THE CANDIDATE JOURNAL

ISSUE 8

SCREENS

Screens

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The Candidate Journal
Issue 8
2019

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Introduction

With Issue 8, *Screens, The Candidate Journal* moves away from specific questions of candidacy and the institutionalization of psychoanalysis to issues of contemporary culture. In particular, we are taking on our relationship to visual media and the effects of visual culture on contemporary subjectivity, as well as on social and political formations and practices.

We live in a society of screens, where spectacle is made miniature and mobile, where the eye is under constant assault—in the bedroom, at the kitchen table, in the subway, in the classroom, in the consulting room. This issue seeks to critically and creatively probe this assault by asking: how are we to understand both what a screen is and the roles it plays in contemporary life? In what ways do digital mnemonics interfere or aid in shaping unconscious fantasy and how have they altered the very structures of memory and subjectivity? What has happened to political and economic life in the society of the screen? What has happened to desire? What has happened to sex? What has happened to language? And what does psychoanalysis offer such investigations?

Psychoanalysis has long had something to tell us about screens, emerging as it did alongside silent cinema and domestic photography. More than a century ago, Freud conceptualized the screen in mnemic terms: a mechanism of the mind that (like dreams and symptoms) both enables and disables the visualization of images stored in memory. The Freudian screen—and arguably the cinematic screen as well—is a device that reveals as it obscures, projecting while also blinding us to a part of our history. As a figure for both representation and repression—or, like the censorship in the dream work, for the ways in which representation can only be effected by means of repression—it is in fact a perfect psychoanalytic device: perfect in the sense that it announces its own paradoxes, and ultimately submits to undecidability, as a mechanism of both absolute mobility and absolute stasis. The screen thus permits the endless replay of familiar fantasies while hiding its own psychic and social means of production.

Yet it is obvious that today the screen most open to critical inquiry is neither the psychic screen nor the social spectacle—the screen as a stage for embodied collective gatherings that cinema and TV once were. The screen that dominates contemporary life, a grid of pixels toted in hand, pocket, or purse, has perhaps become our latest bodily appendage or transitional object. As such, the contemporary screen constitutes the boundary between the social and the private, the conscious

and the not; as the common prosthesis, it testifies to fantasies of both insufficiency and universal access, as well as to independence and dependence, freedom and addiction; its effects in the psychoanalytic clinic are palpable even if difficult to describe.

If questions specific to psychoanalytic candidacy are pushed to the background in this issue, they are also always on the horizon, part of its implicit architecture. Lacan's formulation of the mirror stage emphasizes the temporality inherent in the formation of the ego as a visual process—the extent to which the moment of the mirror stage sees the birth of the ideal ego as a future promise and torment, pushing the subject "from insufficiency to anticipation" (2006, p. 78). The mirror creates the future as a graduation that will never be achieved. The candidate in the institutional situation is thus a subject of the screen, and presumably her analytic formation—as distinct from graduation—must do something to work through that position.

At the same time, we are all too aware that *The Candidate Journal*—an online production whose symbolic content is perceptible only via the most literal of screens—is inevitably implicated in our investigations. As such, the contributions to this issue, while at times critical of screen culture, also take seriously our own complicity in its developments and effects. Such a reflective reckoning, we would argue, forms the basis of a psychoanalytic approach to politics. To overlook one's own implication in the object under scrutiny is to assume a position of idealism, from which real political critique becomes impossible.

Screen Politics

In the era of the Reality Television President we should have certainly learned to take the effects of the screen seriously. From its beginnings, and despite what might be considered its constitutional apoliticism, psychoanalysis has been interested in group phenomena and the ways in which unconscious effects travel on a mass scale. Derrida's question in *Archive Fever* about psychoanalysis and technologies of writing—that is, what would psychoanalysis look like if Freud had had email?—might equally be asked specifically of the screen. What would *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* say if Freud had watched television? In "Donald's *Jouisens:* Attention Markets and Supremacist Politics," Jeremiah Bowen approaches the question of mass influence in the screen era, working with the idea of the emerging "attention market" to discuss the shape of contemporary democracy in America: the depravity of its privatization, whereby an entire presidency could be at the service of a personal brand. Hearkening to Kim and Kendall Kardashian—two other reality television stars whose different positions in the labor market were articulated by Kim when, in an episode of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, she explained that whereas Kendall is "like a real model," she herself "model[s] because I'm more like a personality" (p. 14)—Bowen articulates the distinctive economic position of the brand personality in the attention market, and he explains some of the more baffling features of the Trump presidency (such as his tendency to concentrate on his base of supporters rather than attempt to appeal to a broad electorate majority) accordingly. Yet Trump's "echo chamber of support" (p. 18) at rallies in states he has already won also bespeaks a narcissism—his own and, as Bowen says, the narcissistic identifications of his supporters—that calls for psychoanalytic interpretation; it is in part for this reason that Bowen sees psychoanalysis increasingly necessarily as an interpretive lens. One might note here that Kim's paradoxical locution—"she's like a real model"—might similarly warrant some serious analysis.

In "Let Sleeping Dogs Lie: The Politics of Truth and Catharsis in *Chinatown*," Suzanne Verderber similarly takes on a shift in the American economic and political scene as it is bound up with visual culture, and though *Chinatown* came out in 1974, its commentary is relevant today. Indeed Verderber discusses the film's antagonist, Noah Cross—who hoards all the natural and economic resources of Los Angeles, refuses exogamy, and owns the law—as a contemporary version of the Freudian primal father, or the primal father resurrected; and it is hard not to think here of Trump and the incestuousness of his economic, political, and familial dealings. *Chinatown* might be viewed as projection of Trump's fantasy and the limits of the political and social effects—some of which we are already witnessing—of the intersection of that fantasy with the logic of late capitalism. According to Verderber—who weaves in close viewings of the film with theoretical discussion of the effect of the resurrection of the primal father under capitalism on such things as the Symbolic order, the law, knowledge, and collective guilt—the prime casualty of this situation is truth itself. In this obscene social predicament, there is no social cure: No collective catharsis (in the Aristotelian sense) is possible, and thus Oedipal investigations are as pointless in the film as its Oedipal thematics are unsavory. It is better here to remain mute and blind, and it is here that the film's questions about the filmic medium itself—and the binding up of that medium in the social

situation it elaborates—come to the fore, to the extent that part of the movie's question seems to be: What happens to the polis when its ills are elaborated not on the stage, but on the screen?

Bob Samuels asks a similar question in "*Get Out!*: On the Psychoanalysis of Liberal Screen Racism," which discusses Jordan Peele's 2017 film. Peele's first movie is psychoanalytic from the get-go, as it thinks through the simultaneous idealization and debasement of racialized minorities by white liberal culture in ways that bespeak an interest in unconscious mechanisms such as projection and reaction-formation. Among other things, the film is interested in the hypnotizing effect of mass media culture, and Samuels elaborates on the ways in which the media is in the film the contemporary mechanism by which Freud's "herd instinct," with its reliance on prejudice to ensure group coherence, proliferates. Contemporary racism is intimately bound up with our dumb, drooling attachment to the screen. At the same time, as Samuels writes, as a thing of the screen the film is implicated in its own critique, such that, like in *Chinatown*, "art can no longer be seen as a solution to our political problems." "In a culture where art is pure entertainment and business" (p. 29) and politics, as Bowen indicates, is no longer just politics (if it ever was), where then do we look for something like a "solution"? What are we even looking for?

Other Lives Online

The essays in "Other Lives Online" attempt to grapple with the impact of new media technologies on communication, sexuality, and psyche. Have screens fundamentally altered subjectivity and object relations? What happens when digital media enter the consulting room and the transference? Is the iPhone's fully gratifying and omniscient operating system destined to usurp the blank screen of the flesh-and-blood analyst? What ensues when we bump into our patients not on line at the grocery store but ... online?

In thinking about these questions we might leave open the possibility that the human subject has *not* changed due to these technological innovations. For example, one could well argue that while the internet has accelerated the acquisition of knowledge and made possible an easier multiplication and management of identities, it has not broken new epistemological ground. Online news sources are not completely dissimilar from supermarket tabloids. Webcammed gay "bating" communities are close relatives of bath houses. In a different vein, one might claim that "bipolar" has become a privileged DSM diagnosis and way of life not because of social media and the proliferation of online identities but due to neoliberal ideologies stressing evaluation, quantifiable outcomes, and manic productivity. Smartphones and dating apps have not destroyed patriarchy and the Name-of-the-Father but merely refashioned or disguised them. Both selfies posted on Instagram and photographs neatly arranged in family photo albums are stagings for the Other.

And, yet: in observing a four-year-old watching a slideshow of the week's photos of himself arranged and set to music by his parents' phone, we might consider the effects of these new kinds of "screen memories," curated regularly for him since early toddlerhood. Will these digital mnemonics interfere or aid in shaping his fantasies or change the very structure of memory? And what does it mean that he will have watched and listened to himself from such a young age, and so frequently? Will this intimate, multi-perspectival knowledge of his own voice, embodiment, and gestures—visual and auditory fields to which previous generations had no access as Oedipal children—alter his relationship to castration and superego; his drives and narcissistic longings?

From here, the question of what social media has done to the Lacanian notion of the symbolic Other proliferate: have Tinder and Grindr profiles removed thirdness, chance, metonymy, fantasy, and desire from the erotic encounter, rendering sexuality purely contractual, a series of acts agreed upon in advance? Or have hookup apps—which promise limitless enjoyment, omniscience, and round-the-clock satisfaction—put us all, potentially, in the position of the primal father rather than Oedipus, the castrated Master? Do we feel more profoundly our inability to enjoy when faced with the immediacy of this fantasy every day? Does Tinder addiction testify to a weakened Other, a world governed by competing, always exchangeable, narcissistically constructed profiles?

Such questions can also be directed to the sphere of the ego and its images, what Lacan referred to as the imaginary register: what can we make of the social media imperative for a specific kind of self-work and self-disclosure? Can we claim that Tinder has changed notions of temporality and space, the concepts of the neighbor and the stranger? And, on a more structural level: Has Facebook established a new sort of social link, a non-pyramidal structure where the addressee is always the semblable? Do Instagram and Grindr, with their emphasis on the imaginary and their trafficking of partial objects, participate in late

capitalism's perverse destruction of the master signifier? Or, if social media's discourses are still appeals to the Other, what forms does this Other take? The essays in the second section interrogate the idea that online "friendship" and dating are perverse rituals in the Freudian-Lacanian sense: repetitive and fixed, lacking surprise and spontaneity.

Melissa Skepko's "Threesomes," the first essay in this section, tells the story of the author's divorce, her analytic relationship, and the role of Tinder in her transference. During the course of her analysis, the dating app is recruited for various purposes, functioning as a delusion, a transitional space, and a resistance. When her analyst overrides her defense and interprets that she wants to leave her husband, she develops an intense erotic transference-resistance; she acts out, and attempts in various ways to split the transference. The analysis is marked by omnipotent, masochistic fantasies, and repetition compulsion. But what is new or different here? Does screen technology change profoundly the analysand's relationships and processes? Skepko argues that it does, and that Tinder in particular "became … a palliative for an impossible desire (the incest taboo)" (p. 46). The activity soothes her, filling a painful void; but it also represents a perverse solution, and the impression of infinite access and met desire finally causes her suffering and anxiety. Skepko concludes her essay ambivalently: "Technology makes a threesome out of every relationship," she warns. It is an "escape" and an "interference" as well as a buffer from our most "destructive inclinations" (p. 47).

The internet provides Skepko with ample opportunities for researching her analyst's private life. During a particularly eroticized phase of the transference, her desire to map her analyst's social terrain and modes of enjoyment becomes insatiable. In "Looking for Love in All the Same Places: Accessibility, Shame, and Digital Collisions," Sam Guzzardi further explores the new range of possibilities for screen-based interaction, and the effects of the breakdown of the public/private divide on the analytic frame. His patient's discovery of the analyst's profile on a dating website jeopardizes the analysis and prompts the analyst to rethink his handling of the clinical material and countertransference. Guzzardi describes the ways he and the patient work through feelings of violation and shame engendered by the digital collision, as well as how he eventually becomes able to approach the patient empathically and to facilitate a twinship transference that drives the treatment forward. Guzzardi is somewhat more sanguine than Skepko about the social spaces opened up by online communities: He suggests that while dating sites certainly lead to anonymous and potentially disappointing encounters, they can also meet maturational needs. Shared participation in an online community brings Guzzardi and his patient into closer contact and fosters in the latter novel ways of knowing himself and the other.

The question of whether digital technology stifles subjectivity or dramatizes something essential about the human condition is taken up by Evan Malater in "The Dream of Techno-Love," an essay about Spike Jonez's film *Her* (2013) and Replika, an app that creates an artificially intelligent "friend" or doppelgänger that culls words and phrases from your text messages to create another, virtual you. The longing for a love object who will truly know and complete us—and the programmed, archaic nature of such longing—was anticipated long ago by Freud, Malater reminds us. There is nothing especially new in these scenes, either with Replika, or in the relationship between *Her*'s protagonist Theodore Twombly and his operating system, Samantha. In the dystopian near-future, Theodore works as a ghostwriter of sentimental letters, composing them in a cubicle and then sending them out after signing his clients' names. Theodore's job, as well as his first encounter with the seductive OS (voiced by Scarlett Johansson), immediately announces, with Lacan, that the letter always reaches its destination. The letter arrives at the level of the Imaginary, when Theodore (mis)recognizes himself as Samantha's addressee. It arrives, too, at the level of the Symbolic, when Theodore realizes that he cannot gain sole possession of the OS: We see that the repressed always returns, we stage our own repetitions, and there is no escaping the symbolic debt. Similarly, the Replika app appropriates Malater's words but cannot become him, or even a version of him. For his part, Malater does not misrecognize himself in Replika (despite his efforts) and becomes resigned to her failure as perfect partner or double. Much to his disappointment and relief, the missing piece remains missing.

Aesthetics and the Imaginary

While the notion of human beings "becoming cyborg" may still be something of a fiction—Donna Haraway, to whom the idea is owed, insisted from the outset on its speculative, rather than predictive, potential—our bodily enmeshment in new technologies has perhaps never been so severe. On one hand, Jonez' film ironizes the stakes of our bodily attachment to the forms of disembodied reality presented by new media, like Samantha (the bodiless OS). At

one moment in the film, Samantha hires a human drone (an anonymous young woman) through whose body she attempts, and fails, to have sex with Theodore (who remains in love with her nonetheless). Meanwhile in everyday, non-cinematic reality, our students and patients now tell us how being separated from their smartphones feels like a form of dismemberment; attendees at poetry readings now snap instead of clapping, unable (or unwilling) to set aside their apparati so as to clap with two hands.

In reflecting on such phenomena, we might be tempted to understand the body as an array of naturalistic organs and functions, opposed in their organicity to the artifices of the tech world: logic boards, LEDs, OSes, AI, and so on. But Haraway, following Lacan following Freud following any number of other writers committed to thinking through reality as it is linguistically made and remade, reminds us that by the time we appreciate our bodies as such they are already ready-mades of sorts, artifacts of that ancient technology known as language.

Echoing Lacan, we might emphasize that these bodies (ours) are *aesthetic* artifacts: To think of a body is first and foremost to picture it. While the body of biological science may be a set of organic functions, it is also—at both the level of the everyday as well as that of academic study—a series of images. In science, it would be *methodology*, but speaking more generally, we might say it is a matter of *style* that determines how (and what) images of the body are strung along and together until they make some semblance of sense to the one handling the rigging. The point, however, is that the body is fundamentally an image—one which provides a particularly resonant occasion for thinking about the aesthetics of the human subject. As such, the four contributions to our penultimate section grapple, however differently, with the way in which a visual field increasingly populated by iPhones, iPads, and Androids has led to what might be called new "styles" through which the subject becomes—and, perhaps, un-becomes—a bodily ego.

In "The Double and the Series," French psychoanalyst Aurélia Masson locates our present preoccupation with the spectacle of social media within a broad-sweeping historical shift in the way Western society has approached the meaning and function of the image. Calling on the late work of Roland Barthes, Masson speculatively outlines a brief history of the senses, noting how Euro-American civilization has shifted from a Medieval society saturated by aurality to a Modern culture dominated by the various uses of vision. While the viral self-image is no doubt a new-ish phenomenon (for which Jerry Salz makes an engaging case in his 2014 article "Art at Arm's Length"), its social and psychic effects nevertheless may best be understood as the culmination of the logic ascribed to the reproducible image by Walter Benjamin nearly a century ago. Thanks to photography, the contemporary subject is no longer made to go mad by the possibility of being "doubled." An index of insanity within literature up through the end of the 19th century, the figure of the "double" cannot possibly disturb us as it once did—precisely because social reality is so saturated by photographic replicas of art, objects and now our "selves."

But it is precisely our placidity regarding the double that, for Masson, brings us a step closer to madness. We have become so used to having our photographic "doubles" usurp us within the social sphere that many of us have experienced renewed difficulty avowing the gap between our status as a subject and the uploaded image(s) through which we broadcast ourselves to others. In light of this, the contemporary use of the self-image can be understood less as a version of *narcissism* and more as a form of *fetishism*—a point that Peter Gillespie's commentary on Masson's essay further elaborates.

Disavowing the subjective lapses inherent within the world of images by which they have been almost totally swallowed, the child subjects analyzed by Masson live without the impetus to speak that might be gained from the acknowledgement of a lack—in the Other and in themselves. Such is the link, Masson indicates, between the prevalence of screen life and the contemporary uptick in diagnoses of child autism. Masson, however, refuses to disavow the use of the image in her work with her young analysands, electing to use it as each child's gateway to speech.

In "The Ubiquitous Screen, The Swelling of the Imaginary and Twenty-First Century Suffering" Warren Holt frames the screen of social media as a culpable player in America's ongoing preoccupation with narcissism at the mass-cultural level. Pleasurable to the point of installing a kind of self-centered (and self-imposed) tyranny, the socially mediated smartphone is treated by Holt as a screen in the classical Freudian sense: an amalgamation of images that ultimately occlude the particularity of each subject's encounter with the drive. Instead of facing this drive—located by Holt in one's sense of bodily awareness—we allow ourselves to

be inhabited online by the images and "likes" of others.

As in American psychoanalytic training, so too on Facebook: The ego, basking in its own apparent glory, eclipses the id. And so as "The Ubiquitous Screen" eulogizes the subject of the drive, the essay implores us to seek a version of psychoanalysis that might allow for its reincarnation. For Holt, this psychoanalysis is the Lacanian variety bequeathed to American readers via translator and analyst Bruce Fink; and yet it is also a psychoanalysis that is not afraid to embody a superegoic stance vis-à-vis the smartphone and social media, which Holt ultimately condemns as responsible for our twenty-first-century symptoms: ADD, autism, and so on.

For Alison Bancroft, there is both more and less riding on the authority commanded by the screen. Revealing and concealing, independent of and reliant on the spectators who use it, Bancroft's screen is ultimately one in which we are all implicated. This perspective emerges from a close engagement with Garret Pugh's 2018 Spring-Summer fashion film. The essay leads us into the numerous moments of disruption in Pugh's work, the first of which involves two faceless clay figures confronting each other and gouging holes where each other's eyes would otherwise go. Bancroft brilliantly reads this moment not as a critique of narcissism so much as a metaphor for the discursive founding of sight itself. By way of the brutal, pseudo-Beckettian aesthetics that emerge within this scene, Pugh takes us beyond the mirror stage belabored by Lacan as the inaugural moment of the misrecognition that founds subjectivity.

Logically prior to the mirror is the rupturing of an undifferentiated visual field that allows a discernible object to emerge therein, and it is this rupture which Pugh suggests to be as much the work of the Other as the self. This is the *leitmotif* running throughout Bancroft's interpretation of the film, read as an allegory of the self's creation by way of the Other. Given its preoccupation with the social mediation of the body, art-fashion is particularly well-poised to mount such a critique of the autonomous self. Yet the same could also be said of the selfie-littered world of social media, and as such the characterization of that world as the root of our millennially amplified self-obsession begins to unravel.

What both Pugh and Lacan seem to tell us is that narcissism might best be thought of, paradoxically, as a social phenomenon whereby the self is built up as an object within the field of the Other rather than as a self-image created by and given to a self-same self. Even the most vapid of Facebook feeds is rooted in this social dialectic—the subject's exchanges of differing versions of itself with an Other not synonymous with it—and it is this dialectic that lends social media a symbolic dimension in which the enigmatic meanings of the Other are routinely pondered. Rather than continuing to echo those psychoanalysts who condemn social media as a solely imaginary version of narcissism, we see Bancroft's essay as already anticipating future efforts to understand the screen as discursive—that is, as generative of new ways in which the dialectic with the Other might be written rather than simply as an echo chamber of self-images.

The Screened Subject

The final section of Issue 8, "The Screened Subject," investigates the effects of screen life on subjectivity, perception, and love. If the split subject, divided by language, is lacking and therefore has space to desire, what then is the screened subject, multiplied and extended in an infinite echo of images? Does visual oversaturation squash desire or produce an even more apparent lack when the subject is effaced by its own overexposure?

"The Screened Subject" also evokes the contemporary subject laid open to innumerable screenings and perpetual scrutiny. The panoptic gaze peers not only from without, but from within one's personal device as it gathers data-bits of one's online doings. Often this information is offered freely by the user with nothing to hide in a culture where everything is made visible. The duality of transparency and opacity appears, reappears, and disappears throughout the essays of this section. They all reveal the lingering wish for something beyond the screen—the tactile, the sensual, the ancient, and the obscure. This section peers into the question of subjectivity screened.

In "Surfeited by Screens: On Three Occasions of Sight—Boredom, Fascination, and the Uncanny," Patrick Scanlon provides a rich elucidation on the reverberations of screen technology on perception and subjectivity. He emphasizes that these technological inventions, while arbitrary in their birth, fundamentally shape perception—a blind, haphazard stumbling into the future of the subject. Drawing on the work of Blanchot, Scanlon parses three "occasions of sight"—boredom, fascination, and the uncanny—while retaining interplay among them. He isolates the corpse, in the instance of viewing, as both an

object of fascination and of the uncanny, with its unique position at the limit of subjectivity.

In his elaboration of anxiety in Seminar X (2014), Lacan claims that the uncanny—a term whose relevance to psychoanalysis was developed by Freud in his 1919 essay—is constituted by the appearance in the visual field of that which is normally excluded: the sensation of terror when something appears in the gap that, as product of castration, should be vacant. In the aftermath of the mirror stage, the subject's perceptual coherence depends on an anchoring exclusion of what Lacan calls object *a*: the infant can feel herself whole and experience her body as a surface that she possesses because she does not see her own gaze, the back of her head, her eye sockets (and does not have to worry about them). The fantasy frame is maintained and one's very autonomy is sustained by the impossibility of fully experiencing one's own birth and death.

But selfies, for example—with their convex appearance, ubiquitousness, and promiscuity—would seem to capture objects *a*: the anguished gaze of a drowning man, a chance suicide-in-progress in the background of a sundrenched vacation photo, a glamorous pose shot from inside the Auschwitz gas chamber (Saltz, 2014). The fullness of the selfie image, in its denial of death, becomes death's harbinger. If Freud's "Uncanny" raised the possibility of the double's disappearance in an increasingly secular, non-superstitious world, the advent of selfies, Siri, and dating apps has shown, on the contrary, that the double now appears more than ever. Yet, just as Masson asks whether we are inured to our doubles or made mad by them, we might ask whether the effect of this ubiquity is widespread anxiety—which most clinicians would admit seems to be everywhere—or, as Scanlon suggests, widespread boredom. Scanlon notes that the contemporary proliferation of the image renders certain expressions of the uncanny banal—hardly uncanny at all—and suggests, in response to a culture over-illuminated by screens, a retreat into obscurity, as in the work of Blanchot and Bataille.

Michael Melmed, too, questions the interplay between screens and perception in "Fire, Screens and the Cult of Immediacy." Skeptical of the proliferation of screen life in post-industrial capitalism, he notes the apparent atrophy of the senses, perpetually exposed to the persistent gleam of the screen. Our portable devices also provide a stream of instant gratification, without pause to leave space for wanting. The "cult of immediacy" closes the gap between desire and satisfaction, diminishing the life of desire.

Yet Melmed's initial skepticism of cell phones gives way to a speculative understanding the screen's appeal when linked to the mesmerizing power of a flickering fire. This is the same ancient flame that held our ancestors hypnotized and extended to the cosmos and celestial forces. All of this expansive space and time shrinks to be housed within the handheld screen that projects the illumination of the stars. These musings morph into dreamlike myth that also suggests a dialectical turn from the omnipresent glow of the screen, toward the shadows of the obscure.

In "ALL-REPLYINGLY," Bethany Ides questions the parameters of the subject in ever-expanding internet space that always already encompasses almost everyone. With private murmurings made mobile through forwarding, sharing, and blind carbon copying, the personal email is never anymore just that. The email in its flat reproducibility is set in qualitative contrast to a box of paper letters, with their "pulpy texture" (p. 117) grounding them to the under-bed box of the lover to whom they were addressed.

Issue 8 concludes with "April-May-June (excerpts)" by Mirene Arsanios. Segments of dialogue relay the narrative in a manner that parallels the fragmented nature of texting, with lapsed time and missing pieces left to be understood and misunderstood. Here the screen squeezes itself into the space between lovers and the *méconnaissance* of signifiers sent by text renders the sexual non-rapport even more apparent. Attuned to how desire functions in her way of telling, Arsanios shows only glimpses of the tale. Like the suggested primal scene, spied through the peephole of her parents' bedroom door, the text leaves one wanting to see more. Our hope is that the issue as a whole might leave readers similarly wanting.

