesa, 107.

manifestation of any signifier”²⁷. This position can also be used to ground the possibility of history. For does not the existence of a transcendental signifier that ‘always-already’ unfolds the relation between the subject’s desire and the signifier in a particular way imply that nothing new happens in history? That everything is determined beforehand, like Kant’s ahistorical *a priori* concept of the understanding?²⁸ So a transcendental Other guarantees the possibility of history at all, of the emergence of the subject into a symbolic universe, and that the lack of an Other of the Other not only guarantees its non-closure, but also the implication of the Other in the dialectic of the subject’s desire.

When a universal paternal metaphor was presupposed by Lacan, a distinction had to be made between individual speech and the symbolic universe of language. It is only then that one could speak of an intersubjective history and of the universal law of the symbolic. The spiritual roots of the subject were outside, so to speak. At this time, Lacan’s theory of the symbolic requires a non-deceptive element in order to function, an element that turns the field of imaginary feint (i.e. presence and absence of an image) into the symbolic field of speech. This implied that truth “requires another locus- the locus of the Other...the Other as witness who is Other than any of the partners”²⁹. We can say that the erected stones of the phallic culture of

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ “Transcendental philosophy has the advantage but also the obligation to seek its concepts in accordance with a principle, since they spring pure and unmixed from the understanding, as absolute unity, and must therefore be connected among themselves in accordance with a concept or idea. Such a connection, however, provides a rule by means of which the place of each pure concept of the understanding and the completeness of all of them together can be determined *a priori*, which would otherwise depend upon whim or chance.” Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 204.

²⁹ Lacan, *Écrits*, 684.

menhirs represent something like a transcendental ego, one that guarantees consistency of the locus of the symbolic truth. The temporality of this move is always already prior. To use the language of *Being and Time*, which we will come to shortly, the disclosure of being is an “a priori perfect”.

Now, with the denial of the existence of the Big Other, what becomes of truth? Whereas before the transcendent name-of-the-father separated the real (which was simply that which the symbolic is not) from the subject, now a direct contact between the real of language and the individual’s speech is established. As Chiesa explains, “the fact that there is no Other of the Other entails the impossibility of distinguishing between the universal and the individual level”³⁰. It is an interesting question whether the impossibility to distinguish between them entails a collapse of transcendence. But what is sure is that from the 1960’s on, “Lacan relativizes the function of the name-of-the-father, and... speaks of the names-of-the-father in the plural”³¹. It is interesting to compare this with a passage from *Subversion of the Subject*, the first essay in which, according to Chiesa, Lacan announces the non-existence of the big other:

“It is this image that becomes fixed- this is the ideal ego- from the point at which the subject fixates as ego-ideal...In the capture it undergoes due to its imaginary nature, the ego masks its duplicity; that is, consciousness, in which the ego assures itself an indisputable existence...is in no way immanent in the ego, but rather transcendent, since consciousness is based on the ego-ideal as a unary trait. As a result, the transcendental ego itself is relativized, implicated as it were in the misrecognition in which the ego’s identification originates”.³²

³⁰Chiesa, 116.

³¹ Chiesa, 117.

³² Lacan, *Écrits*, 685.

The relativization of the name-of-the-father can be said to be equivalent to the relativization of the transcendental ego. The reason for this relativization is not that the transcendental ego is a figment of the imagination, a mere semantic game that hides beneath it a deceptive ontic concern, but rather because transcendence is already a function of the ego. In other words, the erected stones are relativized, deprived of their transcendental function, not because they are nothing but stones, mere objects of reality, but because the ego does not recognize its dependence on transcendence. The Other is implicated in a relation of misrecognition, one that is constitutive of the ego. One could say that the phrase “Dasein is always mine” is fraught with the same ambiguity and misrecognition. The subject is extimate to itself; he is neither completely inside the box of ego (something always already reaches out), nor is he in a position of transcendence with respect to himself, a position where he can view himself objectively from the outside. Another way of putting it is to say that the subject is constitutively non-identical to itself. So in *Seminar V*, before the relativization of the name-of-the-father, Lacan says, “besides speech and super-speech- the law of the father...something else is necessary. It is for this reason that the phallus, the elective signifier, introduces itself”³³. Here the name of the father is clearly distinguished from the phallus, yet later, according to Chiesa, when the real is the real-of-the-symbolic, “whenever Lacan refers to the name-of-the-father, he is speaking of something which is perfectly identifiable with phallus and S(A)”³⁴. So we get two propositions: Before the *kehre*, the phallus needed the transcendental paternal law in order to be instituted as a signifier of lack in the other, so that “something may be established for the subject between the

³³ Quoted in Chiesa, 118.

³⁴ Ibid, 119.

big Other qua locus of speech and the phenomenon of [the subject's] desire"³⁵. After the Kehre, we have a superimposition, an identification, between the phallus and the paternal-law. What happens to the function of transcendence then? To having access to an historical, symbolic existence? Does the phallus now acquire a transcendent function, or is the subject doomed to the misery of playing "fort-da" with object *a*?

1.3 From Name-of-the-father to père-version, Or From Metaphysics to Discursive Truth

Thus one of the main consequences of the nonexistence of the big Other is that even what Lacan calls "idiotic" jouissance, masturbation, which is, given the import of non-existence of sexual relation in the analytic discourse, more common than one might think, is not totally idiotic. Previously, idiotic jouissance could not have any import beside its imaginary narcissistic solipsism since the phallus, the signifier that does not signify anything but is a place holder for lack, the failure of symbolic consistency, was distinguished from the S^1 , the primary signifier. Late Lacan, in his working out of the aftermaths of the lack of such of a signifier, found no other way than to fully assume the consequence: namely, that the phallus is actually incarnated in S^1 .³⁶ In other words, the idiocy of such a jouissance is fully assumed as designating the fundamental solipsistic nature of human reality. Consequently, the importance of Lacan's Borromean topology stems from the fact that it orients "man's being in the world" not by relying on the Other, but "by taking its bearings from each subject's particular invention- or fiction- for the

³⁵ Ibid, 118.

³⁶ Lacan, *Encore*, 80.

treatment of his Real”³⁷. Lacan, in his late *Seminar XXIII* no longer believes in the universal validity of the Oedipus complex as a way of the subject’s entry into the symbolic, attempts the replacement of the name of the father with the père-version, thus highlighting the integral role of the function of disavowal for modern subjectivity³⁸. As Véronique Voruz explains, the disintegration of the Other of love as a unique site of truth makes disavowing real castration the only way for the subject to attain his sexual partner³⁹. The Other of love, being no longer a universal symbolic Other, becomes a unique, particular Other of love. In perversion, the subject’s bodily consistency is dependent upon the gaze of the loving Other⁴⁰.

The subject has only to disavow any, so to speak, metaphysico-ontological dimensions that sexuality might have and treat it, so to speak, as a phenomenological affair, in other words, as the symbolic. The pervert, therefore, avows the symbolic lack only in order to be the one that corks, fills up, such a lack through imaginary identification with the phallus. The pervert’s partner has no real jouissance; his\her knowledge is not situated in the Other. The site where the pervert’s partner fails to see the distinction between his cause of desire and his object of desire is where the pervert directs his attacks, against the subject assumed as the locus of knowledge, as the ‘I’ that knows. The pervert thus puts himself in place of the Other that enjoys his partner as an object; that is to say, the pervert imagines himself as object a in relation to the Other as the subject of desire. It is precisely because they enjoy the partner as an object that Lacan claims they produce a subversive “savoir-faire”, a knowledge that is not merely symbolic, or

³⁷ Voruz, 284.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ See Ibid, 291.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 286.

phenomenological, but rather “of the nature of things”, in so far as “there is a direct connection between sexual behavior and its truth, namely, its amorality”⁴¹. Yet, Voruz’s discussion of perversion in her article “The Topology of the Subject of the Law” comes mostly under the heading of the Other of love as a way for the subject to assume his\her place in the symbolic order. Perversion as she sees this dimension of it, is indeed a way to keep things functioning, although at the price of a double alienation that requires psychoanalytic intervention. Where does the subversive knowledge of perverts Lacan talks about fit in then? I think this can be answered in the following passages from *Seminar XX*:

What was seen, but only regarding men, is that what they deal with is object *a*, and that the whole realization of the sexual relationship leads to fantasy. It was seen, of course, regarding neurotics. [People] could not help but notice that there was a correlation [between neurotics and] the perversions.⁴²

But people had the opportunity after that to notice that the perversions, such as we believe we discern them in neurotics, are not that at all. Neurosis consists in dreaming, not perverse acts. Neurotics have none of the characteristics of perverts. They simply dream of being perverts.⁴³

Thus if, as Voruz contends, it is true that Lacan says that in the structure of modern subjectivity “the law here is the law of love, in other words, perversion”⁴⁴, then the fact must be

⁴¹ Lacan, *Encore*, 87.

⁴² Lacan, *Encore*, 86.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 87.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Voruz, 284.

acknowledged that the general neurosis of humanity finds its perverse dimension in dreaming, and not so much in its actions. It is precisely because the neurotic does not act on its perverse fantasy, in other words, that he does not “push away reality in fantasy”⁴⁵, that he does not follow the symbolic to the end. Perverts, those for whom the act consists of enjoying the partner as an object, by virtue of being the phallus for him\her, produce a subversive knowledge in so far as they cannot but make the object fail. The impossibility of inscribing the sexual relationship in the Other is attested to by the pervert’s never-ending failure to anchor the phallus in the real. That is why Lacan says the perverts are “the ones Aristotle didn’t want to see at all costs”⁴⁶, precisely because of the challenge they pose to the “golden mean”, or “the happy medium”, the precarious balance according to which reality is constituted.

The law of perversion, then, makes it possible to map its structure on what Lacan says about phallic jouissance. Man cannot approach a woman except as his object cause of desire. The consequence of this fact is that “the act of love is the male polymorphous perversion”⁴⁷. Hence, and of course in accordance with everything articulated in psychoanalysis since Freud, sexuality has no norm on the basis of which it can measure its other manifested forms and call them perversions. Sexuality is itself a perversion in so far as the norm, if one must use this world, is that the real of the sexual relationship is impossible. The male pole of the sexes can only alienate itself in the enjoyment of his fantasy, which is constructed around his *object a*. The Other jouissance, the feminine jouissance in so far as the jouissance of her organ fails, is barred for

⁴⁵ Lacan, *Encore*, 107.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 87.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 72.

man. That is why Lacan defines the pleasure principle as “the coalescence of a with S(A)”⁴⁸. The more man confuses his *a*, but that already delivers the meaning since *a* in so far as it is the cause of desire is not his at all, with S(A), “the less he hates, the less he is”⁴⁹. We will come to the function of being in so far as it is based entirely on the cause of desire as a void, in other words, on what Lacan calls the semblance. For now it is important to anticipate where the letter, in so far as it plays a role in jouissance, comes to play a role in this structure. The knowledge ,S², that is produced by the pervert has its subversive core in the fact that it stops the phallus not being written. In other words, it writes the phallus. This is how Lacan defines the contingent function of the phallus in *Seminar XX*, that which “stops not being written”⁵⁰. I think it is demonstrated well enough historically that the phallus functions much more effectively when it is not questioned, when it is not pointed out, when, in Lacan’s words, it is “reserved in ancient times to the Mysteries.”⁵¹ The neurotics, in dreaming of being a pervert, resuscitate the ancient function of mysteries. Whereas the pervert, in disavowing castration, points to the way in which the sense that is produced in the fantasmatic sexual link leads to non-sense, assuming of course, that he is at the level of the drive, in other words, that he acts. The knowledge produced here is not a mere semblance. Of course the pervert in the neurotic’s dreams can only enjoy his fantasy because he is relying secretly on a form of a big Other (hence the disavowal of castration).

No wonder then that Lacan’s famous formulation of the ethical maxim of psychoanalysis, ‘do not compromise your desire’, came alongside his articulation of the positions of enunciation

⁴⁸ Ibid, 84.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 89.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 94.

