

VOLUME/ISSUE I

MIDDLE VOICES

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 DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY Psychology Department

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Middle Voices is a journal of scholarly research published by the Department of Psychology at Duquesne University. As part of Duquesne's longstanding tradition in human science psychology, the journal is concerned with cross-disciplinary intersections that inform our understanding of self and world.

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DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF
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Middle Voices can be seen as a part of a (even if discontinuous) tradition belonging to the Duquesne University Department of Psychology. The origin of this tradition can be traced to Duquesne Studies in Phenomenology, edited by Psychology Department faculty members Amedeo Giorgi, William F. Fischer, and Rolf von Eckartsberg. This journal, which lasted (in this form) from 1971 to 1983, not only hoped to forward an approach to a human-science of psychology informed by phenomenology, but, to such ends, insisted that “many problems in the field [of psychology] might be more clearly understood as arising from its philosophical presuppositions and theoretical formulations”.

Almost 50 years later, the Department of Psychology remains a center for both phenomenological research and thought that is committed to interrogating the philosophical and theoretical assumptions of contemporary psychology. To this latter aim, however, the conceptual resources utilized by Duquesne psychological research have diversified considerably. One could say Duquesne Psychology has more generally become a safe haven for thought at the margins of academic psychology; psychoanalysis, critical psychology, post-structuralism, and neurophenomenology, are but major examples of traditions of thought, and approaches to research, contemporaneously embraced, in an effort to produce work founded on rigorous reflection on the ontological, epistemological, and ethical bases/basis of psychology.

It is thus appropriate that this inaugural issue pertains to the intersection of the work of Jacques Lacan and a human-science approach to psychology. Such concern not only exemplifies a turning to critical alternatives to contemporary psychology. The articles presented in this issue further illustrate the

importance of cross-disciplinary thought for psychological knowledge—thinking that ties together matters pertaining to the phenomenological, the aesthetic, the erotic, and the clinical.

Yet, it is not without reluctance that I've written this. In a time of such social tension it is difficult to not be burdened with the question: what could I [we] possibly say that matters? Conversations and the polemics of academia can easily seem trivial. But, as Gadamer has written, to hold a conversation is to attempt to come to some sort of agreement on some subject matter; some would be so bold to speak of this agreement as approximating truth. In this conversation is the happening of tradition, the integration of the familiar and the alien—we understand the past insofar as it speaks to us today, to our present concerns. I am, at least, willing to affirm that a ‘local tradition’ of questioning and challenging psychology is not only a past worth invoking presently, but a tradition worth building on for future conversations and concerns.

So, let this be the aim of the journal, its source of any potential relevance and legitimacy. Not only to conserve a local, institutional tradition, which contains within it a larger set of intellectual traditions, but to enliven it, to provoke it and be provoked by it, in some hope that we understand, and continue to understand better, what is Other.


Pavan S Brar
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

SIGNIFIERS STILL MATTER:

The importance of

‘On an ex
post Facto
Syllabary’

for Therapy
Today

Yael Goldman Baldwin

Signifiers Still Matter: The relevance of ‘On an ex post Facto Syllabary’ for Therapy Today

Yael Goldman Baldwin

Mars Hill University

Amongst current mental health treatments, what makes Lacanian psychoanalysis still an excellent option? This article discusses how one answer can be found in the role of the signifier in relation to the unconscious. A little-known Lacanian essay, “On an ex post Facto Syllabary”, is discussed in order to illustrate the important role of speech and language—the symbolic—in mental health treatment, especially when so many therapy offerings make use of somatic and archetypal methods, what Lacan would deem imaginary. The article addresses Herbert Silberer, Carl Jung, and more recent popular therapies in juxtaposition with Jacques Lacan’s work.

Given the plethora of mental health treatments available today, what makes Lacanian psychoanalysis still an excellent option? One answer can be found in the role of the signifier for the unconscious. To highlight this, we turn to a little-known Lacanian essay entitled “On an ex Post Facto Syllabary” (2006/1966), which from here on I’ll refer to as *Syllabary*. In the English version of *Écrits* (2006/1966), *Syllabary* is eight pages and granted stand-alone essay status, but in the original French, “D’un Syllabaire Après Coup” follows right below,

without a page break, “In Memory of Ernest Jones: On his Theory of Symbolism”. Lacan wrote *Syllabary* as an addendum, a postscript to his essay on Jones, a rather longwinded P.S., the footnote readers might have expected alongside Herbert Silberer’s name in the “In Memory” essay.¹ Seven years after writing “In Memory”, Lacan filled out what he saw as an ellipsis, deeming *Syllabary*’s contents important enough to write, and indeed, I think this short, little known text holds a key to what is radical and still most important regarding what makes psychoanalysis relevant today, and that is the role of the signifier and the

1 The translation’s “ex post facto” refers to retrospective action or force, which highlights Lacan’s retrospection on the essay’s topic. *Syllabary*’s eight pages were added seven years after the completion of the previous text. It is the only addition to a specific text in the entire *Écrits* collection—the other additions, such as “Overture” and “Antecedents,” punctuate the *Écrits* as introductory and biographical notes, respectively. Thus *Syllabary* is *après coup*, “after the event” of the initial essay. The *après coup*, of the French title (“D’un syllabaire après coup”), can also be translated as deferred action. Bruce Fink’s translator’s endnote mentions *après coup* is used to translate *Nachträglichkeit*, the idea of retroactive understanding manifested following further events. These further events might be Lacan’s work on psychoanalysis’ relationship to science; when writing *Syllabary*, Lacan was thinking about this topic. In December of 1965, with “La science et la vérité,” he juxtaposes both Freud and Jung’s relationship to science, and linguistics versus psychology. It is also likely a reference to the work done via association after the dream, work that allows for retrospective understanding. As for syllabary, it is a writing system that consists of syllables instead of a symbol letter. So one symbol can be the syllable “he”. Ethiopic has a syllabary.

symbolic in mental health treatment.

So first, who was Herbert Silberer, the author Lacan specifically discusses in *Syllabary*? The little-known Austrian psychoanalyst wrote on symbolism, dreams, imagery, introversion, mysticism, alchemy, yoga, and Freud. Silberer's works include *Problems of Mysticism and its Symbolism* (1914) which was later published as *Hidden Symbolism of Alchemy and the Occult Arts* (1971), and *The Dream: Introduction to the Psychology of Dreams* (1918/1955). Of course, the 'Syllabary' (*Syllabaire* in French) in the title is a word play on the phonemes of Silberer's name. And thus in the essay's title, Lacan draws attention to the power of paying attention to the phonemes or syllables that make up signifiers.

In *Syllabary*, Lacan specifically dissects Silberer's concept of the 'functional phenomenon' that occurs in dreams, a concept that Carl Jung championed (Jung and Silberer acknowledged a mutual intellectual debt to each other and Jones and Lacan sometimes refer to the Jung-Silberer school). Freud integrated functional phenomena into his 1914 edition of the *Traumdeutung*.² Lacan takes up functional phenomenon in order to clarify the role of the signifier in both dream formation and interpretation.

What is the Functional Phenomenon?

Silberer described three classes of symbolization phenomena: 1) the material phenomena (where a dream's visual images represent or symbolize the dreamer's thought content that is being dealt with: an object of thought), 2) the functional phenomena (where the dream's visual images represent or symbolize the dreamer's subjective states—a symbolization of how the mind is functioning), and 3) the somatic phenomena (where a dream's visual images represent or symbolize the dreamer's bodily states). In *Syllabary*, Lacan focuses on the second, Silberer's functional

phenomenon, which represents what is going on in the psyche of the dreamer as she dreams.

Lacan agrees with Silberer that functional phenomena do actually exist in reality and says a good illustration of what constitutes functional phenomenon is to be found in Silberer's 'symbolism of the threshold' aka 'threshold symbolism'. The psychic states symbolized in threshold symbolism include the transition stages of falling asleep and waking. To illustrate, Silberer (1918) presents examples of common images during these transitory states including the following:

I was on the point of departing from the waking state. The following image appeared to me: I am putting on my coat as if preparing to go out with another person who comes to call for me. The sleep appears here as a person who comes to call for me. (p. 368)

Recently, I awoke from a dream just as I was watching an image of a friend board a train that left the station. One can certainly, following the functional phenomenon idea, interpret such symbolism in terms of what was going on in my psychic functioning, as a transition from a sleeping to waking state. Indeed, I awoke as I watched the train pull out [and yes, make of that what you will on the multiple staves of the score]. But this symbol of the train does not *necessarily* mean a crossing from one state to another [nor what else you're thinking]. It could also refer to the saying "the train has left the station," that means the opportunity has already passed, that a process has already begun and there is no point in resisting, or the act has been done, akin to the saying "that ship has sailed." However, to best glean the unconscious formations at work in the symbolism of the train leaving the station, one must pay attention. Whow the arrangement and variations of signifiers create independent meaning effects. One needs *the*

dreamer herself to specifically associate to the signifiers in relation to other signifiers, in order to glean the unconscious at work, rather than assume it represented a particular saying, transitional state, or 'natural' hidden meaning. Lacan argues along with Freud that the focus must lie on the associations of the dreamer not the analyst or another interpreter [nor mysticism, archetypes, or theology for example, which I'll get to in a moment]. This is a difference in the level of the work, a level related to staying close to the letter, which is an important difference that Lacan argues Silberer failed to grasp and demarcate.

In *Syllabary*, Lacan both dissects Silberer's concepts of functional and threshold symbolism, and juxtaposes them with his own language-based understanding of dream symbolism, which he argues is found in Freud. Lacan had already made this argument in various forms many times prior in his seminars and writings. In 1957, discussing linguistic analysis in relation to dreams, Lacan said "dream images are to be taken up only on the basis of their value as signifiers" and in the dream "we are dealing with writing" (p. 424). In exploring the unconscious meanings of dreams, as with symptoms, fantasies, parapraxes, and jokes, Lacan is most interested in the "constitutive role of the signifier" (p. 426). He investigates what we do with *syllables*, the phonemes, the small literal components of language, and their relations to the functions and productions of the unconscious, such as, but not limited to, our dreams. Lacan emphasizes how symbolism in dreams, like symptoms and all unconscious formations, must be understood as (phonematic) signifying material. Bruce Fink (2004) describes how signifiers are the "motor force behind [dreams]. An image of a man standing under a line may have nothing to do with the idea of being below a certain standard, but everything to do with 'understanding'" (p. 98). A key component of what makes Lacanian method unique is this

insistence that the letters, the phonemes, *matter*. Think of an analysand recalling a dream in which there is a river. One way of viewing the symbolism would be to focus on the hidden meaning of the proverbial and stereotypical 'river of life' symbol, as used in theology and over the course of human history, across time and cultures, utilizing conscious processes. Or one could listen for and highlight what Lacan (2006) calls the "signifierness of dreams" (p. 424). By encouraging associations, the analysand may associate to a host of signifiers. River could have (hypothetically) been the name of the neighbor's dog, perhaps a dog that the neighbor would violently kick when angry as the analysand watched on in horror as a child. Or perhaps someone named Rivka plays a particular role in the client's life, and thus the Riv syllable plays a dominant role. Perhaps something happened when Rivka was giving a talk. The point being, paying attention to the phonemic form will bring forth more particular unconscious material that we cannot know ahead of time (based on a saying or archetype). Indeed, the *ex post facto* in the title also points to the retroactive action and force, the deferred action of sorting out the syllabary at work in analysand's dream life that is not dependent on a prior preexisting lexicon of images.