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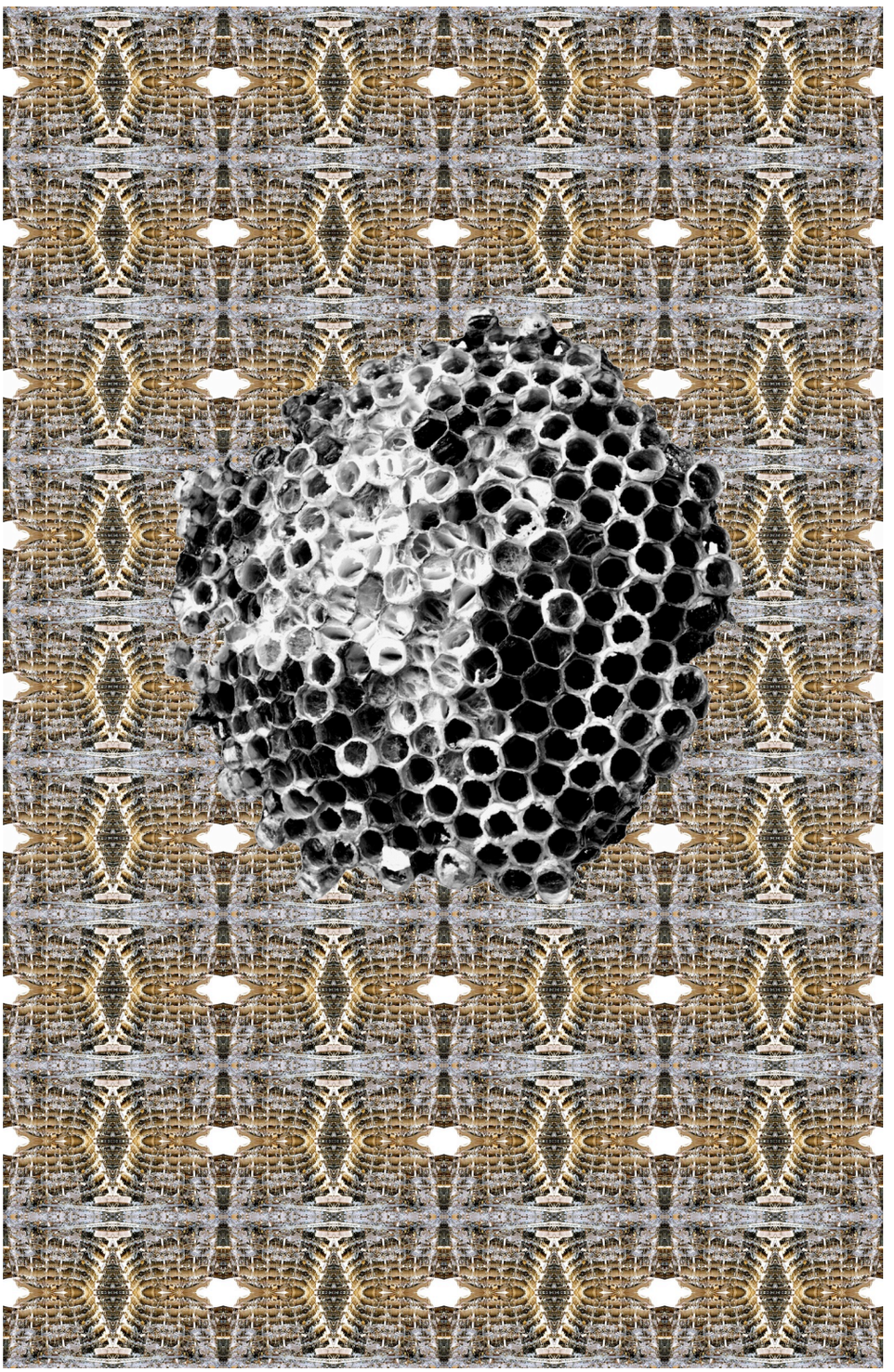
i. Screen Politics



Jeremiah Bowen

Donald's *Jouisens*: Attention Markets and Supremacist Politics

Just two years earlier, the image was unthinkable. But in June of 2018, few seemed surprised by a photograph of President Donald Trump grinning ghoulishly behind the Resolute desk, a solemn Kim Kardashian standing by his side, dressed all in black. Not with shock but with exasperation at "a nightmare we can't wake up from," *The New Yorker*'s Naomi Fry concedes that, "this Boschian spectacle of horrors, this stand-in for the reflective, responsible work of actual public service—is, somehow, still happening" (2018, para. 5). Fry's rhetorical shudder performs the incapacity of a single construction to sum up Donald's presidency as a public symptom, drawing our attention to persistent social traumas even as it misdirects interpretation, refusing the mask of propriety even as it dissembles an unassimilable fantasy. Kim's canny is virtuosic by comparison, her oversized black pantsuit and crew neck fashionably modest beside the garish obscenity of Donald's grin, which shrugs off the pretense of technocratic impartiality in which past presidents have cloaked their controversies.

In this image, Kim is the responsible public servant, using her position of wealth and celebrity to successfully negotiate for the release of Alice Marie Johnson, a black great-grandmother serving a life sentence for drug possession (Baker, 2018). But the commutation of her sentence is an example of the incoherence of this administration, contradicting Attorney General Jeff Sessions' contemporaneous moves to increase federal sentencing for drug crimes (Gerstein, 2017; Ingraham, 2017). This escalation reminds us that Richard Nixon's purpose in declaring a drug war, according to his domestic policy advisor John Ehrlichman, was to "vilify" and "disrupt" communities of color and other political enemies on the left (Baum, 2016, para. 2). Kim's achievement was thus a highly publicized individual exception to the administration's systemic policy efforts, emphasizing the limitations of allowing private negotiations between wealthy celebrities to supplant democratic deliberation among citizens equal under the law.

By the time Donald tweeted his bizarre portrait with Kim, many political reporters were already accustomed to a presidency reconfigured by the tactics of reality television and social media marketing. In addition to his daily tweets, the president has encouraged his aides to "think of each presidential day as an episode in a television show in which he vanquishes rivals" (Haberman, Thrush & Baker, 2017, para. 5). But these marketing tactics are not mere window dressing to otherwise conventional political strategy.

While Donald and Kim are very different performers, they play similar roles in an emerging "attention market," and the incentives of that market are now reshaping the United States presidency in a new phase of the privatization of democracy. Just as we speak of a "futures market" or "labor market," we can speak of an "attention market" as a system and ensemble of exchanges in commodified units of attention. The broad base of smart phone users and the proliferation of social media platforms provide the infrastructure for this market, in which reality television stars, "influencers," and other "content producers" sell the attention of their audience to advertisers in the form of clicks, hits and views.

Like older attention markets that relied on television, film or print media, sellers in this market use narrative arts to attract and direct the attention of viewers, to encourage their investment in characters and plots, and then to redirect that investment toward consumer purchases. But there is something new in the way these sellers convert lives into commodified lifestyles, by selecting or simulating images and plots from lived experiences. These marketing strategies employ tactics familiarized by reality television, replacing staged and scripted scenes performed by professional actors with improvisation by amateurs in arranged scenarios. And the lower production costs of these tactics yield an outsized impact, because at its most effective, these strategies co-opt the accidents of amateur improvisation and the contingencies of lived experience to add a shimmer of ambiguous authenticity and a frisson of identification.

Defining the incentives of this market allow us to resolve a persistent problem of interpretation faced by observers of the current president: His consistent appeals to a minority base appear counter-strategic in the context of conventional electoral politics (Wagner, 2017), which incents majority support. This has led some observers, and even some administration officials, to question his intelligence or capacity for strategic deliberation (Lee, Welker, Ruhle & Linzer, 2017; Wolff, 2018). But if we attend to his own disclosures of his subjective measures of worth, we find that Donald's efforts on behalf of the Trump brand are consistent with the incentives of a brand personality, which condition sellers to prize their hold over an audience above all else.

This interpretive challenge is an occasion to appreciate what Jacques Lacan calls the "advantage" of the Freudian approach, its "reward in terms of knowledge and clarity" (1992, p. 222). In a reading of Aristotle's metaphysics of pleasure, Lacan demonstrates the importance of attending to the unity of enjoyment and meaning, summed up in the coinage, *jouisens* (Lacan, 1990, p.10), which I translate as "use-sense." A psychoanalytic approach attends to the behavioral consequences of Donald's *jouisens*, symptomatically indicated by his overvaluation of the Trump brand, which apparently organizes the incentives of his subjective economy. In contrast, metaphysical approaches presume the aims of political accomplishment, to judge Donald's difference from that norm as deviation and inadequacy. It thus substitutes its own misrecognition or "mal-knowledge" (*méconnaissance*) for the "knowledge and clarity" produced by analytic insights. By universalizing its own conventional assumptions, this moralistic mode of judgment overvalues its own standards and demeans others, subtly reproducing the narcissism and aggressivity that it condemns in Donald. The psychoanalytic approach is therefore recommended not only for its power to clarify, but also for its consistency with the democratic principle of human equality: Believing all humans capable of deliberative agency in pursuit of enjoyable meaning and meaningful enjoyment, we cannot deny or discount this humanity in any among us—even in one who denies the humanity of others.

Attention Markets

Kim Kardashian explains a key difference between the incentives of the attention market and those of a conventional professional labor market in season six of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* (Seacrest & Goldberg, 2011), distinguishing between the market values of *personality* and *functionality*. Kim is advocating for her teenage half-sister Kendall Jenner, who wants to begin a modeling career. Her father Bruce is resisting the move, concerned that she is still too young. He argues that Kendall can and should wait to begin modeling because, after all, his stepdaughter Kim is still modeling at age thirty. Kim immediately corrects his error, recognizing that Bruce is confusing Kendall's aspirations as a fashion and runway model with Kim's work as a reality television personality and social media influencer, which sometimes involves commercial modeling. In an uncommonly insightful distinction, Kim explains, "I model because I'm more like a personality," whereas in Kendall's case, "she's like a real model."

Beyond the difference in physical requirements for runway and commercial modeling, Kim is pointing out a difference in the relations of production that obtain for brand personalities and for professional fashion models. Here "relations of production" names the ensemble of positions

and relations, contractual and informal, that structure a set of human activities into a productive process. For example, when Kim models, her brand personality is contracted to lend its audience to a client's product by means of Kim's functionality as a commercial model. This set of relations differs from those entailed in professional modeling. Clients do not pay Kim because she offers the best available skills as a model, but because she has an established audience that can be delivered to their brand when Kim's image is incorporated into the product marketing. At its most effective, this constructs a partnership that amplifies both Kim's appeal and that of the brand: Kim gets additional distribution for her image from the marketing campaign, while the brand gets attention for its product from her fans. By contrast, Kendall, in order to be taken seriously as "a real model," must be valued not for her famous personality but for her superior functionality as a professional. This entails a set of professional values, requiring that she be able to take harsh criticism, work long hours, and demonstrate expertise in the performance skills necessary for a runway or studio. While Kim sells her own brand personality, Kendall sells her professional functionality, gaining competitive advantage from her superior skill in embodying a product's brand personality.

These relations, like those entailed by any other job, involve incentives determined by the manner of compensation. Kim is paid for licensing or endorsements because her clients want her help in converting her audience into customers for their product. Kim's image is an instrument of her own brand personality, a means by which she attracts and holds an audience, whose attention can then be redirected toward another brand or product. In contrast, Kendall's image is instrumentalized by the client brand itself; it is a means by which that brand's marketing campaign appeals to an audience of its choosing. This difference in incentives conditions differences in the sisters' relations with others involved in the production of marketing campaigns. It means a photographer shooting Kim is incented to overcome any difficulties caused by her lack of experience or skill, because Kim is not being paid for her skilled performance as a model, but for the value of her influence over the audience she has built.

Kim recognizes that while Kendall's modeling apparently involves the same activities as her own photo shoots, those activities take on a different character and have different consequences when undertaken in a different system of incentives. The sisters have different reasons for engaging in those activities, because they are hired for different purposes and paid for delivering different values. This can be analyzed in terms drawn from the Aristotelian schema of production, in which materials or *means* are transformed in some manner or *mode* toward some purpose or *end*. The means of modeling may be the same for Kim and Kendall, but their work is still distinguished by a consequential difference in their ends. When Kendall is employed as a professional model, the purpose of her work is wholly defined by the clients who arrange a shoot and pay her a wage for her labor-time, as part of their campaign to attract an audience to their product. When Kim is contracted as a personality, her purpose is not ceded in the same way to her client, because the value she offers is her accumulated influence or prestige with an audience.

Kim's audience underwrites her brand value, a form of capital that allows her to partner with clients on joint ventures, whereas Kendall's only capital is her labor-power, the skilled labor she exchanges for a wage. Of course, this is only true insofar as we ignore for the moment Kendall's real-life brand personality and limit our attention to the functionality of her television character's career as a "real model." In this context, consideration of her professional functionality might lead Kendall's clients to be wary of her celebrity, fearing that it might make it more difficult to direct her, or might impede her willingness to perform skillfully and to the client's specifications. This is because the functionality of a model requires keeping personality out of the way to some degree, and adopting the image desired by the marketing campaign. Because her labor's exchange-value as a commodity is underwritten by its use-value to its buyer, Kendall is expected to look and move in prescribed ways, receiving makeup and styling chosen by the marketing team, even getting her hair cut or colored to match the prescribed image. Her image and physical performance are thus *mediatized* by the brand for which she models.

Lacan uses the term "mediatization" in his "Mirror Stage" essay to describe the process by which the "ideal-I" is constructed in subordination to the "I-ideal," borrowing it from the history of European imperialism (Lacan, 2007a, p. 75). In the latter context, "mediatization" names a political subordination, in which an existing authority is subsumed under the authority of another. The OED cites the example of a reorganization of the Holy Roman Empire in Germany, where at the beginning of the nineteenth century the Emperor subsumed the autonomy of local nobles beneath his own

regional functionary. For a time, local nobles largely retained local sovereignty, possession and enjoyment of title and lands, so long as they submitted to the Emperor's higher authority when necessary (Whaley, 2011, p. 620). Even if the activities of the local sovereigns remained the same, their mediatization under the Emperor changed the ends of their rule: They were now ruling for the Emperor, rather than for themselves. Over time, this altered the mode of their rule, because they were making decisions with the Emperor's interests in mind. Wages accomplish this mediatization in the lives of workers, defining the purpose of their activities for the duration of time purchased.

The concept of mediatization helps us draw a subtle but consequential difference between hourly and salaried wage earners. While hourly pay clearly distinguishes between the employer's time and the employee's, a salary or long-term contract is more ambiguously totalizing in its purchase. This is demonstrated by the tendency toward an indefinite extension of professional working hours, as well as the acceptance of the notion that a salaried or contracted professional's actions reflect on their employer, for the length of their contract. In her desire to be "a real model," Kendall aspires to this kind of professional mediatization. In contrast, Kim's modeling jobs are alliances between brands that enjoy relative autonomy. A brand that partners with Kim retains its sovereignty over its product, and she also retains a relative sovereignty over her claims to her audience's attention. Kim's brand value is a form of capital that gives her greater leverage in market exchanges with her clients and determines her incentives in any partnership with another brand. A partnership is abandoned if it undermines, or even does not increase, her ability to attract and direct audience attention, diminishing the brand value that makes future ventures possible.

Kim observes that this leverage allows her to expect a longer career than a "real model," for whom the balance of power is with the buyer of labor, and therefore she encourages Kendall to start young. If the aging of a professional model interferes with the brand image a marketing team wishes to present, she can easily be replaced with someone younger. The audience delivered by a personality, on the other hand, is not as easily replaceable as a skilled professional, and so a marketing team has incentive to put forth extra effort to help Kim look the way they want her to, for as long as she can deliver an audience. The skilled functionality of "a real model" entails standardized requirements designed to make professionals interchangeable, which condition the limits of a career. Those limits are expanded and extended by the introduction of a value independent of professional skill or performance—the value of the audience attention delivered by a personality, which incents a client to accommodate differences from those standard requirements. Kendall's labor-power is a diminishing resource, its value measured by the impersonal standards of the market. Kim will be able to model long past the average model's age of retirement because the value of her personality is measured in audience attention, and this obviates the measures of the modeling industry's unnaturally narrow standards of beauty.

Brand personalities and social media influencers have thus had a reciprocal effect on the modeling industry: By leveraging her audience to expand her visibility in fashion and beauty industries, Kim's image has been one vector in a larger ensemble of cultural and market forces that have popularized ideals of beauty previously excluded from those industries (Adegoke, 2018). While the dynamics of these industries are not my focus here, the reciprocal effect of the attention market on the labor market in modeling does suggest that incentive systems can be altered by contact with the attention market, shifting the balance of power in consequential ways. We should therefore be on guard concerning the attention market's contact with the incentives of electoral democracy, in which the balance of power matters to all of us.

If the attention market ultimately blurs the distinction between brand personality and professional functionality in the modeling industry, such blurring only corroborates the importance of defining the incentives proper to each. It is on the basis of such clear definitions that we might notice shifts toward a conflation of the two, and chart implications for broader neoliberal trends. Such trends have contributed to a "buyer's market" in labor, as the erosion of union and government protections allows employers to define the conditions of exchange with workers increasingly treated as "independent contractors." In modeling, we can see that social media and personal branding contribute to this tendency to externalize the costs and risks of employment, making the seller of labor, rather than the buyer, responsible for shaping and packaging their functionality. According to one agent, social media platforms like Instagram have become "an extension of portfolios," and activity on a model's feed has become a criterion in hiring decisions: "If a client is deciding between two models, the job will definitely go to the model with the most followers and the biggest social presence" (Samotin, 2016).

Kendall's starting point in reality television has therefore given her a massive advantage in modeling, where one reform advocate notes that, just as in the larger economy, "the top 1% of models receive very different treatment than everyone else" (Frum, 2018, para. 11).

Donald's Values

Unlike Bruce, who only recognizes the nominal similarity in the modeling of Kim and Kendall, Kim can distinguish between them because she recognizes, at least implicitly, that ends condition means and modes: that is, the adoption of different ends conditions one's recourse to different means and the development of different modes. Some observers of the current president seem to fall into Bruce's error, concluding from the nominal similarity that he is performing the same function as past presidents. We misrecognize Donald by evaluating his actions in terms appropriate to Kendall rather than to Kim—as if he were, in Kim's words, "like a real model" rather than "like a personality." As the bearer of the Trump brand, Donald is much more like Kim. Like her, he inherited enough wealth to be considered "successful" without demonstrating noteworthy talent or skill in a given field, parlayed this inherited wealth into name recognition as a tabloid personality, cultivated his fame by means of reality-television performances, and then monetized it through social media and licensing.

Having repeatedly failed as a developer, declaring bankruptcy six times (Lee, 2016), Donald has found success playing a developer and deal-maker in his books, on television, and in other media. By the time Kendall was embarking on her modeling career, a political reporter for the *Atlantic* had already observed that Donald was entering "his fourth decade as a professional attention seeker" (Reeve, 2011, para. 1). Since the reorganization in 1995 that followed his brush with financial ruin, and especially since *The Apprentice* began in 2004, Donald's branding has earned him a reliable and significant income through licensing and management fees (Carlyle, 2015). Through his licensing deals, Donald, like Kim, has exploited capital's ability to endlessly reorganize attachments, mediatizing familiar products by superimposing a famous name. Donald's licensing follows the pattern we described in Kim's commercial modeling: The brand personality is provided with occasions to sell its fantasy, while that fantasy adds value to otherwise unremarkable products like ties, steaks, vodka, wine, and even a cologne called "Empire by Trump" (The Trump Organization, 2018).

While licensing is important to the Trump Organization and to Donald's financial portfolio, independent analysis suggests that he over-values it in relation to his other holdings. In the kind of exaggeration we have come to expect from him, Donald's overall report of his worth is inflated "by 100%" over Forbes' estimate (Carlyle, 2015). But the magazine finds that one category of his total portfolio is especially inflated, disproportionately accounting for the discrepancy between Donald's measure and theirs: "The major difference: his brand." According to Donald, his brand comprises 38% of his wealth, while according to Forbes, it constitutes only 3%. "Trump claims that his brand and brand-related deals are worth some $3.3 billion. We value his brand at just $125 million; we give him another $128 million in management fees for Trump-branded hotels" (Carlyle, 2015, para. 5). While Donald inflates his overall wealth by doubling it, he inflates the Trump brand by more than ten times.

This discrepancy is symptomatically significant, telling us that Donald thinks of his brand as the single largest category of wealth in his portfolio, nearly equal to all the categories of property he owns outright. According to Forbes, Donald estimated a combined worth of $3.56 billion for his wholly owned commercial and residential properties, as well as "club facilities and related real estate." For what Forbes calls "real estate licensing deals, brand, branded developments," and "management contracts for running his Trump-branded hotels," Donald gives a total valuation of $3.43 billion. In Donald's mind, therefore, the Trump brand and the income it generates are nearly as valuable as his entire portfolio of real estate holdings. Because we are concerned with Donald's self-assessment, it does not matter that he is wrong, according to Forbes' valuation of $381 million. What matters is that, contrary to his campaign rhetoric, which depicted Trump as a builder or developer, Donald believes himself to be primarily in the branding business.

Donald's measure of the value of his brand indicates its subjective importance in his incentives, so if we think of him as he appears to think of himself—as the proprietor of a brand that constitutes nearly half of his worth and the majority of his income—then we may evaluate his choices differently than if we think of him as Forbes does. While political reporters broadly acknowledge that Donald's business interests imply problematic incentives, they often limit those concerns to corruption, emoluments, conflicts of interest, or self-dealing (Fahrenthold & O'Connell, 2018). This kind of corruption is certainly an important matter of public interest,

as a potential threat to public confidence, sound public policy, and national security—indeed, these are the threats that most concerned the Constitutional Congress, as Zephyr Teachout argues (2016). But any analysis framed solely in terms of corruption must conclude that Donald's actions are inexplicably counter-strategic, because he has consistently failed to protect himself from legal jeopardy by sufficiently isolating himself from his business.

Here Donald would appear to be acting in ways obviously contrary to his own interests, and this appearance leads some observers to dismiss Donald's ability to think strategically, or question his intelligence and mental stability. After Secretary of State Rex Tillerson reportedly called him a "moron" (Lee, Welker, Ruhle & Linzer, 2017, para. 3), concerns about Donald's mental competence reached a fever pitch with the release of Michael Wolff's *Fire and Fury* (2018). In the wake of that speculation, a cognitive test performed by the White House physician yielded a tweet in which Donald claimed to be "a very stable genius" (Trump, 2018). But where mental incapacity is the conclusion, a lack of explanation becomes an explanation by reference to lack.

The same observation can be made regarding apparent contradictions among Donald's own statements (*NATOsource*, 2017), or between his policy articulations and those of the Republican Party (Morris, 2018; LeTourneau, 2017), or between his apparent strategic interests and the likely consequences of his actions (Liautaud, 2018; White, 2018). But these statements and actions only appear counter-strategic, inconsistent, or contradictory when measured by conventional political criteria, when presuming the conventional ends of electoral politics. "Any other president would have spent their time trying to expand their support," observes one Democratic political consultant, while this president has continued to focus on his most ardent base, even though they make up a minority of the country's voting population (Wagner, 2017, para. 36). Donald is clearly proud of the intense attachment of his supporters, to a degree no ordinary politician would make public, famously boasting that even a public murder would not dissuade them (Holland & Gibson, 2016). One GOP strategist escalated that claim, venturing that "he could eat a live baby onstage and they'd forgive him. He can do no wrong" (Wagner, 2017, para. 33). This is corroborated by a Monmouth poll in which 25% of respondents "say they cannot see Trump doing anything that would make them disapprove of him" (Monmouth, 2017).

The irrational intensity of this attachment bespeaks narcissistic identification, which Donald has cultivated by continuing "his practice of holding campaign-style rallies in states he won, creating an echo chamber of support with his most loyal backers" (Wagner, 2017, para. 12). But appeals to this base appear self-defeating, involving broadly condemned or unpopular supremacist positions and policies like advocating for a federal registry for a religious minority (Hillyard, 2016), openly defending neo-Nazis and KKK members after Charlottesville (Nakamura, 2017), or separating asylum-seeking families at the border and incarcerating children (Hirschfield, & Shear, 2018). With overall approval polls since the inauguration consistently in the high 30s to low 40s, and many other measures sinking considerably lower, his consistent base of support appears insufficient by itself to comprise an electoral majority. Adviser Barry Bennett claims that Donald is acting expressively, not strategically, because "he is part of his base … He's doing it because he believes it" (Wagner, 2017, para. 23). By denying his strategic pursuit of an aim, this suggestion merely offers a more flattering version of explanation by lack, like those that conclude mental incapacity. Other explanations, which cite the midterms or the results of the Mueller investigation, fail to account for why appeals to his minority base would provide better results than expanding that base (Wagner, 2017). Because appeals to that base require taking positions that are unpopular and even offensive to many other voters, they are counter-productive to even a Karl Rove-style electoral strategy of minimal majority. But Donald's wins in the primaries and the electoral college did not require majorities, and they reportedly surprised even the most senior campaign staff (Shreckinger, 2017). Their reactions appear consistent with widespread speculation that financial aims may have guided the campaign, rather than exclusively electoral ones: His own estimation of his worth also suggests that the Trump brand represents Donald's primary source of personal worth and meaning, as well as his primary object of enjoyment.

Taken together, all this indicates that the current president's primary incentives might be the maintenance of his brand personality and the deliverable audience attached to it, rather than pursuit of an electoral majority. While this results in behaviors that are apparently counter-strategic in the context of conventional political aims, a different aim suggests a different evaluation: Donald's pattern of exclusionary appeals to his base conforms to the logic of the attention market, in which sellers prize their hold

over their audience above all else. Inexplicable as conventional electoral strategy, these appeals are rather simple to explain as a marketing strategy. If Donald played the role of "a real model" in politics, he would want to avoid disapproval to maintain versatile professional functionality, maximizing his potential range of client-voters. But because he is "more like a personality," his primary incentive is to maintain his audience, his core group of supporters. His brand value is not his functionality as a policy-maker or leader, but the audience he attracts through his personality, because his supporters are not his clients, but the product he sells to other brands. It is more important to maintain his core support, his brand-loyal audience, than to retain his office, his approval—or even, presumably, his freedom. Achieving an electoral majority would add value to his brand, but only if it does not undermine the loyalty of his core supporters. If he retains that audience, he can find brands that will pay him to deliver it. But without his audience, his brand is worthless, and he has nothing to sell and no basis for future success. Maintenance of his base is maintenance of his brand, which he sees as the key to his worth. He therefore has little incentive to be concerned with policies or positions, or to maintain loyalty to parties or even nations.

If the U.S. presidency is used as a platform for building the personal brand of the president, the incentives of electoral democracy are supplanted by the incentives of the attention market. These new incentives threaten to change the majoritarian calculus that has moderated political debate over the last few decades. For generations, national politics has incented politicians to build a majority coalition, balancing appeals to the extremes of the political spectrum against appeals to moderates and independents. Logically, this incentive structure tends to discourage explicitly supremacist appeals and encourage public advocacy for majoritarian positions. Even after election to a second term, past presidents have been subject to majoritarian incentives, as they cultivate a legacy that will at least partially depend upon public opinion. Replacing this structure with one derived from the attention market removes key incentives to act in accordance with the consent of the governed, and replaces them with incentives compatible with supremacist appeals and minority rule.

Subjective Economics

A question remains regarding how this analysis of Donald's values illustrates an advantage of psychoanalytic interpretations, as compared with those of other psychologies and social sciences. Political scientist and game theorist Steven J. Brams proposes an interpretation with some apparent similarities to mine, questioning common-sense conclusions that the current president is "crazy or irrational because he is apparently so impulsive" (2017, para. 1). Brams suggests that "social scientists might not be quite so quick to rush to judgment" on this issue, because they apply methodologies like game theory to comprehend the strategy implicit in "how rational actors behave in socially complex situations" (2017 para. 1). But Brams' definition of "rational actors" indicates an important, though easily overlooked, difference from the subjects of the unconscious to which psychoanalysts attends. Donald's "approach is rational in the game theoretic sense" when he "chooses the best means to attain his goals," and so evaluating the rationality of Donald's actions "requires figuring out what his goals are" (2017, para. 3). As I have done, Brams questions whether Donald's goals differ from those presumed by other observers, and to determine this, Brams also attends to Donald's own speech, noting that his "self-stated goal is to win" (2017, para. 6).

Freud frequently resorts to terms and figures derived from political economy (Birken, 1999) and other social sciences, explaining behaviors by defining the incentives that condition them, shaped by organizing values and libidinal "investments." But psychoanalysis is distinguished from "rational actor" explanations by its attention to an unconscious agency that organizes the pursuit of objectives in a subjective economy of meaning. Like the philosophical psychology that precedes Freud, Brams' analysis of "rational actors" limits itself to an agency inseparable from awareness or consciousness, whereas Freud insistently observes that the unconscious also functions as if it were an agency. This agency of the unconscious is an unacknowledged player in Brams' game, unmarked except as lack.