⁵¹ Ibid.

of Kant and Sade. This is because the point of these latter two is to transform the super-egoistic enjoyment into a universal maxim, a way to arrive at a pure signifying chain in order to force their way into the real of the Thing. Thus in *Seminar XX*, and right after the last passage we quoted about “amorality” as the truth of sexual behavior, Lacan immediately connects it to Kant and Sade in so far as in both of them the Good object is posited, not as an unmoved mover the way Aristotle conceived it, but as “endlessly saying good things”⁵². This is the formula Lacan gave us for phallic jouissance, according to which man can reach the Other only on the basis of infinity.

Therefore, it may not be a bad idea to distinguish the neurotics’ dreams of being a pervert and those who attempt to say the whole truth as they imagine it, namely, that they are what the Other lacks. The latter, if one may put it this way, could be said to be subject of the drive as opposed to subjects of desire, i.e. the neurotics who dream of being perverts. If it is true, as Lacan claims, that perversion is new the law, then a new articulation of the relation of this law to the drive must be elaborated. The goal of analysis, defined as sending back the subject’s message in an inverted form, is structured around subjects of desire. The analyst gives them such a message inverted in the same way a semblance enacts the object cause of desire⁵³. The result is, of course, a doubling of desire, in other words, transference. The analyst, just like Socrates does with Alcibiades, shows the analysand an image of himself desiring by dissociating the imaginary object from that which sustains it, the void that is the cause of desire. Yet Lacan’s formulation of the non-existence of the big Other was also in part that which insists in analysis, that which resists interpretation. Consequently, there should be a more appropriate way of intervening in the

⁵² Ibid, 87.

⁵³ This will be elaborated below in relation to Lacan’s discussion of Plato’s *Symposium* and the semblance.

knot of jouissance that is more fit to the nature of the drive rather than to the nature of desire.

Hence the purchase of the materiality of the letter in relation to writing, as Lacan later theorizes it, as a form of jouissance that deals with the subject of the drive.

If, again, the law of perversion is the law of modern subjectivity, then a form of perversion must be distinguished from the pervert that secretly depends on the big Other, and instead must be equated with phallic jouissance. The death drive⁵⁴ is, of course, not that which is opposed to the pleasure principle. It is the pleasure principle pushed to its limits. Therefore, the coalescence between a and S(A), as that which defines the pleasure principle, can produce a knowledge that is subversive in the sense that it *stops not writing the phallus*. This is attested to by what is mentioned above as a consequence of the barring of the Other, namely, that S(A) and phallus are perfectly superimposed on each other.

Lacan said in *Seminar XX* that the other consequence of scientific discourse, besides a subversion of *connaissance* (a knowledge that “participates in the fantasy of inscription of the sexual link”⁵⁵), is that we are becoming the subject of instruments and gadgets. This, I think, has the consequence not only of disavowing the real as the impossible, but also of allowing more and more mediums for realizing one’s fantasies. They are, in other words, means of pleasure. Consequently, they will certainly encourage some of those neurotics to real-ize their dreams of disavowing castration. It is certainly only with such subjects that a topology of writing may be effective.

⁵⁴ The death drive is related to the real dimension where jouissance and the object cause of desire reside. It is thus beyond the pleasure principle in its function of disturbing the homeostatic equilibrium of the psychic life. As an attempt to regain the jouissance that was lost with the entrance into the symbolic, the death drive aims at annihilating itself by forcing the subject into The Thing.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 82.

1.4 Historicists: neurotics who dream of being perverts

As I have suggested above, there is a structural affinity between disavowing the real lack in the Other and disavowing the ontological import of metaphysical questions. The pervert fears most that he may be an object of the Other's jouissance, "for to accept that the Other lacks introduces unbearable anguish"⁵⁶. Therefore, far from acknowledging the failure of sexual relation in the real, he disavows the whole import of the question; it is for him a pseudo-problem. One can also say this about a certain discursive movement that takes the object of philosophy to describe the discursive condition under which something like truth can emerge. Metaphysical questions are questions of being in so far as the latter is taken to be equated with substance (this certainly started with Heidegger), and consequently have their roots in , or at least correlative with, the traditional conception of the subject as an enclosed space of thinking and knowing. The scandal of philosophy, according to Heidegger, which apparently was taken as an unquestioned truism, is that a proof of the existence of the world is demanded at all. We are always already in the world. This is probably the inaugural gesture of disavowal. Psychoanalytic discourse as it is articulated by Lacan allows us to redeem the whole import of traditional metaphysical questions. Certainly the point is not to pose these questions in the way the ancients did. But the purchase to be gained is rather to acknowledge that the fact of their failure to provide answers is certainly not superfluous. How does Lacan achieve this? He achieves by "opposing to the concept of being...the notion that we are duped by jouissance"⁵⁷. In other words, he takes jouissance, in so far as it is the jouissance of the body, to be the only substance.

⁵⁶ Voruz, 292.

⁵⁷ Lacan, *Encore*, 70.

It is not particularly easy to *begin* talking about historicism as such. For, one might object, the word is an umbrella word that unifies under it conflicting discourses (Foucauldian and Derridean discourses, for example) and any attempt to construct a reality from such a notion would appear as arrogantly over-arching and reductive. Yet perhaps historicism, in the precise sense of anti-essentialism, can only manifest itself in different, and even conflicting discourses, just like the act of love for the masculine side of speaking beings, because what he approaches on the other side is only his object-cause of desire manifests itself in polymorphous perversion⁵⁸. In any case, the justification of creating a category of thought called historicism, even if on a closer investigation the empirical *data* would render such a category unfounded and fabricated, is that it is merely *for our thought*, cannot be an external matter to our topic. It is a matter of nothing less than what Lacan attempted to articulate as the position of speech from which a discourse is enunciated. If it is true that psychoanalytic discourse bases itself on the nonexistence of sexual relationship, then it is the only discourse that confronts the speaking being's fantasmatic construction of reality. One might object: "All right, sexual relation must be supplemented with a fantasmatic construction, but what does that have to do with reality?" The answer to this question resides in the following formulation: that psychoanalysis contends that "reality is approached with the apparatus of jouissance"⁵⁹. The discourse of being is therefore replaced by the discourse of the jouissance of the body; in other words, we are duped, played, mastered by jouissance⁶⁰. What, then, can be said of ego, with which the world (Welt) is approached, other than it is

⁵⁸ Lacan, *Encore*, 72.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 55.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 70.

nothing more than a precarious construction, a collage of rhetoric put together according to the principle that confuses object *a* for the Other, namely, the pleasure principle?

To return to what we said in the introduction about the “fate of desire”, we must add, following Lacan, that the fact that sexual relation is impossible “doesn’t in any way diminish the interest we must have in the Other”⁶¹. And it is only on the basis of the Other that one can speak of a history at all. For Lacan, the Other, as locus of truth, is an inevitable correlate of the fact of speaking: “As long as things are said, the God hypothesis will persist”⁶². Yet it is not the Other as a universal process imbedded with a telos, nor the Other as a network of signifiers with a final word that determines all other words. The Other that concerns itself with the purpose ancient forms of writing might have served is an example Lacan gives of “the habitual function of History”⁶³. In short, what is of interest is not at all History insofar as it has meaning, since meaning only veils the jouissance of the lack of being, and thus investigating forms of writing, or anything for that matter, under the heading of a purpose obfuscates language as an apparatus of jouissance. What is of interest to us is history with the following proviso: the subject of enunciation is not the Other of meaning, but the Other insofar as it is barred.

If we cast what we are calling historicism in the light of what we are also calling anti-essentialism (but what is essential is the fact that there is no sexual relation) has the immediate repercussion of linking history or historicity proper to truth value to the extent that truth in psychoanalysis is indexed on the failure of inscribing the sexual rapport. Historicism, naively defined, is the demonstration of how the universality of a certain notion is, if not completely reduced to, at least marked by the specific, contingent, historico-empirical circumstances of the

⁶¹ Lacan, *Encore*, 87.

⁶² *Ibid*, 45.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 46.

time in which it was produced⁶⁴. Such contextualizing refrains from making a judgment, or an interpretation: it refrains from intervening under the pretext that all which lies within its power enables historicism only to describe the set of circumstances under which such discourse, such notion, can arise. There is no truth, or “truth” is merely an empty container filled with the specific socio-political power relations of the era in question.

But the apparent neutrality of such contextualizations is deceiving because it ignores the dimension of speech, and consequently, of jouissance as a “dit-mension of the body”⁶⁵, the dimension that speech brings with it. The point is, of course, not to return to any transcendent subject that defies any historical or symbolic over-determination. We should acknowledge that historical contextualization, in limiting itself to uncovering the conditions under which discourses arise, disavows the agency of the subject. The subject’s agency must be understood not as subject as the commander of the verb, but rather that it is subject *of* the verb. This is what being duped by jouissance means. In other words, it is more appropriate to attribute this agency to the letter since it is the letter, as a fragment of the real, which insists itself in the symbolic. For Lacan, the letter is distinguished from the message just as the position of enunciation (the unconscious) is distinguished from the statement (consciousness): “That one speaks remains forgotten behind what is said in what is heard/understood”⁶⁶. The articulated language in what is said in what is heard, i.e. the signifier that is carried in the letter, obfuscates the very fact of

⁶⁴ See Žižek, Slavoj, “History Against Historicism”, *European Journal of English Studies*, Vol. 4, no. 2 (London: Routledge, 2000): 101-110.

⁵⁹ Lacan, *Encore*, 114.

⁶⁰ Quoted in *Lacan: Topologically Speaking*, 6.

enunciation. It is on the basis of this fact, the fact that although the letter carries a signifier, it is nonetheless at a disjunction with respect to the dimension of the signifier, that “the letter always arrives at its destination.” As Philippe Hellebois contends, “For the destination in question is nothing other than the jouissance of whoever makes use of it. It is in this sense that the letter is littoral, tracing for the subject the contours of being.”⁶⁷ Therefore, the historical contextualization will remain vacuous if not linked to the fact that the subject is divided from his jouissance.

The thesis here is that this “suspension of truth-judgment,” which has turned hitherto metaphysico-ontological questions into historicist-discursive ones, functions as a defence mechanism against, or a kind of an avoidance of, a certain deadlock, a certain antagonism where the modern subject is, as Joan Copjec puts it, in too close a proximity to his object *a*. In a similar vein, one can see the unbearable anguish of the pervert being an object for the Other if he confronts its lack. In other words, the repressed consequences of the deterioration of symbolic distance return in the form of an avoidance of ontological questions. The contextualization and deconstruction of narrative has the function of preventing us from fully identifying with the narrative, from acting *as if* such narrations (historical or philosophical) have a ground in the real and not merely a symbolic game of differential signifiers. The psychical capital of such avoidance, of assuming implicitly an exceptional, unaccounted-for position outside narrative, is the avoidance of an encounter with the real impossibility, with the real limit which will allow us to traverse the fundamental fantasy. It is only with such an encounter with a limit that psychoanalysis achieves one of its important tasks, namely, to shift the subject’s unconscious relation to jouissance.

⁶⁷ Quoted in *Lacan: Topologically Speaking*, 205.