What the Jung-Silberer School Failed to Grasp

The other main point that Lacan (2006) argues in *Syllabary* is that when Silberer fails to grasp the "signifierness of dreams, at the crux" (p. 424) of Freud's dream theory, it is because of a lack of theoretical tools that would be necessary for such an understanding. In particular, the three theorists Lacan takes up in *Syllabary* (Silberer, Jones, and Jung) don't have Lacan's valuable and useful theoretical apparatus of the RSI registers (the realms of the real, symbolic, and imaginary) to make the proper arguments and come

² Freud (1914) said Silberer's concept of the functional phenomenon was "one of the few indisputably valuable additions to the theory of dreams" (p. 97).

to the most helpful conclusions for theory and technique.

Employing his RSI categories, Lacan argues that functional phenomena are actually imaginary phenomena, fall under the imaginary realm, and as such are not a proper formation of the unconscious. Yet we fall prey and are “seduced” into treating functional phenomena as such.

Lacan says the functional phenomenon is seductive because a) the imaginary realm is seductive which his oeuvre lays out from the mirror stage onwards, and b) situated in the imaginary realm it also harkens back to a pre-psychoanalytic psychology. Lacan warns we must be wary of its seduction just as we must be wary of *all* tendencies to relinquish the import of the signifier while veering back towards the imaginary. We keep getting seduced back into the imaginary realm, to the image, identification, ego, and narcissistic identification with the ego’s image. Additionally, in the imaginary we tend to fall back on a search for hidden meanings, on the signified over the signifier. Lacan (2006) claims the principle of the “*primacy of the signifier over the signified*” (p. 391) is what differentiates Freud from Jung.

Lacan repeatedly states that the proper work of analysis, the transformative and ultimately ethical work of analysis, takes place *not* on the imaginary plane (not ego to ego) but on the symbolic plane, where the analyst’s desire is situated and where the most fruitful and liberating work takes place. The symbolic plane is where we work the most non-defensively.

With *Syllabary*, as with his other writings, Lacan wants to redirect, turn around a misdirected movement, especially when some of Freud’s and Lacan’s colleagues take dream symbolism and the work of analysis in the direction of the imaginary. According to Lacan, Jung over-generalizes and thus loses psychoanalytic specificity and relies too much on conscious processes.

The effect of the signifier and the automaticity of the signifying chain play out in all three RSI realms. Lacan recognizes psychology’s broader tendency to biologize or naturalize without recognizing the role of the signifier upon that biology. Lacan (2006) argues that to misrecognize this profound role of both image and signifier upon the body, to think of the body as a real or biological entity that can be divorced from image and signification, is a “delusion” (p. 608). When we are speaking of human behavior, and particularly in the realms that interest psychoanalysis, including dreams, and also aggressive and sexual behavior, we must recognize the profound role of image and signifier upon the real. The image and the signifier will always interact to affect our bodily drives—RSI intersect. In understanding how one suffers and how to work through that suffering, one must include the effects of RSI and the signifier. Lacan reminds us that post language instantiation, while all three registers of RSI are always simultaneously in play, the human being is never again the same as pre-language instantiation, however much we may wish it was. Thus, we are always particularly vulnerable to the lure and captivation of the imaginary, at the expense of the symbolic. Lacan argues in *Syllabary* that Jung and Silberer (the Jung-Silberer school) fall prey to this vulnerability. *Syllabary* is ultimately a critique of a Jungian approach, via an explicit detour of Silberer and Jones.

And *we are still vulnerable*, this is a battle psychoanalysis continues to fight, 50 years after Lacan wrote *Syllabary*. Some (even psychoanalytic) therapeutic approaches, by emphasizing consciousness, feelings, and archetypes that affect one *over and above the role of the signifier in formations of the unconscious*, as if they are natural, primary, and *not* affected by language, fall prey to the very traps and pitfalls Lacan criticizes in *Syllabary*.

Being open to the work of the signifier, and offering a method that follows the

formations of the unconscious using speech and language is still called for today. Especially now, with the proliferation of somatic therapies that profess to bypass speech and go straight to the workings of the nervous system as if we are not speaking beings. Also, very popular and accessible are self-help groups with a strong foundation in spiritual surrender, and popular life coaching strategies strongly based on Jungian archetypes. Alchemy is making a comeback. Based on the burgeoning proliferation of treatment offerings and social media trends regarding mental health, Jungian psychology, with its focus on the role of archetypal images and the realm of the imaginary, is having a resurgence. Just ask the much-discussed Jungian psychologist of the moment from the University of Toronto, Dr. Jordan Peterson’s more than two million Youtube followers and readers. If you’re wondering if Lacan’s *Syllabary* argument has any relevance today, also notice how discourse around masculine/feminine polarities, divine feminine and masculine, and the psychology of the spirit (which Lacan also takes up in *Syllabary*) is reigning supreme in mental health treatment. Popular psychology books these days, like *The King, Warrior, Magician, Lover: Rediscovering the archetypes of the mature masculine*, have the Jung-Silberer school written all over them, so to speak. Robert Bly and Joseph Campbell are making a comeback. Would Lacan would be rolling in his grave? One could argue, when looking at the cultural landscape, at this moment in time, Jung is winning. It is not that these treatment modalities do not have a place in the realm of mental health; I believe they do. It is that we *also* need space for different modalities and a discourse around the potential pitfalls of such approaches, and Lacan’s critiques and offerings hold true today as much as ever.

The specific details found in Lacan’s *Syllabary* argument regarding his critique of functional and threshold phenomena remind

us that identification with the ego (of the subject or analyst) and staying on the level of the imaginary and consciousness is what we *still* want to avoid in psychoanalytic theory and technique. Rather, working at the level of language, with desire and the specificity of the signifier, on the symbolic plane, is at the heart of Lacanian psychoanalysis and is what makes it unique, then and now. While the concept of the functional phenomenon no longer has a vibrant role in analytic discussion (not that it ever really did, for in many ways it has always been relegated to an addendum), it is, however, a fine example of the resistance against the role of the signifier in our suffering, thriving, and treatment that remains present in the offerings of mental health approaches today. The point is that the resistance is still strong and the signifiers we use still matter.

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THE DEMON OF THE UNVEILED PHALLUS:

Jacques Lacan's

“Signification of
the Phallus”

and the Photography
of Robert Mapplethorpe

D. MICHAEL JONES

The Demon of the Unveiled Phallus: Jacques Lacan's "Signification of the Phallus" and the Photography of Robert Mapplethorpe

D. MICHAEL JONES

The recent exhibit of Robert Mapplethorpe's work, "Implicit Tension" (January 25–July 10, 2019), at the Guggenheim, explores the artist's obsession with the magical, the demonic, and the unveiled phallus. It is Mapplethorpe's artistic obsessions, personified in the photographs of the X, Y, and Z Portfolios, as well as the deeply homophobic response his photography, even his name, evoke twenty years after his death, that make this recent exhibit an ideal space to reencounter key concepts from Jacques Lacan's "Signification of the Phallus" in *Écrits*. For as Lacan (2002) points out "the phallus is the signifier of this very *Aufhebung* [sublation], which it inaugurates (initiates) by its disappearance. That is why the demon... springs forth at the very moment the phallus is unveiled in the ancient mysteries (see the famous painting in the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii)" (p. 277). This paper argues that the historically hysterical response to Mapplethorpe's work, which culminated in the 1990 Cincinnati obscenity trial, is created in part by the reenactment of this *Aufhebung* between signified and signifier, the splitting [Spaltung] that exiles us into the symbolic and initiates "the paradoxical, deviant, erratic, eccentric, and even scandalous nature of desire" (Lacan, 2002, p. 276).

Keywords: Lacan, Mapplethorpe, symbolic phallus, male hysteria, homophobia

Image and reflection are central to Jacques Lacan's project. From the mirror stage to the graph of desire, the subject is revealed and nullified in reflection. With that in mind, it is no great surprise that the most interesting philosophical reflections on photography overtly or obliquely speak to the Lacanian project of the subject as refracted reflections of the Other. As Roland Barthes (1981) puts it in *Camera Lucida*:

In the Photography, the event is never transcended for the sake of something else: The Photograph always leads the corpus I need back to the body I see; it is the absolute Particular, the sovereign Contingency, matte and somehow stupid, the This (this photography and not Photography), in short, what Lacan calls the *Tuché*, the occasion, the encounter, the Real, in its indefatigable expression (p.4)

Or as Susan Sontag (2001) writes in *On Photography*:

The contingency of photographs confirms that everything is perishable; the arbitrariness of photographic evidence indicates that reality is fundamentally unclassifiable. Reality is summed up in array of causal fragments—an endlessly alluring pointedly reductive way of dealing with the world. (p.80)

Both of these quotes suggest how the photography interconnects with the multilayers of splitting, fragment, and the always already of absence: what escapes the frame and makes the frame possible, pointing to a "Reality [that] is fundamentally unclassifiable," or "what Lacan calls the *Tuché*, the occasion, the encounter, the Real" (Barthes, 1981, p. 4). The image and reflection of causal fragments, the disordering

of the everyday, and the mechanical reproduction of memory as presence make photography an ideal space to consider a Lacanian psychology of aesthetics.

The recent exhibit of the late-twentieth century, American Robert Mapplethorpe's work, "Implicit Tension" (January 25–July 10, 2019), at the Guggenheim is just such a space. Exploring the artist's obsession with the magical, the demonic, and the unveiled phallus personified in the photographs of Mapplethorpe's X, Y, and Z Portfolios as well as the deeply homophobic response his photography, even his name, evokes twenty years after his death, are an opportunity to reencounter key concepts from Jacques Lacan's "Signification of the Phallus" in a museum setting.