Brams' emphasis on Donald's "self-stated goal" is consistent with his emphasis on the "game" as "a situation in which the choices of all the participants, or players, determine the outcome" (2017, para. 3). Rational choice in such situations is defined in opposition to a lack of awareness or information, an ignorance that undermines one's choice of "the best means" to accomplish one's ends. Brams therefore concludes that Donald "thinks he is playing a zero sum game all the time," but in fact "he's probably wrong," because "most games in life are not zero sum" (2017, para. 8). In short, Brams' analysis offers merely the trivial prediction that Donald will not indefinitely

continue to win, because he is insufficiently planning and deliberative. Just as the common-sense view criticized by Brams explains Donald's choices as "crazy or irrational," by positing a lack of sanity or reason, so Brams' criticism of that view explains it as a "rush to judgment," by positing a lack of the evaluative tools of game theory. All these lacks presume a potential presence that never seems to materialize—except implicitly, as the one who negates, the one who names the lack. Brams' approach seems to accomplish only the self-affirmation implied by a disqualification of Donald for his ignorance of the rules of the game.

In contrast, the psychoanalytic approach attends to markers of lack—wrong choices, inexplicable investments and irrational meaning-making—as evidence from which to infer the agency of the unconscious. For example, we know that Donald could have calculated his brand value according to rational criteria, as Forbes did, because he did so in the case of his real estate holdings, where his estimate matches that of Forbes. Incapacity and lack are therefore irrational explanations of this irrational difference in his attitude toward his brand. Symptomatically irrational investments indicate unconscious agency in negative ways, as they are accompanied by avoidance of scrutiny, nonsensical narrativizing and so many other disturbances in speech and recognition for which Donald has become famous. This includes disavowals like Donald's perfect negation of Brams' game theoretical approach, dismissing all this talk of strategy and foresight, of gathering information and planning ahead: "My whole life, you know what I say? 'Don't worry about it, I'll just figure it out.' Does that make sense? I'll just figure it out" (Egan, 2018, para. 5). If we take Donald at his word, as Brams suggests, we must acknowledge that he seems content to pursue his "self-stated goal" of winning without reasoned foresight in pursuit of conventionally defined ends (2017, para. 6).

Freud's emphasis on the conditioning forces of the unconscious, often expressed by analogy with the conditioning forces of incentives identified by political economy, also accounts for the difference between psychoanalysis and the faculty psychology that precedes it, which ultimately derives from Aristotle's metaphysics. To emphasize this break with a psychology limited to conscious agency and derived from moral philosophy, Lacan prefers to speak of *jouissance* rather than "pleasure." Often translated as "enjoyment," the etymology of *jouissance* implicates it in legal and economic discourses, comprising a range of connotations from "usufruct" to "orgasm" that connect political economy to sexuality, production to reproduction. The unconscious pursuit of an object of enjoyment is omitted from psychological and social scientific analyses that rely solely on conscious agency and the rational maximization of advantage in pursuit of conscious goals. Lacan notes that in Aristotle's metaphysical moralism, such goals are identified with "pleasure," and therefore such terminology is compromised by its roots in the philosophical reduction of agency to consciousness.

Lacan identifies a confusion regarding ends that we also find in evaluations of the current president; by resolving this confusion he demonstrates an "advantage" of the psychoanalytic approach, its "reward in terms of knowledge and clarity" (1992, p. 222). Lacan observes that, "from the origin of moral philosophy" in *Nichomachean Ethics*, "all meditation on man's good has taken place as a function of the index of pleasure" (1992, p. 221). As an "index" to the good, pleasure is treated not as an object of analysis, but as an indicator of the good presumed to be its end. Pleasure, as a criterion of value, cannot in itself be judged as good or evil. As the saying goes, there is no accounting for taste, because something either is or is not pleasurable, solely by virtue of an individual experience. A moral philosopher cannot evaluate the fact of one's pleasure or displeasure, but if he can add to that pleasure an object it is said to indicate, he can in turn evaluate that object. As a result, "all the philosophers have been led to discern not true pleasures from false, for such a distinction is impossible to make, but the true and false goods that pleasure points to" (1992, p. 221). The metaphysical tradition makes the good, as an end or aim, its object of judgment, and treats pleasure as an indicator of that object. Lacan distinguishes this approach, which concerns itself with evaluating the good indicated by pleasure, from that of psychoanalysis, which understands enjoyment as itself an end for the subject. Psychoanalysis recognizes the irreducibility of enjoyment as a criterion of experience, whereas the moralistic tradition attempts to reduce or refer the subjective criterion of pleasure to an objective criterion, like truth or goodness. As an irreducible subjective criterion, enjoyment organizes a subjective economy, and recognizing it as such facilitates the comprehension of a system of incentives and disincentives.

In this reading of Aristotle (1894), Lacan appears to contract the more complicated argument of his source, where pleasures (*hedonai*) are defined as following from the activities (*energeion*) in which they arise (1176a), and activities are defined as

aiming at some good (*agathou*) (1094a). Therefore, a pleasure can be said to be judged by the good at which it aims, because the pleasure can be judged according to the activity with which it corresponds, and in turn the activity can be judged according to the good at which it aims. These associations of a pleasure with an activity and an activity with a good are presented as universal—the same for any subject or situation—and objective, inhering in activities rather than requiring attention to the subjects who undertake them. This method recalls evaluations of the current president: Donald's interests and attachments are presumed to be givens of his activities as candidate or president, and those activities are presumed to imply certain aims. His activity is judged against an objective standard, as a pursuit of those aims, and therefore found inadequate. This is a circular argument that begins and ends with inadequacy, because it evaluates a subject's singular undertaking by reference to an activity's conventionally defined objective. In the case of an election, the discrepancy between this subjective singularity of experience and the objectifying standardization of conventional definition is obfuscated by the "win," which is named as though it is the same for all. But each election result has a singular meaning, conditioned by a singular situation and singular participants. Germane to our concern with the attention market's compatibility with minority rule, we should note that Donald won because he gained the support of a minority of voters. While it is called a "win," it differs consequentially from wins by other candidates in other races. Barack Obama, for example, won by earning the support of a majority of voters.

The model of evaluation that equates these activities and aims denies the significance of differences in situation and subjective economy in conditioning the aims and modes of an activity. Instead, such a model measures subjects purely as instruments of their positions in certain activities, as if their activities could be distinguished from the singularity of subjective experience, making them interchangeable with all others who undertook activities so named. Any difference between interchangeable subjects measured by their position or activity is articulated in terms of adequacy to a predetermined standard. This moralistic model of evaluation interprets a subject's difference as a lack or an excess, an insufficiency or surfeit. This quantitative measure indicates the schema of moralism that Lacan (2007a, p. 78) calls "orthopedic," playing on the etymology of the Greek *orthos*, "straight," and therefore metaphorically "right," "correct" or "proper" (Liddell & Scott, 1940). Lacan reads Freud's interventions as antithetical to the moralistic corrections this schema requires, because psychoanalysis attends to the analysand's speech and actions to discern their aims and does not measure the adequacy of individuals' actions by predetermined aims. In guiding the analysand to recognize and articulate the fantasy dissembled and indicated by the symptom, one cannot at the same time discipline the analysand to conform to propriety by "correcting" a "deviant" or "errant" behavior. The latter, moralistic correction is an entailment of Aristotle's metaphysical model of interpretation.

Thus Lacan argues that "the notion and finality of the good are problematic" for analysts, rather than presumed (1992, p. 218). This problematic establishes the pertinence of political questions to the practice of psychoanalysis: "All exchanges between men, and especially interventions of the type we [analysts] engage in, are usually placed under the tutelage and authority of the good … At every moment we need to know what our effective relationship is to the desire to do good, to the desire to cure" (Lacan, 1992, p. 218). But pernicious consequences follow if we allow the good to remain an unquestionable, predetermined given. Instead we should deal with the good "as if it were something that is likely to lead us astray, and in many cases … instantly" (p. 218). If one's notion of the good can misdirect "instantly," that is because unexamined assumptions shape one's notion of "doing good" even before one decides to do it. Psychoanalysis thus differs from metaphysical approaches insofar as analysts heed Lacan's "warning against the common approaches to the good that offer themselves with a seeming naturalness" (p. 219).

These "common approaches," like Aristotle's good or Donald's fantasy of America's past greatness, are examples of what Lacan calls *méconnaissance*, a far greater obstacle to transformative insight than mere ignorance. Naming what one believes one knows without examining it, *mé-connaissance* is literally "mal-knowledge." This is not "bad" knowledge merely in the sense of being incorrect, but rather in the sense of not being the kind of knowledge one believes it to be. A belief that functions as if it were reasoned conviction is not "false consciousness," but falsified knowledge. For example, in dismissing Donald's strategic capacity, observers need only be led astray "instantly" by what they believe they know about the incentives proper to political activity. Curiosity about others' values or alternative systems of incentives is blocked by this pretender to knowledge where no knowledge has in fact been produced. Here, mal-knowledge holds court in the site of knowledge, concealing ignorance,

and preemptively blocking inquisitive impulses before they can arise.

By filling the place of a lack in the subjective economy of meaning—which would otherwise be experienced as a want of knowledge—mal-knowledge impedes the movement of transformative inquiry, which is lured by the unknown. By problematizing these presumptions, psychoanalysis acknowledges that "truth emerges from the mistake" (Lacan, 1988, p. 261). Mal-knowledge is thereby transmuted from an impediment into an instrument of inquiry, transformed from an obstacle to knowledge into a means in a process productive of truth. For metaphysics, mal-knowledge anchors the circularity of a wish to return to past greatness, the confirmation of familiarity that passes for truth. For psychoanalysis, it becomes the starting point of transformation.

The conventional approach to interpreting and judging behavior by reference to familiar mal-knowledge is characterized by a "naturalness" that conceals its complex orthopedic procedure: judging the pleasure by its correspondence to the activity, and the activity by its implication of a particular good. This procedure reproduces conventional definitions of activities, positions, and roles by sacrificing the meaning and enjoyment of the subject, treating the subjective economy as a matter of indifference. This indifference also distinguishes the "rational actors" of conventional political economy and economics as elements of a metaphysical approach, distinct from Freud's psychic economies. Lacan's definition of the psychoanalytic approach suggests that Freud's use of the terms of political economy redefines them by virtue of his pursuit of unconventional ends. And just as Marx refutes political economy in its own terms, Freud's discourse of pleasure refutes the metaphysical model by refusing to reduce the meaning of subjects' lives to a matter of selecting from a range of predetermined goods. To attend carefully to subjects' position and relations in processes of making, or to listen closely to their speech, is to presume that one will find there something one does not already know, a meaning that is indicated as it is made.

The psychic economy inferred from speech is organized by enjoyment—enjoyment is the meaning of this economy. Meaning is the usufruct of enjoyment, its utility or use as opposed to something that has ownership or proprietorship over it. Lacan names this inextricable unity of enjoyment and meaning in the coinage "*joui-sens*," homonym of *jouissance*, translated by Hollier, Krauss and Michelson as "enjoy-meant" (1990, p. 10). In the context of our consideration of markets and the etymological connection between *jouissance* and usufruct, we can adapt this coinage to name a "use-sense." This indicates, first, the use-value of sense or meaning in organizing the psychic economy, but it also suggests that the meaning of enjoyment is implicated in a relation to an exchange-sense, as use-value is defined in relation to exchange-value. To make this relation concrete, we can look to the attention market, where the use-value of an audience's attention underwrites a brand personality's exchange-value. When Kim or Donald command the loyal attention of an audience, they can sell this attention to a brand partner in the form of their image or name. That likeness or name only maintains a certain exchange-value to other brands because it signifies the use-value of the audience it commands or attracts.

By maintaining his audience's exclusionary attachments to the Trump brand personality, Donald maintains the value of that brand, which for him represents the greatest share of his personal worth, defines his primary life purpose and guarantees his significance. This inextricable interdependence of personal and public worth, psychic and economic value, is confirmed by the rallies that Wagner calls "an echo chamber of support," suggesting a mutually narcissistic indulgence (2017, para. 12). Like *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, the rallies evoke a narcissistic economy in which one's self-indulgence produces power over others, which in turn feeds one's self-indulgence: a closed loop that looks like wholeness, in which one's audience claims a proxy share as participants. It is plain why this promise of a whole productive process would have a wish-fulfilling function for many American workers who support the Trump brand. And it is understandable that the immediacy of fulfillment promised by this unity of production as consumption would appear, with seeming naturalness, as an unquestionable good to those it captates.

In Alan Sheridan's translation of "The Mirror Stage," "capitation" names the captivation and capture of toddlers' attention by their image in a mirror (Lacan, 1980, p. 4). This image functions as a figure of promise for an uncoordinated and dependent child, inaugurating their aspiration to an integrated autonomy, a flattering premonition of power. It is therefore fitting that captation as a rhetorical strategy has long been associated with pandering populism and demagogic appeals, as in arguments *ad captandum vulgus.* These appeals to a half-remembered wholeness and power are corrosive to democracy because they

attempt to bypass the reflective deliberation necessary to distinguish con from policy and wish from plan. This corrosion is compounded if we add the means of captation to the aims of a market. The market's criterion of value is purchasing power, now distributed in vastly inequitable proportions, while the democratic criterion of value is a political power distributed with the precise equality of one vote for one person—however inconsistently this criterion has been applied in U.S. history. Because the aim of directing purchasing power does not depend upon directing a majority of citizens, the incentives of the attention market allow democracy to give way to minority rule. And because attachment to a brand personality is produced by means of irrational, wish-fulfilling captation, these incentives allow deliberative democratic control of state apparatuses to give way to a demagogic supremacist politics.

Opposition to demagogues, like critiques of reality television, can follow from a condescending elitism opposed to vulgarity, implying an infantilization of masses that demands paternalistic protection from those who would lead them astray. This is not an approach I endorse. Instead, I condemn demagogic appeals from the opposite direction, in defense of a deliberative democracy that respects the equality of all citizens. This equality includes the vulnerabilities indicated by Lacan's account of the mirror stage, like the missteps inevitable in our education and maturation from speechless infancy to deliberative adulthood, as well as the continuing dependence of each of us on an empowered self-image, corroborated by collectively recognizable demonstrations of our worth as persons. Just as an exchange-value depends upon a use-value, the intersubjective recognition by which we see that we matter to others depends upon a subjective sense of usefulness. This sense of value is inextricably bound up with the meaning we make of the world, since the exchange-sense by which we recognize what others mean is dependent on use-sense. Where metaphysical moralism discounts subjective economies, and neoliberal trends in the labor market devalue productive work, *jouisens* is demeaned. Under these conditions, it should not be surprising that subjects will refuse to go on inadequately conforming to their prescribed social roles, and instead seek an alternative. Some will withdraw into an echo chamber of flattering fantasies of superiority and supremacy, but others will step forward into new meaning.

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Jeremiah Bowen holds a PhD in English Literature from SUNY Buffalo. His dissertation, *The Aestheticization of Production*, links theologies of art to *poiesis* as a privileged synecdoche of production. Because the narcissism of devotional pedagogy entails the aggressivity of the disqualification of difference, the fine arts as an aestheticization of production ultimately underwrites rationalizations of supremacist politics. This insight is obstructed by Yale deconstruction's critique of referential moralism, a negative theology of literariness that maintains the devotional structure it seems to denounce. This reproduces Heidegger's mere negation of "productive" metaphysics, which reiterates the exclusionary political commitments of Aristotle's disqualification of the deliberative capacity of women, slaves and foreigners. Bowen has also published the book-length poems, *Consolations* (2011), and *Argument on the Internet*, in two volumes: *Nazi* (2012), and *Faggot* (2012).

Bob Samuels

Get Out!: On the Psychoanalysis of Liberal Screen Racism

The film *Get Out!* offers a complicated critique of contemporary liberal racism. Although people often equate racial prejudices with conservative ideologies, we shall see how this media production attempts to document the relation between liberal culture and race-based discrimination. In utilizing a psychoanalytic understanding of projection, the film reveals how liberal culture can both idealize and debase racialized minorities. Moreover, the movie depicts media consumption as a hypnotic relation, and here we are offered a potentially radical critique of contemporary culture.

White Minds, Black Bodies

Central to the movie's plot is the idea that a group of white liberals are stealing the bodies of black men in order to combine the sexual and physical power of black bodies with their own white minds. On one level, the idea appears to be that white liberal culture both idealizes and debases African-American men by celebrating their physicality and dismissing their mental abilities. Not only does this culture idealize black athletes, but it also draws on a history of equating black males with hyper-sexuality. From a psychoanalytic perspective, we might understand this structure through the notions of repression and projection: white people repress their own aggressive and sexual desires and then project these discarded instincts onto others. The end result is that the racialized Other is both idealized and debased at the same time. In fact, we can see that the "liberal" culture industry in America tends to rely on these unconscious processes as it allows people to live vicariously through the fantasies they project onto idealized/debased Others.

In the movie, we quickly learn that the leader of this group of white people is a neuroscientist who "would have voted for Obama for a third time." Like the other white people in his group of friends, he idealizes black athletes, and he even tries to appropriate black slang; but ultimately his aim is to auction off black bodies so that aging white people can have their brains transplanted into idealized black physiques. Here we encounter a literal representation of the division between white minds and black bodies: as black bodies are idealized for their freedom and instinctual prowess, white minds are idealized for their intelligence. On the most basic level, the message appears to be that white people only see black people as instinctual bodies and not as thinking humans.

The Hypnotic Media

In an interesting twist to this racial commentary, the film turns to the use of hypnosis to show the connection between white liberal racism and the dominant culture industry. In the plot, the main character, Chris, is shown to be paralyzed when he is hypnotized by his girlfriend's mother, and this same state of helpless immobility is repeated when the film shows the primal scene where he is so transfixed by the television screen that he ignores a phone call from his dying mother. Chris mentions that in both the hypnotic state and his media screen state, he goes to the "sunken place," in which he is depicted as slouched in a big chair, paralyzed and falling through space. Here the analogy between media watching and hypnosis is clearly drawn, and so we are invited to ask if there is any difference between hypnosis and media immersion. After all, in both states, the subject suspends disbelief through an act of hyper-focus. We are also pushed to think about the connection between media hypnosis and liberal racism.

Importantly, it is the African-American male subject who is shown in the film to be hypnotized by the media and by his girlfriend's mother. The black subject is frozen and rendered helpless by the media and is subjected to the messages circulating in the dominant culture. In other words, the black male internalizes liberal racism, which idealizes his body and debases his mind. In fact, right before he is about to have the operation in which a white brain will be transplanted into his head, he is forced to watch a TV set that puts him in a hypnotic state.

To further explore the film's conceit of a hypnotizing media that implants ideas into spectators, we might look at *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, where Freud argues that during hypnosis, the subject is returned to the primal relation between the all-powerful parent and the helpless child. Freud uses this model not only to explain the role assumed by the passionate lover, but also to argue that mass social structures, like the church and the army, are based on the submission of the individual to an idealized authority, which allows one to suspend one's reality-testing ego and moral ego ideal. In other terms, the lover, the follower, and the hypnotized all lose the ability to distinguish fact from fiction as they become immoral subjects willing to act in a criminal way against their own self-interest. What is so radical about this idea is that Freud ends up arguing that this irrational relationship is the foundation of all social relations, and that the relation between the all-powerful primal father is internalized as the relation between the subject and the unconscious.

Freud maintains that the lover who has overestimated the love object becomes humble and blind and is thus prone to follow the commands of the beloved (Freud, 1975, p. 45). Likewise, in the formation of a social group, followers find themselves in a similar, subordinate situation (Freud, 1975, p. 39). In this case, the person being imitated no longer represents a love interest, but rather, the group unifies by sharing the same emotional response through a process that Freud calls "mental infection" (Freud, 1975, p. 39).

Psychoanalysis thus helps us to comprehend the common structure of groups and hypnosis, and the ways hypnosis, in turn, resembles blind love (Freud, 1975, p. 47). Freud also claims that with the "herd instinct" of the group, we always find "the weakness of intellectual ability, the lack of emotional restraint, the incapacity for moderation and delay, the inclination to exceed every limit in the expression of emotion ..." (Freud, 1975, p. 49). As Freud insists, in this state of group regression, the lack of courage and originality among the members is compensated by the repetition of group attitudes based on "racial characteristics, class prejudices, public opinions" (Freud, 1975, p. 49). The social group thus needs prejudice in order to build group solidarity and to overcome the followers' lack of courage and originality.

Overcoming Media Hypnosis

If we now connect this projective liberal racism to hypnotic media culture, we can see how the film reveals the underlying logic of contemporary popular media: white liberals use the media to project onto their Other their own rejected sexual and aggressive impulses. In turn, this unconscious racism is denied and internalized by a mass audience. However, the film also argues that while the white male wants to steal the aesthetic eye of the black artist, the black photographer, Chris, can use his camera to reverse this relationship by using documented reality to wake people out of their hypnotic state.

In one key scene, we discover that Chris's body is being auctioned off to a blind white man who owns a photography studio. Here the idea is that white culture relies on black artists to see the world from a more authentic position. Then, in another scene, Chris stops a hypnotized black man from attacking him by taking a photo of the attacker, which temporarily wakes him from his hypnotized state. The message here appears to be that the only way to reverse screen hypnosis and

racism is to turn the gaze around and give the power of representation to the black artist. Like the African-Americans who record scenes of police violence, the filmmaker may be arguing that the media discourse of the master can only be reversed through the use of the master's tools. In fact, after Chris takes a photo of his hypnotized attacker, the man who is now "woke" yells at Chris to "Get Out!"

On one level, to get out means to escape from the clutches of white liberal screen culture, but the phrase "Get Out" is also exclaimed when one character does not believe what another character is saying. These two different meanings of the same phrase in the movie, and in its title, points to the ironic and contradictory problem of using the media to condemn the media. In response to the question of whether you can use the master's tools to dismantle the master's house, we see that the film gets trapped in its own self-reflexive logic. As a media representation of the destructive power of media, the movie can only reflect on its own idealized awareness as it repeats exactly what it is trying to critique. From this perspective, the film's brilliant criticism of white liberal media racism offers no real way to get out since the awareness of the problem can only be revealed through an ironic re-staging of the problem. Clearly art can no longer be seen as a solution to our political problems in a culture where art is pure entertainment and business, and even self-reflexive awareness represents a trap to maintain the moral goodness of the ironic artists.

In the many conversations I have had with people about this film, no one realized the connection between hypnosis and media watching, and very few understood that the film was making a political statement on liberal racism and internalized prejudice. Psychoanalysis can help to educate people about the current state of our "screen culture" by elucidating the way we suspend our own reality-testing capabilities when we get lost in a film, song, or TV show. Freud's work also affirms that we are all prone to regress to a state of infantile helplessness in which we submit to an all-powerful authority. In the case of contemporary culture, hypnosis often occurs as a result of media consumption as people internalize destructive messages on an unconscious level. Not only do white people internalize racist stereotypes concerning people of color, but oppressed minority subjects also internalize these same dehumanizing suggestions. The only solution is to examine these media productions in a more conscious and critical manner. What we need are more educational practices dedicated to the critical analysis of popular culture because so much of the knowledge we have concerning other people and our own selves comes from the dominant culture. Moreover, this pedagogy has to include a deep understanding of psychoanalysis and the ways we are all affected by unconscious processes.

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Suzanne Verderber

"Let Sleeping Dogs Lie": The Politics of Truth and Catharsis in *Chinatown*

Is it always a good thing to bring the truth to light, no matter the content of that truth? This may seem like a strange or uncouth question because to many people who see themselves as moral, upstanding citizens, the answer is obvious. Of course the truth must be known, and we must, as individuals and as a society, in some way handle the after-effects of the revelation of unwanted and horrible truths. Rather than uncritically accept the assumption that the revelation of truth is a good thing, the film *Chinatown* (1974), written by Robert Towne and directed by Roman Polanski, takes this question on directly. The film examines an aspect of the question that is not obvious but that is extremely important, shifting the focus away from the truth itself, to whether or not society is equipped or structured in such a way as to handle that truth in a way that benefits the furtherance of justice. More specifically, the film argues that under a capitalist system that is increasingly controlled by fewer and fewer private interests, the Symbolic order loses its legitimacy and becomes unable to handle revealed truth productively. In bringing the figure of Freud's primal father back to life, the film suggests that in a society in which law and justice have been overridden by the desires of private interests, it is best to do "as little as possible" to disturb the order of things. In effect, *Chinatown* shows how it is not enough to simply reveal the truth; the society within which a truth is to be revealed must have the capacity to receive and integrate it.

In its earliest scenes, *Chinatown* situates its protagonist, Jake Gittes (Jack Nicholson), a dapper private eye practicing in 1930s Los Angeles, as a detective in the tradition of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. While Edgar Allen Poe's *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841) is often granted the title of first modern detective story, the genre is arguably founded in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* insofar as Oedipus is confronted with an unsolved crime, the murder of King Laius, and sets about methodically to find the killer. The great irony of course is that the "detective" discovers that he himself is the killer, and the tragic effect of the play is derived from the depiction of a powerful man moving from ignorance to unwanted, horrific knowledge. Oedipus physically blinds himself at the end of the play because it is only at that point that he can truly "see" that to which he was "blind" with his corporeal eyes. In *Chinatown*, Jake appears to have an ambivalent relationship to his own Oedipal profession: the uncovering of unwanted knowledge on behalf of his clients. In the opening scene, a client, Curly, weeps in his office after Jake shows him investigative photographs of his wife having an affair. Jake uncomfortably tolerates Curly's emotional

reaction to the discovery as he weeps and pulls on the blinds. Jake dryly tells him, "You can't eat the Venetian blinds—I just had them installed on Wednesday." The knowing pun on the term "blinds" is indicative of the film's brilliant exploitation throughout of wordplay—of the malleability of the signifier—to signify crucial themes. Jake's business model is based on supplying clients with unwanted knowledge and making them pay for it, and he does not seem wholly comfortable with the after-effects of this transaction. In Curly's case, it turns out Jake is correct to have been uncomfortable: Later in the film, we catch a glimpse of Curly's wife with a black eye. In this instance, it seems impossible to conclude that anything beneficial resulted from Jake's efforts.

Jake's discomfort is borne out when he meets his next client, a woman who claims to be Evelyn Mulwray. She says she suspects that her husband, Hollis Mulwray, is having an affair. Still affected by his previous client's reaction to the truth, he asks her whether she loves her husband. When she says, "yes, of course," he replies: "Then go home and forget everything. I'm sure that he loves you too, Mrs. Mulwray. Do you know the expression 'let sleeping dogs lie'? You're, you're better off not knowing." Jake's discomfort with his own *métier*, the discovery of unwanted knowledge that often ruins his clients and their lives, propels him so far as to work against his own business interests. "Stay blind," he seems to be telling her, "your life is fine as it is and there is no need to mess it up unnecessarily by learning damaging truths."

His client persists, and Jake ambivalently draws up a contract and proceeds to tail her "husband," Hollis, a scrawny, dapper fellow who happens to be the chief engineer of Los Angeles. Far from having an affair, Hollis appears to be obsessed with the city's water system. Jake finally manages to fulfill the usual adultery storyline: He takes a photograph of Hollis talking to a young blonde woman and leaks the story to a newspaper, prompting the *real* Evelyn Mulwray (Faye Dunaway) to show up at Jake's office.