In other words, the function of such “full identification” is to enact the dreams of neurotics. The point is to enact the inevitably failed attempt to ground the narrative in the real. For what will be revealed then is nothing but the fact that the symbol does not adhere to the thing, that there is no natural correlation between the signifier and signified. The call for full identification, similar to the call not to compromise one’s desire, is to reveal that full identification is impossible. This, indeed, is one of Lacan’s formulas for arriving at the cut that is the unconscious: the mapping out of the whole network, following the letter traces, so that “the unconscious, when it gives up, testifies that it exists nowhere but in [the cut].”⁶⁸

1.5 Transference And the Semblance of being

Again, in linking historicism to a suspension of truth-judgment, we are effectively achieving the opposite: linking the historical experience proper, i.e. history itself, to truth. This link between history and truth (designated very vaguely and very generally as “essentialist” in the sense that it poses an objectifiable limit according to which a “measurement” or “interpretation” is possible) was designated by Lacan as “a profession arrived at recently in history”⁶⁹. In spelling history in a hysterical way, Lacan is suggesting that only history can stand in stark contrast to the pseudo-hermeneutic spelling as his-story, that “the question of another reason” has been possible at all. Lacan articulates this ‘other reason’ as going beyond the mere care of the self and earning money, and thus grants it an ethical dimension. In psychoanalysis, what the hysteric cannot tolerate is the non-lack in the Other: his or her ethical

⁶⁸ Quoted in Miller, “Matheme”, 47.

⁶⁹ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI* (New York: Norton, 1998), viii.

call is the death drive insofar as the hysteric realizes the structural impossibility of finding his\her lack, or his\her complement, in the Other. Here, the Other is understood to be a field which precedes the existence of the subject and whose structures determine the subject.

Therefore, in order for the hysteric to be “cured” in analysis, her desire must be posited in relation to the analyst as unsatisfied desire⁷⁰. The hysteric must receive the message of its lack, in the sense that she previously has posited the other as a beyond, in the sense that the big Other has closed itself into a totality, in an inverted form. That is to say, the lack must become a positive lack, when the middle term connects the two extremes as a messenger: in effect, the messenger tells the beyond that the individual is no longer an individual, that it has renounced its object *a*, that it has become lacking, and telling the individual that the in-itself, God, which for Lacan belongs to the real and not to the symbolic, is no longer an extreme other, but has also become a lover. The incarnation of the imaginary subject in an image that reveals the void of desire is at the same time a capture, an entrapment of a piece of the real that makes the latter imbedded in the dialectic of the symbolic. It is the image of the beloved as lacking which is the result of complete ignorance and complete veiling. That is why Lacan in *Seminar XX* says the unconscious is “the fact that being, by speaking, enjoys and wants to know nothing about it”⁷¹. What is at stake in the dialectic of love is the incarnation of the imaginary subject. In other words, an image appears where, from the perspective of knowledge, there should be nothing. In “Kant avec Sade,” Lacan characterizes the function of beauty as “an ultimate barrier that forbids access to a fundamental horror”⁷², i.e. object *a*. In love, in making things beautiful, what we seek

⁷⁰ Ibid, 15.

⁷¹ Lacan, *Encore*, 105.

⁷² Lacan, *Écrits*, 654.

is not the abyssal singularity of the other subject but a distance from object *a*, from the object cause of desire.

In *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists*, Joan Copjec demonstrates how the decline of the symbolic distance that protected the subject from the horror of its object *a* since the nineteenth century is the consequence of the utilitarian definition of the subject which declared that the subject was indeed equal to its traces, that it could be fully grasped in its use or function⁷³. It is the deterioration of the symbolic (the death of God according to Nietzsche) that forced our environment (the return of the repressed) to bear the burden of this death in the guise of symptomatic phenomena such as overcrowding and the danger of passive smoking. The deconstruction of context, of narrative, then, is the disavowal of the return of the repressed; it disavows the deterioration of the symbolic and its effects on the subject. Instead of accepting once and for all, that narrative has no final meaning, no stability, or to use Hegelian language, no being-in-itself, which are all consequences of the deterioration of the symbolic, the deconstructive gesture merely defers the belief in the symbolic with the hope that one day it would be possible to institute it, although this day may never come.

It is clear that the question of traversing the fantasy is not for Lacan a question of making sure, in keeping aware that beyond social discourses there is a pure subjective content, say a warm human being, an innocent child, or a devout mother. Rather, it is, as Zupančič writes in her *Ethics of the Real*, a question of mapping the whole network of possibility⁷⁴. This mapping out is driven by truth, in other words, by the subject's constant attempts to ground the symbolic in the real, thus disavowing the structural fact that the real lacks in the symbolic. Therefore, if as a

⁷³ See Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan against the Historicists* (Cambridge: Verso, 1994), 103.

⁷⁴ See, Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real*, 4.

discourse, utility has overcrowded the environment, trapping the subject in the image of its traces, then it has also established a positive will of the other, a will which is determined according to seeking what is pleasurable and avoiding what is harmful. In other words, we are caught in the drive of the good as such; if all that is true, then salvation does not lie in running melancholically from utility, but in following its claims to truth to the end and mapping its network. When Copjec analyses the nineteenth-century oriental fantasy of clothing, she clearly distinguishes between the ego-ideal of utility, that clothes should be defined only by their utility, and the sartorial superego which secretly hints at the exceptional pleasure derived from the dignity of it being the transgression of the law (for example, the weird erotic gestures that serve no clear purpose, the complete veiling where no parts of the body appear, etc.). This unconscious knowledge, this disavowed knowledge of transgression, of an exceptional *jouissance* to the function of utility, is what gives the ego-ideal of utility its consistency. In traversing the fantasy, “being in love, *verliebtheit*”, Lacan says, is “the recognition of the foundation of the narcissistic image insofar as it is what gives its substance to the Ideal Ego”⁷⁵. According to Lacan, this is what was at stake at the final scene between Alcibiades and Socrates in the *Symposium*. That is, it is a showing, an interpretation by Socrates, of the object around which Alcibiades’ fantasy was constructed.

Provisionally, we should take Lacan’s lesson to be that a symptom is a blind spot which, paradoxically, makes things visible; the symptom is thus crucial to visibility. If the positive will of the other is the symptom of utilitarianism, then it is because utilitarianism defines human subject as an entity which seeks pleasure and avoids pain. But as Joan Copjec explains, this definition is predicated upon a definition of *balance*. The fact that it is a definition of balance

⁷⁵ Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 137.

means that excess has been acknowledged as existing: people who pursue pleasure or pain (jouissance) too much, people who suspend the reality principle, a principle whose function is to delay pleasure and keep the proper balance intact. This problem, according to Žižek, is the reason why Freud, in *Totem and Taboo*, had to supplement the Oedipus myth with the structural killing of the father: “We have all done it, we had to have done it”⁷⁶. In other words, the reciprocity of social relation, a utilitarian fantasy, depends on an “other knowledge,” an unconscious knowledge that the human subject has already, structurally, crossed any proper balance; that its eternity, in fact its immortality, is much more important to him than his pleasure (understood here as the good, the goods). Thus, according to Diotima, the woman who taught Socrates about love in *The Symposium*, the fact that love is a child of Poverty is what is good in love; this lack links mortal beings to immortal beings⁷⁷. Hence Lacan’s discussion of Socrates in *Seminar VIII* seems to be mapped on the structure of the hysteric whose cure is present only in her desire’s being unsatisfied. Because Socrates knows, he cannot love. Because he knows he is nothing, what terrifies him most is being in the position of the beloved where he is bound to be deceived. Knowledge clearly necessitates Socrates being a void, and once Alcibiades declares publicly that Socrates’ jewel, his *agalma*, could not be won through seduction, through desire, he constructs Socrates as an analyst. But what drove Alcibiades in the first place to think that Socrates has a secret jewel, a hidden *agalma*? The answer lies in what Lacan tells us about the discourse Socrates invented, the discourse which embodied the dictum that “in the order of the

⁷⁶Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999), 105.

⁷⁷ Plato, *The Symposium*. Translated by Christopher Gill. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1999), 204c.

just city there are no healthy beliefs which are unverified”⁷⁸. Lacan credits Socrates with inventing the discourse of pure signifier, and it is due to this discourse that Alcibiades is hystericized with respect to Socrates’ desire: *Che vuoi?*

In order to be more intelligible, we must trace exactly the turning point in *The Symposium* around which Lacan situates his analyses. The *agalma* makes its appearance in the text of *The Symposium*, Lacan tells us, when the rule of the game is changing. It is no longer a question of praising love, but a question of praising the other person. It is in the relation of the one to the other rather than the question of love that the text is now focused on. Socrates is not yet an analyst when he is enjoying his “formidable metonymy,” that is, before Alcibiades makes his confession, a confession which is addressed to no other but the Other. In other words, a metonymy of desire which aims at producing knowledge cannot make any metaphorical substitution because it knows there is nothing there. It is this formidable metonymy which is a discourse of pure signifier, an infinite discourse which characterized by typical Socratic dialectic. For example, hotness cannot be brought into coldness without the former losing its essence, just as pure madness, in its attempt to bring the signifier to a stop somewhere, will perforce stop anywhere. It is this formidable metonymy which gives us the best illustration of traversing the fantasy, of mapping the entire network. The Socratic maxim of verification, contrary to the Nietzschean interpretation of Socrates as the corrupt kernel of reason and rationality, one which perhaps had contaminated a beautiful soul such as Plato (beyond good and evil), will show us that the chain of signification shall always be indefinite. In other words, to use Heideggerian language, the move from meaning to truth, or from sense to nonsense, will be effected. The function of Socratic impasses is thus, as Lacan indicated, structural and not a mere “fault” or an

⁷⁸ Jacques Lacan, *Le transfert* (Paris: Seuil, 2001), (16.11.60).

“error” of intersubjectivity. Just as there is something other in the sadomasochism of Sade, something that goes beyond the simple asymmetry of intersubjectivity, something which cannot be explained by reference to the narcissistic wound (when this wound is understood as requiring an imaginary recognition of the, from the, other in order to temporarily alleviate its suffering and constructs a misunderstood relation), there is something other in the desire of Socrates, in his out of place desire.

Once the question is turned towards praising the other person, the agalma comes on the scene. The question of the jewel inside Socrates becomes, once the jewel is found, a question of duty: duty becomes whatever Socrates pleases to command. Lacan relates this to *Che Vuoi?*—“What do you want?” But the magic he attributes to this formula is not merely one-sided: What do you want from me? You are trying to corrupt me, leave me alone, etc.? The other side of the suspicion is an already present unconscious knowledge that desire is by definition alienated, and what is being asked for is a pure desire or: “a desire that is really your will.”⁷⁹ In other words, the patient is demanding love from the beginning. In directing Alcibiades’ desire towards Agathon, Socrates reveals the other passion, his demon which goes beyond the desire of knowledge. It is the Freudian ethical maxim: that the good of the patient’s eros is the criterion and guide for any ethical action. Due to his austerity, to his insistence on separating desire from love, Socrates does not reply to Alcibiades on the level of desire. In this silence, like the silence of [the] woman at the level of the unconscious, Alcibiades is placed on the path to his own eros’s good.

In order to explore the question of Socrates’ passion, Lacan sets the figure of Socrates against that of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra. He opts for the eternal metonymy governing Socrates over the poetic and extra metaphoric Zarathustra; the former has the potential to reveal the origin

⁷⁹ Lacan, *Le transfert*, (1.2.61).

of the narcissistic desiring subject in creating the signifier in all its purity: desire is thus turned into drive. In Socrates' metonymy, those who are not supposed to understand passion will not understand, nor, which is more than one can say for the metaphoric discourse of Zarathustra, will they imagine they have understood. The Socratic message "even though it involves something which refers to love, is certainly not in itself fundamentally something which begins, as one might say, from a center of love"⁸⁰. It is rather the atopic place, the void of knowledge, which fuels the ascesis towards Beauty, is implied by the position from which Socrates speaks. This void attests to the fact that the relation between the knower and the known is not simply that of knowledge. Rather, it is skewed through object *a*.