I visited "Implicit Tensions" on a rainy Wednesday in March of 2019. The Guggenheim was busy, and after following the rest of the crowd up the Frank Lloyd Wright staircase to the special exhibit floor, I entered, for a moment or two, Mapplethorpe's obsessive, contradictory, and beautifully lit world, which Richard Howard (1988) described as Mapplethorpe's "congestion of fantasy and obsession" (p.152). My first impressions on seeing such a beautifully curated exhibit of his work was the "implicit tension" between the brutal and the fragile: leather and lilies, chains and roses. In my first walk through I was also struck by the sighs, grunts of disgust, and quick glances, at Mapplethorpe's more challenging works from the infamous X, Y, and Z Portfolio. So I went through the exhibit a second time, watching the watchers. Many were scandalized; even the ones that tried not to show it.

On closer inspection, I found it was those pictures that refracted symbolic organization of desire—specifically when they refracted Jacques Lacan's "Signification of the Phallus," which elicited those no-saying responses

(Fink, 1997). Images of the phallus, such as *Mark Stevens* (1976), *Bill* (1976-77), and *Bob Love* (1979), or Mapplethorpe's S&M pieces like *Joe* (1978) and *Self-Portrait* (1978), where a whip inserted in his anus troubled the museumgoers most. It makes sense, of course, in the context of a still puritanical America, but the uncomfortable aesthetic response to Mapplethorpe's work also points to deeper refraction of the reality of the Real.

For as Lacan (2002) points out "the phallus is the signifier of this very *Aufhebung* [sublation], which it inaugurates (initiates) by its disappearance" (p. 277). This substitution and sublation of the symbolic Law of the Father with all its concomitant gendering, mutilation, and verticalization of desire is potentially refracted (one literally cannot see it clearly) to us through Mapplethorpe's unveiling of the phallus. The museumgoers response to Mapplethorpe's unveiled phallus speaks to that image's unique symbolic position in the splitting of the subject, the ordering of desire, and barring of the subject by language. With his photographic representation of the phallus, Mapplethorpe puts pressure on the imaginary and refracts deeper into the veiled ordering of the symbolic phallus, the signifier without a signified, through unsettling absences, blank spaces, and dark magic.

In *Mark Stevens, or Mr. 10 1/2* (1976), for example, the phallus is placed on a display dais with a man wearing chaps, his neck and face out of the frame. The entire composition: the arched back, the skin tight leather chaps, the sucked in stomach, and the tiny devil tattoo under the hardly visible vaccination scar work to unveil the semi-flaccid phallus as refracted, part of the symbolic chain of signifiers (everyone recognizes as the biology of a penis) and yet carrying in it this blank space of its own absence. It is clearly presented as part of the body and yet resting on a platform it is split from the body, as if

the faceless human to which it is attached is merely a frame for the image of the phallus, "privileged signifier" (Lacan, 2002, p. 277). The refraction of the absence is unmistakable in the photographs that make up *Bill* (1976-1977) from the same year.

For in *Bill* (1976-1977), three photographs of the phallus and symbolic phallus are framed one beside the other. The first photograph is of a male hand holding a semi-erect phallus, again disconnected from any body of pleasure, or any face or form to give it context; the second photo is absolute black: a void where nothing can be signified but absence; the third photograph returns to the hand holding the semi-erect phallus at a slightly higher angle. The three photographs—image, blank, image—narrate the disappearance of phallic presence and illustrates what I have called refraction: the broken glimpse of the *Aufhebung* between signified and signifier, the splitting [Spaltung] (the sublation and splitting being a double motion of the same act) that exiles us into the symbolic and initiates "the paradoxical, deviant, erratic, eccentric, and even scandalous nature of desire" (Lacan, 2002, p. 276). "Deviant, erratic, eccentric, and even scandalous" are an excellent discretion of the S&M photoplays from the X, Y, and Z Portfolio (Lacan, 2002, p. 276).

For Lacan and Mapplethorpe, the moment of absence is also a moment of diabolical creation. "That is why the demon," as Lacan (2002) writes, "springs forth at the very moment the phallus is unveiled in the ancient mysteries (see the famous painting in the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii)" (p. 277). Indeed, from a Lacanian position, the Mapplethorpe exhibit at the Guggenheim Villa of Mysteries, for at its center is the unveiled phallus and the demonic trespass that its unveiling conjures. The infamous photographs suggest the magical and demonic

forces that emerge when the "privileged signifier" is split from "the Logos [it] is wedded to" (Lacan, 2002, p. 277). In Mapplethorpe's S&M pieces, like *Joe* (1978) and *Self-Portrait* (1978), where a whip inserted in his anus unmistakably suggests the centaur, along with the demonic self-portraits—*With gun and star* (1982) and *Self-Portrait* (1985) with devil horns—the artist reveals images of the magical, transgressive, and demonic that haunt the fissures of the "privileged signifier" (Lacan, 2002, p. 277).

In the S&M photographs, the privileged signifier as cancelled, voided and re-initiated outside of its own self-enclosing privileged status. The phallus in *Self-Portrait* (1978) with whip is an image of power (a whip) but it is also flaccid, limp and connected to the anus, which creates a centaur: by scrambling the signifying coordinates, a phallus becomes a meaningless tail. In *Joe* (1978) the phallus of oral sex is literally turned upside down, disconnected from vertical authority, and turned into a stiletto-sharp leather tongue.

This repositioning of phallic power—with all its deep symbolic meanings—refracts power and desire backward through signifying chains that situate authority and pleasure outside of the homonormative phallic law. As Judith Butler (2006) writes, "men are said to 'have' the Phallus, yet never to 'be' it, in the sense that the penis is not equivalent to the Law;" and yet men "are compelled to articulate enact these repeated impossibilities" (p. 46) of masculine wholeness. Mapplethorpe's work undoes that: by unpacking the mechanics of its making, associating power with the anus, the mouth, and horizontal positions, the vertical and phallic are magically reduced to what they are: props in the masquerade. It is this refraction of phallic power and authority that accounts for the deeply hysterical response to Mapplethorpe's photography.

Lacan helps us understand the grunts of disgust as more than lingering homophobia, but a deeper mechanics of homophobia and the trauma that is the brutal organization and signification of our desire. The absence of connection between the signified and the signification of bodies, opens up the lack between “the appetite for satisfaction” and the “demand for love” from which “the power of pure loss emerges from the residue of an obliteration,” (Lacan, 2002, p. 276). Part of the hysterical, homophobic response to touch that “residue of obliteration” at the heart of our coming into the language: the cancellation of the signified and creation of the symbolic that can never reclaim it (Lacan, 2002, p. 276). This is not simply a theoretical observation but a historical one.

For Mapplethorpe’s photography became the space for a national debate on art, freedom of expression; or quite literally, for people like late Senator from North Carolina, Jesse Helms: freedom from expression. This flash-point of the culture war is well documented: the uproar around Mapplethorpe’s X, Y, and Z Portfolio, the protests for and against, the Corcoran’s cancelation of the exhibit, and the famous protest, where the Mapplethorpe’s iconic photography of the tattered American flag and his own ironical self-portrait were projected on the wall of the museum. This key moment in the cultural wars and the LGBTQ+ movement is also a “Perfect Moment” (1989-90)—ironically the name of the touring Mapplethorpe exhibit at the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati prop that lead to the most publicized obscenity trail since Ginsberg’s reading of *Howl* in 1956—to look at the Lacanian mechanics of homophobia, which the reaction to Mapplethorpe’s photography patently reveals (Tannenbaum, 1991).

In fact, Jesse Helms, one of the most openly homophobic and vitriolic figures in

late twentieth-century American political history reveals it best. On July 25, 1990, Helms’s attack on the National Endowment of the Arts, the nebulous, liberal news media, and the work of Robert Mapplethorpe, who died from AIDS only a year before, perfectly elucidates the hysterical response to any challenge to the phallic systematization of desire:

I have tried without success to establish in my own mind when if ever the liberal news media have engaged in more distortions of the truth than in the public prop discussion of the National Endowment for the Arts. The media have in fact been obsessed for at least 5 years to my knowledge with trying to prove that black is white and that disgusting, insulting, and revolting garbage produced by obviously sick minds is somehow art (Helms, 1994).

Like many hysterical subjects, Helms’s attack on the object of his ego’s discomfort, his no-saying, is more revealing about him than it is about the merits of the object; and in this case, is most revealing about how Mapplethorpe’s photography engenders homophobia. The problem, he admits, is in “my own mind”—and it is a signification problem—one where the coordinates will not cohere, which he calls: “distortions.” (Helms, 1994) These distortions—created by a symbol for the symbolic other: the media—is turning “black to white” (in Helms’ the anti-miscegenation implication of the metaphor is duly noted) speaks to a painful confusion of the phallic law, built on binaries, and thus is a refraction, an angular mixing of light and dark, becoming a mirror for the unstable subject. This “... power of pure loss emerges from the residue of an obliteration,” and engenders, in Helms’s case, a cascade of hysterical and bodily rejections: “disgusting,

insulting, and revolting garbage” all of which speak to ideological homophobia as a manifest recognition of the phallus itself as demonically dangerous to the Phallic law (Lacan, 2002, p. 276; Helms, 1994).

Helms’s no-saying also suggests Barthes’s and Sontag’s interpretation of the unique potential of photography to speak to the trauma that fantasy and binary ideologies work hand in hand to hide. “Implicit Tension,” the retrospective of Robert Mapplethorpe’s work at the Guggenheim, read through Lacan’s “Signification of the Phallus” unveils the mutilating mechanics at work in aesthetic no-saying, historical homophobia while suggesting deeper patterns in masculine hysteria. The Mapplethorpe retrospective also celebrated—in floral still-life photographs like *Easter lilies with mirror* (1979) and *Poppy* (1988), alongside nudes such as *Joe* (1978) and *Mark Stevens* (1976)—an unspeakably fragile life, one that just escapes: the all-consuming, symbolizing lens. In the photograph *Poppy* (1988), with the almost impossible delicacy of the interconnected steams bursting into the silk of the bloom, one can glimpse a logic based on fragility and care as opposed to illusion and subjugation, but one can only glimpse it.