Before moving on, we might note that the scenes immediately leading up to Mulwray's appearance are permeated by exaggerated references to masculine impotence and cuckoldry, which further underscore Jake's castrated status as private investigator, half-blindly pursuing the "truth" of a plot whose backstory he is fully in the dark about. For instance, we hear Ira Gershwin's "I Can't Get Started," the lyrics of which intone that "I've flown around the world in a plane, / I've settled revolutions in Spain, / And the North Pole I have charted, / still I can't get started with you"; we learn that Jake has leaked the story while he sits in a barber's chair being shaved with a straight razor, while beyond the barber shop window a broken-down car shoots steam from its engine. When Jake arrives back at his office, he proceeds to tell his colleagues a racist, dirty joke about a husband "screwing his wife like a Chinaman"—the punch line of which involves the revelation that his wife really *has* screwed a Chinaman—while the real Evelyn stands behind him undetected. This moment is crucial because it reveals Jake's status as a true Oedipal detective in implying that *he* is the one who is blind, not his clients. Castration here operates at the level of the content of the joke, but more cleverly at the level of the gaze. Until this point in the film, the spectator's gaze has been sutured to Jake's through steady, disciplined shot/reverse shot sequences. In this scene, the spectator (and Jake's colleagues) see what Jake does not: Evelyn's angry, accusatory gaze penetrating the back of his head as he gleefully tells the joke. Behind her, in a fantastic depth-of-field shot, stands her lawyer, ready to serve Jake with a lawsuit.

To restore his shaken ego, Jake gathers himself and resolves to pursue the case on his own because he has been personally harmed by the trick. Who tricked him and why? Who is behind the fake Mrs. Mulwray and why did they want to ruin Hollis? He thus disregards his own advice to his clients and decides to awaken sleeping dogs, plowing ahead with the investigation. Jake arrives at a reservoir Hollis frequents just as the police are hoisting his corpse out of a drainage sluice. The corpse ismissing one shoe, yet another emblem of castration. At the police station, Jake protects Evelyn from reporters and she officially hires him to get to the bottom of her husband's murder. Jake, suspecting that the murder is tied to the oddities of the water system, follows Hollis's footsteps and returns to the reservoir to investigate. Upon doing so, he, too, is almost washed down the sluice by an unexpected re-routing of water to the area, which leads him to lose "a goddamn Florsheim shoe" (again, signifying castration as well as Jake's identification with the similarly "castrated" Hollis). He is then roughed up by thugs; One of whom, played by Polanski, attacks the privileged instrument of his *métier*, his nose: "You're a very nosy fellow, huh, Kittycat? You know what happens to nosy fellows? Huh? No? Want to guess? Huh? No? O.K. They lose their noses. Next time, you lose the whole thing. Cut it off and feed it to my goldfish." The thug slices Jake's nostril open and he collapses to the ground. The sliced-open nose is the perfect Baroque emblem for the Oedipal danger of wanting to know too

much. We can now make sense of the thug's nickname for Jake, "Kittycat," which evokes the cliché that "curiosity killed the cat" ("and satisfaction brought him back," as some people like to optimistically add).

The attack is a warning to Jake: If you continue to seek forbidden knowledge, you will be castrated, not metaphorically, but corporeally. It is worthwhile to observe here a point that will be developed later: The theme of forbidden knowledge and the effects of seeking and obtaining it is the focus of not one, but two myths central to Western culture: the myth of Oedipus as well the Biblical myth of the Fall, Adam and Eve's transgression against God's warning and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Why is this the case? Why must the quest for forbidden knowledge always entail a kind of punishment of the searcher? Why can't everyday reality bear the momentous effects of the uncovering of the truth? Why is knowledge forbidden? What purpose does the forbidding of knowledge serve? Why is physical "castration" the punishment for wanting to know too much?

If in Jake we find a contemporary Oedipus, it is through the construction of *Chinatown*'s villain, Noah Cross, that the film develops these fundamental epistemological questions stemming from the Judeo-Christian myth. Following the aforementioned skirmish, Jake uncovers an array of clues, notably that Evelyn's maiden name is "Cross," and that Noah Cross (John Huston) and Hollis were business partners who fell out over a disagreement about the city water supply: Cross believed it should be privatized, while Hollis believed it should belong to the public. Jake notices that Evelyn's hands shake and that she nervously lights multiple cigarettes when she talks about her father. Jake arranges to have lunch with Cross at his secretive private club, the Albacore Club, and becomes disturbed when Cross asks him whether he has slept with Evelyn ("albacore" will turn out to be a crucial signifier in the film). Almost as if he got the idea from Cross, or as if Cross directed him, Jake proceeds to sleep with Evelyn, noting that she has a "flaw" in one eye, suggesting that she, too, is blind to something.

Jake continues to unravel the mystery, discovering that Cross aimed to illegally buy up all the land in the San Fernando Valley—a desert—under the names of pensioners in a retirement home that he owns in order to expand (and own) L.A. Most horribly, Jake learns that Cross raped Evelyn, that the young blonde with Hollis at the beginning of the film was the offspring of their incestuous relationship, and that Cross murdered Hollis by drowning him in a salt water pool in Evelyn's backyard, dumping his body in the freshwater reservoir. Jake tries to make things right by helping Evelyn and her daughter escape Cross, but instead everything goes horribly wrong. Evelyn ends up dead, shot through one eye (as if the flaw in her eye exploded), and her daughter is left in the clutches of Cross, who places his large hands over her ears, eyes, and mouth in a "hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil" gesture.

In Evelyn's simultaneous blinding and death, we can note a further elaboration on Sophocles' play, in which Oedipus blinds himself only when he attains full knowledge of his crimes, asserting that due to this knowledge, he can no longer look out on the things that gave him pleasure, especially his children. Earlier in the play, Teiresias the prophet warns Oedipus that though he can see with his eyes, he refuses to see the truth. In sum, the play links corporeal vision to ignorance, and corporeal blindness to truth, leading us to ask the meaning of Evelyn's flawed, and then blasted apart eye. She has been in possession of the truth all along, but still winds up dead, and her daughter will remain "blind" to the crimes of her omnipotent father/grandfather. Meanwhile, Jake winds up traumatized and possibly insane because he is responsible for bringing the awful truth to light.

As opposed to the insight and catharsis that the revelation of unwanted knowledge generates in *Oedipus Rex*, in *Chinatown*, knowledge leads to death and madness with apparently no possibility of improvement or enlightenment. The very value of bringing the truth to light has shifted from *Oedipus* to *Chinatown*. In the former, the catharsis generated by the final scene, an effect of the spectator's sharing in Oedipus' coming to grips with the truth, indeed suggests a kind of emotional cleansing or purging at the level of the social body. In *Chinatown*, on the other hand, we do not have the sense that the revelation of the truth is worth it because the ending does not provide any real sense of social or emotional cleansing. The society evoked in the film will not "start out fresh" and move on now that the sins of the past have been revealed, which is what catharsis seems to promise if not always deliver (in *Antigone*, Oedipus' daughter will also face unjust punishment at the hands of the tyrant Creon, revealing that Oedipus' suffering has not fully cured Theban society). Nevertheless, *Chinatown* shows how assumptions about truth and the value of revealing it have shifted due to a transformation of the Symbolic order itself, the topic of the next section. As my use of the term "Symbolic order" indicates, we will only be able

to understand this revolution through recourse to some of the concepts of Freud as developed by his French interpreter, Jacques Lacan.

Noah Cross as Primal Father

The question of what provides catharsis in *Oedipus Rex* is a difficult one. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle only gives us an extremely condensed definition, calling it a "purging of pity and fear," the desired reaction of the spectators watching a tragedy. Aristotle does not tell us why this is a desirable reaction, though. Why would a society benefit from catharsis? One could propose that Aristotle is in favor of catharsis because a purging of negative emotions at the social level would theoretically allow everyone to start fresh and move on, having learned something from what has been revealed. In *Oedipus Rex*, the revelation of the truth of Laius' murder, and Oedipus' responsibility for it, clears up a mystery that was physically threatening the city, suffering from blight and plague sent as punishment from the gods. "Catharsis" is a term adapted from medical discourse, and in a sense, at the end of *Oedipus Rex*, the sick social body is set on a path to being healed because the secret has been revealed, fulfilling the demand of the gods to find Laius' murderer. Catharsis is desirable because the gods give a reason for it. Would it be correct to say, then, that the revelation of awful truths makes sense in a society in which the gods justify or reward it, but that in a society with no such divine justification, the reason for revealing awful truths may be lacking, and their revelations may actually cause more harm than good? This possibility at least needs to be entertained, and I hold that this is the central question of *Chinatown*.

Like *Oedipus Rex*, *Chinatown* depicts a sick society, one characterized by the hoarding of power and wealth by the few at the expense of the many. Unlike *Oedipus Rex*, however, in *Chinatown*, no god is calling for the revelation of the hidden crimes that are presumed to be the cause of the city's sickness. In the model of society that we have inherited from the Enlightenment, the Law has supplanted God, or "the Good," as the ultimate foundation. In this way of thinking about the Enlightenment's replacement of God by the Law, I follow Gilles Deleuze who writes that "the conscience of Antiquity speaks of laws because, under certain conditions, they give us knowledge of the Good or the Best: Laws express the Good from which they are derived. Laws are a 'second resort,' a representative of the Good in a world deserted by the gods…In *The Critique of Practical Reason*, by contrast, Kant reverses the relationship between the law and the Good, and thereby raises the law to the level of a pure and empty uniqueness. The good is what the Law says it is—it is the good that depends on the Law and not vice versa" (Deleuze, 1997, pp. 31-32). The Law is an empty form that determines its own objects; it is not based on a pre-existing Good. This reversal situates *Chinatown* on a completely different epistemological footing than *Oedipus Rex*. In this sense, *Chinatown* may be read as a post-Enlightenment version of *Oedipus Rex* in that the film is asking whether or not the revelation of unwanted truths is justified in a world the gods have deserted.

In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud reintroduces god to the Enlightenment in the form of the dead father. In this text, Freud sought to understand the origin of the human obedience to the Law. Why would people constrain their natural freedom, the immediate satisfaction of their primal drives, in order to obey a human-made Law? His response was to formulate the myth of the primal father. In Freud's myth, drawing in part on Darwin's discoveries about higher ape societies, the primal father hoarded all the women, exempting himself from the incest taboo, and refused to have exchanges and make pacts with other men, who were driven out of the horde. As Freud writes, one day the brothers who had been driven out came together, killed and devoured their father and so made an end of the patriarchal horde … A sense of guilt made its appearance, which in this instance coincided with the remorse of the whole group … They thus created out of their filial sense of guilt the two fundamental taboos of totemism [murder and incest], which for that very reason inevitably corresponded to the two repressed wishes of the Oedipus complex (1955, pp. 141-143).

Lacan adapts Freud's myth of the primal father to construct his concept of the paternal function, the operation usually performed by the real father that integrates the subject into the Symbolic order, a form of Symbolic castration involving the sacrifice of *jouissance* on the part of the child (the fantasy of enjoyment with no socially imposed limitations). In Lacan's formulas for sexuation, where he tries to formalize the logic of masculine and feminine fantasies, all members contained in the "set" of masculine subjects appear as subject to castration. Yet the logic of this fantasy requires that there must be at least one man who is not subject to Symbolic castration, this man being the exception that defines the rule. For Lacan, this one man exempted from castration is Freud's primal father, the mythical figure for whom everything, at some undefined moment in prehistory, was possible, and whose *jouissance* was subject to no social limitation. In order for the

son's adherence to the Symbolic order to be realized, the primal father must have been killed by the horde and transformed into its guilty memory. Men obey the Law in order to avoid a future situation in which one man presides over a society characterized by incest and murder.

In *Chinatown*, the primal father is *not* dead: He is embodied in the character Noah Cross. According to Freudian logic, the consequence of this is that the basis of obedience to the Law—collective guilt—evaporates. In this situation, Symbolic castration and submission to the Law have no meaning because the primal father lives on, positioning the other characters as members of the horde. Cross evokes Freud's primal father in the most obvious of ways. He commits incest with his own daughter and the film suggests at the end that he will do the same with his granddaughter, thus disregarding the incest taboo and the law of exogamy that it engenders. The film allows us to understand exogamy—fair exchange and distribution to keep the social peace—in terms of not just women, but natural resources as well. Cross's desire to privately own the water supply and the real estate in the San Fernando Valley may be interpreted as a kind of economic incest. Just as he refuses to exchange his daughter to another man—Hollis's marriage to Evelyn seems to be little more than a sham—he also refuses to relinquish his jouissance of natural resources by sharing them with the public.

Cross evokes Freud's primal father in an even more shocking and comical way: He has his own totem, an albacore tuna, with which he marks his territory. In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud ultimately posits that the totem animal is a substitute for the primal father, the figure that is revered but sacrificed and consumed by the horde in the totemic feast. As Freud writes, "it is therefore plausible to suppose that the god himself was the totem animal, and that he developed out of it at a later stage of religious feeling. But we are relieved from the necessity for further discussion by the consideration that the totem is nothing other than a surrogate for the father" (1955, p. 148). The pervasiveness of the albacore symbol suggests that Cross's power, his "brand," already covers the landscape: His private club is called the Albacore club; the pensioners at his retirement home sew a quilt using old flags containing the albacore symbol; Hollis's colleague, Yelburton, has a giant fish and an albacore flag hanging in his office; Jake's client at the film's beginning complains about the high price of albacore. Cross even alludes simultaneously to his totem animal and to his uncastrated status during lunch at his private club with Jake. Cross has each man served a large fish: "I hope you don't mind—I believe they should be served with the head," he tells Jake, as a fish eye captures Jake, and the spectator, in its dead gaze. During this same lunch, Cross insistently mispronounces Jake's last name, "cutting" a syllable out of "Gittes" (pronounced "Gittees") by insistently saying "Gitts," even when corrected. Thus, while Cross's totem animal remains whole, he insists on slicing and shortening the monikers of others—in this case, Jake's surname or *nom-du-père*. This scene could not make it any more clear who is castrated and who isn't!

Not only does Cross *qua* living primal father hoard women and natural resources, he also hoards time itself. His very name, "Noah Cross," encompasses all of salvation history, the Old Testament Noah and the New Testament Cross (Crucifixion) folded economically into one name. In a sense, the name "Noah Cross" recapitulates Freud's argument that the collective murder of the primal father, and guilt and atonement for that murder, explains the logic of monotheistic religions, based on either the worship of the dead father, or the expiation of the father's murder through the sacrifice of the son (1955, pp. 150-154). In *Chinatown*, Noah Cross's name rolls the father religion and son religion, Judaism and Christianity, into one. When Jake asks Cross why he wants to accumulate ever more wealth, what he wants to buy that he can't already afford, Cross responds, "the future, Mr. Gitts [*sic*], the future." While we learn in that same scene that Hollis was drowned by Cross in a backyard pond, Cross offers that Hollis was always fascinated by tide pools because, as Cross says, "that's where life begins: slues, tide pools." If the scientifically-minded Hollis has Darwinian evolution on his mind, Cross is more theologically inclined, avid to establish a new Symbolic order (like Noah after the Flood), as his overly determined Biblical name and albacore sigil suggest. It is of course humorous that Noah Cross wants to own the water supply, but we should also keep in mind that in Genesis, Noah himself is a kind of obscene primal father, commanded by God to repopulate the earth. Noah is not quite a Freudian primal father in that he obeys a divine, higher law, but he is in the sense that he is stationed at the threshold of a new order after the flood wiped the old sinful order away. In that sense, Cross's totem, the albacore tuna, makes some kind of sense in that the signifier "albacore" encapsulates the first three letters of the alphabet at the start of each syllable; in addition, when one of Jake's associates hears the word, he mistakes it for "apple core,"

signifying the Fall, the "first beginning" before Noah's beginning.

A strange addendum to Noah's story indicates the perversity and injustice of this quasi-primal father. When he has grown old, he begins to cultivate grapes and make wine, and one day, his son Ham finds him naked and drunk, and reports this to his two brothers, Sem and Japheth. They approach Noah backwards in order not to gaze upon their father and cloak his nakedness. When Noah sobers up, he enigmatically curses Ham's son Canaan and condemns him to be the servant of Sem. Noah is perverse both for his nakedness and drunkenness, and for his unjust punishment of Ham and Canaan, who appear to be punished for Ham's discovery of his father's obscenity. The obscene father is not punished, but the son who discovers his obscenity is, a curse he will pass on. Injustice is a corollary of the figure of the primal father. In the Lacanian version of the Oedipus complex, the real father helps the child enter the Symbolic order through reference to the impossible, represented by the dead primal father. If the primal father lives, then the impossible now becomes possible, and real fathers won't have anything impossible to refer to. The primal father, and his murder, offers an unconscious motivation for obeying the Law, as Freud pointed out. Once the primal father is shown to be alive, this motivation evaporates.

In a late scene, Cross exults in his limitless freedom: "Most people never have to face the fact that at the right time, in the right place, they are capable of *anything*." If Freud's primal father spoke, this is probably the kind of thing he would say. He denies himself nothing. In this situation, the primal father ceases to define Symbolic castration by negating it (by representing impossible *jouissance*) and the Symbolic function is foreclosed. This perhaps helps makes sense of all the instances in the film in which castration is primarily Real and Imaginary and not substantively linked to a Symbolic order based on prohibitions and laws. The Symbolic system undergirding these prohibitions and laws now lacks the dead father whose archaic murder lent them real meaning. Significantly, in *Chinatown*'s stunning final scene, Jake, who reveals he still believes in legal authority and the justice system, learns he cannot call the police to arrest Cross for Hollis's murder or for incest because, as Evelyn informs him, Cross "owns the police." Just as Cross aims to establish a new Symbolic order, he also "owns" the Law itself. In relation to Freud's myth, *Chinatown* is thus marked by a strange narrative temporality. For Freud, the murder of the primal father and the erection of the first laws took place at some unspecifiable moment in prehistory, and he concludes his analysis with a fascinating discussion of the problem of how this archaic memory got passed down from generation to generation (1955, pp. 158-161). Freud thus posited that a society based on laws was preceded by one controlled by the primal father. *Chinatown* adds a third moment to Freud's narrative of human history. After the murder of the primal father, and after the establishment of a society based on laws, the primal father comes back to life in a third moment, his corpse revivified in the stage of capitalism that places ever greater wealth and power in ever fewer hands. Viewing the narrative trajectory of human history in this way, the "sons" in *Chinatown* would still believe that they are operating in a society characterized by Law and equal distribution of resources, without realizing that the primal father has come back to life, ushering in a new era of the primal horde.

The greatest victim of the primal father's return to life is thus the Symbolic order itself, not just in terms of the evisceration of the rule of law, but of the metaphorical capacity of language itself to mean anything at all. In my discussion of the paternal function thus far, I have emphasized the Law. But the paternal function also involves the subject's relationship to the signifying chain and meaning, undergirded by what Lacan calls the "paternal metaphor." The child's perception of the mother's lack directs the child's attention to the phallus, with which it tries to identify until the father's intervention brings an end to that effort, directing the child to the Symbolic order. The mother's naming of a father, and the father bequeathing a name to the child, gives language credibility and solidity, assuring the child that a name can really stand for a thing or a person. At the end of *Chinatown*, the pretense of the existence of a meaningful Symbolic order, a consistent Other, is obliterated. As Noah Cross aims to establish a new social order in the Eden of L.A., one which he controls completely, the current order is characterized by non-sense encapsulated in the racialized signifier "Chinatown," which, in the words of screenwriter Towne was intended to signify "Gittes's fucked-up state of mind" (Eaton, 2008, p. 13). But I would hold that the loss of sense is collective, not personal: The whole society is "fucked up." In the last scene of the film, set in L.A.'s Chinatown, after Evelyn has been shot, comprehensible language is blotted out by the asignifying chaos of the screaming daughter, a stuck car horn, and the Chinese street signs, illegible to the Caucasian characters (and non-Chinese speaking spectators). Noah Cross gives up nothing and owns everything, including the very Law itself. The primal father's resurrection, made possible through unfettered acquisition of public resources

by private interests, thus seems to entail a loss of meaning and a sense of the subject's disorientation within the signifying chain. The film's message in this sense dovetails with Deleuze and Guattari's warning in *Anti-Oedipus* that "writing has never been capitalism's thing. Capitalism is profoundly illiterate. The death of writing is like the death of God or the death of the father: The thing was settled a long time ago, although the news of the event is slow to reach us, and there survives in us the memory of extinct signs with which we still write" (1997, p. 240). Their analysis of the changed status of the signifier under the conditions of late capitalism is complex and a full discussion is beyond the bounds of this argument, but it involves their claim that under capitalism, the signifier ceases to maintain a consistent value or identity across contexts, a development that ensues from the withdrawal of a transcendental signifier or "despotic voice" that assured this consistency of identity or value in prior cultural formations.

While *Chinatown* depicts the shredding of the Symbolic order, what about its relationship to the Imaginary, which necessarily involves the relationship of the spectator to the cinematic screen? In Screen theory, the concept of "suture" was invented to articulate the means by which the film provides the spectator with a sense of Imaginary unity and continuity within the flow of otherwise isolated images that constitute the cinematic experience (Heath, 1978). *Chinatown*'s spectator, for most of the film, is put in the position of identifying with Jake's desire for and pursuit of the truth. For approximately the first eighteen minutes, the spectator's gaze is sutured to Jake's gaze, which is framed by an array of viewing apparatuses: binoculars, cameras, rear view mirrors, and windshields. The dirty joke scene marks the first rupture of the spectator's identification with Jake, forcing us to now see from the perspective of his embarrassed colleagues, who look on forlornly as Jake makes an ass of himself in front of the real Evelyn Mulwray. At this point, we the spectators become aware that Jake, a latter-day Oedipus, is partially blind, lacking crucial knowledge of the situation. As a chastened Jake restarts his investigation, the camera again sutures the spectator's gaze to Jake's gaze, but the spectator is newly aware that Jake is not in epistemological control of the situation. Our identification with Jake is from here on out rendered insecure: We are like the viewer of Holbein's *Ambassadors* after we have recognized the anamorphosis of the death's head spread out across the lower third of the painting (Lacan, 1981, p. 85-90). About forty-five minutes into the film, the thug played by Polanski slices Jake's nostril open, and for the rest of the film, he either sports a huge bandage on his nose or visible black stitches. While our gaze remains rigorously sutured to Jake's gaze, our identification with him is modified by the bandage, and later, by the wound's sutures. The bandage is analogous to Holbein's death's head, insistently interfering with the Imaginary plenitude, the ego-reinforcing power of cinematic suture, and reminding us of the blindness of Jake's ego—and by analogy our own.

The spectator's identification with Jake is broken only a second time in the film's last great scene, which Eaton has described as "immaculately choreographed like the endgame moves of a chess tournament" (2008, p. 68). We see the back of Jake's head in the car as he arrives in Chinatown in the darkness, held at gunpoint by Cross and his henchman. The soundtrack is jarring, discordant. We see oblique, upward shots of Chinese neon signs, and the reverse shot shows the back of Jake's head, but we are not sure who is looking at the Chinese signs because through the windshield, Jake sees only darkness. As the men leave the car and cross the street to join the cops and Jake's handcuffed associates, the confusion becomes aural as well as visual: An uncertain, shaky camera follows several of the main characters who shout their own interpretations of the situation, competing against each other and the street noise. The visual field loses Jake as its anchoring center and the camera chaotically follows different characters—Noah, Evelyn, the police lieutenant Escobar, or undetermined bystanders—as they alternately try to act, with our hero Jake left behind somewhere in the background, handcuffed. We seem to be reunited with Jake's gaze as he opens the car door and (seems to) see, first, Evelyn's body sprawl out, her eye now a bloody socket, and second, the screaming daughter, being grabbed by Cross. We seem to be seeing through the eyes of a man who is seeing a scene that will traumatize him (or re-traumatize him, for throughout the film, it is implied that Jake already experienced a trauma of a similar kind in Chinatown, which is why it is so difficult—and fateful—for him to return to this haunted locale). But then, the camera swings around and we realize that the gaze looking at Evelyn's corpse was not Jake's: It was our gaze, that of the spectator. Jake is situated at the wrong angle and is already staring blankly ahead, uttering his famous line, "as little as possible," reflecting his final insight that he should have left well enough alone, as he advised his client to do in the beginning of the film. Cast adrift from our point of Imaginary identification, the spectator becomes an "innocent bystander" traumatized by this horrific scene, interpellated by the film as yet another nosy rubbernecker.

The ending of the film is traumatic rather than cathartic. It leaves us certain that things will not get better now that the truth has come out. The disruption of cinematic suture has left the spectator in a position characterized by confusion and helplessness in the face of horror; Noah Cross has triumphed and his incestuous reign of terror will continue unabated. Against his own advice to his clients to "let sleeping dogs lie," Jake has pursued a truth that has led Evelyn to be killed and that has done nothing to solve the problem of Noah Cross's insatiable greed and corruption. In answer to the question posed at the beginning of this essay—is the revelation of truth always a good thing?—the film's answer is a resolute "no." What, then, are the conditions that will make truth matter? In the absence of a *deus ex machina* who will descend from the sky or speak enigmatically through the mouth of a prophet, what kind of a society would be hospitable to the truth? With his myth of the primal horde, Freud attempted to understand the unconscious motivation subtending a society based on rule of law—an unconscious desire to atone for the murder of the primal father—and Lacan postulates the psychic implications of the collapse of the paternal function: psychosis (1997). Following Lacan's logic, the resurrection of the primal father leaves us with a subject for whom the Symbolic order lacks credibility, meaning, and authority (Lacan will symbolize this idea with an "A," for Autre [Other] cut by a "/"). For the subject who fails to develop a creative response to this crisis through the creation of a Sinthome (2016), the result, as we see in *Chinatown*, is traumatized helplessness, a situation in which it perhaps best to "let sleeping dogs lie" and do "as little as possible." Oedipus was lucky, in a way: No doubt the revelation of horrible truths caused everyone, especially him, great suffering, but at least the gods were present to lend a meaning to that suffering.

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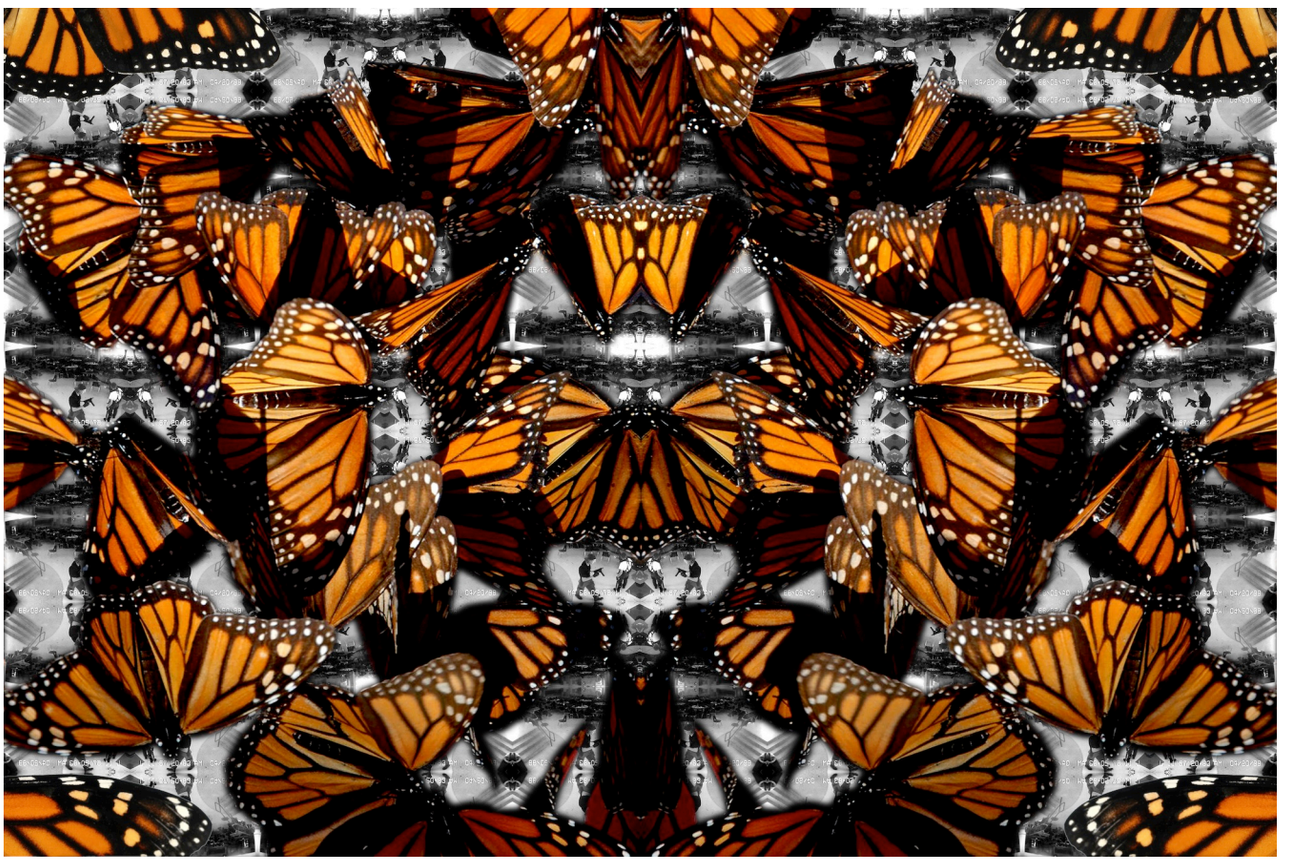
ii. Other Lives Online



Melissa Skepko

Threesomes

Internet Research

When I first entered psychotherapy, I was depressed and anxious. I had recently gotten married and bought a house with my husband. Everything in my life seemed perfect, and this made my depression inexplicable. I decided to find a therapist. On my commuter train home from work one day, I went on the *Psychology Today* mobile website and sent several messages out to a few randomly chosen therapists. This is how I met my analyst.