The image Socrates erects for Alcibiades by interpreting his confession as one that is really directed towards Agathon is, in Lacan's words, an image of Alcibiades desiring. Similarly, the image of seven wolves which fascinate The Wolf Man in his dream fascinate him in its proper seduction as an image. What becomes apparent "is that their fascinated gaze is the subject himself"⁸¹. When Socrates did not satisfy the local commandment of the jour, to satisfy the appetite of the body first and foremost, he renounced the transgression of the appetites. But what he was renouncing was not a philosophical despite of the body, a metaphysical prejudice against filthy matter in opposition to pure soul; rather, what was he renouncing was the body being taken as transgression, as a hostage for transgression: that is, the superego enjoyment that transgresses symbolic duty. Socrates also denounces the very symbolic duty, the ego-ideal, in the sense of democratic Ideal, which like the utility of the nineteenth century, depended on its consistency by rejecting the sensual, the body as pierced with symptomatic *jouissance*. At the time of *Seminar*

⁸⁰ Lacan, *Le transfert*, (1.2.61).

⁸¹ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 251.

VIII, Lacan was of the position that Socrates, and the Greeks, were at that period of humanity when the pure signifier made its appearance, and consequently a new criterion of truth appeared to the subjects, one that takes its index from that same pure signifier. For example, what makes *The Republic* so significant in the history of thought, what makes it so original and important, is provided in the condition which the interlocutors make Socrates uphold, prior to his proof, that the just man is happier than the unjust man, namely: that the unjust man has to conceal his injustice from the big Other, for the one “who is found out is a nobody”⁸². The restriction of being to the domain of the symbolic must be taken literally: outside the big Other, outside the site of fiction, our existence is inconsistent, confused: if you take away the big Other, the subject loses reality itself. Hence the origin of all the Platonic aporias: How to deliver truth if we are to keep the big Other at the same time?

It is at this limit between the superego and the ego-ideal that Socratic passion intervenes as a historical moment. It is the moment where poetry, images, and myth confront humanity as humanity, as pure appearance. The ethics of the real is really the ethics of the pure signifier. Since we suffer from subjection to pure signifier, since we are as human beings innately completely dependent on a symbolic Other, Lacan opts for the pure imagery as a sort of reproduction technique, a reproduction which is a presentation of the pure signifier: The image in Baroque art in all its seduction testifies to the gaze of the subject himself, that is, his image is himself desiring. In this reflection of desire in the mirror, in the image, we discover love: desire doubled is love, love doubled is illusion. The illusion and deception of love is that the subject thinks he can desire his image desiring, in the sense of objectifying the pure image of his desire in its signification, in its meaning. That is to say truth becomes desirable, that god moves the

⁸² Plato, *The Republic*. Translated by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic, 1968), 361.

world by the fact that he is beautiful. To be loved is not to become nothing, to close the big Other, to become desirable, and therefore to close the gap. Socrates did not give up his knowledge, he did not allow himself to be “filled” by the *agalma* that is Agathon. Once God becomes desirable, a whole vertigo of hysterical knowledge about what exactly is desirable in God ensnares the subject in an ideal ego. According to Lacan, the reformation was nothing less than a reaction to the fact that the beloved object is desirable: it therefore strives to recreate a feeling of the sublime through sin, to recreate the void, the ignorance, the non-knowledge as to why a beautiful God, a good God, loves a sinful man like me. Baroque Art, consequently, is Catholicism reborn, after it had gone through the reformation. We can say that according to Lacan, Baroque art corrected the deception of the Socratic demon, and attempted to restore that nothing where something is supposed to be. Unconscious knowledge is thus not a simple relation to the subject, but is mediated through object *a*.

Conclusion of Chapter 1

Erecting the pure void, object *a* as cause of desire, in an image is the model of the goal of analysis. It is a possible way of effecting a disjunction between *a* and $S(A)$. But the consequences of the big Other as we saw in the structure of perversion makes it much more difficult to effect such a separation. Something nonetheless resists interpretation. In the following chapter we shall read Heidegger’s discourse of being to the letter.

Chapter II

The Discourse of being in Heidegger

2.1 Introduction

I think it can be well noted that Heidegger has a peculiar position in the course philosophy has taken since then. Despite his uncontested influence, almost of none of those who were influenced by him can be called ‘Heideggerians’ pure and simple. The exception is Gadamer, who faithfully follows the path of a ‘thinking of being’ in the precise Heideggerian sense of a historical disclosure of the relation between being and the essence of human beings. Heidegger’s legacy is strongly adhered to, amongst different parties from Foucault to Deconstruction, when the question is of casting a suspicious light on a certain notion of the subject. This latter loses all the primacy traditional philosophy has given it. The subject is at best a secondary inference, an ossified cartilage that is deduced from a technical interpretation of thinking. The point being, of course, that thinking has all too long been a prisoner of this technical interpretation, just as language has to some extent been a prisoner of a grammatico-metaphysical interpretation that imposes on it the structure of a subject and a predicate. The consequences of “deconstructing” the subject were immediately seen after Heidegger’s *Being and Time* and are seen everywhere today, from replacing the subject with a certain notion of biopolitical power, to claiming that even Heidegger was not radical enough in his questioning of the subject and remained hostage to a certain metaphysics of presence. Our wager is that there is a certain profit in dissociating Heidegger from what can be called a negative way of thinking that takes for its sole goal the unhinging of fixations, a way of thinking that is usually formulated today in the watered-down dictums of finitude and immanence: “meaning comes from

everywhere”; “the identity of the person is the result of a plasticity of making”; or in an existential reading of imagination as a projection of man’s essence in a way that transcends all positive determination, etc. This is not to say that Heidegger’s works do not bear some responsibility for such dicta. Yet we maintain that a certain ‘absolute’ dimension is traceable in his work, a dimension that can perhaps best be characterized by his anti-humanism, that is, by a refusal to reduce the thinking of being to any ontic concerns. Certainly, for Heidegger, as well for Freud and Lacan, no sovereign Good is the ultimate arbitrator where the only kind of errors allowed are judicial⁸³. But just as certain, that there is no sovereign Good does not mean “life is in the making”, that now we are free to choose, to decide, to create, in the simple and naive sense these clichés are enunciated. The fact that there is no sovereign Good means, first and foremost, that *thinking* sustains itself only when its element is given back to it (i.e. as *being*). In other words, apropos of Lacan’s reading of the Kantian categorical imperative, there is no hierarchy of beings insofar as sustaining thinking is what is in question. For Lacan, Kantian morality “becomes a pure and simple application of the universal maxim” without any regard for any ‘pathological’ content of any positive moral law⁸⁴. One could say that, for Heidegger, thinking as such, as even distinguished from philosophy, becomes equated with the thinking of being. This definitely was his position after *being and time*, that is, after he abandoned the project of grounding Dasein’s ontical projects (i.e. thinking in which being is not explicitly thematized, yet implicitly understanding it is presupposed). The absolutist dimension in Heidegger must be read as the counterpart of Kant’s elimination of the difference between Sovereign good and any positive moral law. The Kantian silence in *being and time* is repeated: no “fort” without “da,”

⁸³ See, Lacan, *Le transfert*, (16.11.60).

⁸⁴ Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness*, 171.

that is to say, a thing-in-itself is impossible, and any beyond, even God, must make its appearance to Dasein within its being-in-the-world. What compensates for such a silence in *Being and Time*, is the superegoic space opened by the commandment to enjoy what the rural Dasein enjoys: The harmonious, quite, transcendental grasp of being as a totality of world-relation, of grasping the mysterious connections between nature and the world. Such commandment is meant to real-ize the symbolic (to arrive at the lost object) at the expense of the dialectic between law and desire.

It is not a far-fetched idea, I think, to argue that the Heideggerian project, in its inauguration of ontological difference, attempts to provide the coordinates of a universal transferential experience in the psychoanalytic sense. The fact that being is not, and cannot, be reduced to a being immediately points to what Lacan calls the object cause of desire- the mysterious x which cannot be found in any empirical object and is in surplus of ontically-understood reality. The statement that thinking sustains itself only in its element, being, might be understood as having certain consequences. For example, that thinking disintegrates, loses its consistency if it loses that element. Yet such “therapeutic” values of the thinking of being are prominent only in the early Heidegger, the Heidegger of *Being and Time*. It is only there that Heidegger speaks of anxiety and guilt as having ontological dimensions, and of an authentic resoluteness in assuming one’s ontological burden as being-towards-death. In *Being and Time*, one can still find a certain homology between the Lacanian understanding of the unconscious as governed by a certain lack that is covered up, plugged, concealed in the way thinking takes its daily courses, and a Heideggerian understanding of being that is present and presupposed by all our ontical engagements yet is thematized only in an phenomenological ontology. Later Heidegger would find precisely in this ‘transcendental’ presupposition the erroneous point from

which thinking began in *Being and Time*. Whereas in *Being and Time* one of the, if not the, central issue, is how a certain thinking of being, an orientation, a relational predisposition, although “unthematized” (one might venture, “unconscious” or “unknown”), is present in Dasein’s different modes of being-in-the-world. In the later Heidegger, this problem disappears entirely. If “thinking sustains itself only in its element, in being”⁸⁵, then later Heidegger is not concerned with the problem of how other forms of thinking which are not thinking of being, that is which do not take the disclosure of being as their object, sustain themselves. That is why for the later Heidegger, science does not think; in other words, thinking is reduced to only thinking of being, in an eventual disclosure of the relation between the two. The problem of psychoanalysis is to show precisely how everyone, that is the speaking being in so far as s\he speaks, is always already engaged in a thinking of being.

What I intend to do here is to show what was missing in Heidegger’s *Being and Time* as a possible discourse of an unconscious thinking of being. What is at stake here is a structural dimension, a structural gap, a gap of an unknown knowledge that must exist if we are to link a philosophical discourse on truth to the way that discourse is present as absent, as lacking, in life as it presents itself as a manifestation of spirit. Slavoj Žižek has pointed out that the Heideggerian paradigm misreads the relation between the ontological and ontical. The consequence of this misreading is that Heideggerians are always in search for a positive ontic discourse that would represent the ontological epochal truth⁸⁶. Behind the complicity of concrete

⁸⁵ Heidegger, Martin. “A Letter on Humanism” *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 215.

⁸⁶ See, Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 13.

ontic discourses (Americanism, communism, democracy) in the ontological horizon they attempt to reject (the point of *Destruktion* is to lay forth the unsaid ontological assumptions of such discourse), there is in Heidegger another movement: one which privileges a certain concrete ontic discourse as the true representative of the ontological truth of the epoch. This is why Heidegger could distance himself from the ontic discourse in the way that it appears to itself, and claim an “inner truth”, which is ontological and appears only for the observer. This inner truth is that which claims there is something more beyond the ideological text, a non-ideological kernel (say, as we will show below, the understanding of being in the ready-to-hand). As Žižek shows, Heidegger expected that Nazism should be aware of its inner greatness, and consequently that it should direct itself and conduct itself in accordance with such knowledge and awareness: “This expectation is profoundly metaphysical, in so far as it fails to recognize the gap separating the direct ideological legitimation of a movement from its inner greatness (its historico-ontological essence) is constitutive, a positive condition of its functioning.”⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 15.

2.2 Object a in Being and Time

In *Being and Time* there is an unresolved antagonism between two positions from which “beings are encountered as beings”. On the one hand, there is the position of our everyday practical dealings for which being is understood implicitly, but is not thematized. In this position, understanding of being is interpreted in terms of Kantian Transcendentalism, and consequently such an understanding is taken to be *a priori*. On the other hand, there is the position of what is called here “the distant observer” for whom also “beings are encountered as beings”. This is the position, the gaze, of Dasein as “authentic understanding of being”, or Dasein as a circular understanding which projects itself into the open. Let us take two themes in *Being and Time* as the exemplary mode of analysis: *Besorgen* as engaged dealing with beings ready-to-hand, and the Understanding-Interpretation relation. This chapter will show how Heidegger’s analysis of both of these themes contains the antagonism in question which prompts him to abandon the line of thought which informs *Being and Time*. Two statements made by Heidegger were a source of wonderment for me: “We always cope with beings as beings,”⁸⁸ and beings at hand “show themselves genuinely only in such dealing [engaged heedfulness]”⁸⁹. These statements are difficult to think because they involve two positions, the relation between which is not clarified anywhere in Heidegger’s philosophy.