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THE MASOCHIAN WOMAN:

*A fantasy of
male desire?*

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The Masochian woman is a figure who stages what is at stake for women when desire and the law come together. This requires an examination of the conflict that exists between the idea that women's masochism is the fantasy of men and the truth about who wields power in the masochistic theatre. Thus, the inquiry into women's masochism means following Jacques Lacan's conception of women's masochism in *Anxiety*, which describes it as holding a "completely different meaning, a fairly ironic meaning, and a completely different scope" from the pervert's masochism or moral masochism (Lacan, 2016, p.190). Beginning with a critical analysis of Freud and Lacan's theories on masochism, I will decipher what feminine masochism is and why we are usually only presented with cases where the man exhibits this type of masochistic desire. In order to reach a full understanding of this different and ironic meaning for women's masochism, it is important to examine the connection between the gaze and masochism to comprehend the way in which the fantasy of the Other is an essential mechanism in the design of the masochistic theatre. However, connecting these two perversions as both belonging on the passive side of the erotic register, as Lacan does in "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis", does not go far enough, and it must be understood that masochism itself is inherently reliant on the gaze as an

essential part of the masochistic theatre, and allows it to function as a fantasy. Thus, for masochism to exist in women, even if it is ironic, Lacan proposes that the fantasy imagined by the Other, or the male fantasy, is what is enacted. This leads to the question of what role anxiety plays in the male fantasy. Lacan believes the masochist's aim is the anxiety of the Other. If woman is enacting a male fantasy, and one which causes anxiety in the face of the Other's desire, and man sustains his jouissance through his own anxiety, what is this anxiety? I believe Deleuze provides the answer to this question in his own discussion of the three women figures in Masoch's work. It is the figure of the Grecian woman, who "believes in the independence of women and in the fleeting nature of love; for her the sexes are equal" (Deleuze, 1967, p.47), that is the cause of anxiety for man. For Aphrodite, equality between men and women is the "crucial moment at which she gains dominance over man, for 'man trembles as soon as woman becomes his equal'" (47-48). In *Écrits*, Lacan reminds us of Freud's advice "not to reduce the supplement of the feminine with respect to the masculine to the complement of the passive with respect to the active" (2005, p. 615). In representing what Lacan calls the 'absolute Other' the Masochian woman is able to wield the power of law through her control of the masochistic *mise en scène*.

The Masochian Woman: A fantasy of male desire?¹

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In Lacan's "Guiding Remarks for a Convention on Female Sexuality," he posits the question, "Can we rely on what masochistic perversion owes to male invention and conclude that female masochism is a fantasy of male desire?" In my discussion of women's masochism, I trace the connections between masochism and the gaze in psychoanalysis, which has important implications for the fantasy formation and the theatricality of women's masochism. Lacan would go on to later state in *Seminar X: Anxiety* that "that women's masochism is a male fantasy" (2016, p.190), seemingly confirming this question from his earlier writings. By tracing the connections between the gaze as *objet a* and masochism in the work of both Freud and Lacan it leads to an understanding of process involved in the formation of the masochistic fantasy, and its extimate nature. Thus, by transferring this understanding of masochism to the Masochian Woman reveals the irony which Lacan saw in the concept of a masochistic woman, but also the power relations involved in the theatre of masochism. To come to a theoretical awareness of the

Masochian Woman, it is also necessary to understand who she is not, and therefore this paper will also examine several figures of women who display characteristics of masochism, but do not fully embody the identity of the woman I seek.

Masochism and the Gaze

In Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905/1924) he names sadism and masochism as "the most common and the most significant of all the perversions" (p. 23), and, following Krafft-Ebing's naming of these perversions, he emphasizes the way that Krafft-Ebing's nomenclature "[brings] into prominence the pleasure in any form of humiliation or subjection" (1924, p. 23). In his discussion of masochism, Freud gives a general description of the perversion as being comprised of "any passive attitude towards sexual life and the sexual object, the extreme instance of which appears to be that in which satisfaction is conditional upon suffering physical or mental pain at the hands of the sexual object. Masochism, in the form of a

perversion, seems to be further removed from the normal sexual aim than its counterpart [sadism]" (1924, p. 24). This explanation was added by Freud in 1924, along with the footnote stating: "I have been led to distinguish a primary or *erotogenic* masochism, out of which two later forms, *feminine* and *moral* masochism, have developed. Sadism which cannot find employment in actual life is turned round upon the subject's own self and so produces a *secondary* masochism, which is superadded to the primary kind" (p. 24). The classifications of different types of masochism are also outlined by Sigmund Freud in "The Economic Problem of Masochism" (1924), and his discussion is centered around Feminine masochism because, for Freud, it is "most accessible to our observation and least problematical, and it can be surveyed in all its relations" (p. 276). According to Freud, this Feminine form is based not only in the erotogenic form, pleasure in pain, but also "places the subject in a characteristically female situation" (p. 277). This type of masochism is only ever discussed in the male subject, and since women already exist in these 'characteristically female situations,' Freud never seems to consider diagnosing the perversion in a female patient. Therefore, to understand what it means for a woman to engage in masochism we must also consider Lacan's idea of women's masochism as holding a "completely different meaning, a fairly ironic meaning, and a completely different scope" from either the male pervert's masochism or moral masochism (Lacan, 2016, p. 190). However, that does not necessarily mean that Freud's investigation into male masochism is unhelpful. It provides us the means for understanding how and why women engage in masochism.

If we take a step back to Freud's earlier work discussing Krafft-Ebing's naming of sadism and masochism in the *Three Essays on*

the Theory of Sexuality, and the emphasis on humiliation and subjection which Freud finds innate to this perversion, the language used in this passage echoes the preceding section in the *Three Essays* regarding 'Touching and Looking'. Here, Freud discusses the pleasure in looking (scopophilia) and, like sadism and masochism, he proposes that perversions of looking occur in two forms: the active and the passive. He goes on in the section 'Sadism and Masochism' to align the pain of masochism with both disgust and shame as forces that "[stand] in opposition and resistance to the libido" (Freud, 1924, p. 25). Thus, for Freud, the passive act of looking/being looked at and masochism are aligned together on the side of the Nirvana principle, which "expresses the trend of the death instinct," although under modification by the libido (Freud, 1924, p. 275). The subject who does not seek his own good is influenced by the death drive, and this is manifest clinically, according to Freud, in various ways, such as repetition compulsion, or masochism, which relies on the gaze to function.

Bringing the discussion of the gaze back to Lacan's 1949 essay "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" Lacan first explores the gaze and the role it plays in the formation of the *I*. Here, he describes the mirror stage "as an identification, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image" (Lacan, 2005, p. 76). This stage of identification is understood to involve a specular image reflected for the child to see himself, and this process therefore involves an exteriority in order to resolve the analysand's "discordance with his own reality" (Lacan, 2005, p. 76). The end of the mirror stage, which occurs when the *I* is linked to "socially elaborated situations" (Lacan, 2005, p. 79), is also important, as

¹ Lacan poses this question in "Guiding Remarks for a Convention on Female Sexuality" in *Écrits*.

Lacan points out, saying, “It is this moment that decisively tips the whole of human knowledge (*savoir*) into being mediated by the other’s desire” (Lacan, 2005, p. 79). This hints at the further development of the mirror stage which focuses around the ‘other’s desire.’ Adrian Johnston provides a succinct description of the later, 1960s mirror stage:

language-using (and language-used) big(ger) Others bathe the infant in a cascade of statements and behaviors whose saturating effects endow the specular components of the mirroring moment, Lacan’s primal scene of inaugural identification, with their special, fateful status. The *petit a(utre)* of the child’s forming ego, partially bound up with imagistic representation, is originally and primordially a precipitate of “the desire of the Other”. (Johnston, 2013, p. 256)

Here, Johnston brings together the mirror stage together with later Lacan, and, in doing so, ties the literal, specular activity of seeing oneself in the mirror to the non-specular gaze as empty *objet a*.

These statements regarding the mirror stage focus our attention on the desire of the other/Other. The idea that “man’s desire is the desire of the Other” (Lacan, 2016, p. 22) is reiterated throughout Lacan’s work, and will be key, in analysis, to understanding the function of masochism for the woman analyst. When Lacan states that knowledge is mediated by the other’s desire, later to become the big Other, he is referring to an “intimate exteriority” (Lacan, 1999, p. 139), or extimacy, which is naturally mimetic. The process of the mirror stage is not isolated to the individual, but, as Johnston outlines it in his article, is a process which depends on the influence of big Other(s). Johnston provides the following

description for this important process:

Insofar as the ego itself, as what becomes intimate ‘me-ness,’ is born by crystallizing around a core kernel of external Other-subjects’ fantasy-formations, it could be said to be an instance of extimacy in Lacan’s precise sense of this neologism. Put differently, at the very nucleus of the recognized ‘me’ resides a misrecognized (*a la* Lacanian *méconnaissance*) ‘not-me,’ something ‘in me more than myself’ (Johnston, 2013, p. 256)

Thus, our own fantasies and desires are never truly our own because the formation of what makes me who I am is built around a kernel of extimacy. So, when Lacan states in *Seminar X: Anxiety* “that women’s masochism is a male fantasy,” (2017, p. 190) this is what he means. He is referring to the conceptualization of a masochistic woman, which becomes the kernel for the fantasy of masochism for the subject.

Lacan directly links the concept that “man’s desire is the desire of the Other” to the gaze in “What is a Picture?” when he states: “I would say that it is a question of a sort of desire *on the part of* the Other, at the end of which is the *showing (le donner-à-voir)*” (1981, p. 115). The particular word *showing* that Lacan uses here indicates to us that the gaze is not merely a process of being seen, but requires a conscious showing on the part of the subject who is being seen, and literally translates from the original French *le donner-à-voir* as giving-to-see-it. Lacan goes on to pose the question, “How could this *showing* satisfy something, if there is not some appetite of the eye on the part of the person looking?” (1981, p. 115), and he feels that this reveals the truth about the eye: that it is a voracious and evil eye (1981, p. 115). What is not

mentioned here is what this showing reveals about the one who is performing the ‘giving-to-see-it’. This ‘giving-to-see-it’ represents an unstated agreement between the one who sees and the one who shows, not unlike the masochistic contract, which reveals that this giving not only satisfies the appetite of the eye of the viewer, but also satisfies some desire on the part of the one who gives. For Freud, this ‘giving-to-see-it’ is another form of the perversion of looking because it supplants, or overtakes the importance, of the normal sexual aim. Freud provides three cases in which looking becomes perversion: when looking is “restricted exclusively to the genitals,” when it is connected to disgust, or when it supplants the importance of the normal sexual aim (1924, p. 23). However, when this ‘giving-to-see-it’ is incorporated into the masochistic fantasy, and if Freud’s classification of what is considered a perversion is strictly followed, then the presentation of the masochistic individual in a submissive or humiliating position as “visual impression” is simply “the most frequent pathway along which libidinal excitation is aroused” (Freud, 1924, p. 22), and as long as the act of looking is only preparatory to the normal sexual aim, this visual arousal can be considered a way to raise the libido to a “higher artistic aim” (Freud, 1924, p. 23). As I will later discuss in regards to masochism, the theatrical act of looking and showing is usually a step in the script of masochism which does not completely take the place of touching or the normal sexual aim, but instead a passive, masochistic form of looking can be considered an “artistic and theatrical display” (Bronfen, 1996, p. 60) by Freud.