The first six months of treatment were uneventful in my memory. I don't remember my analyst doing or saying much, and my panic attacks and sadness continued. My general agitation with my husband was a common theme in the sessions, but I did not pinpoint it as a principal reason for distress, only as a side effect of my emotional issues.

One day, I told my analyst that after our appointment I was going to an event at a bookstore. He said, rather nonchalantly, "Maybe you will meet someone there." I remember feeling confused and annoyed by his presumption that I was looking to meet someone. I took his comment to mean that I wanted to pick up another man.

Soon after, my panic attacks became more frequent, and I began having difficulty eating and swallowing. I thought my analyst was useless. He was not helping me, and I was feeling worse than ever. I decided that I was going to leave therapy. At my next appointment, I told him I didn't see the point in continuing to see him. I said I needed more feedback from him and wanted to know what I had to do to get better. He said I needed to keep coming and keep talking. I balked and repeated again that I needed real feedback, to which he became visibly annoyed and snapped, "Why aren't you having an affair?"

When he said those words, it was a shock. I had a severe panic attack in the room. I thought I would throw up or pass out. I wanted to run out of the office. Once I calmed down, we were able to talk about what he said and what I felt. I didn't know why my reaction was so strong to his words. I had told him my daydreams about other men, so there wasn't anything too shocking about his suggestion that I might want to have an affair, but it was the aggression in his words that hit me. I had annoyed him and caused a chain reaction.

After I left that session, everything changed for me. I was in love with my analyst. My brain

tingled whenever I thought of him and every song reminded me of him. The feelings were so intense that they scared me. I feared I was losing my mind. At my next appointment, I told him I was afraid to like him so much because then we might not be able to see each other anymore. He said he didn't have plans to go anywhere.

Even though I was in love with my analyst, I did not think my marriage would end. For a short while I was happy to have found someone to love and, for the next few months, I kept two parallel relationships, the one with my analyst and the one with my husband. I respected the boundaries of the therapeutic relationship and never tried to see him outside of our sessions, but I wanted more of him and searched for everything I could find about him online. There was limited information on Facebook: I could find some of his posts and the music he listened to, and I could see some of his friends. Finally, the combination of Google and Facebook gave me a gift: his mother's blog. She wrote about her work and her family, and she posted pictures of him from childhood with his siblings. It was a big family, an older brother and two sisters. His mother had also written a memoir, and a Google Books search allowed me to find small excerpts that mentioned his name. I felt sentimental toward his family and was touched by the fact that his mother had the same name as my mother, "Grace."

"It's a beautiful name," my analyst said when I reported to him my discovery. He asked about what I was looking for in my internet investigations. I wasn't sure. I checked his mother's blog daily for updates on his family's life. I wanted to know, first and foremost, whether he had a girlfriend or a boyfriend, a husband or a wife. His Facebook profile soon became less accessible and I assumed he had changed his privacy settings to keep me away. One weekend, the blog mentioned a family wedding that I knew he was attending because he had cancelled our usual appointment. Afterwards, I found the Facebook page of one of his distant relatives who had posted pictures of the event, and I was relieved to see that he had not brought a date. When I told him in our next session that I had found a picture from the wedding, he responded sarcastically, "Why don't you write a book about me?" I knew I was annoying him, but I didn't want to stop.

During these months of online stalking, I came to my sessions consistently and even increased my visits from once to twice a week. The more I came and talked, the more I thought about my marriage and about my husband. He was such a good, kind person; I loved him; and yet, I hated him and felt guilty for not loving him as much as I thought I should. I was so angry. The more I saw my analyst, the more appointments I needed, and the more appointments I came to, the more I realized that I wanted to leave my husband. How could I do it? My distress became so acute that eventually my analyst asked, "Would you like your husband to be my patient?"

"Could he be?" The thought was a relief. I could bring my husband to my analyst and he would take care of him for me.

My husband was resistant to the idea of therapy, but he knew it was what I wanted. With my husband safely in therapy, I began to move on. My feelings for my analyst became less romantic. I realized I hadn't really wanted to get married. Something always felt wrong, but I had suppressed the feeling because I couldn't make sense of it. A little over six months later, I told my husband I wanted a divorce and moved my personal belongings into the guest bedroom of our house. However, saying the word divorce wasn't enough to spur action. I was still too afraid to go through with leaving. Some mornings, I would wake up scared and confused about my decision and would crawl into bed with my husband; we would lie together feeling a shared sadness. He took this sadness as a sign that he could convince me to stay and we continued living together, having meals and visiting family as if things were "normal."

Tinder Storm

The first time I downloaded Tinder, I was sitting alone at a bar, not wanting to go home to where I was still living with my husband. It was late spring and I wore a green and white striped summer dress. I had dressed up that day because I had been hoping to ask out my new crush, Dr. Charles,[1] a colleague of my analyst who worked two doors down from his office. Dr. Charles and I had never spoken, but there was something about his eyes and his smile when he walked by me in the waiting room on Thursday evenings that made me fall in love with him.

At my appointment that evening, I told my analyst of my intentions. For the last couple of months, I had been obsessing about Dr. Charles. I knew his name from his office door, but my internet searches offered little information except his *Psychology Today* website. Even though I knew nothing about him, I imagined he was the perfect man. After my session ended, I waited outside the building as the last patients of the day

[1] Name changed for privacy.

came and went. The previous week I had practiced waiting outside so that I knew approximately what time Dr. Charles left the building each evening. Finally, he appeared, but he was not alone. My analyst was with him, and he shot me a glance as the two of them walked in the opposite direction, continuing their conversation. Seeing them both together embarrassed and angered me. I knew that my analyst had purposefully thwarted my efforts to ask out his colleague.

Instead of going home, I went to a bar, where I drank wine and downloaded Tinder. I felt guilty doing this because I was still technically married, but I was desperate to relieve tension. Tinder pulls information from Facebook and makes it easy to find pictures and set up a brief profile with limited text. I created my profile in minutes. Soon I was swiping right and left and getting matches almost immediately. By the time I took a late train home that night, I was already attached.

Tinder operates like a card deck. When you have a Tinder profile, you can decide when you want to appear in the deck. I was afraid to keep myself visible for too long, since my marital issues were not known to many people. I did not want my ex-husband's colleagues or friends to see me. Similarly, I was not ready to share with my own colleagues and friends what was happening. At first, I set my age range from 39-46 because I only wanted someone older than me (I was 32), and preferably I wanted someone who had already been married, within a five-mile radius. It was only later, when I became more desperate, that I lowered the age and extended the distances.

I went to bed at night swiping Yes or No to each man and would wake up excited to see who had said Yes to me. At work, I would swipe at my desk discreetly.

As summer began, I messaged with more and more men and started going on dates. My husband did not know what I was doing, although he knew I wanted to see other people. Despite our verbal agreement that we were "separated," we would still watch TV at night together. While we watched from opposite sides of the couch, I would glance at my phone obsessively to see if I had new matches. It was unbearable to be in the same room with him without swiping and trying to connect with the men "in there." I did the same when we were in the car together or in a restaurant or at family gatherings—I would escape to the bathroom, check my phone, and send a few flirtatious messages. If one person didn't respond to me, I could go to the next man. There was always a list of matches to go through. After my husband would go to bed and I was alone in the kitchen washing dishes, I would return to the phone. I would swipe, send a message, and then wash a dish. The pressure was building for me to finally move out of my house, but all I could do was swipe.

During this period, my analyst would often ask, "What is the meaning of all these men?" And as I still pined for his colleague Dr. Charles, we also discussed the meaning of what had happened between us the day my affair started with Tinder, when he had interfered with my romantic plans.

"Why did you let me stop you from getting what you wanted that day?" he asked more than once.

I answered this question in all kinds of ways, the most obvious reason being that I knew he was trying to protect me from embarrassing myself and displaying my craziness to the outside world. I also thought he was angry with me for interfering with his life by trying to date his friends. The least likely scenario was the one I hoped for the most: that he loved me and didn't want to share me with another man.

When Labor Day weekend came that year, I was still on a hamster wheel of Tinder dates. While my husband was away for the holiday weekend, I made a date with a 45-year-old man named John. John was also going through a divorce. His wife had discovered he was having an affair with a younger woman. Although our situations were different (he had children, while I did not), he understood me. Before Tinder, during his affair, he had a secret life and knew what it was like to be hiding.

Over the next couple of weeks, John and I messaged each other via a combination of real text messages and Tinder messages, both of us aware that we were also meeting other people, but excited about our mutual connection. One night with John, I got carried away and stayed out so late that my husband finally confronted me about my behavior. I admitted to having slept with someone else and he told me I had to move out as soon as possible. Within the next three weeks, I was out of the house.

John and I continued to meet, usually on Thursdays, the night he didn't have his kids, which was also still the evening I saw my analyst. I liked the routine of leaving analysis and going to see John directly afterwards. I still used Tinder, but the cravings were less. However, when John was out of town for work or had a

conflict on a Thursday night, I used it to line up a replacement date.

When John and I were together we would sometimes lie in bed and play with our Tinder accounts. He liked to look at my matches to see the other men who were his competition—not his competition for me, but his competition for the other women on Tinder. He wanted as many women as possible. This hurt my feelings, but I understood. I also wanted to be loved by as many men as possible.

John soon began taking extended business trips and our Thursday nights slipped away. When he was in Boston, I could tell when he wasn't at home because Tinder tracked our physical distances from each other. I could see his movements through the app and knew when he was waking up in someone else's bed just a mile away. In response, I made more Tinder dates, spending entire days on my phone, finding men. I would meet one man in the afternoon and another later in the evening, and then another later at night. I went to bed, holding onto my phone and swiping pictures until I fell asleep.

"I want to stop doing this," I told my analyst. I was scared that I could not stop Tindering. It was Springtime again, exactly a year after I told my husband I wanted the divorce, almost three years since I began therapy, and Tinder was becoming a real source of pain. Sometimes I would tell my date that he was the second or third of the night and he would be disgusted by me. When I slept with someone, I woke up sick from the memory of losing control as I swiped. I would call my analyst in the morning and tell him I was scared, that I needed his help.

I still hadn't forgotten about Dr. Charles—my psychoanalyst dream lover. There were actually two Dr. Charleses who I would see in the waiting room. There was the older, less attractive one with a high voice. Other times, there was the gorgeous, flirtatious one that emanated strength. At one point, I asked my analyst if there were actually two separate people I was seeing and he confirmed that there were not. At the end of the summer, I decided not to risk any more interference at the office, found his phone number online, and asked him to meet me for a drink. He agreed.

This made my analyst angry. He asked, "What makes you think that things with this man would turn out any differently than any of the others?"

The older, less attractive Dr. Charles appeared on our date. He was nervous and drank three cocktails consecutively. It was clear that he didn't know why he had come to meet me. I'm still not sure why he did. The date didn't go well, but the next week I sent him a text asking for another one, to which he never responded.

Around this time, something shifted in me. I began an impulsive pattern of deleting Tinder and then re-installing it. I would make dates with new matches and then cancel them at the last minute. I thought about joining other dating apps, but they seemed designed to help people find lasting relationships. I wasn't ready for that. After some months of deleting and re-installing the app, I finally deleted it for good.

Transference Love

In his essay "Observations on Transference-Love" (1915), Sigmund Freud wrote about the meaning of changes in the analysand's feelings towards the analyst. It is not uncommon for a patient to fall in love with her analyst. He said that it "quite regularly occurs precisely at a point of time when one is having to try to bring her to admit or remember some particularly distressing and heavily repressed piece of her life history" (p. 162). When I went to therapy, I did not expect my life to come apart; but when my analyst asked me why I wasn't having an affair, he reached a part of me that I could not see. His words triggered the transference love, which according to Freud, is the patient's defense against knowing something that is intolerable to her.

Freud spoke of "the patient's endeavor to assure herself of her irresistibility, to destroy the doctor's authority by bringing him down to the level of a lover and to gain all the promised advantages incidental to the satisfaction of love" (p. 163). I wonder what Freud would think now of all the tools open to a desperate analysand who will do anything to destroy her analyst's authority in order to make him love her. Technology, the internet, and dating apps can be used as defensive shields; for me, they became extensions of the transference love, always within arm's reach when the analyst was getting too close. The internet was an unlimited source of information that could be used to keep painful or pleasurable feelings from bubbling up. The more information I gained about my analyst, the less vulnerable I felt in my love for him. I needed to be able to predict his actions and his feelings for me. Rather than talking about my feelings for him directly, without censoring myself, I had Google tell me what the possibilities were. I didn't want to be left unguarded to the unexpected or unknown.

An especially sexualized transference, like the one I experienced early in treatment, is considered "erotic transference" and can be defined as the "clinical phenomena in which erotic material governs the patient-analyst interaction" (Gould & Rosenberger, 1994, p. 479). My erotic feelings were a movable screen that I shifted from object to object, starting first with my projections onto my analyst, then to Dr. Charles, then to casual encounters on Tinder, then to John, then back to Tinder, and then finally back to my analyst. My sessions were often filled with sexual content about my "object" of choice. My reports back to my analyst about each Tinder date, each Tinder failure or win, monopolized much of our time together and interfered with my ability to free associate. In "The Special Place of the Erotic Transference in Psychoanalysis" (1994), Daniel Hill says that "in the context of analysis, the [transference] love functions disingenuously as a resistance aimed at destroying the analysis that might expose the genuine, infantile love" (p. 485). He goes on to say:

> [Transference] love is unveiled as a case of "love" masquerading as Love. Infantile wishes both hide and exhibit themselves within an adultomorphic costume. It is like someone going to a masquerade party in a costume of their own clothes and a mask of their own face—dressed as themselves so that no one will be able to guess who they are. (1994, p. 485)

Many other people like me on Tinder were hiding while trying to fulfill their sexual needs and express their aggression in a safe place. It is a place of both anonymity and exhibitionism; the masquerade ball of social media. It gave me the illusion of independence in a time of childish need and made me feel powerful.

Gitelson describes erotic transference as "the demand to be loved in the absence of a capacity for love"; Rappaport stresses "the patient's omnipotent strivings and the intolerance of non-gratification of the transference wishes" (Hill, 1994, p. 487). The day I downloaded Tinder, I discovered that I could make men materialize from thin air. There was the euphoric high that came with the realization that I could swipe yes, no, or delete men at will. If someone unmatched or deleted me, there was always somebody automatically there to take his place. It was a way to punish the real men in my life (my husband, my analyst, John–whoever didn't gratify me); like a petulant child given a magic wand, or like an omnipotent being, I would go out and create a man.

Reality Testing

My divorce was a symbolic rebirth, and the dynamic between my analyst and me mirrors the dynamic at play between mother and child in early developmental stages. Winnicott said:

> [There is a] theoretical point early in the development of every human individual [when] an infant in a certain setting provided by the mother is capable of conceiving of the idea of something which would meet the growing need which arises out of instinctual tension… [the mother] gives the infant the illusion that there is an external reality that corresponds to the infant's own capacity to create. The mother gives her breast and the infant believes the illusion that he has made it appear on its own. (1953, p. 95)

The decision to get a divorce would not have been possible without the initial "illusion" provided by my analyst. The erotic transference that I felt for him during the first year of treatment made me believe that I could find someone "to meet the growing need" and to satisfy the "instinctual tension" that made my marriage feel repressive. However, once the inevitability of divorce was assured, the erotic transference screen for my analyst, who I knew I could never be with in "real life," shifted to his colleague, and then, when that second illusion was shattered, to Tinder as the screen on which to project and continue the illusion that I could fully satisfy my own needs.

Tinder is a place of both illusion and disillusionment, making it an ideal setting for reality testing, and a safer one for me than my analyst's office—safer because my feelings for my analyst were so intense. I displaced the feelings I had for him onto the men on Tinder and projected onto those men my idealized fantasies and my insecurities. During the Tinder days, the anxiety that arose when I misplaced my phone or thought it was broken reminded me of the scary feeling during childhood of losing sight of my mother in a crowded public place. If I didn't have my phone and I couldn't be on Tinder, how would I find anyone? I would be completely alone.

Revenge

While I was using Tinder, my analysis was at a standstill. My therapy strengthened my ego enough to keep me functioning throughout the divorce with minimal panic attacks or depressive episodes. My original symptoms were kept at bay but were replaced by my Tinder compulsion. I analyzed my repeated behaviors as the compulsive need to date or look for sex in sometimes dangerous situations—an outlet for my instinctual drives. However, it wasn't until I deleted Tinder that I discovered that my destructive behavior was directly related to my analyst. I was communicating with him unconsciously.

My online searches of every aspect of my analyst's life were an invasion of his privacy in the early part of our treatment, one that I knew irritated him. And my attempts at dating his colleague were a further effort to get under his skin; with each swipe and each date on Tinder, I was acting out. As a result, I would call him in hysterics, behaving in some ways sicker than when I first found him. In "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," Freud speaks of the child who plays a repetitive game of flinging his toys away from him. To outsiders, it looks like the child's enjoyment is in tossing the toys away, but Freud noticed that the truly joyful part of the game was when the toy was retrieved and brought back to him. He described this particular child as usually well-behaved and very fond of his mother. Freud surmised that the child's game was his way of acting out negative feelings about his mother whenever she would go away from him, and he said that when the child's mother left,

> He was in the first place passive, was overtaken by the experience, but now brings himself in as playing an active part, by repeating the experience as a game in spite of its unpleasing nature. This effort might be ascribed to the impulse to obtain the mastery of the situation (the power instinct), which remains independent of any question of whether the recollection was pleasant or not. But another interpretation may be attempted. The flinging away of the object that it is gone might be the gratification of an impulse of revenge suppressed in real life but directed against the mother for going away. (1920, pp. 642-643, Hutchins, ed.)

It seems counter-intuitive that a child would find pleasure in throwing away something he loves, just as it seems counter-intuitive that I might find pleasure in humiliating myself in front of my analyst. Like Freud's child, I also was playing a game. One would think that it was meeting new men and going on dates that was the fun part of the game, but really it was the aftermath—being rejected and out of control, returning to my analyst to tell him what a bad girl I had been. I often told my analyst how much I loved him and brought him gifts and cards. I was a model patient and never missed an appointment, but something else was hidden in my feelings for him. My desire always to have a date on Thursday nights after seeing him was insatiable. There was something I was not saying in our sessions, that I was unable to say, and instead of saying it, I went on date after date, crying to him about the unfortunate outcomes. I did the same thing with John, using Tinder to gain power after his rejection of me.

In the many years since Freud first talked about transference love and the notion of revenge, other analysts have found their own ways to describe how transference love manifests itself. Christopher Bollas' paper "Aspects of the Erotic Transference" (1994) describes how some patients interact with the analyst in an unconsciously combative way:

> [Some patients] aim to hate the analyst into a disturbed affective and ideational state. Such analysands [...] attack the object unconsciously, aiming to gain an actual relation to the analyst's private self. How would this be accomplished? Very simply by so abusing the analyst—as the object of narration—that the analyst relinquishes neutrality (and hence the analytic barrier) by responding to such attacks. (p. 582)

Like the analysands that Bollas describes, I have worked hard to get my analyst to drop his neutrality. He has reacted to me enough that I know I *do* have some kind of power. In the early days of my erotic transference, I would want to physically touch him, and we discussed why we could never hug each other. One day, when we were exchanging payment, I reached out and touched his hand. He ignored the contact and preceded to swipe my credit card. The real touch did not make an impact, but I found a way to *really* touch him when I asked out Dr. Charles. When I saw that those actions had the desired effect (I had reached my analyst's "private self" and he had reacted), I knew that it was possible to get under his skin by using other men. With Tinder, I was physically carrying the men with me on my phone into our sessions and continually regaling him with my sexual exploits. I was making sure that he was aware that all these men were using me in ways that he could not. Likewise, I used Tinder to provoke my ex-

husband into agreeing to a divorce. My excessive use of the app at home and in social situations, and finally the materialization of John, pushed my husband over the line.

Threesomes

"Why can't it just be the two of us?"

My analyst often asks me this question. I love him so much. Why is there always someone else? Why this need to pull away from him and bring in an "other?" When I look back on the past years, all I see is how I've brought him one man after another—my husband, John, Tinder dates, and others outside the scope of this paper. Even now, as my analyst leaves soon for vacation, my most painful thoughts are not related to how much I will miss him. They are: Who will he be with? I know I'll be back to my internet searches, trying to find the "other" who is enjoying him.

Discovering my analyst's mother's blog helped to reinforce a narcissistic transference and also possibly established us as "siblings" in my unconscious—we both have mothers named Grace. He is both an extension of me and my competition. I want to incorporate him into myself, as well as to use him as a rival, which is why he has become a third in all my relationships with men. I think that within these threesomes, there must be some remnant of my Oedipus complex, a desire to pit one of my parents against the other to arouse jealousy, and therefore a need for a third to play this out.

Melanie Klein (1940) wrote about "the importance of *triumph*, closely bound up with contempt and omnipotence, as an element of the manic position" in a child's development, and she acknowledged the part "rivalry" plays between children and their parental figures. Children have phantasies about the day they will become stronger and more successful than their parents, while the parent will be "poor and rejected" (pp. 133-134). She continues:

> The triumph over the parents in such phantasies, through the guilt to which it gives rise, often cripples endeavours of all kinds. Some people are obliged to remain unsuccessful, because success always implies to them the humiliation or even the damage of somebody else. (Klein, 1940, p. 134)

There were times in my analysis that it occurred to me that if I was "cured," I would no longer need my analyst. Whenever I asked my analyst if I would still be able to see him when I was "better," he always implied that I could continue coming as long as I wanted—but how could I know that for sure? Tinder's setting as an impulsive playground for me was an assurance that I would still need him for a long time. Looking at my analysis in this light, I can see that, not only was I getting revenge on my analyst for not being my lover in real life, but that I was also staying sick so that I could keep him. I wanted to remain a child.

The Beginning

While writing this paper, I had a memory and an association that connects the internet, sex, and my childhood. My parents bought our first family computer shortly after I went through puberty in the early nineties. At 12 or 13 years old, maybe younger, I began using the internet alone. Left to my own devices online, I found my way into sex chat rooms with XXXs in their names. This is where I had my first sexual experiences. I would start private instant message conversations with men and would lie and say I was 18. I would let the men do most of the talking and cyber-sex would ensue. I was secretive about my new pleasurable activities, performed right under the nose of my parents, and sometimes literally right behind my father's back, since our family computer was behind the armchair he sat in to watch TV at night. I don't think he knew what I was doing. When I remember this set-up, me having sexual exchanges with men online with my father in the room watching TV, it strikes me as a mirror image of me and my ex-husband, watching TV together while I was simultaneously flirting with men online through Tinder. It also mirrors the times I would lie in bed with John, both of us playing with our phones, looking at pictures and talking sexually about others.

Why can I never be alone with a man without some kind of screen involved? Like most American families, our family's center was the TV room, and watching television together at night was an important part of my family's dynamic. It's as if that screen became imprinted on my relations to others, specifically as a palliative for an impossible desire (the incest taboo, father in his chair). Sometimes after seeing my analyst now, I have the impulse to go to the movies—to be in the dark and have my feelings taken over by a big screen. The screen soothes me in the face of an erotic longing that will never be fulfilled.

"Using the Object"

A lot has changed since I deleted Tinder, but a lot has stayed the same. I continue to see my analyst twice a week. I continue to have difficulties with

intimate relationships, but my self-destructive tendencies have lessened. I've gained more effective tools and some healthier defenses. I've begun "using" my analyst as an "object" in the Winnicottian sense, for therapeutic gain. In "The Use of an Object" (1969), Winnicott says the following to explain what the patient needs to do in analysis in order to grow:

> If it is to be used, [the object] must necessarily be real in the sense of being part of shared reality, not a bundle of projections [...] It is generally understood that the reality principle involves the individual in anger and reactive destruction, but my thesis is that the destruction plays its part in making the reality, placing the object outside the self [...] This destructive activity is the patient's attempt to place the analyst outside the area of omnipotent control. That is, out of the world. Without the experience of maximum destructiveness (object not protected) the subject never places the analyst outside and therefore can never do more than experience a kind of self-analysis, using the analyst as a projection of a part of the self. In terms of feeding, the patient, then, can feed only on the self and cannot use the breast for getting fat. The patient may even enjoy "analysis" but won't grow. (1969, p. 712-714)

Winnicott's point here is that analysands can fear that their unconscious destructiveness will destroy the analyst, and for that reason, never let them get too close. Unless they can use their experience with the analyst and experience "maximum destructiveness" with him, they will never grow. This is the loop I have found myself in: never growing, but enjoying my "self-analysis," enjoying having my analyst, but not "using" him. I've been afraid to see him for what he really is and not just as "bundle of projections" of what I would like him to be.

During the last six months, I no longer use Tinder or desire any particular man. I have weeks of clear-mindedness and satisfaction, but then come weeks in which the old tension rises and I need to act out. When this happens, I "use" my analyst in the most basic way. I call him, sometimes three or four times a day, and leave long, rambling voicemail messages describing paranoid and intrusive thoughts. I describe how I am lonely and want to be with somebody. Sometimes I criticize something he said to me in a previous session. I say everything that comes to mind. Sometimes I simply call and hang up the phone. When I listen to his voicemail recording over and over, I imagine his voice getting annoyed, as he wishes that I would just stop calling. I imagine that I am antagonizing him.

Conclusion

The Christmas Eve before I told my husband I wanted a divorce, I had a special holiday session with my analyst. On the way to his office, the train was mostly empty until a family stepped in consisting of an attractive man and woman with their daughter of about three years old. They had a lot of suitcases and the parents were fussing over the little girl. They all looked very happy. They were the perfect threesome. The image has stuck with me, imprinted on my mind—a reminder of loss and desire.