Phenomenological reflection must show the being of entities as encountered in average everydayness. That is, the being of entities as encountered in the way of being of average everydayness, i.e., taking care (*Besorgen*). Phenomenology must explicate what is understood

⁸⁸ Martin Heidegger; *Being and Time*, Translated by Joan Stambaugh (State University of New York; 2010), 61.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 69.

implicitly in taking care as the nearest mode of being of Dasein. Entities show themselves as entities in taking care. This statement is ambiguous. For if the mode of being of taking care is that of a pre-reflective ‘immediate’ engagement, then it is clear that the as-structure (beings as beings) cannot be explicated from within *Besorgen*. Everyday engaged dealing with useful things, “which show themselves genuinely only in such dealings, neither grasps these beings thematically as occurring things, nor does such using even know the structure of useful things as such”⁹⁰. How should we understand the fact that the being of useful things (their structure of in-order-to) shows itself only in taking care, yet such a mode of Dasein’s being is incapable of knowing these entities as the entities they are, that is, as they are ontologically determined by their in-order-to structure? When Heidegger says that “in such useful dealings, taking care subordinates itself to the in-order-to constitutive for the particular utensil in our dealings”⁹¹, this “subordination” must not be understood as a coming to the surface, a showing of itself, of the in-order-to structure as an in-order-to structure. If the in-order-to structure in so far as it refers to a totality of other ontological structures (what-for, with-which, and in-which) is the being of the entities ready-to-hand, and further, if the being of beings is that which for the most part does not show itself and “remains concealed”, then it is a mistake to imagine (think representatively) the ontologically definitive in-order-to as showing itself in itself in our dealings. “What is peculiar to what is initially at hand”, Heidegger writes, “is that it withdraws, so to speak, in its character of handiness to be really at hand”⁹².

This withdrawal and its possibility is conditioned by the utmost (im)possibility of Dasein, death. But unlike the Freudian death drive, death in existential analysis remains an external limit

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

to all possible experience. Its possibility is the no-longer being-in-the-world, whereas the death drive, if one may articulate it this way, is the way the real speaks at the very heart of our experience. It is not an impossibility beyond the phenomenological realm, but rather a very real possibility at the intersection between life and death. In other words, although the death drive could be described as active annihilation, this annihilation is not the result of death as a limit, an end, but is the result of “the subject...reducing itself solely to the certainty of being a subject”⁹³. A too-muchness of life. Therefore, if the as-structure of handiness is to designate being, it must remain concealed. That is to say, the subject must not be reduced solely to the certainty of being a subject. Just like a dream is read in what is said about it, the unconscious thought reveals the unconscious “I am”, “provided, and this is the leap, someone thinks in [the subject’s] place”⁹⁴. The Being of the useful things disappears into itself in taking care (*Besorgen*), it conceals itself in this pre-reflective engagement so that, from within this engagement, that with which *Besorgen* is concerned is not the Being of tools, but the work as a totality. The in-order-to is thus implicit from the perspective of *Besorgen*; the being of handiness is implicitly understood. What does this mean? What does it mean to say that Being is implicitly understood? To say Being is implicitly understood in dealing with tools does not merely assert what is understood (Being) as an external fact to the dealing which can be proven only by enumerating phenomena from practical everydayness and, as it were, attaching them to Being. In other words, Being as what is implicitly understood is not inferred based on some evidence that ‘it must be implicitly understood in engaged dealing’, just like, for example, Kant’s transcendental apperception is inferred and posited as an issue of validity whose status is only that ‘it must be the case’. Rather, what is implicit must be thought of as implicit. That is to say, implicitness is a necessary moment

⁹³ Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 81.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 36.

in thinking Being because it belongs to the essence of Being to be implicit. What is being called an implicit character of Being is, of course, nothing other than what Heidegger later would call the concealment of Being. Let us clarify this further.

The Withdrawal of Handiness:

Throughout his discussion of the Being of useful things, Heidegger was aware of the problem of “volatizing reality”. “If we define”, Heidegger writes, “the being of what is at hand (relevance) and even worldliness itself as a referential context, are we not dissolving the Being of inner worldly beings into pure thought?”⁹⁵ . In order to avoid this problem he makes a distinction between “the being of innerworldly beings initially encountered (handiness)” and “the being of the ontic conditions of possibility of discovering innerworldly beings in general, the worldliness of the world”⁹⁶ . Handiness is “the ontological, categorical definition of beings as they are in themselves”⁹⁷, beings, that is, unlike Dasein, whereas worldliness is an “existential structure of” Dasein itself. If Handiness is the being of beings unlike Dasein “initially” encountered in our environment, then why is Heidegger concerned about “volatizing reality”? The reason is that he defines the being of what is at hand as a “referential context”. Yet a referential context, as the ontological structure of serviceability, is constitutive of the worldliness which is a characteristic of Dasein. Therefore, Heidegger oscillates between two definitions of Handiness, the phenomenal relation between the two definitions is not clarified anywhere in *Being and Time*. There is Handiness as the “being of innerworldly beings initially encountered” and Handiness as “the ontological, categorical definition of beings as they are in themselves”. To distinguish tools

⁹⁵Ibid, 86.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 71.

from the existential structure of worldliness, and thus to give a ‘transcendental’ priority to worldliness, Heidegger resorts to the first definition. To avoid both ascribing to Being a subjective character imposed by Dasein and consequently maintaining a sort of Kantian thing-in-itself, he employs the second. In order for handiness as “the being of innerworldly beings initially encountered” to emerge, the handiness of the ontological/categorical must “withdraw itself in its being”. Thus the issue of “volatizing reality” is the result of the desire to apply “worldliness” in its “referential structure” to the things in themselves. So how does the first definition of handiness as “the being of innerworldly beings initially encountered” avoid “volatizing reality”? We answered this question above when we attempted to distinguish two meanings of “in” in Heidegger’s statement that entities at hand “show themselves genuinely only in such dealing [engaged heedfulness]”⁹⁸. There is the ‘in’ from the perspective of *Besorgen* itself, and the ‘in’ from the perspective of a distant observer. When Heidegger speaks of the “being of innerworldly beings initially encountered,” he must have in mind the first meaning of ‘in’, that is, from the perspective of the engaged worker. But things are not so simple; the gaze of the distant observer is already involved in this first case too. As we said, handiness in so far as it refers to the “ontological, categorical definition of beings as they are in themselves” does not show itself at all in “immediate” engagement. This practical engagement operates on a completely pre-reflective level. In any case, it does not operate with the “what-for”, “in-which”, and the “with-which” as such in mind. Because of this fact Heidegger uses this definition of handiness to take a distance from worldliness as an existential structure. It is, as if, a handiness in-itself, not-yet explicit, an underdeveloped, concealed heedfulness that does ‘not know’ it is heedfulness. Therefore, Heidegger is not accurate enough when he writes, “When a being shows itself in general to heedfulness, that is, when a being is discovered in its being, it is always

⁹⁸ Ibid, 69.

already a thing at hand in the surrounding world and precisely not “initially” merely present “world-stuff”⁹⁹. The contention is not that what shows itself “initially” to heedfulness is merely present and world stuff. No. However, neither is it simply “discovered in its being” through heedfulness. The ready-to-hand, when it shows itself to heedfulness, is *not* the same moment when it is discovered in its Being as the being that it is. Or rather, when the ready-to-hand is discovered in its Being as ready-to-hand, it is not discovered at all for heedfulness, but for a distant observer, for one who has let things be. Handiness, to repeat the quote above, has the peculiar character of withdrawing itself in order to be the being that it is. Heedfulness is not a thinking of Being; rather, in heedfulness, handiness completely withdraws into its being. The phenomenon of worldliness can only be brought into a “kind of definiteness” through “letting something be relevant”¹⁰⁰. To let things at hand be means to “let them be as they are and in order that they be such”. Is this an attitude of a heedful engagement in the world or rather of a distant observer who can, as it were, “abstract” from the engagement? Heidegger writes in a footnote on the same page: “Letting-be. “On the Essence of Truth” where letting-be is related in principle and very broadly to every kind of being!”¹⁰¹. In *Identity and Difference*, Heidegger is of the thought that what determines the experience of thinking is a “letting belong together of man and Being”¹⁰². This is the event of appropriation which is achieved through “a spring [as] the

⁹⁹ Ibid, 84.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 83.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, Translated by Stambaugh (Harper& Row, 1969), 38.

abruptness of the unbridged entry into that belonging”¹⁰³. An unbridged leap is throws Dasein into the clearing face-to-face with Being. The fact that such a leap is unbridged indicates that the distance missing in *Being and Time* is thematized here; the leap must be an ungrounded spring, the initial movement of thought without detour, in inventing a new terminology of ontological structures. “Letting belong” as an abrupt spring “into the abyss” can least of all be achieved in any heedful engagement. To let a thing be is to “let it presence in its truth”¹⁰⁴, Heidegger footnotes on the same page he discusses handiness. Therefore, an unthematized distinction of two kinds of “letting be” is present in *Being and Time*. There is the “letting be” of Heedfulness which somehow “discovers entities as they are in their being” without somehow grasping them explicitly as entities, where the worldliness, in so far as it is the phenomenon of the world, is not present in its truth. If heedfulness must concern itself with its orientation in the world, if it must show the phenomenon of the world through referential totality at all, it must not be aware of the ontological, categorical structures of handiness. Second, there is also the “letting be” of the distant observer who cannot be engaged in *Besorgen* if he is to grasp thematically and brings to light the phenomenon of worldliness as such, and thus lets beings presence in their truth as the beings they are. We have, therefore, two kinds of “letting be” and two kinds of “as structure”. How are we to resolve this enigma? One can already deduce some kind of “mediation” between the two: handiness withdraws in its being for the distant observer.

Understanding and Interpretation

Does not the opposition between “implicitness”, as we have characterized it, of the Being of the ready-to-hand as it is present in heedful engagement, and its ontological explication

¹⁰³ Ibid, 31.

¹⁰⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 83.

from a distance, correspond to the pair of Understanding as the implicit understanding of Being and Interpretation as fundamentally characterized by the “as” structure? The standard story in reading Heidegger usually exalts him for being one of the original philosophers who demonstrated that on a fundamental level, our experience is a pre-reflective, nonconceptual mode of orientation in the world. Hubert Dreyfus conceptualizes the relation between “nonconceptual” understanding and “conceptual” understanding as that between a “ground floor” and an “upper floor”. Although Heidegger claims that the Being of the Da (there) is essentially Understanding, this assertion, Dreyfus argues, cannot be taken to support that claim that our experience is conceptual all the way through. For Dreyfus, Heidegger owes us an account of how nonconceptual content is converted into conceptual content¹⁰⁵. However, it is dubious whether the term “conceptual” is relevant at all for Heidegger since there is no mind-body distinction in Heidegger’s philosophy but simply Da-sein as existing Being-there. Further, it is clear also that in *Besorgen* the structure of Interpretation (*Auslegung*) is already present. *Auslegung*, as explicating, stretching out, laying out, is “the development of Understanding”¹⁰⁶. Heidegger writes that “what is disclosed in understanding, what is understood, is always already accessible in such a way that in it its ‘as what’ can be explicitly delineated”¹⁰⁷. However, he further writes: “The ‘as’ constitutes the structure of the explicitness of what is understood; it constitutes the interpretation”¹⁰⁸. So the “as structure” is present both at once in Understanding and in Interpretation; and interpretation is merely the articulation of what is understood; that is, the

¹⁰⁵ Peter Dennis, “Discussion: Was Heidegger a Nonconceptualist?” *Ratio* 25:1 (London: Blackwell, 2012), 108-117.