In “I Hear You With My Eyes” Žižek expands further on Lacan’s ‘evil eye’ concept and categorizes the voice and the gaze as *objet a* which align with life and death. However, simply connecting these two perversions as both belonging on the passive side of

the erotic register does not go far enough. Masochism itself is inherently reliant on the gaze as an essential part of the masochistic theatre which allows it to function as a fantasy. The intrinsic nature of the gaze in relation to masochism is revealed by going back to Freud’s initial discussion of sadism and masochism, where he states that rather than overemphasizing the element of pain associated with these practices it is “the pleasure in any form of humiliation or subjection” (Freud, 1924, p. 23) that should be our focus. By tracing the etymology of ‘subjection’ to the Latin *subiectiōn*, which means the “action of placing something before one’s mental vision” (OED), the important link between these two perversions becomes clear. Lacan further draws out this connection between ‘giving-to-see-it’ and masochism in *Seminar X: Anxiety* where he notes the distinction between voyeurism/exhibitionists and the act of what he refers to as “*letting something be seen*” (Lacan, 2016, p. 191) in masochism. This means more than the specular image being revealed in a process of ‘giving-to-see-it’ because it reveals something about the subject that is normally concealed. Most interestingly, Lacan believes that this revelation of “*letting something be seen*” is anxiety-provoking for both men and women, but for woman the masquerade of femininity is uncovered to show “*what there is*” (Lacan, 2016, p. 191) and for man this revelation of desire only allows “*what there is not*” (Lacan, 2016, p. 191) to be uncovered, and we can understand this to be his own anxiety.

Where are the Women?

Turning from Freud and Lacan to Deleuze it becomes obvious that in most discussions on masochism the women have been relegated to a lesser position or altogether forgotten. However, in Deleuze’s

Coldness and Cruelty (1967) he pays particular attention to the role of women in the writing of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch; Deleuze analyses the different fantasy women that appear in Masoch's works, but this still remains problematic for my discussion because the woman is always described in relation to man's desire. These three women exist in a masochistic relationship with the men, but as female tops they are not the masochistic directors, nor are they sadists able to derive pleasure from the situation, because the male bottoms disregard woman's pleasure. However, Deleuze classifies the women as masochistic based on them existing as "a pure element of masochism" (Deleuze, 1967, p. 42), and clarifies that "it is a mistake to think that she is sadistic or even pretending to be so" (Deleuze, 1967, p. 42). Two extreme versions of woman are identified as the Grecian woman and the sadistic woman. The first type, the Grecian woman, is the hetaera or Aphrodite, and "is dedicated to love and beauty; she lives for the moment" (Deleuze, 1967, p. 47). Deleuze goes on to describe her as believing "in the independence of women and in the fleeting nature of love; for her the sexes are equal" (1967, p. 47). Aphrodite is the "female principal" (Deleuze, 1967, p. 47) and the moment of equality is the moment in which women gain dominance over man because "man trembles as soon as woman becomes his equal" (Deleuze, 1967, p. 48). This version of woman wants to cause chaos and destroy patriarchal systems of control, including marriage, morality, the Church and the State because they are "inventions of man" (Deleuze, 1967, p. 48). The opposite extreme version of woman in Masoch's writing is the sadistic woman. As a sadist "She enjoys hurting and torturing others, but it is significant that her actions are prompted by a man or otherwise performed in concert with a man, whose victim she is always liable to become" (Deleuze, 1967, p. 48). Deleuze

proposes that these two versions of woman are not the ideal type for Masoch because "At one extreme masochism has yet to come into operation, and at the other it has already lost its *raison d'être*" (1967, p. 50). The true fantasy woman instead falls somewhere in the middle of these extremes, but is almost impossible to pinpoint. This fantasy woman does not actually exist anywhere within Masoch's writings, and Deleuze can only describe her by piecing together various descriptions from Masoch's work; she is "cold—maternal—severe, icy—sentimental—cruel" (1967, p. 51). This coldness applies not only to the woman in the masochistic relationship, but also the sadistic heroes found in sadomasochistic literature. For Sade's characters this is expressed as apathy which is directed against all feelings. Masoch differs here from Sade in that the coldness connected with the fantasy woman is not a "negation of feeling, but rather the disavowal of sensuality" (Deleuze, 1967, p. 52). For Masoch, this cruel and sentimental woman is able to "compel man to thought and properly constitute the masochistic ideal" (Deleuze, 1967, p. 54). However, as I pointed out earlier, this cold-hearted woman is not the woman I seek; she does not enjoy her own subjection and humiliation, and she instead serves as the woman-as-fantasy who exists only to torture the masochistic man.

The true Masochian woman is only implied near the end of Masoch's literary case study of masochism, *Venus in Furs*; here, Wanda ends her relationship with Severin in order to have a master of her own. When she ends her relationship with Severin she says, "Not another slave, I have had enough of them: a master. Women need to have a master to worship" (Masoch, 1967, p. 258). Although few details are provided about Wanda's new relationship with the Greek, the moral of the tale is provided by Severin when he says, "I was a fool... If only I had whipped her

instead!" (Masoch, 1967, p. 271). However, this would mean that instead of Severin transforming into 'the hammer' he would have to take on the fantasy role that the masochistic woman plays in the work of Masoch. For if he became the sadistic torturer in order to whip Wanda their relationship would have been incompatible.

In Angela Carter's *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography* (1979) she examines the work of Sade as another literary case study, and specifically focuses on the two sisters Juliette and Justine. In Juliette she finds the true Sadeian woman, who is also very similar to the extreme sadistic woman that Deleuze finds in the work of Masoch. Juliette's ability to become a Sadeian woman is based on two things: her ability to be the "perfect whore" (Carter, 1979, p. 92) and her rejection of femininity. Juliette is motivated by financial profit and libidinal gratification, and these two things work together to ensure that she does not have to submit to any law. Through the use of her sexuality as power, "Juliette transforms herself from pawn to queen in a single move and henceforward goes wherever she pleases on the chess board. Nevertheless, there remains the question of the presence of the king, who remains the lord of the game." (Carter, 1979, p. 91). Juliette lives in a patriarchal world which is "governed by god, the king and the law" (Carter, 1979, p. 92), which Carter describes as "the trifold masculine symbols of authority" (1979, p. 92). Juliette is aware of how to survive in this world, and does so through her rational sexuality, but, like the Oedipal mother Deleuze describes, she is always at risk of becoming the victim, even as she engages in sadistic torture.

In Rebecca Comay's "Adorno avec Sade..." she discusses the proximity between Adorno and Horkheimer and Lacan's work on Sade. She points out that, for Adorno, there exists:

nothing fascinating, nothing shocking, nothing disgusting, nothing virulent... but merely the tedious administration of routine piled upon routine, bleached out, neutralized, antiseptic: sodomy, incest, mutilation, torture, coprophagy, whatever, everything reduced to business as usual, Juliette as gym coach, the bedroom as boardroom, boardroom as boredom, boredom as the congealment of the always-the-same. (Comay, 2006, p. 8)

This corresponds to the rituals of the libertines, which Carter compares to the Catholic Church, and which Juliette is educated in to become the Sadeian woman. The banality which Comay associates with Sade's smut also applies to Juliette's libertine education, which is learned by rote, much the way schoolchildren endure learning multiplication tables. For Juliette to become a perfect whore, and eventually place herself "firmly in the camp of the masters" (Carter, 1979, p. 98), requires the ability to master the education she receives from several older women figures. Carter traces this education from the convent, where she learns from the abbess Delbène "the elements of sexual expertise, the relativity of ethics, militant feminism and doctrinaire atheism" (Carter, 1979, p. 93), to the brothel, where she learns to steal, lie, and play a part in a male fantasy. In the brothel her "virginity is sold successively to fifty buyers" (Carter, 1979, p. 96) and her apprenticeship is completed when she sells her anus to an archbishop. Much like the rote recitation of numbers, Juliette's virginity must be repeatedly sold in this banal way for her to master her role as whore.

The ability of Juliette to learn these various sexual acts is an example of Freud's theory of polymorphous perversity which he outlines in *Three Essays*. His example of the polymorphously perverse subject is the 'uncultivated woman' who learns to be poly-

morphous through the repetition of different sex acts with various partners. Freud provides this description of the woman:

Under ordinary conditions she may remain normal sexually, but if she is led on by a clever seducer she will find every sort of perversion to her taste, and will retain them as part of her own sexual activities. Prostitutes exploit the same polymorphous, that is, infantile, disposition for the purposes of their profession...it becomes impossible not to recognize that this same disposition to perversions of every kind is a general and fundamental human characteristic. (1924, p. 57)

In this description of the process for developing the polymorphously perverse prostitute it is easy to locate Juliette's own education. She, however, does not stop at becoming polymorphously perverse in order to satisfy her customers, but instead seeks to become "a Nietzschean superwoman, which is to say, a woman who has transcended her gender but not the contradictions inherent in it" (Carter, 1979, p. 98). The contradiction inherent in being a Sadeian woman is just as important for the Masochian woman; woman is regarded as the 'weaker sex,' and so even as a sadistic master, Juliette is always at risk of becoming the victim of the libertine men. For the Masochian woman, the same belief that woman is weaker, and that masochism itself has something feminine inherent to it, means that a woman who enjoys being the masochistic bottom is regarded as enjoying her own patriarchal oppression. In theorizing this woman though, it becomes clear that she wields as much power as the Sadeian woman, and like Juliette, learns to play a part in her own masochistic fantasy by "[playing] with mimesis" (Irigaray, 1985, p. 76). Therefore,

as Juliette adopts the libertine theatre of cruelty, where she is willing to play any part, and her moral purity, and that of mankind, are found in her own infinitely polymorphously perverse nature, the Masochian woman adopts her own masochistic theatre, where she dictates the roles to be played for herself and those who enter her theatre.