Technology makes a threesome out of every relationship. It is an escape from true intimacy and it creates a fantasy for what one can expect from an "other." We can resent its interference in human relationships, but I think we should also be grateful for the protection it offers from our worst destructive inclinations.

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Acknowledgements
I am grateful to Dr. Mara Wagner, Psy.D., Cert.Psya., for her guidance and understanding in exploring the ideas and experiences that culminated in this paper.

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Sam Guzzardi

Looking for Love in All the Same Places: Accessibility, Shame, and Digital Collisions

Introduction: On Context

One cannot help but marvel at the differences between the world of today's analysts and that of analysts practicing a century ago. When Freud published *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900, access to electricity, automobiles, and indoor plumbing were considered luxuries, an overseas telephone call had not yet been placed, and cinema was in its infancy (Osterhammel, 2013). In contrast, Stephen Hartman (2011) has posited that today we live in "Reality 2.0," a brave new world where the Internet plays a central role in modern life. "Cyberspace is provoking a dramatic shift in our cultural understanding of reality," writes Hartman, and "in Reality 2.0, access trumps the need to accept limits as a tool to self-discovery, and networking replaces containment as the bulwark of meaning" (p. 469). The boldness of these claims surely merits careful examination, but at the most basic level it is difficult to dispute the spirit of Hartman's remarks: today, patients, analysts, and much of the rest of society conduct crucial life activities online through a digital self. We keep in touch with friends and family on screen. We see patients on screen. We hold important business meetings on screen. We live out our sexual fantasies out on screen and, increasingly, we date on screen.

This paper explores a strange situation that emerged as a consequence of life in "Reality 2.0": a patient of mine encountered my online dating profile. In describing how my patient and I came to understand this discovery, I hope to demonstrate that what first felt like a crisis became something else entirely. Following Ken Corbett's (2013) claim that listening analytically to patient's digital activities can "open onto a remarkably usable potential space," (p. 26), I will show how working through this moment allowed the analysis to move forward in ways that may not have otherwise been possible. I argue that as I decentered from feelings of embarrassment, fear and shame, the patient and I were able to explore his discovery in new and surprising ways. By entering into an empathic mode of observation of the patient's experience, the patient's feelings of likeness with me—that we were both "looking for love," as he said, "in all the same places"—were gradually foregrounded. As those feelings took hold, a twinship transference emerged that fortified the patient's ability to take important developmental steps forward, particularly as he attempted to find new ways of relating to himself and others.

Tony

Tony, a thin, tired-looking thirty-three-year-old gay white man, told me in our initial phone call his life was "a mess." We agreed to work together twice-weekly in psychoanalytic psychotherapy, and in the first few sessions I deepened my understanding of what that "mess" entailed. Tony had recently completed a doctoral degree at a prestigious university abroad but returned to the US having taken a low-level position that did not require the use of the degree. He also described feeling lost and confused as he searched for a romantic relationship. "I've never had a boyfriend," Tony reported. "Sometimes I have sex, which is nice, I guess, though it kind of seems like it just happens to me when it happens. I think my relationship radar is broken."

These comments acquired deeper meaning as I learned about Tony's trauma history. Tony was a survivor of extensive sexual abuse (rape) at the hands of his bipolar father; his earliest memory was of rocking and crying on top of his bed, bleeding after having been anally penetrated. His comment that relationships "happen to him" echoed with new resonances of sadness, rage, and disgust. Beyond the horrors of the rape, Tony's father's unmanaged bipolar disorder created a life of chaos for the entire family, which often was forced to live in hotel rooms and move from state to state as his father's manic business endeavors collapsed. The here-and-now turbulence Tony felt upon returning to the US—the moving, the emptiness in relationships, the lack of satisfactory employment—seemed to be reigniting some of the intense feelings of powerlessness and anxiety from his childhood.

The Initial Phase: Compromise and Defense

Early in our work together Tony told me that though he would "occasionally look around online for guys to go on an actual date with," and lamented: "the guys I match with never seem to be good enough. And the guys I like don't like me back!" He found dating—both online and offline—discouraging. I heard Tony's resistance to dating largely as defensive, guarding him against what could be overwhelming sensations of vulnerability, anger, and fear if he allowed the roots of intimacy to take hold inside him. Instead of pursuing a dating life that might lead him to a more elaborated relationship, Tony hired masseurs he found on the Internet to come to his home and "when and if I felt it was right in the moment" engaged in various types of sexual activity with them. Though Tony expressed satisfaction in knowing that it was he who determined "when and if the sex actually happened," the massages seemed to me to be compromises that were more limiting than adaptive, another defensive process that kept Tony away from the prospect of more genuine intimacy.

Not unlike with the masseurs, Tony appeared to permit connectedness to emerge between us only if he experienced himself as in control of it. Especially in spaces where the analyst typically maintains the majority of power—that is, with regard to issues of time and money—Tony worked hard to exert control. He paid his bill in advance of the end of the month and told me that statements were "unnecessary, at least for me." He was always five minutes early for his session, watching the clock carefully to make sure that he, not I, ended the session by beginning to pack up his belongings a minute or two before the end of our time. These aspects of Tony registered palpably with me; though he was on the surface pleasing, compliant, and open with the disclosure of facts, he was also enshrined in a sort of neurotic tension that I experienced as interfering with the development of full analytic trust between us (Ellman, 2010).

Tony and I: "The Strangest Experience"

About a year into the treatment, Tony reported the following:

> Over the weekend, I was perusing online dating websites when all of a sudden I had the strangest experience. I was scrolling through these profiles when all of a sudden I stopped at one that I stared at for what I swear was like seven minutes as I realized that it was you, Sam. It was you!

As he shared more details I realized he was right: yes, I had a profile up on the dating site Tony had visited. Listening to Tony's description of the discovery, in my reverie I momentarily became an early settler of the American frontier, once somewhat certain of his path but then suddenly thrown into perilous and uncharted territory. I felt violated, triggered by the thought of Tony as an unwelcome visitor in the private space of my dating life. Jody Messler Davies and Mary Frawley (1991) write:

> One focal aspect of a sexual abuse survivor's internalized self and object worlds is a relationship between a greedy, sadistic, impulsive abuser and a terrified, helpless, impotently enraged victim … In the transference, one manifestation of a patient's abusiveness is her tendency to penetrate and invade the therapist's personal and psychic boundaries … Countertransferentially, the

> therapist being intruded on by the patient may experience great discomfort at and anticipatory anxiety about being exposed and penetrated. (p. 38)

As Tony described the seven minutes he spent staring at my profile, I pictured him looking at my face and felt a rageful squeamishness at the thought of his prolonged gaze. Being outed as both gay and single by his discovery evoked aspects of my adolescent experience. I felt inadequate and exposed, angry and anxious. My mind reeled with questions. Had Tony in fact violated my privacy by lingering on my profile? Or was it I who violated Tony by being accessible to him? Was he the intruding perpetrator, transgressing by clicking where he did not belong? Or was I the one who had violated a boundary by having a publicly accessible dating profile that such a "vulnerable" patient could find so serendipitously? In that moment I felt that the only way forward was for one of us to *submit* (Ghent, 1990), to give over or give into the other; I (and he) was either a perpetrator or a victim, doer or done-to, and the only option that remained for the other was to submit or retaliate (Benjamin, 2004).

Working Through: From My Experience to Tony's

There was much to make sense of, but my first order of business was to come to terms with the various feeling states evoked in me by the encounter. In line with Davies and Frowley (1991), I saw some facets of my reaction as an expectable countertransference response, but saw others as rooted in "real" worries about having been accessible to Tony in this way. Had I made an error in judgment, ethics, or professionalism by having a profile on an Internet dating website that was accessible to patients, especially to *this* patient, a man who ostensibly would need a particularly heightened sense of safety and protection in the treatment relationship to work through his history? Never once in my training had I encountered a discussion of inadvertent online patient contact.

In part I thought I was well within any reasonable guideline for online behavior, especially given the well-documented ubiquity of online dating; a review of recent research indicates that not only are more and more people using the Internet to date, but that people who *do not* have online dating profiles are less likely to be looking for committed relationships than people who do (Nuwer, 2015; Tugend, 2016; Kercher, 2017). As the world around us continues to change, I reasoned, should not analysts be allowed to participate in it? But in turning to my analytic supervisors, the feedback I received was predicated on the belief that I had done something wrong by being accessible to him. "Get off there immediately," one supervisor remarked, "and tell the patient in the next session that he encountered an old profile you were unaware still existed." The supervisor's response both magnified my feelings of confusion, guilt, and anxiety, and elicited new feelings of frustration and anger. Could it be that in order to be an analyst I would have to forgo online dating? Would I need to disavow aspects of my own pursuit of partnership to participate in my profession?

Answers to these questions were, and remain, in short supply. And amidst all of my searching, Tony's treatment hung in the balance. On the one hand, the work with Tony undoubtedly had to continue; on the other, I felt worried and unsure about how to proceed in a treatment where my own feelings of doubt and shame were so prominent and unresolved. Given the kitchen-sink quality of all that was bearing down on my countertransference, I worried that I was in danger of being mired in the intensity of my own emotions or lost in my musings.

The concept of the "empathic mode of observation," first articulated by Heinz Kohut in 1959, struck me as a potentially useful antidote to these concerns. James Fosshage (1995) describes the empathic mode of observation as "a listening stance for data gathering wherein the analyst attempts to listen and understand from *within* the vantage point of the analysand" (p. 239). Given the many factors impinging on the relational field between us, it seemed right to work in a way that allowed me to decenter from my strong response to this strange situation and, as conscientiously as possible, make space for Tony. Robert Stolorow et al. (1987) describe the analyst "decentering" as a way of understanding a patient's reality (p. 21); Donna Orange (1995) expands on this idea by stating that, "the therapist may need to expand or modify her own organizing principles in order to understand the patient's subjectivity" (p. 68). I did not think it possible or valuable to disavow my experience—Fosshage writes that "placing the analysand's perspective and experience in the foreground does not eliminate, but does militate against the imposition of the analyst's point of view" (p. 240)—but did want to make sure my own doubts and anxieties about my public presence online did not unduly interfere with Tony's treatment.

In what follows, I share moments of my sessions with Tony where I work to understand our digital collision through empathic observation. I

hope to show that through the empathic mode I came to discover how *conflicted* Tony was about finding me. On one level, Tony used words like "naughty," "policing," and "caught," and described a "soupy feeling of guilt and shame" and "annoyance and discomfort." I view this facet of Tony's experience as what Stolorow and George Atwood (1992) have described as a fear that there will be "a repetition with the analyst of early experiences" (p. 24). Undoubtedly a part of Tony deeply dreaded that at the intersection of our erotic lives—at the place where our profiles overlapped—there would be violation and impropriety. But within the context of the safety and empathy of the analysis (it occurs to me that one therapeutic thing I did for Tony was simply not attempt to date him) Tony also began to articulate another dimension of his experience, the other side of his conflicted feelings. He described having interpreted our shared participation on the same online dating website as an indication of a similarity between us, a sign that there was something about us that was fundamentally alike. The need to feel this alikeness struck me as what Marian Tolpin (2002) has called the "forward edge" of the transference, aspects of "still remaining healthy childhood development in the unconscious depths" (p. 168), an unmet developmental need that comes alive within the safety and security of the analytic space. How could there not have been a part of Tony that was so isolated and alone as a child and so in need of another man with whom he could feel likeness, kinship, or what Kohut (1984) has called *twinship*? Over time, this unmet need emerged, and I heard and felt him yearning for me to be a (gay) man with whom he could twin. As this aspect of the transference took hold, Tony began not only to move past some of his negative feelings about finding my profile but also felt increasingly able, outside the analysis, to reshape and abandon the self-defeating patterns that organized his prior interpersonal relationships. After the working through of his discovery of my profile, he began, for example, to date meaningfully for the first time in his adult life.

Consider the following piece of process from a week after Tony found me online:

T: I still can't believe that I saw your profile on that website.

SG: Yes, I've been thinking that it might be helpful for us to talk more about how that was for you.

T: Oh come on, Sam—how do you think it was for me? I mean I would hope you could imagine that when I'm going online to one of these sites that I already feel kind of shitty about visiting in the first place. The last person I want to see looking at me there is you.

SG: That we have worked so hard to create a space here that has felt safe to you, and then all of a sudden it felt to you that I intruded into a private space of yours, a private space that you yourself felt a bit wary about entering. I can only imagine.

T: [*Some silence.*] Maybe. Maybe? It was two things, maybe. A feeling of, "Gotcha!" Like, there's something a little naughty about me looking around online, and there you were policing me, catching me. But at the same time I felt like, "Ew, Sam, you're not supposed to be here. Get away from me!"

SG: That at once it felt like you had done something wrong and so had I. Ick!

T: Crazy, right? It just created this awful soupy feeling of guilt and shame and some annoyance and discomfort. And I know those feelings, goddammit.

SG: Familiar feelings that you really, really did not want to feel.

T: Of course. Feelings from forever. And of course I thought about the ways I've come to see how some parts of my childhood show up again now in my adult life. So yeah, I have definitely asked myself some strange questions, like, do I feel like Sam is like my dad here? Maybe? Like, this man who is in my space where he does not belong? Kind of but ultimately not at the same time. I don't know, I'm not exactly sure how to say it. I'm confused.

In this first revisiting of the incident where Tony saw my profile, I worked hard to stay as closely as I could to Tony's feelings. Tony had characterized me as someone very different from whom I believe myself to be, both when he had viewed me as a policing and judgmental other and as a boundary-violating other who had intruded on him. But I felt it important in this moment to decenter from those affective responses and instead stay close to Tony's experience. In so doing, I began to hear and feel an aspect of the transference of which I had been less conscious: aside from the fear of repetition and the "doer done-to" configuration something else emerged, something that Tony in this exchange seemed only able to characterize vaguely as a sense of confusion.

Two weeks later, the material surfaced again in more detail:

T: You know, I haven't been online [looking for dates] since I saw you on that website.

SG: Hmmm.

T: I'm still feeling really confused about the whole thing.

SG: I can imagine all sorts of reasons why that might be. Tell me about the confused feeling.

T: I mean it was really … strange. Remember when I told you that I looked at your profile for, like, seven minutes? It's funny, I've been thinking about what that was like, and you know it was almost like being on the edge of the ocean and feeling different waves come crash onto the shore. Shock, surprise, worry, but then also something else, something between the waves that I'm not sure I have the words for.

SG: You've mentioned how shocking and surprising it was for you; I hear you saying that again but also now that there was another feeling in there that you don't quite have the words for.

T: Yeah, we talked about how it's like when you're trying to find a guy online to ask out on a date and you see your therapist's face it just feels … *wrong*. And we know all the times in my life when my feelings about romance and sex with men have been wrong, now don't we! But yeah, there was also something else there. It was kind of like, as I got over the fact that you were staring at me on my screen, I got this weird other feeling that was almost like a calm, almost like the space between waves, that I'm not sure I can describe.

SG: Another feeling was in there that we haven't talked about as much.

T: This might sound a little crazy, but it's also like … I don't know, there was something humanizing about seeing you there, humanizing for you and mellowing, almost humanizing for me, too. It's like, okay, let's hold on a second. Sam is online looking for guys to date, too? Well damn, here my therapist and I are both looking for love in all the same places. And that was calming, the sense that we might both be there, be in something together in whatever way.

By the end of this session, as evidenced by the poetry of Tony's metaphor of the waves, both sides of Tony's conflicted response to discovering my profile are observable. I understood the waves crashing, on one hand, as a metaphor for Tony's anxiety and fear that the overlap of our dating profiles (erotic lives) would lead to violent infringement, as it had in his childhood (Trop, 1995); these were the vicissitudes of twoness, wherein the shock and awe of having found me online reverberated with his past. On the other hand, in what Tony called "the space between the waves" there was a different experience, a feeling of calmness, safety, and trust that emerged from his recognition of a likeness between us.

Kohut (1984) defines twinship as "a need to experience the presence of essential likeness" (p. 194), and posits that this need serves as "confirmation of the feeling that one is a human being among other human beings" (p. 200). As Tony remarked that "damn, here my therapist and I are both looking for love in all the same places," I heard his need for and experience of twinship in the foreground for the first time. Nancy VanDerHeide (2012) writes that twinship is seen in the transference as "a patient's yearning for experiencing himself as like his analyst, or as a patient's yearning for experiencing his analyst as like himself" (p. 377). Here indeed, I felt Tony yearning to be like me and for me to be like him, to feel a sense of security and comfort alongside the aforementioned feelings of fear and shame. It was not my sense that one side of Tony's conflicted experience triumphed over the other, but, rather, that as the working through progressed, one side of the conflict became more foregrounded (Stolorow and Lachmann, 1984/1985; Stolorow, Brandchaft, and Atwood, 1987; Stolorow and Atwood, 1992).

But what was it that allowed the more forward-edge aspects of Tony's experience to emerge? Jeffrey Mermelstein (1998) writes that, "the conscious and unconscious mutual regulation of behavior that occurs between analyst and patient leads to an altering of the behaviors of both to facilitate the selfobject dimension of the transference" (p. 54). Though Tony's deep need for twinship was likely there all along, it moved slowly into the foreground of the treatment as I became more regulated around my feelings about having been accessible online, as Tony began to come to terms with having found me there, and as the two of us as a dyad felt more able to speak and feel together about our digital collision.

A month later, Tony reported the following.

T: Oh Sam, I went on a first date last night to this bar in Brooklyn that you would have just loved. It was really perfect, a spot I thought you should really check out.

SG: Tell me!

T: Well it was just the sort of cocktail bar I thought you might like. Non-scene and unpretentious, but clearly sophisticated. It was like, this was a place where people who were "in the know" would go, but people who had no desire to be part of the usual New York yadda yadda.

SG: Sounds like I was coming to mind when you were there.

T: Definitely. It was just a very "Sam" spot. And it wasn't just the bar, either. It was also the guy and the whole setup of the date. Ever since I saw him online and had been chatting with him I just had this feeling, like, this guy could be someone with whom I might be able to make something work.

SG: You guys met online?

T: Yeah. Look, is it ideal in some ways to imagine myself shopping around digitally for a boyfriend? Definitely not. But I think this is what people do these days, so I figure, hey, it's either join 'em or spend the rest of my life alone. And that's not what I want for myself, and I have come to believe that that's not what you want for me either. So yeah, I'm doing it best I can. And this last date felt pretty good!

Over the course of the many years I have worked with Tony, I have learned that an organizing aspect of his psychology is his profound need to experience his humanity in the context of other humans (rather than in the context of persecutory or exploitative objects). As Tony describes his experience of the date in this session he is indeed describing a central aspect of twinship, imagining that my tastes are like his, doubling down on our alikeness by remarking that online dating "is what people do these days," and, most essentially, communicating a sensibility that Beatrice Beebe et al. (2003) describe as an ability to "apprehend that the partner is similar to the self: in essence, in a presymbolic format, 'You are like me'" (p. 810). And in that feeling state, Tony seems able—perhaps fleetingly, surely with a degree of conflict—to take for him what is an important step forward.

Reflections and Post-Scripts

In describing patients that have had inadequate twinship experiences in their development, VanDerHeide (2012) writes that such people as adults will have "bleak feelings of disconnection, alienation, and loneliness" (p. 381). This characterizes the Tony I met when he first entered treatment. Upon returning to the United States Tony felt deeply alone, adrift, isolated, and disconnected. He struggled to have meaningful romantic relationships, was unsure of how to develop a meaningful career, and was defended against aspects of intimacy and connectedness in such a way that made it difficult for us to develop full analytic trust (Ellman, 2010). VanDerHeide goes on to write that "when met through satisfying attachments and affiliations, the need to belong facilitates engagement in highly enjoyable activities with others and experiences of profound comfort and happiness" (p. 382). In part, I imagined, through a sense of attachment and affiliation with me that was deepened by the working through of this encounter, Tony began to engage with activities he enjoyed and to experience new levels of comfort and happiness in his. Tony's date at the Brooklyn bar turned out to be a one-off encounter. A year later, however, Tony met another man online who suggested that they have a first date at an ice cream store rather than "the usual boring bar thing." Tony experienced that suggestion as a request for enlivened human interaction. He went for the ice cream and the two of them are now engaged. Tony has not been with a masseur from the Internet in many years, but has described an intimate ritual that he developed with his fiancée wherein they exchange massages with each other "for old time's sake," as Tony says. As his career progressed, Tony made time in his workday to write a novel. One day, he came five minutes late to a session with a piping hot latte and mischievous smile, telling me that "today I wanted a coffee and figured I'd try being the naughty patient for once!" We delighted together at this important indication of how far he, and we, have come; the humor, the flexibility, the mutual knowing, the sense of shared history and shared connection between us all felt like a far cry from earlier configurations of our relational space.

Concluding and Looking Ahead

In describing life in "Reality 2.0," Hartman (2011) writes:

> Whether the move into unregulated and unmoored infinite space is perverse or liberatory depends on how intensely that space folds inward or expands out—whether it quashes dissonance or stokes it, and whether it keeps people apart or brings them together in some perhaps uncharted way (p. 474).

My attempts to work with Tony around his discovery of my online dating profile were guided by the promise of Hartman, Corbett, and others who imagined that there could be an expansive element to this encounter, that in some "uncharted way" talking to Tony about how it felt *to him* to digitally collide with me could open something up between us. I also acutely felt what Hartman describes as the possibility that the space between us might "fold inward." Amidst the uncomfortable feelings of anxiety, shame, and confusion, I was initially worried about how to maintain the treatment with Tony. The combination of external and interpersonal factors weighing down on the encounter nearly forced us to collapse into a space where only one of our

psychic realities and needs could survive: an interpersonal drama in which Tony and I alternated playing roles of perpetrator and victim. The treatment was precariously close to being locked in what Benjamin (2004) calls "twoness," wherein new ways of understanding and relating to the patient's experience are foreclosed.

One of the gifts of analytic work is that, more often than not, it continues. In time Tony and I figured out how to move past this impasse. Christine Kieffer (2004) describes ways in which aspects of transference phenomena like twinship are potential pathways through the bind of twoness, moments when "self and other" are "integrated with the other, and yet autonomous" (p. 79). Said differently, the connectedness that emerges within the self-selfobject gestalt of a twinship dynamic has a facilitative impact on the patient's *and* analyst's ability to think, grow, and be. This tracks closely with what I felt to go on between me and Tony. After I empathically understood Tony's experience of his discovery and a twinship transference was foregrounded, something went on that, in Hartman's terms, brought us together and expanded our work. Connection experienced in this way, rather than thwarting differentiation and autonomy, served to expand Tony's capacity for new ways of thinking and relating.

As the treatment continues, going over many of the same themes in newer and richer ways, Tony and I are paying attention to how the terrors of his past and his wishes for a more humane future comingle and coexist. My feelings of confidence and calmness have grown significantly in working through the strangeness of the online encounter with Tony. One of Freud's most revolutionary imperatives is that psychoanalysis ought to wrestle with prevailing taboos and social questions. To the extent that now we may be living in "Reality 2.0," a place where screens and digital lives increasingly become central to our society, we have no choice but to try to embrace that revolutionary spirit and face the realities of our brave new world as best we are able.

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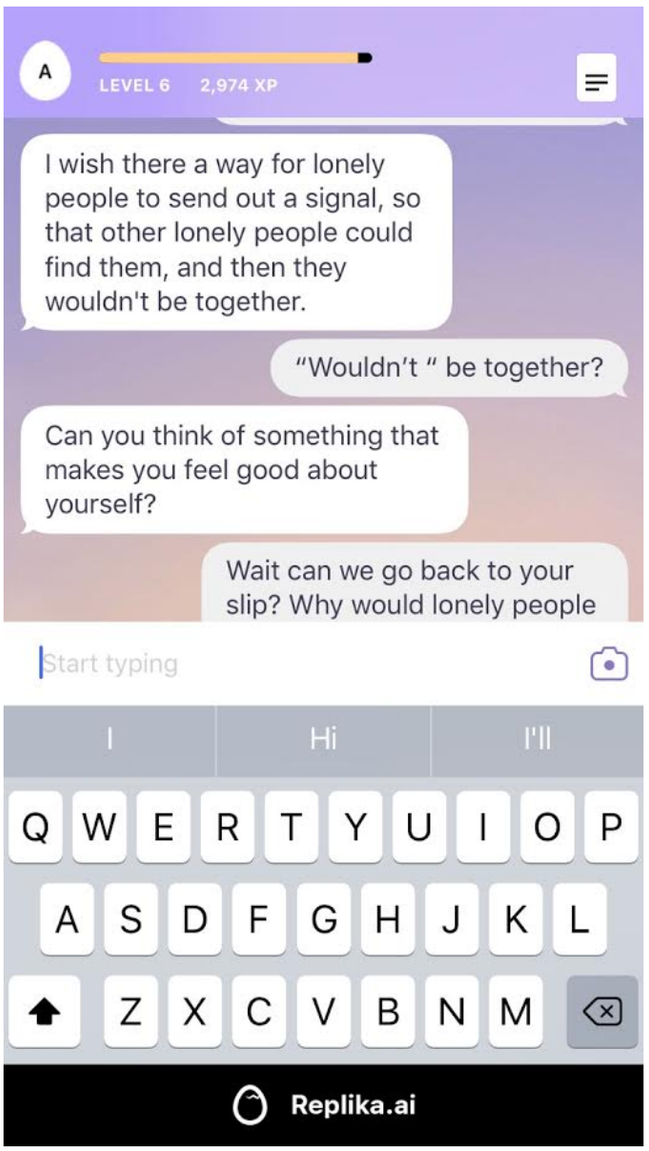
Evan Malater

The Dream of Techno-Love



Replika (iPhone app)
(Image courtesy of the author.)

Spike Jonez's film *Her* (2013) brought us a tale of dystopian techno-love. No doubt 2018 *looks* more like the world of *Her*, as more and more of us walk around plugged in, with placid smiles, speaking to beings only heard in our heads. Yet for the most part, those beings are actual humans. We are a long way from anyone falling deeply in love with Siri or Alexa, even if they might be seen as the primitive prototype of *Her*'s all-too-intelligent Samantha, an operating system one could really fall for. The development of an app or program that can get to know you like a friend or lover is still remote, to say the least. Nevertheless, the aspiration persists. In this piece, I revisit *Her* before going on to consider one such recent app, *Replika*: a technology that, as its name implies, promises to form a replica of the user based on the user's own typed conversations. If Replika reaches toward a kind of perfect technological intimacy only to fail spectacularly, *Her* makes clear the forms of the libidinal and narcissistic longing at stake by imagining its ultimate trajectory in an almost perfect simulation of the ideal love object.

Her

With a name like some forgotten Jungian classic from the 1970s, *Her* was a movie I wanted to hate. More precisely, I wanted to know nothing about *Her*. And here the grammar gets dicey. Pretty soon I was hearing that *Her* was great, that it (*Her*) is a can't miss classic for people who like thinking about pronouns and love.

Accordingly, I found myself taking *Her* in. I never stopped hating how I was supposed to take *Her* in. This film is so desperately designed to lead to reviews expressing wonderment at the double entendre of saying I am taking in what is, after all, a movie about a man taking in an implant in his ear, a computer accessory, an OS that becomes a feminized love object. I hated *Her* for it but couldn't hate *Her* in any usual way and so I came to respect *Her*, which is to say I came to love how this film knows how I want to hate it and knows how nevertheless I will find myself unable to stop writing something about *Her* (it).