¹⁰⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 144.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

articulation of “something as something”. Therefore, and if we want to understand what Dreyfus calls “conceptual” content as structured by the “as-structure”, it is not true that for Heidegger we, first and foremost, have a non-conceptual engaged experience with tools. For Heidegger, it is precisely because the “as” is “so primordially” contained in *Besorgen* that it does not show itself explicitly there¹⁰⁹. To grasp something as “free of the as...requires a kind of reorientation”¹¹⁰. Does not the fact that the “as” does not show itself explicitly in practical dealing with things because this dealing “contains the structure of interpretation so primordially” resonate with the withdrawal of the handiness into itself as the ontological-categorical Being of useful things in Heedfulness? And doesn’t the distinction between the “letting be” of *Besorgen* (letting things be what they are) and the “letting be” of the distant observer (letting things presence in their truth) corresponds to the distinction between the “as-structure” as implicitly present in Understanding, and the “as-structure” as Interpretive laying out of what is already understood? Do we not have here the same transcendental deadlock of providing a ground of the phenomenon of the world that gets to the world itself in its totality?

If Heidegger had conceived of understanding as already in possession of an explicit as-structure, this would have had two consequences: First, we would not be able to get to the world through referential relations. That is, if handiness appeared in its Being as handiness in *Besorgen*, this would mean that we do not dwell in the world but in worldliness (the problem of volatilizing reality); we would take notice of the “for-which” and the “in-which” instead of “the south wind in its being by taking lay of the land”¹¹¹. In Heedfulness, “there “is” no such thing as

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 145.

¹¹¹ Ibid,79.

a useful thing. There always belongs to the being of useful things a totality of useful things in which this useful thing can be what it is”¹¹². In order to get to this totality, the as-structure must withdraw itself.

Consequently, an explicit as-structure, since we are taking it to be a chain of signifiers, can only point to what Lacan calls the primacy of the symbolic, a primacy that can only effect the substance that being is. Here is what Lacan says in *Encore* when discussing the Christian revelation:

The fact that God is indissolubly three is such as to make us prejudge that the count “1-2-3” pre-existed him. One of the two following statements must be true: either he takes into account only the retroactive effect...and it is his being that suffers a blow- or the three is prior to him, and it is his unity that takes a hit.¹¹³

It is clear that the as-structure as the chain we articulated is ultimately of the same symbolic value as the count “1-2-3”. Hence Heidegger’s desire to make us forget the fact that the symbolic, or in his words, conceptual understanding, is already present at the deepest level of the thinking of being. In other words, the as-structure is as primordial as being-there. Yet this fact, as we can see from Lacan’s quote, can only engender the univocity of being.

This description of *Besorgen* was Heidegger’s attack against the epistemological-wordless subject of philosophy who represents objects “out there”. But this totality as a system of referential relations, the worldliness, must disappear into the world, into handy things, and, as it were, ‘substantialize’ them in themselves, so they can form a sort of ‘reality’ as “the being of handiness initially encountered”. Thus in *Contributions to Philosophy* Heidegger says that

¹¹² Ibid,68.

¹¹³ Lacan, *Encore*, 108.

metaphysics, in scaling over beings to beingness (say, handiness), is in danger of interpreting Dasein's transcendence as an action between the ego and consciousness. This error occurs when handiness is not conceived as withdrawn, but rather as an idea. On the other hand, if the "as" that constitutes interpretation was not present (implicitly) in understanding, then again we are in danger of subjectivizing Being, "as if interpretation throw[s] a "significance" over what is nakedly objectively present"¹¹⁴.

Therefore, "Heidegger does not owe us an account of 'how nonconceptual content is converted into a given with conceptual content', but rather an account of how experiential content, which is already conceptual – i.e. possesses the as-structure- is made explicit in Interpretation"¹¹⁵. Now our point is that, as hinted above, the relation between explicitness and implicitness, which is illustrated most clearly both in handiness and in the relation between Understanding and Interpretation, corresponds to the concealment/unconcealment pair in Heidegger's later thought. But how is this relation to be thought? Looking at *Being and Time* with one eye while directing the other towards Heidegger's later thought, we can say that the problem of *Being and Time* is how to think handiness as *implicit* in *Besorgen*, or how to think Interpretation as *implicitly* present in Understanding. This implicitness speaks about the openness of Being, the Transcendence of Dasein. It is a problem of thinking concealment as concealment as opposed to the possible concealment of concealment that *Being and Time* is in danger of executing. To map it on Lacanian terminology, 'concealment as concealment' requires veiling and, to a certain extent, ignorance. The semblance of the big Other can only subsist as a mystery. On the other hand, concealment of concealment is the result of a predisposition towards disclosure. Or again, in the words of Lacan, those who refuse to be duped by jouissance err the

¹¹⁴ Ibid,145

¹¹⁵ Dennis, 2012.

most. Heidegger says we always cope with beings as beings. If this statement is to be more than just a platitude, then in order for it to be thought properly, that is in order for the thinking of Being to stand in the openness of Being and face-to-face with it, thinking must achieve the “leap into the abyss” Heidegger would later speak of. “We cope with beings as beings”. Yes, in our dealings an understanding of Being must be that which allows us to disclose beings. But does that mean that because we experience beings, it follows that we must experience Being?

Heidegger has a wonderful passage in *Contributions to Philosophy*:

From where does the intimation and representation of be-ing come from? From the experience of beings, one happily responds... Does the experience of a being continue to be the only occasion, the occasion, of that representing of be-ing; or be-ing as beingness immediately taken up “on” and “in” a being? Moreover, we immediately face the often asked question: How is one capable of experiencing a being as a being without knowing of be-ing?¹¹⁶

Heidegger radically questions the authority of the “experience of beings” as a path towards ‘experiencing Being’. Heidegger in the same passage further writes: “ Or does man’s intimation of be-ing come precisely not from a being but rather from that alone which has equal rank with be-ing- because it continues to belong to being- from the *nothing*?” The leap into the open region of be-ing is taken here to be the priority in thinking Be-ing; it is this relation with the nothing that provides concealment, which is to say provides the attunement of thinking towards, and face-to-face with, being.

¹¹⁶Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*. Translated by E. Parvis and M. Kenneth (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 173.

2.3 Conclusion

The way we explicated the problematic nature of *Being and Time* points to the need for a void, a nothing, behind what is phenomenologically given in order for the being-there to be sustained. Lacan says, “being-there is not nothing, it is attributed to the object that is *a*”¹¹⁷. Heidegger’s short-circuiting between the ontological truth of being and its positive embodiment in concrete social existence is reflected in *Being and Time* as a short-circuit between the encounter of being and the ontical mode of readiness-to-hand. Heidegger could not give an account of how the always already implicit understanding of being becomes interpretation because once we have interpretation, we have a fantasy. It is startling how Heidegger wanted the as-structure to be ontologically determinative but failed to see how such a proposal would turn the *Umwelt* into a chain of signifiers. One can go further: the *Umwelt* becomes a chain of signifiers in the service of the jouissance of whoever makes use of it. What he calls contextual involvement can only be relevant for a jouissance of being on the basis of a name of the father, that is, of a big Other that subsists independently of the act of speech.

In other words, the transcendental position was vulnerable to being compromised, relativized, so to speak. The freedom which the thinking of being must give us through transcendental reflection on ontological difference, that being is transcendental to every being (entity), was threatened by the very articulation of that difference. Since in *Being and Time* entities were discovered not in isolation, but only in their referential context, a relativization of the ego-ideal in the misrecognition of imaginary identification can only turn the world into worldliness, in other words, the hammer, the nail, the log, the cottage, the shelter, into a series of metonymic signifiers in-which, with-which, in-order-to. Heidegger retreated from this abyss

¹¹⁷ Lacan, *Encore*, 92

quickly and blamed everything on transcendental philosophy and its *a priori* apparatus. One might say the *a priori* in early Heidegger functioned as a guarantor that would establish the link between understanding of being and the way this understanding is articulated in language. This move is strictly homologous with that of Lacan of the 1950's, for whom there was a big Other that guaranteed the integration of symptoms into an already existing meta-language.

Heidegger blamed everything on the Leibnizian heritage of justification and the principle of sufficient reason, and thus abandoned all *a priori* thinking as missing the essence of being, one might say a thinking that relativizes the spontaneity of the transcendental position in which beings are encountered as beings. Lacan's solution was to take the symbolic to the limit, and take justification as already included in everything human beings do and say by virtue of being beings of language. The search for the ground (*Grund*) is not only the task of the reflecting thinker who is engaged in the thinking of being, but rather because of the inconsistency of language (that language is non-all) all speaking beings justify their behaviour by virtue of semblance of a big Other. The proximity of the real as a result of the failure of the Oedipus complex is what makes language lose its consistency. In order for language to have the desired consistency, the subject must strive to veil the fact that it is non-all by recourse to fantasy. This is how individual speech and universal language become dissociated, no doubt precariously and in a fleeting way, in order for the subject to attain his place and his consistency. In other words, speaking beings have to unconsciously justify their acts precisely because they are not in this world, which is to say, since world for Lacan is nothing but the fantasy according to which thought sustains itself, they are not identical with their symbolic mandates, with their symbolic titles.

There is another dimension that appears between the brute reality and our symbolic commitments, the dimension of death drive. There is no meta-language does not mean that we

are prisoners of our own solipsistic egos, that everything we say is utterly meaningless since there cannot be any locus that guarantees the referential relation to something outside of us. That there is no meta-language means precisely that no enunciated statement can escape being compromised by its very position of enunciation. The unconscious as a rupture in discourse is the way the speaking being engages in grounding and abgrounding the symbolic game.

The way the indication of the sign to the referential totality already bears witness to a failure in schematism in *Being and Time*, a failure in how language should grasp the real. The death drive is precisely that the speaking being lives, first and foremost, primordially, in a chain of signifiers, in worldliness as a chain of signifiers, seeking satisfaction in its repetitive circuit. It was this radical dimension that Heidegger retreated from. The stage in schematism is set, as it were, for the chain of signifiers to work on its own, an automaton chain of repetition. In other words, the practical compartments of Dasein, as ultimately directed by an implicit understanding of being turned out to be nothing but a protection against a libidinal enjoyment, or rather, a protection against a real core of repetition.

Therefore, the gap is not between the observer and the heedfulness, but rather between heedfulness as engaged towards a goal, and its real repetitive core, in a nutshell, a chain of signifiers that functions as if by itself. In the section on schematism, the eternal core of the death drive appears as if by itself, through language, and despite Heidegger's intention, where, a real spectral of beyond life apparition makes itself manifest: the hammer hammers, the sign indicates, in turning the hammer to occupy nothing by the function of the signifier in representing the subject for another signifier. From this vortex of enjoyment of the signifier, there is no choice, simply because there is no world; the horizon of interpretation that allows us a distance is not simply present. This is how the fundamental phantasy is traversed, when one goes to the end

through the symbolic. One must thus confront the enigmatic desire of the Other: through the jouissance of the chain of signifiers, one must uncover the signifier of desire (the phallus). In order to claim that the Other is not desiring would mean that there is an *a priori* relation between understanding and being (that is, that S^1 cannot be incorporated into the production of knowledge). The desire of the Other is already there, answered, in an *a priori* perfection. It is a previous freeing, a secure link. Lacan's move was rather from the *a priori* perfect, to the future perfect: I will have been. In *Seminar XI*, Lacan strips *Trieb*, the drive, from any strife after a pre-symbolic satisfaction. They are constructed by and within the symbolic order. Consequently, their real source of jouissance cannot be a return to the inanimate, but purely in their repetitive movement. Beyond the two classical grammatical voices of the drive (active and passive), Lacan defines a middle voice, the reflexive "se faire". Besides "to see" and "to be seen", the drive also returns to itself: "to make oneself be seen". The drive completes its circuit only in this third voice when a new subject appears.