In their discussion of sadism and masochism both Deleuze and Lacan destroy the illusion of a dichotomy between the two perversions. Deleuze states that "The concurrence of sadism and masochism is fundamentally one of analogy only; their processes and their formations are entirely different; their common organ, their 'eye,' squints and should therefore make us suspicious" (Deleuze, 1967, p. 46). As I have already discussed, Deleuze sees all the women in Masoch's works as masochistic in nature, because each woman "incarnates instead the element of 'inflicting pain' in an exclusively masochistic situation" (1967, p. 42), and therefore the men have no need, or desire, for the sadistic subject to enter into a relationship with them. This understanding is reiterated in Žižek's article "Are We Allowed To Enjoy Daphnée du Maurier?" where he emphasizes that sadism involves domination, and masochism involves liberation. The incompatibility of these two perversions is made clear through Žižek's recounting of Deleuze's interpretation of Masoch: "far from bringing any satisfaction to the sadistic witness, the masochist's self-torture frustrates the sadist, depriving him of his power over the masochist" (Žižek, 2004, n.p.).

Betwixt Sadism and Masochism

While Deleuze presents the idea that the sadist and the masochist are enacting different and separate dramas which involve them in completely different interactions of the

pleasure-pain complex (1967, p. 45), and are therefore incompatible as a pair of subjects, Lacan's discussion of the subject provides detailed differences which illustrate how and why sadism and masochism are incompatible. In *Anxiety* Lacan outlines the fact that these two perversions are "not a reversible couple" (2017, p. 177); He details the difference between them, stating:

We find ourselves, betwixt sadism and masochism, in the presence of what presents itself as an alienation. That which, at the second level, is veiled and concealed in each of these two subjects appears in the other party at the level of what is targeted. There is an occultation of anxiety in the first case, of the *object a* in the other. This is not, however, a process in reverse, a switch-around. (Lacan, 2017, p. 177)

It is the differing aims of sadism and masochism which make the subject as sadist and the subject as masochist completely incompatible. The sadist seeks *objet a* in his victim and, as Žižek makes clear, when he does not receive what he seeks from the masochist he is unsatisfied. The sadist wants to invoke shame in the victim through the gaze, but in masochism "the victim no longer experiences shame, it openly displays its jouissance" (Žižek, 2016, p.488). The masochist, on the other hand, is thought to seek the Other's jouissance, but what this mistaken belief conceals is the true aim of the masochist: the Other's anxiety. Thus, even if the same exercise is performed in sadism and masochism, the desire of these two figures is completely different.

The first point which I will bring up is the question of the value of masochism. Lacan answers this by saying, "When desire and the law find themselves together again, what the

masochist means to show—and I'll add, on his little stage, because this dimension should never be lost sight of—is that the desire of the Other lays down the law." (Lacan, 2017, p. 106). This statement echoes several of the concepts already covered in this paper—the dimension of looking and the importance of the desire of the Other—and these concepts will also prove to be crucially important for the Masochian woman. Lacan goes on to discuss masochism and he establishes that the aim of the masochist is the Other's anxiety, which has been established as a different aim from the sadist, who seeks the object *a* in the other.

In principle, the concept of women's masochism "is a male fantasy," or the fantasy of the big Other, and which Lacan goes on to explain, "In this fantasy, it is by proxy and in relation to the masochistic structure that is imagined in woman that man sustains his jouissance through something that is his own anxiety. That is what the object covers over. In men, the object is the condition of desire." (Lacan, 2017, p. 190). In contrast, "For women, the desire of the Other is the means by which her jouissance will have an object that is, as it were, suitable." (Lacan, 2017, p. 191). Thus, for masochism to exist in women, even if it is ironic, Lacan believes that the fantasy imagined by the Other, or the male fantasy, is what is enacted. This leads to the question of what role anxiety plays in the male fantasy. As I have already stated, Lacan believes the masochist's aim is the anxiety of the Other. If woman is enacting a male fantasy, which causes anxiety in the face of the Other's desire, and man sustains his jouissance through his own anxiety, what is this anxiety? I believe Deleuze provides the answer to this question in his own case study of the three women figures in Masoch's work. It is the figure of the Grecian woman, who "believes in the independence of women and in the fleeting nature of love; for her the

sexes are equal” (Deleuze 47), that is the cause of anxiety for man. For Aphrodite equality between men and women is the “crucial moment at which she gains dominance over man, for ‘man trembles as soon as woman becomes his equal’” (47-48).

This raises the problem of how man can reject the equality or dominance of woman by enacting a masochistic fantasy. For the male masochist, he “stages his own servitude” (Žižek, 1994, p. 92), and in doing so the man is the one “who actually pulls the strings and dictates the activity of the woman [*dominatix*]” (Žižek, 1994, p.92). Thus, the man is always the one in control, and the constant disavowal of real violence allows him to confront the anxiety brought on by the Other by acting it out in the masochistic theatre. In Žižek’s *The Metastases of Enjoyment: On Women and Causality* (1994) he compares masochism with the concept of courtly love; he cites Deleuze’s discussion of masochism to prove the important point that sadism and masochism follow opposite modes of negation (violent domination vs disavowal and controlled violence). In addition to these opposite modes of negation, sadism and masochism also have structural differences in how they are enacted by the analysand: institution and contract. As Žižek shows, sadism uses the “institutional power” to torment “its victim and taking pleasure in the victim’s helpless resistance” (91). This, however, is exactly what the male masochist does not want, for, if he is tortured by a sadist, he will be horrified at being “reduced in the eyes of the Other to *objet a*” (Žižek, 1994, p. 93). Žižek proposes that in this case the masochist responds with “irrational violence aimed at the other” (Žižek, 1994, p. 93). This hystericization is precisely what happens to the masochist Severin in *Venus in Furs*. When the Greek whips him, rather than Wanda, he is horrified at being reduced to *objet a* and feels he is “dying of

shame and despair” (Masoch, 1991, p. 268). In reaction it is only natural that he responds with irrational violence when he becomes ‘the hammer’. Contrary to this institutional violence of sadism, masochism is “made to the measure of the victim: it is the victim...who initiates a contract with the Master (woman), authorizing her to humiliate him in any way she considers appropriate” (Žižek, 1994, p. 91). The keys to masochism are that the masochist enacts the power of the contract, so he is the one who is really in control, and that the threat of actual violence is always interrupted. Real violence is suspended and the entire masochistic theatre, as its name suggests, is an act or feigning of violence.

From Subordination to Affirmation

How does the masochistic theatre then allow woman to face her own anxiety, which, as Lacan puts it, “is only anxiety faced with the desire of the Other” (Lacan, 2017, p. 191)? If women’s masochism is theoretically a male fantasy, consisting of the man dominating the woman, by enacting it in the masochistic theatre the woman is traversing the fantasy, and confronting the anxiety of the Other at the same time. As established, masochism is enacted and the rules set out contractually by the ‘victim’. For woman, this means she is able to escape the institutional and sadistic violence, which permeates society, and instead can enact the “endless repeating of an interrupted gesture” (Žižek, 1994, pp. 92). The full meaning of women’s masochism becomes clear in Žižek’s “Are We Allowed to Enjoy Daphnée du Maurier?” when he proposes a possible subversion of the fantasy of woman by woman:

femininity is from the very beginning split between Eve and Lilith, between

‘ordinary’ hysterical feminine subject and the fantasmatic spectre of Woman: when a man is having sex with a ‘real’ woman, he is using her as a masturbatory prop to support his fantasizing about the non-existent Woman... And in Rebecca, her most famous novel, du Maurier adds another twist to the Lilith myth: the fantasy of Woman is (re)appropriated by a woman—what if Lilith is not so much a male fantasy as the fantasy of a woman, the model of her fantasmatic competitor? (Žižek, 2004, n.p.)

Thus, the role playing that takes place in the masochistic theatre allows woman to reappropriate the fantasy of a woman for her own masochistic desire. The multifaceted identity of woman Eve/Lilith follows the Lacanian definition of the woman who ‘does not exist,’ and she cannot be defined by one single identity because she has always already escaped signification.

This method of appropriation can be compared to Irigaray’s feminist praxis of mimicry and “[assuming] the feminine role deliberately” (Irigaray, 1974, p. 76). In sado-masochism if the masochist is, to return to Freud, the one who is placed “in a characteristically female situation” (Freud, 1924, p. 277), then by assuming the role of the feminine masochist for a woman is to reappropriate the role of the feminine, and therefore “convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it” (Irigaray, 1974, p. 76). Žižek sets the groundwork for how this can be accomplished through his explanation of masochism through the libidinal economy of courtly love. The courtly Lady is described as a “cold, distanced, inhuman partner” (Žižek, 1994, p. 89), much like Masoch’s masochistic women, and she assumes the role of the master in the relationship by imposing on the knight all sorts of “senseless, outrageous,

impossible, arbitrary, capricious ordeals” (Žižek, 1994, p. 90). However, as an object of men’s desire, the courtly Lady provides a fantasy-structure through which woman “refers to herself with regard to her (potential) relationship to man” (Žižek, 1994, p. 108). The reaction of (some forms of) feminism to this structure is one of panic because it cannot accept any form of ‘patriarchal domination’ and this becomes a problem because it undermines “the fantasy-support of their own feminine identity” (Žižek, 1994, p. 108). It is only in the perverse (masochistic) contract, which is established between equal subjects, that Žižek shows us paradoxically “serves to establish a relationship of domination” (1994, p. 109) via the balanced contract. Žižek’s interpretation of masochism through courtly love reveals that in the masochistic relationship woman always holds some form of power over the man. When the woman is playing the dominatrix she assumes the traditional role of the Lady and makes ridiculous demands of the man as knight. Conversely, when she plays the subordinate role, what I have been referring to as the Masochian woman, she still plays the role of the Lady because she sets the terms of the contract and still makes demands of the man. When woman takes on this subservient role, according to Lacan, she is enacting the masquerade, a reference to Joan Riviere’s “Womanliness as Masquerade” (1929), in which she puts on the act of being feminine in a defensive mode.

To take this defensive mode of the masquerade one step further is to attempt to use the act of femininity in order to “[jam] the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its pretension to the production of a truth and of a meaning that are excessively univocal” (Irigaray, 1974, p. 78). Following Lacan’s assertion that in masochism “the desire of the Other lays down the law” (Lacan, 2017, p. 106), the act of intentionally taking on a

masochistic position for woman to achieve pleasure is a conscious act which “can be found only at the price of *crossing back through the mirror that subtends all speculation*. For this pleasure is not simply situated in a process of reflection or mimesis, nor on one side of this process or the other” (Irigaray, 1974, p. 77). The law, or language, has traditionally been denied to women through their “social inferiority” (Irigaray, 1974, p. 85), but through the process of assuming the role of the subordinate in the masochistic situation, woman is able to define the terms of the contract and rewrite the law, and language, in her favour. For Irigaray, this type of “language work” takes on the function of casting phallogentrism “loose from its moorings in order to return the masculine to its own language, leaving open the possibility of a different language” (1974, p. 80). Thus, the masochistic contract, which is made possible by the equality of the subjects, fulfills the fear of woman’s dominance over man; it is written in the language of the Masochian woman and has the ability to subvert the phallogentric language that dominates the rest of the world.