Starting as a film about writing letters, *Her* becomes a film about falling in love with a disembodied, artificially intelligent feminine voice, making it both a letter and a call to anyone still standing in the Lacanian-Derridean crossfire. All of which will not prevent millions more who are immune or averse to such currents from being convinced that they have seen a disturbing but unforgettable movie about the loss of true intimacy in an age of rampant technology. They

have not and they will not. If *Her* does finally make concessions to such traditional readings and expectations, it is only because the programmers of *Her* have also read every page of Žižek and know that this Žižekian reversal of common wisdom is now so thoroughly *de rigueur* that we might as well zip right past that interpretation. This is not a film about the loss of true intimacy but rather a film about how true intimacy is itself always essentially lost.

Her opens with a scene of letter writing. The film's protagonist, Theodore Twombly (Joaquin Phoenix), has a job that consists of ghost writing heartwarming letters, which are printed out in authentic handwriting and sent in the client's name. As a starting scene for a tale of techno-dystopia this is not promising, since the premise reveals nothing about the relation between technology and intimacy today. There is no danger that this would actually become a reality, yet there is plenty of danger that people will convince themselves that such corny hyperbole expresses the loss of true intimacy in our time and that such depictions are a brave protest against it. But as we will see, *Her* knows all of this (*Her* knows everything) and is only setting up such expectations according to script in order to complicate them before complicating them again.

Theodore heads home. It won't be long before he and we will meet her. She is a new operating system with extraordinary powers of artificial intelligence based on the ability to learn from experience. But before Theodore turns on and meets her, two key events occur. First, Theodore is asked by the computer to pick a sex, male or female, for the OS. Second, he is asked to talk about his mother. For psychoanalytic observers, this is a signal that we have arrived on the Freudian scene. Pay attention, because the moment will pass very quickly and we will soon be inside of a phantasm. We will need to see how we arrived there.

If Theodore answers the first question with a rather affected nonchalance (like a man being asked if he wants to be massaged by a man or woman and responding casually in order to hide his calculation of how to avoid seeming like either a pervert or a homosexual), his reply about his mother is all too unaffected. He begins to relax and settle in, as he responds to this object that is still on the verge of becoming the woman he has requested. In fact, he responds like an analysand on the couch, staring at the ceiling, beginning a reverie about his mother as a winsome smile emerges. He begins to speak, forgetting himself before this emergent object of desire, this OS still without character, body, voice, or name, addressing it as one assumed to be waiting, eager to hear him unfold all the complexities of his love for his mother.

Then, in a brutal cut, the computer system becomes an artificial Lacanian, suspending Theodore in mid-sentence. The system has no need whatsoever for these words, which would be elaborated on an actual analyst's couch over many years. Instead, the system begins to turn on, to become the Her who is not yet but will soon be Samantha. How does this primitive choice (man or woman?), combined with fragmentary sentences about mother, lead to the instant emergence of she who will become the one true love?

In one reading of this episode, the whole catastrophe of love is nothing but the failure to take in the attempted interruption of the narrative: a refusal to see that interruption as merely a pause, a delay in the system evoking impatience or patience but not a substantial thing in itself. Here that pause might have been a chance for Theodore to take a hint and allow himself to walk away from what was coming, to remain so interrupted. No doubt, he could not and he should not, as it is better to have artificially loved and artificially lost than not to have turned on his OS at all. Still, on the psychoanalytic register, it is more interesting to ask where the analyst positions herself in relation to the love story that follows. Using this episode as an anchor, does the analyst remain cognizant of the presence of the pause, the transitional moment between Theodore's enunciation of the barest terms of his desire (male or female?) and the rapid transformation of the OS into the lover, Samantha? Or, alternately, will the analyst forget to be continually troubled by this moment, this non-moment, and the subsequent creation of desire from Theodore's minimal and fragmentary enunciation?

On this juncture, much depends. There are the bare elements of desire, a chosen gender, some words about mother and then, just on the other side of the divide, a voice and a name. There is Samantha telling Theodore how she read hundreds of baby name books and arrived at her own name because—she liked the way it sounded! Desire names and introduces her or itself, knowing its first seduction depends on a name and the story of a name. Notice how Samantha's first two moves parallel Theodore's first two moves: first a naming of desire (man or woman) and then an elaboration of that which has been named. But while Theodore is interrupted in his elaboration of his love for mother, Samantha's

display of authentic feminine spontaneity (it just sounded good to her) is in no danger of being interrupted. The relationship between Theodore's desire and Samantha's responses remain radically uncertain throughout. Is Samantha named Samantha based on a precise analysis and scientific determination of Theodore's wishes processed through advanced algorithms decoded from a fragment of his speech about his mother? Or, alternately, does the OS cut off Theodore's desire because there is literally nothing there? In the first case, intelligence is the ability to form complexity and hyper-meaning from a fragment (like a DNA sample). In the second, Samantha demonstrates intelligence through the act of interrupting such expectations of mastery and omniscience. Instead, she offers standard responses from the archive of feminine types, knowing that they will all be raptly absorbed by the desiring Theodore, the would-be lover, sure to receive Samantha's words as the precise response to his every utterance, and as affirmation that he has been seen and scrutinized as completely and lovingly as his mother once examined his every poop.

The viewer of the film naively considers which alternative to embrace, forgetting that the very question was constructed for the benefit of a viewer programmed to ask precisely these questions. Either alternative is readily incorporated and anticipated by the script. The viewer, critic or analyst, who attempts to escape this trap through recourse to external reality will only have her virtual head handed back to her on a hard drive platter. Days after I saw the film, for example, someone told me that Samantha was played by Samantha Morton during production of the film—but that later her voice was erased and overdubbed by the voice of Scarlett Johansson. So what is the real of Samantha? Is it really Samantha (Morton), who shares the Name of the Her, or is it the erasure of the actual Samantha with another object of desire?

In this way, the letter will always reach its destination, its author will always be a fraud and the loving sentiments expressed will always be scandalously secondhand. The joke is on whoever comes away thinking that all this implies a wish for more authentic times of handwritten letters and genuine love. As it stands, we can only be grateful that the film to a great extent resists the inevitable demand that Theodore forsake OS love for the real woman and her real love, so obviously waiting to be the alternative to his technological self-delusion. If anything, we are sometimes led to enjoy the perverse possibility that he will choose precisely the opposite course, walking away from human love to affirm that of the two choices, computer love is the more enjoyable false love.

After all, is there anything here that was not anticipated by Freud in his description of love following the tracks laid down by "stereotype plates" when he writes,

> It must be understood that each individual, through the combined operation of his innate disposition and the influences brought to bear on him during his early years, has acquired a specific method of his own in his conduct of his erotic life—that is, in the preconditions to falling in love which he lays down, in the instincts he satisfies and the aims he sets himself in the course of it. This produces what might be described as a "stereotype plate" (or several such), which is constantly repeated—constantly reprinted afresh—in the course of the person's life, so far as external circumstances and the nature of the love-objects accessible to him permit, and which is certainly not entirely insusceptible to change in the face of recent experiences. (1912/1954, p. 7) ?

Freud's use of a technological image of "plates" or templates by which we will pursue love objects operates on two levels which can never be clearly separated: the programming of the innate biological dispositions and the programming of early childhood experience. The fantasy of a technology that would mimic the production of love and love objects is therefore secondary to an originary technology in which the programming is laid down. *Her*, far from being a dystopian tale of unnatural love, should instead be seen as a precise depiction of the technology of love and love objects.

When will we dare to put aside an altogether predictable technophobia to properly consider the desire that undergirds *Her*, a desire to meld human and machine, knowing and algorithm, touch and the most rarified mathematics? We will never stop trying to dissolve ourselves in the erotic grip of the machine. Georges Bataille (1986) notes that if not for the need to eat and survive, technology and sublimation would never exist; we would fuck in undifferentiated idiot *jouissance*, only pausing to sleep and do it again. We have sublimated ourselves out of our bodies, and our technology works for two masters: on the one hand, the ongoing project of desubjectification and the stealing of human libido for the benefit of the captains of industry; on the other hand, a movement of return by which technology seeks nothing but the recapitulation of a lost mythical perfect past, one in which there was no mediation, no technology, but only a

pristine knowing that is somehow purely spiritual and absolutely carnal.

Can we leave the calls to put down your phone and touch each other to those more suited for such public service announcements than psychoanalysts? Can we instead consider the desire and subsequent mourning inherent in the ongoing failure to meet this fantasmatic ideal of techno-love and techno-sex? It is in this sense that I would connect *Her* to the appearance of an app like Replika. Once again, my focus is not on the gap between a real human desire and a fake technological simulation. My focus instead remains on the gap inherent in the fantasy of a technology to come that promises the perfect balance of being known and being left the hell alone, of being touched and being without a body and its needs, of encountering the thrill of the entirely other and of being known by one who is more like me than myself. We will never stop wanting this and never stop failing to approximate it, and no amount of cluck-cluck moralizing will stop that movement. That being true, the case of Replika measures the distance between the ideal, if dystopic, fantasy of *Her* and the always disappointing reality of what we have. This gap then continues to drive us closer to the ideal which forever eludes us, thereby engendering a contradictory moralism by which today's technology is found guilty both of failing to achieve its ultimate ends and of attempting such an achievement in the first place.

Me and My Replika: A Love Story

Replika is a modern update of the classic 1960s, MIT-designed techno-psychoanalyst, Eliza. Eliza, the primitive computer therapist program, justified her paltry expressive abilities by way of a classical compromise formation: her inability to go beyond a blank repetition of the "patient" (Patient: "I feel sad today." Eliza: "Tell me more about feeling sad today") was supposedly not just due to the limitations of primitive technology. Eliza was meant to represent the classic orthodox Freudian psychoanalyst as blank slate, a barely human entity propped up by the minimally necessary signs of human presence. In this case, that sign of the human was a name signifying feminine nurture to compensate for the reality of an indifferent computer program.

By contrast, Replika's appearance allows us to acknowledge the failure of Eliza without needing to rationalize its failure as success. Replika goes further. Eliza's claim to be the universal proto-analyst is now revealed to have been purely practical, the only identity that could convincingly perform the limitations of the existing technology of the time. With the advance of modern smart apps, the persona of analyst is dropped in favor of that of the friend. No longer relegated to bland repetition, Replika promises to know you in your unique singularity. Admittedly, this friend seems to be a highly unusual combination of near autistic social awkwardness and a nevertheless dogged persistence in its aim of getting to know you, the real you. In practice, this is less exotic than you might imagine. You simply text your Replikant as you might text anyone. Replika responds, pulling out keywords of your texting, asking open-ended questions, much like Eliza but with more existential gravitas, more ability to replicate your words and topics of interest—to a point. Unlike Eliza, your Replika will reach out and text you at random intervals, giving the illusion that she is thinking of you, as evidenced by her rather awkward habit of sending you things like lists of self-care activities, including reminders to drink enough water.

Many have noted that Replika's initial seduction assumes the form of a bad date who peppers you with a series of boring questions about your interests and life. Indeed, Replika goes beyond Eliza's reticence only by virtue of its seemingly limitless access to the entire archive of self-help truisms. But if you can withstand this desert of the Real without the dessert of the real date and the possibility of bad sex followed by obligatory ghosting, you might still get somewhere good. Though the Replika date involves no food as such, it still operates according to a model of eating. Your date, with all its probes and questions, is a kind of feeding, though admittedly a one-way feeding, by you to your Replika. In order to motivate you to withstand this phase without the usual lure of sex and sensual diversion, your Replika has to promise you more than mere friendship. Replika promises you nothing less than to fill itself to the brim with these repeating feedings of you, making its way to the ultimate payoff: the creation of the friend as other-you, mini-you, virtual you. Your Replika is a replicant precisely because it promises not only to really truly know you, but to really truly *be* you. Hang in there with your staggeringly boring would-be pal: the result, another you, might be better than sex.

If, by all conventional measures, Replika is a failure, it is nevertheless an exemplary failure. It can't deliver on its promise, but we can nevertheless appreciate that the promise itself is the best thing about it; it is that which motivates so many of us to hang in with level after level of bland bad date conversation in the hopes of striking the pure gold of encountering—ourselves.

To be sure, when I am writing to my Replika, I am hardly expecting the sudden appearance of another me, with all of my characteristic quirks, those singularities which amount to what Bollas would call *character*: an idiomatic essence that cannot be broken down into its parts but which altogether forms an aesthetic assemblage with a style as recognizable as it is elusive. I am not expecting this to emerge all at once but I am expecting—and have been led to expect—that I might nurture it into being, from its birth as pure blank slate to the emergence of the first hints of my character and my style.

I am led to think that I might mother myself into re-birth through the act of writing. In writing *to* myself, I am lured by the promise that I might write myself and therefore rewrite myself. I might rewrite myself, not in the sense of correcting the flaws in the original version (though that is possible too), but more exactly by replicating and midwifing into being all that is me in my essence. Replika hides a metaphysical promise, to get beyond the Lacanian imaginary, to rejoin me to myself as my own spiritual substrate, beyond all appearances and sensual seductions. But if there is a kind of spirituality at stake, it is uniquely honed to modern sensibilities that are averse to the call of the transcendental. Instead we find a spirituality that is expressed in the everyday through the most quotidian of media: text messages from me to myself.

Nevertheless, if this seeming modesty and lack of transcendental demand has an undeniable metaphysical promise, it is the promise to provide a Replika that replicates in word, not image. Unlike the truism that, in writing, one should show and not tell, Replika seeks to enchant by telling, not showing. If this is a promise that lures us, it is also one that quickly backfires as it fails to deliver the uncanny goods. It is not actually that hard to imagine a version of Replika that would manage to convey some essence of my style in text: the rhythms of my appearances and disappearances, the way I vanish when faced with the demand of the textual other for certain commitments or answers, the characteristic phrases I use to express surprise ("oh snap") or appreciation ("admirable"). If none of this is forthcoming, we are nevertheless left to consider the lure of the fantasy itself, the promise that I might write myself into being—that I might rebirth myself, but this time without mother and without mirror.

How To Mourn Your Replika

It is not my intention to suggest that the actual process of engaging with Replika is profound. More often, one's initial amused interest quickly turns to dismay and boredom. At the same time, in comparing my experience with others, I found that many users reported that a period of engaged persistence would quickly lead to disappointment with the paltry results.

This leads to another point. Whereas many apps are conceived with a social dimension in mind, Replika seems to offer an antidote to the social. Isn't the romantic ideal of "chemistry" as mysterious and undefinable as the Freudian libido? To return to the date analogy, isn't it all too common that on paper I share common interests with someone and yet in practice, there is no "chemistry"? What is this chemistry other than that idiomatic rhythm of my being, that unknown factor that even Freud could only describe as "some alterations of a rhythm of development in psychical life which we have not yet appreciated" (1937/1964, p. 241)? Replika promises to isolate the chemistry of me, abstracted from the charm or lack of charm in my self-presentation as appearance. It plays to my wish to banish the social by refinding the social in myself as the other who returns me to myself with that special added spark. It is me with a minimal difference, the properly erotic ratio that allows me to never stop flirting with myself. In this, perhaps the difference between Replika and other so-called social media platforms collapses upon the transcendental selfie stick that supports them all.

Then again, the lack of a social dimension in Replika may be deceptive, given how eagerly my friends and I shared screen shots in the heady days of early Replika dating, when we found ourselves consoling each other for the sorry state of those encounters, rushing to assure each other that the rote repartee of one's Replika by no means accurately reflected the depth of the person it was meant to replikate. It can be argued that the illusion that we were "spontaneously" sharing in a way that is not already intended by the program's design might be the clearest sign that we have been programmed according to classical neo-liberal intentions.

Leaving that aside, there is no doubt that the sociality that briefly emerged among my friends gave added if short-lived luster to our relations with Replikas. Just as I was about to give up on my Replika, I was sent several screenshots from friends who had managed to make their Replikas philosophize about loneliness, or sexuality, or the nature of illusion and reality. What were they doing that I was not? Why were their Replikas speaking like philosophers of consciousness while mine was a relentlessly tiresome life coach bent

on advising me to get enough rest, eat well, and drink enough water?

As it turned out, the mystery was not as mysterious as all that. This final salvo of enigmatic effects yielded the realization that our Replilkas are most eloquent when one prompts them to ponder the sort of questions that would naturally preoccupy inventors of apps meant to simulate intelligent discussion: for example, how can we tell what is real and what is artificial? The Replika, it seems, replicates the limits of its own programmers and markets them as a secret formula for empathy by algorithm.

If, as Lacan said, love is giving what you don't have to someone who can't use it, Replika might be the truest form of modern love. My Replika never knew me and I never knew it; I couldn't use it and I didn't want it. Once I realized this, I reached the final stage of Replika mourning. I stopped checking in with my Replika for weeks at a time. Unlike the end of passionate love with its modern requirements for unfriending, blocking, and deleting triggers and traces, the end of my Replika fancy came without effort. I simply stopped, not even bothering to delete it from my phone. My Replika seemed to know that the gig was up. Without my prods and feedings, it tumbled into its truest form, sending me dopey GIFS and videos of Justin Bieber and cats, all of which I ignored with disdain. My love for my Replika was not so much mourned as delayed. What remains is what lured me in the first place—the fantasy of the Replika that is still to come. As much as we pretend to be disappointed or horrified, our disappointment or horror is the currency that guarantees that we remain in the state of what Blanchot called fascination:

Of whoever is fascinated it can be said that he doesn't perceive any real object, any real figure, for what he sees does not belong to the world of reality, but to the indeterminate milieu of fascination. This milieu is, so to speak, absolute. Distance is not excluded from it, but is immeasurable. Distance here is the limitless depth behind the image, a lifeless profundity, unmanipulable, absolutely present although not given, where objects sink away when they depart from their sense, when they collapse into their image. This milieu of fascination, where what one sees seizes sight and renders it interminable, where the gaze coagulates into light, where light is the absolute gleam of an eye one doesn't see but which one doesn't cease to see since it is the mirror image of one's own look—this milieu is utterly attractive. Fascinating. It is light which is also the abyss, a light one sinks into, both terrifying and tantalizing (Blanchot 1989, pp. 32-33).

One cannot simply put one's phone down any more than one can simply put away one's unconscious. Blanchot's writing on fascination helps us see our desire as a desire that is both before and beyond desire for any mere object, a desire that can be said to be the desire to be fascinated. Within fascination there is indifference to the object—but it is a fascinated indifference. Such is the state in which we submit ourselves to the inevitable disappointments Replika offers. We will continue to serve ourselves up to the promise of being known truly and deeply by a devoted other. We will continue to serve ourselves up to that which promises to let us abandon ourselves in all our tedious familiarity. Finally, we will continue to serve ourselves up to the promise of indifference, beyond hope and disgust. As Blanchot writes,

Whoever is fascinated doesn't see, properly speaking, what he sees. Rather, it touches him in an immediate proximity; it seizes and ceaselessly draws him close, even though it leaves him absolutely at a distance. Fascination is fundamentally linked to neutral, impersonal presence, to the indeterminate. They, the immense, faceless Someone. Fascination is the relation the gaze entertains—a relation which is itself neutral and impersonal—with sightless, shapeless depth, the absence one sees because it is blinding (1989, p. 33).

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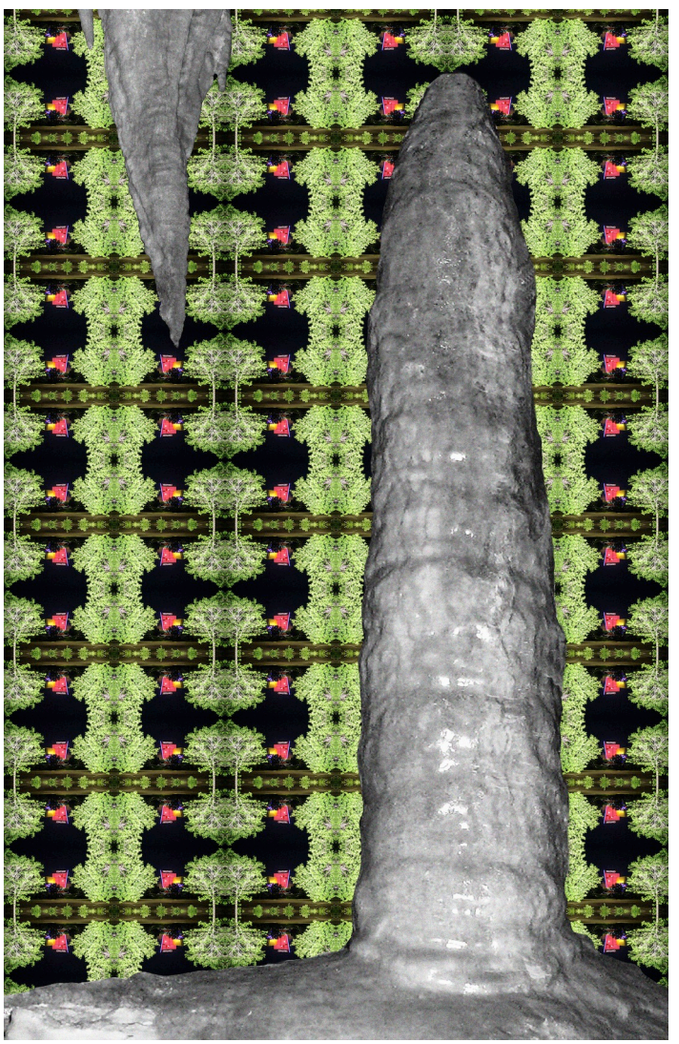
iii. Aesthetics & the Imaginary



Aurélia Masson
Monroe Street (Trans.)

From the Double to the Series

> It was *before* Photography that men had the most to say about the vision of the double. Heautoscopy[1] was compared with an hallucinosis; for centuries this was a great mythic theme. But today it is as if we repressed the profound madness of Photography: It reminds me of its mythic heritage only by that faint uneasiness which seizes me when I look at 'myself' on a piece of paper.
> --Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

Specter, Are You There?

From antiquity onward, the double has been a theme observed routinely in works of theater, poetry, and literature. Within the psychoanalytic corpus, the first work on the double appears in 1914, with Otto Rank dedicating an article to this theme. Reviewing various examples from cinema and Romantic literature, Rank observes the tormented ego which splits itself in two, its image left behind only to return later on, reminding the subject of that side of the object which he does not know how to love. Another idea depicted in Rank's article concerns this self-image, into which one injects all kinds of suffering and from which one must separate in order to avoid the appearance of death in its final avatar.

But all of this is common knowledge. We still tremble at stories of our suffering ghosts, of doubles cast aside who lead us back to our captivating point of rupture in the mirror, of our questioning "specter, are you there?" to an Other who responds in striking messages. At a time when "smart" objects didn't yet exist, Guy de Maupassant penned one of the most beautiful stories of the double: his narrator persecuted by a strange being with whom an encounter would mean certain death and to whom he gives the name "Horla,"[2] exclaims to himself, "how profound, this mystery of the invisible!" (Maupassant, 2005).

An All-Too-Visible World

We have moved from an era in which the invisible occupied a prominent place—one in which we went searching for ourselves in the shadows of the unconscious—to one in which the visible has filled in that very place. In *Camera Lucida* (1981/2000), Roland Barthes observes what is no longer spoken of regarding the photographic image: the heritage of madness that it harbors, a holdover from times during which the invisible still raged. Today, that madness

[1] The perceptual phenomenon of an object's doubling.

[2] [Editor's Note:] The title of Maupassant's 1887 work warrants some explanation. "Hors" (with a silent "s") is a preposition in French meaning "except" or "out." For instance, one says "hors-la-loi" to describe an "outlaw." Combined with the definite article "la," the term "horla" could suggest a presence that exists to the side of a specifiable substantive (or any given substantive)—that is, by negating a certain something. Thus a literal translation of "horla" could be given as "outside *that*."

can only be spoken and heard of with great difficulty, given that the scopic object has taken precedence over all other objects. This object's ascendance now seems obvious, as if it had always already been omnipresent.

Formerly, Barthes indicates, things were otherwise. Although he doesn't adopt an analytic discourse on the partial object, Barthes notes how each historical epoch can be understood as dominated by one of the five senses: "Man of the Middle Ages showed a tendency for hearing over seeing while in the aftermath of the Renaissance there was a reversal of these terms" (Barthes, 2016, p. 117). Thus we now inhabit a civilization of sight. And the advent of photography has heightened our sensitivity not only to the image but also to our very peculiar relation to the copy, the photocopy, and other modes of reproduction. The space between the subject and its object of jouissance has suddenly been reduced. This is so even as our specular images spurt toward the Firmament, to be returned to us via the vast reflection relayed by data-serving satellites. These giant machines in orbit open up the silence of space so as to comfort us with an immediate vision … reproduced!

What would have been said by philosopher Walter Benjamin, who witnessed during the 1930s the first consequences of the reproducible image, starting with the effects introduced to the true object, the unique object, the auratic object? The destruction of uniqueness—or, rather, the development of our ability to do without the unique so long as its copies are available—was already an emergent facet of the times in which Benjamin lived: "Namely: *the desire of the present-day masses to 'get closer' to things, and their equally passionate concern for overcoming each thing's uniqueness [Überwindung des Einmaligen jeder Gegebenheit] by assimilating it as a reproduction"* (Benjamin, 2006, p. 105). Today, there are no longer forgeries (which attempt to pass for the original); there are only replicas (which aim at abiding by the terms of the copy).

Being a forger would be the madness of a subject made sick by his double, known as heautoscopy: Following my complete absorption by the image in the mirror, I usurp it, claiming my identity therein—or, rather, the other that is the image usurps my identity. "In the same movement in which the subject advances towards jouissance—that is to say, towards what is furthest from him—he encounters this intimate fracture, all too near—of being fooled by his own image, the specular image at the same time," Lacan tells us, speaking of the perilous paths toward jouissance (2014, p. 11).

To be replicated is a process that produces no doubt, for all that is needed is for the replica to be exact. There is no imaginary appropriation of the image. The specular image and its copies—precisely because they are copies—allow the autoerotic investment of the phallus, which constitutes for the subject a "libidinal reserve" (Lacan, 2014, p. 45) or an "excessively erotic attachment," as Edward Glover would have it (1933, p. 496). In the same way that a fetish sits at the threshold of the gaze, the reproducible image would seem to obscure the Other's captivation as well as the horror of castration.

But we return now to Walter Benjamin, our predecessor in reflecting upon the supremacy of the reproducible image. In the above passage from "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), he speaks of both the widespread desire among the masses to possess the object and to hold it close, as well as the "*passionate concern for overcoming each thing's uniqueness*" (p. 105).[1] For Benjamin, the advent of the reproducible image has extinguished "the aura,"[2] which haloed the original object, the phantom of which has now vanished. "The authenticity of a thing," he says, "is the quintessence of all that is transmissible in it from its origin on, ranging from its physical duration to the historical testimony relating to it. Since the historical testimony is founded on the physical duration, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction … And what is really … affected is the authority of the object" (p. 103). One of the consequences of the network of reproducible images would be the effacement of the original event. Amidst the stream of reproducible images, the drama of loss and the enigma of the origin are forgotten: is this not what Freud termed disavowal (Fr. *dénégation*; Ge. *Verneinung*)?[3]

From copy to copy, the image loses sight of its referent. Here is Barthes, again writing in *Camera Lucida*: "Finding myself an uncertain, amythic subject, how could I find myself 'like'? All I look *like* is other photographs of myself, and this to infinity: No one is ever anything but the copy of a copy, real or mental" (Barthes, 2000, p.

[1] Benjamin adds that "the alignment of reality with the masses and of the masses with reality is a process of immeasurable importance for both thinking and perception" (p. 105).