Instead of a big Other in which everything can be already secured (one cannot speak of language without a metalanguage), we get the true formula that will not reduce ecstatic temporality to a simple diachrony of desire: I will have been, where what is actualized is not simply futuristic hidden potentialities (this is the diachrony of desire), but rather the past itself. This is why one could say that in interpreting *Being and Time* as still within the metaphysical horizon of the subject (understood as ego) Heidegger attempted to achieve a short circuit in running away from the diachrony of desire. It is the vortex of desire that is bound to reduce the world to worldliness. There is no such thing as previous freeing, and Heidegger saw this in *Contribution to Philosophy*. Yet he still held tenaciously to pre-Socratic thought as a sign of a non-corrupt kernel of thinking. It is, in fact, the subject himself that must bear the responsibility

for ontological difference, and at each stage, as it were, the subject previously re-frees entities. In other words, the subject of the unconscious reconstitutes what ontological difference means because of the immanent encounter between life and death that goes by the name of the death drive. Unlike being-towards-death, the death drive is not an impossible experience even though it stems from a point of impossible enunciation. The repetitive structure of the drive is what allows us to experience the point where life insists beyond whatever aim may be ascribed to it. That this insistence of life is prior to any understanding of being is the reason why the subject, at each stage, projects a newly configured semblance of the symbolic order in which something like being can emerge.

Chapter 3

The letter and the sinthome

Writing comes only in the wake of a reading. “For it is only by taking interpretation to the letter that it will ultimately be able to pass to a limit which can only be crossed when it reverses itself in effects of creation”¹¹⁸. What was read in *Being and Time* was a mapping of the traces of parasitic jouissance, a reading that demands that one does not disavow, but instead reads to the letter.

3.1 From Pure Desire to Drive

Traversing the fantasy is no longer the final word in psychoanalysis. The intervention of the letter as a messenger of the real of jouissance is inserted after mapping out the network of knowledge, S^2 . This is the shift Lacan anticipated in *Seminar XI*: “After the mapping of the subject in relation to a , the experience of the fundamental fantasy becomes the drive”¹¹⁹. Alenka Zupančič, for example, in her Lacanian reading of Kantian ethics, illustrates the mapping of fantasy as the realization that there is no ultimate cause behind the realm of phenomenal causality¹²⁰. This is what it means to say the big Other does not exist. Yet, this already assumes an existence of a semblance of an Other, in the form of a network of phenomenal causality, against which the subject can come face-to-face with his object cause of desire as the ultimate

¹¹⁸ Philip Dravers, “To Poe, Logically Speaking,” *Lacan: Topologically Speaking*, 236.

¹¹⁹ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 273.

¹²⁰ See, Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real*, 40.

lack of being. This is indeed the mechanism for the subject of desire before realizing there is no cause behind the causes; the subject in that position assumed a complete big Other. The need for the letter as a writing of the real certainly stems from the deadlock formulated by the subject of the drive, insofar as for the latter there is no name-of-the-father that could even guarantee the semblance of an Other, even if that Other is taken to be natural law, since for Lacan, thought and being are based on language. It certainly does not make sense to say that for Joyce, as he was writing, such an Other existed.

Thus the dissociation of a from $S(\mathbb{A})$ proved to be not an easy task. There is a tendency in the Slovenian school of analysis to evoke the ego-ideal as a virtual point that will liberate the subject from his morbid relation to object a in the vortex of the drive¹²¹. An example of this, is the articulation of the Hegelian opposition between Reason and Understanding as the former being the virtual point from where understanding sees itself, as incomplete, inadequate. No doubt this is indispensable in confronting the lack of the Other. Lacan's articulation of the *sinthome*, however, can be seen as a more basic move that provides support for the subject's topology, and consequently, as a support for thinking when the consequences of the non-existence of the Other are given their full import.

Perhaps one can even venture to suggest the existence of structural homologies between the thinking of being Heidegger attempts to put forth and Lacan's articulation of pure desire in *Seminar VII*. Consequently, Lacan's failure to distinguish such pure desire (in its infinite measure) from the superegoic function of real-izing the symbolic would also be mapped on *Being and Time* in the antagonism above. "Do not compromise your desire" is a command, and as such an injunction to enjoy. That is why Lacan's later theorization of *jouissance* is formulated

¹²¹ Ibid.

in the neologism of *joui-sans*. I believe that the encounter with beings as beings (pure desire-“being as a lack of being”¹²²) and its correlative superegoic command, which comes in the form of schematism (i.e. relativization of the transcendental ego) in worldliness as a chain of signifiers, is equivalent to pure desire as the desire of the analyst, as an embodiment of the whole metonymy of desire in an object, and the Sado-Kantian absolute law. One can even find homology of the infinite measure of Antigone’s desire in Heidegger. For example, he writes in *What is metaphysics?*: “Think of a chemical oxidation on Mars and of an elephant in the Indian Jungle”. Here there is an attempt to invoke an infinite measure as that which will release thinking into the realm of being as being. Just as Antigone’s desire needed a measure, a big Other, a background in order to appear (“the children I will not have, etc.”), the thinking of being needs a measure in the form of a transcendentially constituted reality of objects, in other words, it depends on a transcendental ego that can only be implicated, relativized. The difference, of course, between Antigone’s evocation of the infinite measure and Heidegger’s own is that the former is a subject who, although sublime for us, “does not experience the sublime herself”¹²³. If Antigone does move the storms of, why not, the thinking of being in us, it is precisely because we observe her from a safe distance. We can now see the import the later Luke Thurston speculates Lacan saw in Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, where the author attempts to self-nominate God and the universe in a series of repetitive and logical rhythms “culminating in a tautological loop”¹²⁴. It is a self-inscription of a new distance, a new structuring subjectivity.

¹²² Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness*, 181.

¹²³ Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real*, 253.

¹²⁴ Luke Thurston, “Joycean Topology,” *Lacan: Topologically Speaking*, 315.

3.2 Topology

I would like to qualify the above reading of *Being and Time* as a *reading*, the function of which, is to map out the network of signifiers in order to reach the limit. The true limit, is of course, a repetitive chain of signifiers that cannot be produced in a scholarly essay. We can only stop at the verge of it. My reading is an attempt to anchor it in the real, to trace the contours of being of the speaking subject. Its failure, however, is not without merit, since it proved “the apparent” necessity of the phallus. A jouissance of the idiot, no doubt, but one at least in accordance with Heidegger’s formula “Dasein is always mine”. It is here that the intervention of topology in the knots of jouissance is relevant. One’s particular real must be supported by one’s own re-invention of the ego. The ego is the *sinthome*¹²⁵. As Milovanovic explains, “locating the moi (Lacan’s imaginary ego)” at the intersection of the real, symbolic, and the imaginary can have the function of supporting the Borromean knot without recourse to the castrating father. This should not deceive us into thinking that Lacan in reverting back to the imaginary domain as a locus of sense production. Whereas meaning is produced at the intersection of the symbolic and the imaginary, the *sinthome* articulates a new relation to a real that is completely missed by the symbolic. The *sinthome*’s affinity to the imaginary is a new elaboration of the old fact that the real cannot be thought without the imaginary. It is thus a point of intersection that can allow new discourses to be reproduced, or at least can re-imagine the configuration of current discourses that depend on the symbolic father.

In short, a reading, since it is based on the jouissance of whoever makes use of it, traces out what Lacan calls parasitic jouissance in so far as it is the function of being that superimposes

¹²⁵ See Dragan Milovanovic, “Borromean Knots”, *Lacan: Topologically Speaking*, 378.

the semblance and $S(\mathbf{A})$ ¹²⁶. Whereas previously the concept of the semblance was specific in Lacan's teaching, denoting an envelope of object a , in his last teaching period, as Russell Grigg contends, "had come to include just about everything that had been previously distinguished, and this is a problem. Language, the Other, the Name-of-the-Father, the phallus, all come to be regarded as semblants"¹²⁷. Thus, one may read the sinthome as a self-nomination of semblants, a way to give consistency to the subject of the drive. It simulates a symbolic order by virtue of the name taking the place of the name-of-the-father.

A meditation on being can only be "successful" if it is guarded by a master signifier. This is the only way it can afford a disavowed disjunction between a and $S(\mathbf{A})$. In other words, only a master signifier can allow the subject to lop off the predicate and say being is: "Everything that has been said about being assumes that one can refuse the predicate and say 'man is' ...without saying what"¹²⁸. This, I take it, is because thought is based on language, and language, as Lacan says, "brings with it considerable inertia"¹²⁹. The inertia of the impossibility of sexual relation as that which "does not stop not being written"¹³⁰ is what confers on thought, or more precisely on meditation on being, its annihilating nature: "As for the meditation on

¹²⁶ See, *Encore*, 83: "a has lent itself to be confused with $S(\mathbf{A})$...by means of the function of being."

¹²⁷ Russell Grigg, "Semblant, phallus, and object in Lacan's teaching," *UMBR(a): a journal of the unconscious*, vol. 1, *Semblance* (2007), 131-138.

¹²⁸ Lacan, *Encore*, 11.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 110.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 59.

being that reaches its culmination in the thought of Heidegger, it restores to being itself that power of annihilation”¹³¹

The tyranny of the superego is not something that can be easily done away with, if it ever can. Its imperative, “Enjoy!”, is a correlate of castration, “the latter being the sign with which an avowal dresses itself up, the avowal that jouissance of the Other, of the body of the Other, is promoted only on the basis of infinity”¹³². The impossibility of inscribing the sexual link in the Other “does not stop not being written”; in other words, the real has agency and insistence and is not something like the Kantian *noumena*. As a result, the imperative to enjoy, to “not stop writing it”, is what follows. This is the paradox of the Freudian death drive: that the only way for desiring beings to deal with impossibility is to necessarily keep trying to make it possible, i.e. to “succeed in making it fail”¹³³. That is to say, impossibility engenders necessity, and further, a necessity that is infinite only because it is related to this or that object¹³⁴. This is what grants idiotic jouissance its particularity.

Now we can see the necessity of what Lacan calls topology as an attempt to cipher jouissance and deliver the speaking being from his alienation in language so that he can see this latter “as something transcendent, truly transcendent”¹³⁵. Hence the importance of topology for Lacan: in-so-far as mathemes are “transmitted integrally”, they defy meaning as much as possible, although in the end they are also transmitted with the help of language, but language’s

¹³¹ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 81.

¹³² Lacan, *Encore*, 7.

¹³³ *Ibid*, 56.

¹³⁴ Miller, “Matheme,” 29.

¹³⁵ Lacan, *Encore*, 96.

inertia limits our understanding of mathemes by purely linguistic means. Thus those who criticize Lacan's mathemes as unintelligible miss the point. This is their function: to illustrate the impossibility of the real as it approaches the symbolic. It is precisely because of this inertia that the semblance of being collapses. It is inadequate. Something resists interpretation and integration. This is easy to see if we take Lacan's later formulations about the subject as not related primarily to the symbolic but to the real.

Topology reveals "a failure, a failure of logic to suture the subject of science"¹³⁶, a failure of the symbolic to remain consistent as the real approaches. For Lacan, it appears that philosophical discourse in general tends to obfuscate this failure by means of the function of being. "Thought is on the winning side" as long as the effects of speech *qua* "dit-mension," the mansion where truth resides, as a knot, a relation between jouissance and knowledge, is not revealed. As opposed to history as meaning, Lacan's conception of history is a relay-operation of jouissance that is carried by the letter. Consequently, what concerns analytic discourse is nothing but the relation between and among other discourses, and the social links the discourses produce. For example, Lacan's famous seminar on Poe's "The Purloined Letter," goes beyond the merely intersubjective structures to explore how one cannot assume a position in the symbolic without an identification and a relation with others. In fact, one could say that it was precisely to get out of such an intersubjective situation that the letter was formulated. Since, 'pure' desire in *Seminar VII* is effected by other subjects' desires, the letter as a writing that is not dependent on what is read (or one can say, on what is said in what is heard) comes to have its mediating value. What is relayed in history, as conjured trick, takes place in accordance with the letter; in other words, in

¹³⁶ Dravers, 206.

accordance with unconscious knowledge, not in so far as it takes its orientation from being, but in so far as it takes it from the Other *qua* hole.