One of the key theoretical points for coming to understand the Masochian woman is that of sexual difference. Following Lacan’s starting point “The Woman does not exist, because there is no universal meaning to what it is to be a woman, for a woman to understand who she is a mimetic process occurs which she learns from those around her. In Darian Leader’s *Why do Women Write More Letters Than They Post?* (1996), he presents several hypothetical situations in which women place themselves in the role of a man in order to understand the way in which men relate to other subjects, and particularly women, in the case of heterosexual desire. Notably, Leader says that women construct love triangles because “a triangle is a necessary condition for the study of someone else’s desire” (Leader, 1996, p. 5). This type of triangulation can be

tied directly back to the masochistic theatre and the audience which is implied to be viewing the masochistic action take place. Thus, the gaze, and the mimetic response which follows, is a crucial part of sexual difference for woman. Another factor which must be taken into consideration when discussing sexual difference is feminine jouissance. Grounded in the fact that woman is not whole, woman has what Lacan calls “a supplementary jouissance compared to what the phallic function designates by way of jouissance” (Lacan, 1999, p. 73). This feminine jouissance is described by Lacan as being what “one experiences and yet knows nothing about” (1999, p. 77). One of the primary examples Lacan gives to show that this extra (*en plus*) jouissance exists, but cannot be put into language, is the statue “The Ecstasy of St. Teresa” (1999, p. 76). The challenge to describe feminine jouissance put forth by Lacan is answered by Irigaray in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974). Here she takes the same figure of a woman, Saint Teresa of Avila, and instead of silencing her by only considering her as a statue, she looks to her writings to find the description of this extra jouissance. Irigaray makes direct reference to Saint Teresa when she writes, “*How strange is the economy of this specula(riza)tion of woman, who in her mirror seems ever to refer back to a transcendence. Who moves away (for) who comes near, who groans to be separated from the one who holds her closest in his embrace*” (Irigaray, 1974, p. 201). The footnote, quoting from Saint Teresa’s vision of the Flaming Heart, refers to pain which “was so great that it made me moan, and yet so surpassing was the sweetness of this excessive pain that I could not wish to be rid of it” (Irigaray, 1974, p. 201). This experience of feminine jouissance, which in statue form Lacan insists that it cannot be denied Saint Teresa is ‘coming,’ is a description of an experience which is undeniably masochistic. Irigaray’s interpreta-

tion of this vision is that it is an experience of transcendence, unmistakably masochistic, and is a part of the specularization of woman. This connection back to the mimetic function of the mirror stage and the gaze is described by Irigaray as “the work of death” (1974, p. 54).

In thinking through the ironic masochism of women, it becomes clear that, in materialist terms, it is a contradictory concept, and it is in contradictions where the truth is found.² Thus, by theorizing the seemingly ironic Masochian Woman, it becomes clear that within the masochistic contract submission requires equality between men and women to come first. Therefore, it becomes apparent that thinking through each contradiction, in turn, leads us to another contradiction. Following this logic, when women enact masochism, its success depends on equality between man and woman, but the outcome is the dominance of the masochistic woman.

2 From Hegel’s thesis “*Contradictio est regula veri, non-contradictio falsi,*” or “Contradiction is the rule of the true, non-contradiction of the false” (Dolar, p. 87).

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EXPERIENCE BEYOND THE IMAGINARY:

Reading Freud's
"Elisabeth von R."

with Lacan's
"The Mirror Stage"

JEFFREY McCURRY

Experience Beyond the Imaginary: Reading Freud's "Elisabeth von R." with Lacan's "The Mirror Stage"

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While many read Lacan as a structuralist who sought to overthrow the authority of first-person conscious experience, his work also has resonances and affinities with a broadly phenomenological approach to psychoanalysis. This connection comes into focus when we bring Lacan's concept of the imaginary stage into dialogue with Freud's early work on hysteria. Lacan implied that the imaginary stage, while necessary for human development, nevertheless frustrates a significant dimension of being human, viz. the human being's internally conflictual and contradictory experience that calls into question the very idea of a unified self or subject. When we read the early Freud's work, we find that he is attempting to liberate the hysteric's self-experience from just this kind of imaginary illusion of unified selfhood that would restrict and even denies the vicissitudes of subjective thinking, feeling, and desiring.

"The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" might be the most famous paper Jacques Lacan ever wrote.¹ My paper explores one—but only one—way of taking up the insights of this rich text in order to show an interesting convergence of theme with Freud's early case study on the hysteria of Elisabeth von R. The convergence concerns, in particular, the question of self-experience, indeed the experience of being a self at all.

In his famous and brief paper Lacan (1949/2006) speaks of "the I function in the experience psychoanalysis provides us of it" (p. 75, original emphasis). Psychoanalysis is an experience that gives a new experience of selfhood. That said, what does psychoanalytic experience reveal about the first-person self? It reveals that the I is an "identification" with an image of oneself first attained during the mirror stage, but continuing throughout life

(p. 76). For Lacan, this identification happens early. The infant's self-experience, if we can even speak of it, begins in a maelstrom of chaos, multiplicity, and discontinuity of his or her embodied and rudimentary thoughts, feelings, and wishes. In the midst of this storm of felt experience, the infant discovers, in theory by seeing his or her image in a mirror, that he is one kind of entity—and not many. He or she "assumes an image" (p. 76) of a unified self that the mirror reflects to him or her.

Yet, just because original spontaneous experience is multiple and discontinuous, this mirror-image of the self that purports to say that the self is one, "situates the agency known as the ego, prior to its social determination, in a fictional direction" (p. 76). The fictional character of the ego, of the personal conscious sense of being one unified agent of thought, feeling, desire, and action, of one's very self as a seamless I, will always be in "discordance with [the person's] own reality" (p. 76) in its

¹ I am deeply indebted to my teacher and friend Bruce Fink for helping me to understand Lacan. He is not, of course, responsible for the content of this paper.

multiple, chaotic, discontinuous experience—a grammar of experience that is present not only in human infancy. Thus, the image creates in the beginning, and goes on creating throughout life, what Lacan calls an “alienating destination” (p. 76) for the subject. This image of oneself as a seamless I or self seduces the subject into positing the “organic inadequacy of his natural reality” (p. 77) and then fleeing it. This inadequate organic reality just is the experience of the “fragmented body” (p. 78) that the ego denies and represses when it creates the I and the self-image or self-concept we have of ourselves as an I, as one kind of entity. Hence, again, we have what Lacan calls “the alienating I function” (p. 79). He thus unmasks “the function of misrecognition that characterizes the ego”—a misrecognition that enforces “imaginary servitude” (p. 80), i.e. servitude to the imaginary, domination by and subordination of the discontinuous and multiple and chaotic moments of spontaneous thinking, feeling, and desiring, to the imagined unity and character of the self.

Lacan’s understanding of the imaginary, then, has to do with the issue of human self-image, self-understanding, in particular when that image or understanding posits the self as a unified, seamless, internally cohering entity. This concern with self-image or self-understanding converges interestingly with work by the early Freud, the Freud whose work Lacan so appreciated. Lacan’s notion of the imaginary, in this case, is a convergence with Freud, and Lacan is, here, a kind of Freudian. What do I mean?

In the case studies on hysteria, Freud (1895/2000) is significantly concerned with conscious experience. Indeed his work has a phenomenological dimension: he clarifies certain essences of psychological experience for his patients, i.e. how they qualitatively think, desire, and feel in their own first-person subjectivity. Nevertheless, Freud is not merely a phenomenologist: he goes further

than just reflection. For he believes that patients come to experience painful neurotic symptoms because they refuse certain of the moments of concrete, direct, immediate experiences he has phenomenologically noted. Neurotics resist and repress these moments of experience that prove too dangerous to their self-image and self-understanding—they are too sexual, too aggressive, too novel, too disruptive, too self-questioning. The paradox Freud points out, however, is that neurotic symptoms find a cure only if we acknowledge and embrace just these kinds of dangerous subjective experiences. Moreover, doing so means that we must embrace a kind of selfhood, or self-experience, that goes beyond any kind of unified self-image.

Freud’s diagnosis is that the pathogenesis of Elisabeth von R.’s symptom was her refusal of an immediate and spontaneous desire. She experienced an untoward desire that she then, in turn, almost immediately refused to allow to remain in her conscious experience: a sexual desire for her brother-in-law and an attendant gladness that her sister is dead so that her brother-in-law is available as an object of romantic attention. However, as his experience with neurotics was teaching him, Freud had begun to learn that we humans cannot unwish a wish, or unfeel a feeling, or unthink a thought—try as we might! When a conscious thought, feeling, or desire is so repugnant to us that we cannot allow ourselves to retain it in consciousness, our only option is to repress it. But we humans are also bad at repression—indeed we find it impossible—and so there is a return of the repressed in the form of an initially unintelligible symptom, one usually psychosomatic in the case of a hysteric neurotic like those Freud was treating in his Vienna.

But why is there in Elisabeth, as in all of us, the desire, the impulse, to repress a conscious moment of experience in the first place? We repress moments of thinking, feeling, and

wishing that are intolerable to self-image, to self-understanding. She and we fold the current of conscious experience violently against itself and repress it into the unconscious, from whence it returns painfully as a mysterious, physiologically inexplicable symptom.

Let me try to parse the situation out by engaging Freud’s own words. He tells us that Elisabeth is a young woman with feelings, desires, and thoughts of love: “Here, then, was the unhappy story of this proud girl with her longing for love” (Freud, 1895/2000p. 143). Yet there is also jealousy and envy, for Elisabeth feels “the contrast between her own loneliness and her sick sister’s married happiness,” a contrast that was “painful to her” and that gave her “a burning wish that she might be as happy as her sister” (p. 151). When her sister dies, though, Elisabeth immediately suffers from excruciating leg pains that prevent her from moving. She is not forthcoming about why she cannot walk. Indeed she is herself, initially, truly unaware of the cause. Hence the mystery: a young woman who wants to love sees her sister dead, a sister whom she envied for her enjoyment of the kind of love Elisabeth wanted, and now Elisabeth cannot walk. Elisabeth herself, we might say, has died to some degree too through becoming immobile and corpse-like.

Freud wants to solve the mystery. To do so, he enforces the rule of free association on Elisabeth, a rule according to which “she was under an obligation to remain completely objective and say what had come into her head, whether it was appropriate or not. Finally, I declared that I knew very well that something had occurred to her and that she was concealing it from me; but she would never be free of her pains so long as she concealed anything” (p. 154). Freud speculates that she had experienced some wish, feeling, or idea that she had then repressed and somaticized in the form of leg pains. In our terms, she had suffered—

in the sense of undergone and undergone painfully—an experience that she did not want to experience. She had an experience that she tried to refuse. This experience was so intolerable that she arrested her experiential current to eject the proleptic experience out into the unconscious, from whence it returned as the psychosomatic symptom. But what was the experience exactly?

The upfront experience was her wish to possess erotically and romantically her brother-in-law, who was free now that Elisabeth’s sister was dead. This theory is not only Freud’s speculation: through free-associative remembering, Elisabeth finally admits it, although not comfortably or willingly. She remembers more or less consciously that she once took a walk with her brother-in-law, in which “She found herself in complete agreement with everything he said, and a desire to have a husband like him became very strong in her” (p. 155). But the traumatic experience comes later as she sees her sister’s dead body. When she comes into the bedroom where her sister’s body was laid out, she “stood before the bed and looked at her sister as she lay there dead. At that very moment of dreadful certainty that her beloved sister was dead . . . at that very moment another thought had shot through Elisabeth’s mind, and now forced itself irresistibly upon her once more, like a flash of lightning in the dark: ‘Now he is free again and I can be his wife’” (p. 156). She has an ever so brief moment of wishing—lust and love—toward her brother-in-law, which is so horrible to her that she immediately rejects it and ejects it—so she thinks—from the stream of her experienced consciousness. Therefore, there is an experience, an erotic wish, which Elisabeth seems unable to directly experience because it conflicts with her image of herself and her understanding about what kind of person she is and should be.

But what if, just here, it is not this wish that is what is most pathogenic for Elisabeth?

What if it is her self-image, her self-understanding, the sense of herself that is dear to her that is really the problem? We might think that Elisabeth's strong stake in sustaining her image of herself is the problem, because without this self-image her desire for her brother-in-law might have been tolerable to her. Elisabeth sees herself as a moral person, as someone who would never think of becoming romantically involved with her just dead sister's husband. As Freud writes, "The girl felt towards her brother-in-law a tenderness whose acceptance into consciousness was resisted by her whole moral being. She succeeded in sparing herself the painful conviction that she loved her sister's husband by inducing physical pains in herself instead . . . her pains had come on, thanks to successful conversion" (p. 157). In order to retain her moral—or moralistic—self-image she has to eliminate from consciousness her libidinal desire to possess her sister's widower when her sister's body is not even cold. In psychodynamic terms, two forces are motivating her—the wish for her brother-in-law and the wish to be the kind of person who would never wish for her brother-in-law—and she is caught in the middle with only a symptomatic road to go down to solve the conflict.

Nevertheless, it bears mentioning here that the wish itself is not the primary threat; nor, perhaps, is the danger to her self-image. The most profound threat Elisabeth fears may be her own multiplicity and discontinuity of experience. She cannot tolerate her untoward desire(s) because to tolerate them would mean that she is 'the kind of person' who has such desires. Moreover, if she is that kind of person, then she is only that kind of person. That is, if she is one and only one person with one and only one trajectory of wishing, feeling, and thinking that has to operate in a coherent, continuous way, then she is, in fantasy at least, a horrible person, so horrible that she cannot admit it to herself.

At this point a full discussion of symptom-formation would need to happen, and a detailed investigation of the process of therapy. But I want to focus on a particular dimension of the cure. For Elisabeth is, at one level, making what we might call an ethical choice, a choice to refuse to experience her experience.

For, eventually, a breakthrough or healing came: "the girl's wish, of which she was now conscious" (p. 159). Her wish, once conscious, then repressed and unconscious, is now felt as a wish among wishes, an experience among experiences, along and within the fullness of her flow of consciousness, where experiences can come and go, rise and fall away, as they will when left unhindered in their vicissitudes. The cure happens through a paradox: while "we are not responsible for our feelings," (p. 157) we are responsible for feeling our feelings, wishing our wishes, experiencing our experiences, however unpalatable to the self-images we cherish.

Here is Freud's ethics of life, his ethics of experience: we often need to experience our experience even when it seems safer not to do so. Yet the ethics of directly experiencing experience is profoundly difficult. We can listen to Freud as he describes the process of Elisabeth von R.'s coming home to her desire: "the recovery of this repressed idea had a shattering effect on the poor girl. She cried aloud when I put the situation drily before her with the words: 'So for a long time you had been in love with your brother-in-law'. She complained at this moment of the most frightful pains, and made one last desperate effort to reject the explanation: it was not true, I had talked her into it, it could not be true, she was incapable of such wickedness, she could never forgive herself for it" (p. 157). While the pains did seem to dissolve, a different pain would never dissolve: the pain of coming to know oneself as a person who has untoward (but still very human) desires alongside so-called moral desires. Here is where the pain

of the symptomatic leg ache has to be transformed into the more direct pain of what we might call being human. This process is necessary if we are to attain Freud's idea of psychic health—experiencing the full texture of our experience—but it can be hellish because one's—often moral—self-image is called into question. Elisabeth had to accept that she was the 'kind of person' who desired erotically and romantically her brother-in-law when her sister had just died.

As a human being, she had to recognize that her phenomenological stream involved profound sexuality and aggression. While Freud would focus on aggression later in his work, it is not too much to say that we see here a sexual and aggressive victory on Elisabeth's part. Her sister is gone, and Elisabeth is glad, for now her brother-in-law can become her husband. For a proper, moral, even moralistic person like Elisabeth, coming to terms with accepting this phenomenology of her experience means coming to terms with phenomenological essences, such as sex and aggression, which may not be pretty. Few people want to think of themselves as feeling jealousy, envy, or death wishes, especially toward those they love. Nevertheless, Freud says that these are precisely the wishes and feelings we feel and repress into the unconscious. Moreover, he insists, we have to feel them directly and fully if we are to keep up our psychological health. The first dimension of sustaining our psychic health is continuing our participation in the immediacy and continuity of our spontaneous stream of experience, and we can only do so if we are willing to embrace the concrete content of that stream of experience directly.

Furthermore, beyond coming to terms with the facts of what she thinks shameful, sexuality and aggression, she has to come to terms with another fact. For she has been making an even more pathogenic choice to be one and only one 'kind of person'. For Elisabeth von R., her self-image, her self-

understanding, as a particular kind of unified person is itself the problem. Neurotics need, in certain ways at least, to become less in touch with the imaginary illusion of their self-unity. Thus Elisabeth's desire for her brother-in-law is not her only fantasy. Her self-image as unified and coherent, as one and only one kind of person, is also a fantasy. It is this fantasy that fundamentally and primarily punishes her, that is the engine of her resistance to her sexual and aggressive experience, and that is the cause of her symptomatic pain.

Thus while Freud emphasizes difficult, dangerous dimensions of the human being's lived experience of consciousness's vicissitudes, such as aggression and sex, the most dangerous essence of experience may be the conflictual, fragmentary totality of the experiential flow itself—or, perhaps better put, flows themselves. Freud's aim, that is, was not only to lead us to experience or embrace our sexual or aggressive feelings, as if that was the end of it. His broader mission was to restore us humans to an existence in which we could more capaciously embrace and sustain the whole gamut of our experience—to feel all our many feelings, to wish all our many wishes, to think all our many thoughts, good, bad, and neutral simply because they happen and are ours. That is, Freud invited Elisabeth to return to the always already present, but often resisted, stream of her multiple, chaotic, self-contradictory, and discontinuous experience that defines human life. This picture of human being stands in contrast to any sense—in Lacan's terms any fiction—she has had of herself as one unified, coherent, seamless kind of person.

Freud's treatment of Elisabeth was an attempt to liberate her from imaginary illusions of unified selfhood that constrict the often anarchic vicissitudes of her real concrete flows of experience. Freud tries to liberate her from a problematic, pathogenic imaginary 'capture' that traps her so she can acknowledge and embrace, in some sense, all her experiences—

all of her thoughts, feelings, and wishes—for the first time. She has always experienced multiply and chaotically and discontinuously, but only indirectly. The cure for Elizabeth is to learn to live beyond a unified but false self-image that has forced to deny and frustrate her multifarious, differentiated, disconnected feelings and desires so that she can live out her conscious experience directly for the first time instead of repressing dimensions of it into the unconscious. She embraces experience's fundamental logic(s) at an epistemic and existential level. Conscious experience is discontinuous, incoherent (it does not cohere), and conflictual. Freud brings Elizabeth to a place where her subjective experience (beyond an imaginary self, so to speak) is consciously conflictual and differentiated in its many flows, all of which are irreconcilable into only one self-image of 'the kind of person' she is. For she is many and different.

Returning to Lacan, I hope the reader has sensed the convergence between Lacan and Freud this paper has tried to make visible. Lacan shows how a baby must pass from an original, fragmentary real into the imaginary in order to begin to be a subject at all, but he also hints that this imaginary stage alienates us from dimensions of being human that fundamentally define our original and ongoing body-experience. For Lacan, we have to learn to live within and after the mirror-stage, to be sure. However, his work also raises the question whether the imaginary and so-called unified self—which would be a self without experiential conflict, difference, contradiction, and discontinuity of thoughts, feelings, and wishes—that is dependent upon the mirror-stage or mirror-phase in turn presents its own problems to human thriving. Does imaginary capture, because it is fictional and alienating to embodied experience, also diminish us psychically?

In a way resonant with Lacan, Freud shows how Elisabeth von R. has to learn to

live a life beyond the imaginary, beyond the unified image of herself as one kind of person that she has assumed. For such an image is fictional, self-alienating, neurosis-generating. Paradoxically, one gets to know oneself, who one is, when one lets go of the notion that one is one, that there is one self to be experienced, acknowledged, and known, and lived.

In conclusion, I do not mean to claim that Freud's and Lacan's work are identical, or that they make the same points in the same way. Nevertheless, while both seem to imply that we need a unified self-image in at least some sense, both also seem to diagnose the pathogenic character of such a unified self-image. Their work invites us to think about ways that we can resist being completely dominated by myths of self-unity. In doing so, Freud and Lacan offer us the possibility to tarry a little more loosely in the realm of the imaginary, in the images that we inevitably hold of our selfhood—and perhaps that of others as well. Such tarrying would entail a more difficult existence without the securities of knowing who we are. Even so, such tarrying might also entail a more generous, forgiving, and curious attitude to ourselves and to others.

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