3.3 The Letter

The necessary interpretation of Freud that saved that father is, according to Lacan, that only the murder of the son would establish the religion of grace¹³⁷. The murder of the son was a negation of the exception, of the function of the father that sustained castration. But this saved the father, and the ethics and the import of psychoanalysis is how to do without him. The Borromean knot was thus Lacan's wager that it might come to replace the father and the identification he entraps the subject with, i.e. the unary trait, with a writing of the real. The consequences of the non-existence of the Other we elaborated above entail the necessity that this new writing must "replace the imaginary consistency [the subject] derives from the father as bearer of castration"¹³⁸. The fact that the imaginary is what is at stake in the late Lacan is not new. We saw his reading of the interpretation Socrates gives to Alcibiades in order to erect his image as desiring. What is new is that now the imaginary is mapped in relation to the drive, and with this mapping comes a new articulation of the subject in his relation to object *a*.

The impossibility of sexual relation, and it is an impossibility with agency since "it doesn't stop being not written", is what makes the real always return to the same place. Late Lacan conceptualizes the letter as the carrier of a bit of the real on its back, in its coupling with the signifier.¹³⁹ Whereas the signifier consists of the sense of articulated language, the letter is

¹³⁷ Lacan, *Encore*, 108.

¹³⁸ Voruz, 286.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, 286.

what knots the body to the jouissance of the unconscious¹⁴⁰. As Philip Dravers puts it, “from the perspective of the later Lacan, we can say that what is at stake in a reading of the letter is ultimately the jouissance of whoever makes use of it, and this is beyond the question of signification that comes to be attached to it”¹⁴¹. This is how the letter traces the contours of being for the subject. In the seminar on “The Purloined Letter,” Lacan says apropos of the characters of the story that “for each of them the letter is his unconscious”¹⁴² Whereas in the early Lacan the letter was perceived to be entirely identical with the signifier, its later dissociation was clearly a consequence of attempting to articulate the subject’s “stuckness” in the drive.

Meaning, as Lacan says in *Seminar XX*, is based on a semblance. Therefore, an alienating imaginary identification is necessary to bar the subject in order for articulated language to be read. What punctuates a sentence is the ego-ideal, a unary trait that incarnates the master signifier in the unconscious. It is on the basis of such alienation that the subject can assume his sexual function. To articulate a topology that will not depend on such an identification, therefore, means we are left with language and the object cause of desire as a real void. Hence Lacan’s reduction of the symptom as the couple: signifier-letter. “Writing, the letter, is in the Real, and the signifier is in the symbolic”¹⁴³. The letter is what insists, it is the instance of jouissance whose primary structure is a “repetition of the unary trait... as an attempt to master [the trauma] that was imposed in the initial encounter”¹⁴⁴. Dravers points out the way the letter goes on its

¹⁴⁰ Dravers, 215.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Quoted in Ibid, 214.

¹⁴³ Quoted in Ibid, 224.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 217.

way, disregarding what is read, by virtue of equivocation in speech¹⁴⁵. The jouissance that the letter carries with it by virtue of the impossibility of the sexual relation is the one that will be used to effect a separation between the letter and the signifier.

Alienation, then, is the attempt to anchor the phallus in the real, or alternatively, S^1 in what is produced as knowledge S^2 . Given the decline of the function of the father, one of the goals of analysis becomes to effectuate a *savoir-faire* of each individual person, producing the know-how to manage one's symptom. Whereas previously Lacan defined the letter as the split subject, later the letter became S^1 , "the letter of the master signifier, insofar as it carries it in its envelope"¹⁴⁶. Whatever the semblance of being, the letter arrives to its destination. Idiotic jouissance can only repeat itself "via the production of a surplus-enjoyment"¹⁴⁷. Here we see a difference in attitude between Lacan and Heidegger. The latter focused on finitude, on passivity, whereas for Lacan, in so far as the deadlock of the drive is concerned, what is needed is the "cease of castration as a possibility"¹⁴⁸. Hence the need for a new structuring of imaginary identification, one based on active writing, on a rejection of castration, that will not repeat itself by virtue of the alienation in the primary signifier. To be clear, this rejection of castration will not change anything of the impossibility of sexual relation. It is an attempt to produce another jouissance that has nothing to do with sex.

This is how a disjunction that may have more success in revealing language's transcendence may be effected. We have seen that one of the consequences of the non-existence

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Quoted in Ibid, 228.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 229.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 231.

of the big Other is the impossibility to distinguish between individual speech and language. This is the point at which the intervention through the letter comes in, an intervention that is particular to each subject's symptom, one that traces his or her jouissance in order to provide a home for a jouissance that is not phallic. In other words, one writes one's real, with the letter.

The Letter is that which “divides knowledge and jouissance, while knotting them together in the margins”¹⁴⁹. It is that which makes “the verisimilitude supposed of fiction” something other than “the vanity of a misplaced mimetism”¹⁵⁰. In other words, the letter is what holds together the semblances of fiction, the symbolic. Hence the importance of the question of writing: its function is to effect a knotting between knowledge and speech in the absence of a castrating other. As Dravers explains, for Lacan there is an initial reading, a reading whose elementary structure is that of repetition. That is to say, it is a repetition of the jouissance of the subject's initial trauma of the encounter with language. What is written in this repetition is the ‘apparent’ necessity of the phallus in so far as “it does not stop being written”. But as Lacan explains, this necessity is only apparent; it is made contingent by the impossibility of sexual relation “that which doesn't stop being not written”. It is in relation to this impossibility that metaphor takes its power in making the speaking subject encounter language as something transcendent. In the absence of a big Other, the *sinthome* comes in as a writing that has object *a* as its reference. Yet, the *sinthome* is posited as that One which eludes any residue of meaning that object *a* possesses. Freud already questioned the effect of analysis against “the primal addiction”, masturbation, in hysterics. The status of our contemporary social discourse, however, is different from that of Freud's time. Reality is more precarious than ever. It is here that Lacan

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 206.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

intervenes with a form of writing whose aim is to self-clothe the subject with a new imaginary that completely evades the correlation of causality that is characteristic of the symbolic order.

That is why what Lacan calls writing of the real cannot be compared on any deconstructive writing precisely because the latter does not accept the impossibility of sexual relation, and merely defers it. Lacan writes that one can use such writings only on the condition of accepting the non-existence of the big Other. Historicist discourses have a function similar to deconstructive writing in their suspension of truth judgments. One can compare the relation between historicist discourses and psychoanalysis as that between psycho-therapy and psychoanalysis. Both ignore the *jouissance* involved in the text and take a hermeneutic approach. They are thus on the side of meaning, of the signifier. The good they do, as Lacan says in *Television*, is a good that returns to what is worse.

3.4 Conclusion

Today, we no longer have an Other to measure our infinite desire against. The model for early Lacan was a dissociation of the alienating imaginary semblance from the S(A) through an invitation to accept castration. For in doing so we give up our own *jouissance* in so far as it is implicated in an imaginary dimension (“Dasein is always mine”). And in doing so, we necessarily re-posit a big Other, but this time it can only be, according to Lacan, incomplete, inconsistent, not-all. In giving up *jouissance* of the exception, which is nothing but the consequence of the command of the superego in its formal structure, the drive which attempts to locate *das Ding* in the heart of reality, we regain it (i.e. *jouissance*) on another level, at the level of the not-all of the symbolic¹⁵¹.

¹⁵¹ See Lacan, “The Subversion of the Subject,” *Écrits*, 700.

When the consequences of the non-existence of the big Other assumed their full weight, Lacan saw the need to theorize it at a more basic psychic level, at the level of the *sinthome* in order to combat the symptom. That madness is the greatest danger that looms over mankind is not new. Hegel took refuge in memory and in theorizing about the stages of human life. The function of such a theorizing is to re-create a semblance of the big Other. One can even venture to posit similar theorization for the Lacanian discourse.

In the course of the human life, the subject is indeed thrown into an already existing big Other, or so it seems. Pure desire can only emerge against this background; the background of a belief that an already existing big Other is there. This is how its infinity is a matter of measurement, a contrast, say, between the infinity of the subject's desire and the seemingly orderly, systematic way of *das Man*. Being-towards-death is actually achievable only through such a distance, only through an image erected in place of the Thing. The death drive is the urge to be the Thing itself; it drives towards the hole in the real. Under the light of the necessity of the big Other to release pure desire, we should read Freud's statement "I cannot see more important need for the child than the father". That the father is already a dead father is not a statement of an "a priori perfect", but rather, his status is that, as Lacan says, "he will have been killed"¹⁵², a future perfect. But that "he will have been killed" cannot mean that he is always already dead, in a sense of an a priori perfect.

Thus traversing the fantasy can only repeat itself. First pure desire (not realizing it yet, but simply once an image is erected as embodying the fact that desire will always be dissatisfied, structurally) is given to the subject, and its consequence that no Other of the Other, i.e. no transcendent Other is there to guarantee the consistency of reality. Yet, and this is crucial, it is only given against a background of some big Other, a universal, yet concealed, name of the

¹⁵² Ibid, 687.

father that sustains all those other desiring beings who just have no clue (i.e. whose desires are arrested in this or that object). The S(A) as lacking is here still distinguished from the treasury of signifiers. The second choice sets in when the superegoic command, which is inherent in any signifying network, forces the subject to will nothingness, as it were. In Freud's often repeated words, 'the gods can turn into demons'. An urge to certainty (to enjoy), to know (to enjoy), for oneself, behind the concealed no-of-the-father, what the real father enjoys. The enjoyment of the real father was an obsession of Socrates. For Lacan, Socrates wanted to know how 'hotness combines with coldness without pushing the essence of hotness to one side and coldness to the other' - in other words, a certainty after the pure signifier. If we take the no-of-the-father as a somewhat similar structure to the transcendental ego, no wonder the subject's desire, when the death drive sets in, that is, when being-towards-death is no longer an option, turns Heidegger's world into worldliness, into a chain of signifiers. This is also the point at which, I think, a difference must be located between the two statements "there is no Other of the Other", and "there is no big Other". One can say, provisionally, there is Other of the Other in pure desire, that there is no Cause of the series of causality in the phenomenal realm. Yet this already presupposes a series of causality, i.e., it presupposes an Other, in a word, transcendence. The statement "the big Other does not exist" is due to the impossibility of distinguishing between speech at the individual level and language at a universal level. How can one not fall back into a destructive imaginary dyad with the (m)Other- and thus fails to see both (the subject and the other)?

Yet something insists. It is the real that holes the symbolic. That is why "Lacan reminds those who read him that it is not enough to simply evoke the void and flood it with jouissance, for one must also know how to locate it and operate upon the structure that encloses it in order to

create a new topological consistency to support the subject's relation to jouissance"¹⁵³. The letter allows the cut of the unconscious to be isolated from the semblance that covers it. If we have defined an alienating reading that is based on the coalescence of *a* with S(A), in short, based on phallic jouissance, then such a reading is what comes before a writing of the knot. In pushing this insight to its logical conclusion, what will remain but the necessity (life or death) to replace it with a form of writing that goes beyond poetry and metaphor? It is the function of the letter to replace the phallic topology of the subject with a new one that re-structures his relation to jouissance. One could say that the inspiration for articulating the *sinthome* originates from the impetus of the death drive as that which forces the subject to begin from the beginning again. Since the *sinthome* is not a function of meaning, since it does not produce an unconscious knowledge in relation to a master signifier, it is not capable of being interpreted like object *a*, or traversed like fantasy. The contemporary subject's subjugation to scientific gadgets certainly have the effect of doing away with the impossible, an effect which is also brought about by scientific discourse since it reduces all knowledge to known knowledge. This lack of confrontation with the real can only produce "the last man" who is completely foreclosed from historical experience. This is because the man who only wants to desire the next thing cannot possibly have any relation to his jouissance.

¹⁵³ Dravers, 225.

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