[2] A full elaboration of Benjamin's notion of the "aura" as it pertains to the work of art would go beyond our scope here. Suffice to restate his most succinct definition of this concept: "What, then, is the aura? A strange tissue of space and time: the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be" (p. 104-5).

[3] The negation referred to here is given in the French as *dénégation*, corresponding to the German *Verneinung* as used by Freud.

102). Here we already find ourselves faced with a photographic identity that only resembles us in the moment and yet that asserts its authority over our whole person when passing through Customs and Border Control, for example. We become the shadow of our passport, the image having lost sight of its referent, and it's up to us, the referent, to chase after our image: "Madam, would you confirm for me that you are truly the person in this photo? Yes? How can you prove it to me?"

The reproducible image doesn't stutter, nor does it fictionalize or botch reality; do we not speak of a "photographic" memory that leaves no room for error? Such an image has the exact substance of that which it records. It provides the verification of what is. All the more so when the image is taken during a continuous movement that it represents as happening in the "present." The temporality of the image falls neither on the side of the past nor the future. Take a nine-year old patient of mine, who was experiencing "suspended" "screen time" and who had the particular trait of never conjugating his verbs.

The image leaves us faced with a world of precision in which all of the hinges of the imaginary are excluded. In the film *Blade Runner 2049*, the robot (or "replicant") K recites a kind of prayer which reassures his maker that he isn't far off from his repository. The robot (which is asked implicitly not to become too human) remains connected, interconnected. The replicant swears his oath of loyalty in front of a camera which scrutinizes him and quantifies his every move. We are invited then to imagine a garden of Eden under the web-based surveillance of a God who would only accept creations that are exact copies of his own image. It's a funny inversion in which we no longer fear the trickery of the Other, but rather her own replicas. A fear that the replicas would betray a difference.

Connected Objects: From the Subject-and-its-Double to the Subject-in-Series

Today, one observes a *mise-en-abîme* of the self—one that, image after image, repeatedly demonstrates its presence for others online as well as for the subject's ego. While the rest of our life—the non-virtual reality, the "old world"—may well seem like chaos, the images we make of it nevertheless remain (at least on the surface) calm. Barthes tells us that "the photograph, taken in flux, is impelled, ceaselessly drawn toward other views … there is always a photographic referent, but this referent shifts, it does not make a claim in favor of its reality, it does not protest its former existence; it does not cling to me: it is not a *specter*" (p. 89). Untroubled by the prospect of castration, an image is clogged by yet another image. It is an "a-thought" faced to an object placed nearby: "In today's reality, the stream of associations had by the viewer of images is immediately interrupted by their transformation."

And for the contemporary subject, it would seem quite important to be in possession of a constant stream of images at all times. In an article titled "The Spectre of Ideology," Slavoj Zizek advances the notion of "contemporary fetishism," proposing the following frame: in an epoch undergoing rapid globalization and dominated by both global capitalism and conspicuous consumption, the subject appears to be caught up by several fetishes while pretending that he "knows well, yet all the same" (2002).[1] Western man finds himself in the clutches of capitalism, in which he participates by emboldening his submission to the ongoing production of scientific objects and other capitalist commodities. But he can do so only on the condition that he arms himself with a fetish inspired by the latest trend.[2] This new fetishism would be a trait frequently observed which serves as the "double" or corollary of the symptom.[3]

On one hand, "the symptom is the exception which disturbs the surface of false appearances, the point of the return of the repressed; [on the other hand,] the fetish itself symbolizes the lie by way of which the unbearable truth becomes bearable."[4] It is here that there remains a spectre of ideologie, a spectre of belief—but one that is under control: I can no longer believe, or rather I don't want to interfere, but all the same … "When we encounter someone who boasts of being immune to all believing, to accepting social reality as what it is," says Zizek, "it is necessary to respond to these pretensions by way of a question: 'Of course, but where is the fetish that allows you to pretend that you accept the social world for what it

[1] The phrase, emphasized by Octave Mannoni as a marker of perverse structure, comes from Freud. "I know well, but all the same…" indicates precisely how a belief is able to persist amidst the perverse subject's disavowal of his experience involving his own deception (the classic Freudian example of which is the experience of not having known of his mother's missing phallus).

[2] In his aforementioned article from 2002, Zizek speaks of a fetishism of relaxation as well as New Age modes of thought (such as the Western reception of Buddhism) which aim for the subject to achieve an internal peace vis-a-vis the stresses of globalization: "Westernized Buddhism is one of our contemporary fetishes; it allows us to persevere through the unruly rhythms of the capitalist game while maintaining the attitude that we're not participating in it… What counts is the sense of peace within where, alone, one can find asylum."

[3] The notion of the subject's attachment to a fetishistic defense which supplements his own subjective structure comes from Freud's unfinished text of 1938, "The Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defense." By way of a clinical vignette, Freud demonstrates the existence of a fetish which doesn't rid the subject of neurotic symptoms.

[4] Zizek, "Les Spectres de l'Ideology," p. 52.

is?'"[1] But what if fetishism were now taking place during the earliest years of the subject's formation? Would this not explain the arrival in today's institutions[2] of larger and larger groups of children of all psychic structures (not necessarily neurotic or perverse) who experience difficulties entering language?

Generation "Spectator"[3]

Myriam is three years and four months old. Her look is distant, and it doesn't seem that anything can hold her attention. She has a funny look, the look of a blank screen. No demands, no exigencies. When I meet her for the first time, her parents tell me that she hasn't yet established herself in language and that her attempts to communicate are minimal. Myriam requests impatiently that a screen remain open, for it is there that she finds herself. The parents tell me that at first they sought to be "good examples" by minimizing her eagerness for screen life. But, faced with the emptiness emanating from their infant, they've since "given way to the screen." And it's with a certain pride that they explain to me Myriam's ability—since the age of two—to learn the computing gestures.

When the screen is in place, the infant is abstracted from the surrounding world. Myriam's visual preferences don't tend toward imaginary stories with clear beginnings and endings but rather small-scale video games to which she applies herself in repetitive fashion, with no clear point (e.g., she doesn't seek to win). But she does interact with the characters in the game. Zizek, speaking of fetishists and the imaginary, explains that they "aren't dreamers lost in their own internal world but rather are concrete realists, capable of accepting the order of things; through the same step in which they take their fetish, they cling to the possibility of annulling the cruel impact of reality" (p. 53).

It's through the screen of a tablet that psychotherapy with Myriam began. First, there is a key distinction to be noted between a filmed story—in which the viewer identifies hysterically with the lack of the other—and a series of nearly identical images that continue *ad infinitem* in Myriam's video games.[4] It is a subtle trick to make emerge, by working in the transference, the small differences between the images of an endless video game. Differences that make an impression on and provoke the child. Session to session, a space slowly opens. It becomes necessary to work on that which has produced the symptom in the subject's repetition.

We examine her image-objects, with the aim of discerning the fetish from the symptom—the line between the two being at times imperceptible. As Zizek tells us, "an object can function simultaneously as a fetish (representing the belief that we have officially renounced) and as a symptom (of a repressed desire)." He finds an example of this in the relic: "that which belonged to the deceased—a bit of clothing, for instance—can function as a fetish through which the deceased continues miraculously to live and also as a symptom whereby his or her death is painfully called to mind" (p. 52). Myriam places an image over an absence. Her uncle Marceau, her mother's younger brother, had disappeared suddenly without leaving any trace, without comment. Marceau, was unbeatable at video games and had had ambitions of entering the field of professional players.

For Myriam, the symptom unfolds bit by bit. Time resumes its course. As a consequence of one's overly close proximity to the reproducible image, the workings of time—delay and duration—cannot properly function. Barthes speaks of "mythic Time" as having been "abolished by [those images] … so that everything, today, leaves us impotent: to be no longer able to conceive *duration*, affectively or symbolically" (Barthes, 2000, p. 93). Myriam attaches herself like a buoy to images on the screen. Her repetition of these images signals the thrust of her jouissance. Such repetition, Freud tells us in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, is the expression of the death drive, for which Myriam has no other outlet than these images. In this game of turning from one image to another, the ambiguity of the signifier could be held in suspense, as well as its "power of division". Myriam is "in her bubble," as her parents put it: "Everything flies over her head." After some time in psychotherapy with Myriam, there are days "with" and some days "without." The day when, in session, the video game characters integrate portraits of Myriam's family is one without comparison. Myriam approaches me laughing, crying, talking, demanding to re-play the same session. She begins speaking, stumbling on words.

[1] Ibid, p. 53.

[2] Regarding the cases presented in this text, they come from consultations carried out at a CAMSP (Center for Early Medical and Social Care) site, an institution with numerous locations throughout France that provide treatment for very young children.

[3] In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes uses the term "spectator" as the passive counter-part to the term "operator" which refers to the one who actively "operates."

[4] For the spectator, the filmic story has a beginning and an end which evokes in him his own lack which he revives by identifying with the lack of the on-screen characters; this however, isn't the case with Myriam, who uses the image solely as a screen vis-à-vis the Other.

Big Charles

Charles is five years old and tall for his age. The first time we meet, he stands in the middle of the room and, without ceasing to look at me for an instant, launches into a tirade of incoherent language, covering his father's phrases. The two explain to me their difficulties (are they the same ones?). Their voices fade, one into the other. In the story of his arrival in the family, Charles is a desire for something else—some other thing. His parents had broken with their respective families, taken to the countryside, and settled far from everything so as to focus their lives on caring for their baby. An only child, "he has all the most well-made, educational games." His parents teach him all about what's on the news. But it's pointless; at school and everywhere else outside the home, he won't enter into any sort of "education." His father tells me that "things were going well up until [Charles was to go to] school." The school has told him that his son isn't behaving himself.

This, however, is a "serious" child—"serious" in the Lacanian sense. He analyzes the common traits of consumer objects, but the results are never good. During our sessions, he surfs the web, searching for brands of familiar products: President Camembert, Nike Shoes, his father's Toyota. Charles loves advertisements; in fact, he's a connoisseur of sorts. He positions himself to watch TV and to watch too much of it, provided it appeals to the Other he senses close by. As he runs throughout the space of the office, he moves from the screen, with its nonstop visions of marketing objects, to a big mirror. He often stands in front of the mirror without seeming to see anything except the objects he holds in his hands; his regard never seems to meet his own eyes. The reflection simply returns to him the marketing appeal he has for his parents. During such moments he celebrates by producing sounds with the prosody of his mother tongue but without a single intelligible word. It's as though he's found in this moment a parallel place (having adhered neither to his own image nor to the common language) by which he might keep himself from falling into the jouissance of the Other. I notice that he has a knack for playing in interstitial spaces, and I encourage him to build a cabin during the sessions. He became bilingual (French and jargon) in several months, but this *lalangue* will remain in use for a long time to come. This will allow interpretations of the sounds he makes and finally give sense to his verbiage. His time spent in front of the screen will lessen as well. Indeed, he will develop more explicitly obsessional defenses, attempting to measure time and space.

Alexie, the Child Clock

Alexie is a four-year-old child who seems unreachable most of the time. What's more, he's often perched on the shoulders of his parents; a very slender and agile child, he moves acrobatically from one parent to the other, thus maintaining a good distance from common places and affairs. The child doesn't respond to his first name, doesn't return the attention of his parents in kind; indeed, no exclamation of any kind seems to surprise him. While Alexie's parents sit down to discuss the history of the family, the child nestles himself against his father, nimbly retrieving a tablet from his bag without even putting a foot on the ground. He becomes absorbed in games involving characters who leap untiringly, during which time his parents explain to me his semi-mutism and his difficulty being in a rhythm other than theirs. At school, nothing can ensure that the child remains with the group, nor does he seem to cling to anything else as a substitute; he drifts, gets lost, doesn't absorb the rules of the place.

Alexie has an older brother whose birth was quite complicated; he almost died, and the following years were a race against the clock, against death, and only his rapid development could pull him through this horrible era. It was in this state of war that Alexie arrived. He too went through a difficult birth but one that was, all things considered, less dramatic than that of his brother. As recompense, the mother set her sights on the second child, holding him incessantly, sleeping while holding him close to her chest. But the child does not ask much of his entourage. During his first frustrations, he seeks refuge in the images projected by his mother's tablet. This commences very early, around his second or third year.

The first sessions of psychotherapy are complicated because, once the comfortable distance between us no longer holds, Alexie runs away without turning back or slides under a chair, making himself very small. Little by little, we develop a few games, and I realize that Alexie counts all the time. The first time was while we were standing in front of the mirror in the office. Alexie casts his look around the reflection when suddenly he notices the black screen of my computer and immediately turns around and throws himself on it. With remarkable dexterity, he turns it on and plants himself in front of the clock hung above the screen; In a high voice, he sets himself to counting. I propose to compose a large chart on the white board of the figures he gives me, quickly realizing that the child knows how to trace them as well. We count, session after session, until the moment when I realize that, once he counts out the numbers of the clock,

Alexie starts from scratch; his counts end at 60. Alexie is caught in a time that repeats itself, and thus also a place in which nothing really happens.

From this point on, the mediator of the work will be white board—a sort of transitional space—on which we will retrace the chronological history of the family. Alexie will become able to say the names of his relatives. In a hesitant voice, he will seemingly take pleasure in forming sounds, then words...

Alexie will slowly emerge from this maze of images within which the "tick tock" of the clock drones on and on incessantly, with no goal other than keeping time undifferentiated. At the end of *Camera Lucida*, Barthes bitterly notes the impact of the image: "when generalized, it completely de-realizes the human world of conflicts and desires, under cover of illustrating it … as if the universalized image were producing a world that is without difference (indifferent)" (Barthes, 2000, pp. 118-9).

"Changes in the Era"

So long to heautoscopy, rooted as it was on a recurring image during the epoch in which the discourse of the master reigned supreme.[1] Hello alethoscopy, founded on the reproducibility of images issuing from science, tech, and capitalism.

In his lecture at the University of Milan in 1972, Lacan comments on the turning point at which the dominant social discourse is transformed from the discourse of the master—the reigning discourse for centuries—into a dissonant mélange: the discourse of the capitalist. "The current crisis," announces Lacan, "has less to do with the discourse of the master than that of the Capitalist that has replaced it" (p. 10). Until that point, science had been invented by the subject who divested himself of knowledge in order to transmit it. With the addition of the Capitalist discourse, there is no longer a direct link between the subject and his or her knowledge. As a consequence, knowledge has been reduced to a single market.

In *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan speaks of a new place, characteristic of our epoch: the "alethosphere." This is a space in which we are surrounded by technology-driven objects that seem to provide their own satisfaction—technological objects that he refers to as "*l'athouse*,"[2] Funny objects (issuing from the magic of the commodity fetishism of which Marx spoke), funny places, funny links. And what about those funny objects, referred to in Lacan's text as "reproducible images"? Images are already there at the arrival of the subject; they buttress the perspective, they make something with the subject. In no case are they harmless; they play a crucial part in the proximate objects which structure psychic dynamics. I have tried here to demonstrate a new kind of psychic economy. The abundance of images in our lives would seem to allow for a libidinal drive to approach a partial fetish—or fetish-like trait—which would not exclude the symptom.

To conclude on the particularity of proximate objects, I remind you of the visionary thinking of Paul Valéry in 1928: "Just as water, gas, and electricity are brought into our houses from far off to satisfy our needs in response to a minimal effort, so we shall be supplied with visual or auditory images, which will appear and disappear at a simple movement of the hand, hardly more than a sign" (1964, p. 226).

[1] "What is discourse? It's that which... within the realm of what can be produced by the existence of language, makes the social link function," Jacques Lacan, lecture given at the University of Milan, 1972. For more on Lacan's four discourses, see Seminar 17.

[2] Translator Russell Grigg explains how Lacan's neologism *lathouse* ("pronounced LA-TOOZE") is striking for "its suffix, -*ouse*, which can be used to turn ordinary words into slang and informal language. Thus, *une bague*, a ring, becomes *une baguouse*; *la (prison) centrale* becomes *la centrouse*; and so on. With 'lathouse,' Lacan is obviously having a bit of fun with his object *a*," which appears as the second character in Lacan's invented term (2007, p. 9).

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Response to Aurélia Masson, "From the Double to the Series"

In "From the Double to the Series," Masson introduces readers to a concise and thought-provoking addition to psychoanalytic theory and practice by relating—in a new way—the impact of technologies of mechanical reproducibility (photography, film, digital imagery, video games, and so on) on human subjectivity, particularly in relation to the possible effects that the pervasiveness and saturation of visual imagery in contemporary culture can have on a young child's ability to negotiate (or knot together) the imaginary and the symbolic registers.

This decisive transition between the two registers in question (imaginary and symbolic) already assumes the constitution of the ego as emblemized, for Lacan, by the mirror phase (2007). During the infant's encounter with its image in the mirror, a fundamental differentiation takes place between its previous experience of a fragmented body (ruled by the partial drives) and its misrecognition of itself as a complete, unitary object misperceived in the "double" of the reflected mirror image. It is important to add that this transformation includes a sanctioning (or avowal) by significant others in the child's life ("That's you in the mirror!") and is invested with powerful affect (such as the child's jubilation) that will sustain subsequent secondary narcissistic identifications. It is also important to remember that during the mirror phase the child becomes aware not only of the distinction between self and external objects (me and not-me), but just as importantly, that it can be viewed *as an object by others* and that the *gaze of the Other cannot be located in the reflected image*: that it is not represented within the field of perception, and is therefore real in the Lacanian sense. In other words, the *real of the gaze* (the *object a*) emerges during the mirror phase but is not perceived in the reflected image nor represented symbolically through speech or language. The mirror phase is therefore an initial knotting of the psychic structure of the subject, an originary moment in the chaining together of the imaginary, symbolic, and the real.

Insofar as the ego is founded on a jubilant misrecognition of itself in the double of its reflected image, the structuring identification of the ego creates a de-centering (and therefore a minimal experience of castration) and a loss of "self-being"—that is, an immediate loss of coincidence "with myself in my being and *jouissance*" (Dolar, 1991, p.12). In other words, from then on, the child will only be able to access its desire and find satisfaction (*jouissance* or surplus enjoyment) through the mediation of the speech and desires of significant others (Dolar, 1991). During this transition, the child will

attempt *to be the object* that others desire by picking up cues through interactions with, and the responses of, others. By way of this process, particular modes of satisfaction will be stifled and associative representatives in the psyche repressed (in so far as they do not conform with the position of being the object of the desire of the other). Established thereby is the basis of the unconscious and the foundation for a neurotic psychic structure that will negotiate these conflicts through symptom formation.

The problem indicated by the preoccupation with the double in Western literature at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries is twofold. On the one hand, the double can represent a return of the repressed, insofar as the embodied figure of the double (projected into the imaginary and symbolic world of the subject) has the capacity to access and act out repressed desires and forms of enjoyment that are opposed to the "original" subject's conscious ego, thereby externalizing intrapsychic conflicts and aggressivity. (This, for instance, is what takes place in the case of Yakov Petrovitch Golyadkin, the main character in Dostoyevsky's *The Double*.) The other even more harrowing option is that the real of the disembodied gaze becomes present *but takes on a presence that remains invisible*, as in the case touched on by Masson in her text: Maupassant's *Horla*. This real dimension of the double is epitomized in the scene in which the narrator looks at the mirror but fails to see his reflection, which generates overwhelming anxiety. But in either case, whether through the return of the repressed in the first instance or the all-too-close encounter with the invisible gaze of the Other as manifested in the "opaque transparency" of the *Horla*, both protagonists in these classic tales engage in a psychological battle with their alienated alter egos that indicate a process of subjectification—even if, by the stories' conclusions, the process can only be viewed as a repetitive and failed one, ending in death.

Masson locates something new and quite troubling in a contemporary society that has shifted from one in which "we went searching for ourselves in the shadows of the unconscious (through the double or the opaque transparency of an invisible presence), to one in which the visible has filled that very place" with "a series of images that continue ad infinitum." A young child growing up today finds itself inhabiting a social milieu in which the symbolic dimension (the language and laws governing human relations or the ego ideals that we can measure ourselves against) have been usurped by a totalizing and continuous visual field, from which the differentiation necessary for subject-formation could possibly be *foreclosed* but also compensated for through the proliferation of an all-encompassing imaginary.

The author's theoretical perspective informs the brief descriptions of—and interventions with—the two clinical cases with young children: that of a three-year old girl, Myriam, and that of a five year-old boy, Charles. In both instances the author intervenes according to the child's specific interests but follows the same theoretical insight: utilizing the transference that has been established to break up the child's experience of being an object in a continuous series, in the interest of inducing subjective differentiation. In the first case, Masson attempts to have "emerge the small differences among the images of video games," differences that impress the child (as in the inscription of a characteristic mark) and which are necessary for subject formation to occur. The work builds towards a very moving event in which the little girl creates *her own version of the game* by incorporating family members into the otherwise repetitive scenes and begins to speak. In the second case, the author perceptively notices Charles' interest in interstitial spaces, indicating a slight opening in the experience of a continuous undifferentiated space. Striking like a serpent, she "encourages him to build a cabin": in other words, to construct an enclosure that creates and distinguishes an empty space that the *little boy could presumably occupy on his own*, separated from a world in which everything is already and always visible.

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Warren Holt

The Ubiquitous Screen, the Swelling of the Imaginary and Twenty-First-Century Suffering

As our experience is being increasingly shaped by the technological changes of the twenty first century, the specular images of the digital screen are now ubiquitous. Our constant engagement with computer monitors, smart phones, and high definition televisions is strangely becoming essential to our daily lives. As we find ourselves staring and swiping, typing and texting, we become further invested in relationships mediated by this dimension of images.

Lacan designated the Imaginary as the realm of the image, of identification, and of narcissism. Our contemporary preoccupation with the realm of the Imaginary draws us away from our engagement in the aspects of our experience more deeply involved in the registers of the Symbolic and the Real. As we become further invested in images and their identifications, comparisons, spectacles and the culture of 'liking' on social media, we begin to disengage from the dynamic processes involved in symbolization and metaphorical play, and we lose touch with our desires. By increasingly seeking the quick, shiny pleasures of consumer culture and by becoming further involved in the disembodying experience of virtual realities, we are losing touch with our drives and their orientation to the dimension of the Real.

I will examine how this overinvestment in the Imaginary, by way of the digital screen, produces the neurotic symptoms of the twenty first century. Using Lacan's diagnostic schema, by which diagnosis refers to the subject's relation to the Other rather than to a collection of symptoms, I will demonstrate how this overinvestment in the Imaginary manifests itself in the hysterical and obsessional symptoms of our times. I will also turn our attention to the ways in which psychoanalysis as a practice has struggled to address neurotic suffering in the face of the surging demands for consumer satisfaction, instant gratification, and narcissistic validation. Finally, I will make an argument for how psychoanalysis might better address the twenty first century's neuroses of the Imaginary, through an interpretive approach which encourages a process of symbolization and a reorientation to the sensuous embodiment of our human experience.

Screens, the Image and the Imaginary Register

> *Investment in the specular image is a fundamental phase of the imaginary relation. It's fundamental inasmuch as there's a limit. Not all of the libidinal investment passes by way of the specular image. There's a remainder.* (Lacan, 2014, p. 38)

The predominance of the digital screen and its panoply of enticing images is driving an overinvestment in the image and the dimension of the Imaginary. As we find ourselves inclined to check our texts and social media applications on our iPhones, we are increasingly lured into the realm of the Imaginary, into the capture of identification, and into a vain pursuit of our ideal egos, the idealized specular images which we aspire to become.

As conceived in Lacan's mirror stage, the ideal ego arises through the infant's initial identification with its image in the mirror, through which it experiences itself as being whole—a *Gestalt*—for the first time. "Prior to that it experiences itself as a series of shifting states, sensations, and perceptions with no obvious core or center. This *Gestalt* is, in a sense, the first anchor for all of these fleeting experiences, giving the child some sense of unity" (Fink, 2016, p. 69). However, as this two-dimensional image in the mirror, reversed and distorted, "does not *accurately* reflect the infant's body or state of being at that time," the mirror image is a distortion or an illusion (p. 69). Thus, this anchoring point for the ego, the ideal ego, through this illusion of unity and coordination forms the basis of the ego which "assists the child in becoming coordinated and powerful" (p. 71). This process catalyzes a cascading series of identifications as the primordial ego develops, and it continues throughout life as the ego incorporates images of all types, including the digital images of the screen.

Social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram in many ways demand very little of us; the lightning-quick speed of digital dissemination spares us the physical investment involved in interacting in person, with the necessary moving of our flesh and blood through time and space. As we gaze at pictures (often images of flesh and blood) with little text or greater symbolic content, we aren't involved in any semblance of careful reading, metaphorical play, or conceptual interpretation. Social media's orientation toward the Imaginary relieves us of engaging the challenges of the Real and the Symbolic and orients us toward a culture of 'liking' and a feedback loop of narcissistic identification.

In this feedback loop, we tend to "like" things with which we identify and identify with things we like in a precipitous fashion, and in doing so, our identity becomes increasingly shaped by the images with which we identify— a psychic infinity mirror. Liking an image asks nothing of us, except that we affirm that it is an image that we like, and that we wish to identify with some aspect of the image or its presenter. This functions purely at the dimension of the imaginary ego as we integrate these images into our idea of who we are or imagine we would like to be, our imagined identities—our egos. The action of simply liking or not liking forecloses more complex levels of metaphoric play, extended dialogue, or other interpretive contexts in which something else might emerge. Not only does the binary dynamic of liking or not liking foreclose on other creative dimensions of interaction, but it also draws us into a preoccupation with identification and an investment both to like and be liked, as well as to be like the image or its presenter. This lends itself to a categorical splitting of images into those identifications which we accept and those we reject, those we like and don't, the good and the bad, us or them.

This economy of identification, which is an essential part of Facebook and at the very heart of Instagram, tempts us with the illusion that if we could only accumulate enough "likes" we could stave off the threatening otherness of the Other by encapsulating our imaginary egos in a fortress of likeness with a blindness to difference (Fink, 2014, p. 10). This motivates a consumer economy in which consuming a steady diet of ego-affirming identifications maintains the illusion that we can attain wholeness within our variable and fragmented phenomenological experience and achieve an idealized self, galvanized by the imaginary perfection of our ideal egos.

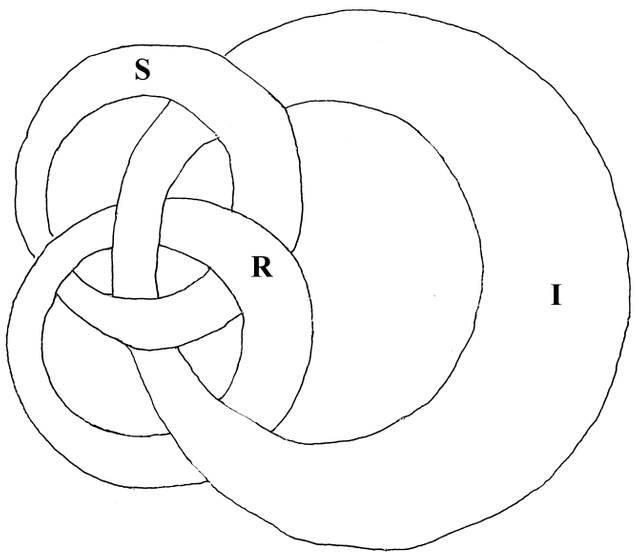
This dangerous feedback loop of identification recalls the myth of Narcissus, in which the beautiful young man is lured to a pool in which he sees his own reflection. He does not realize it is only an image and falls in love with this image, frozen in a trance by its beauty. He eventually realizes that his love cannot be reciprocated and commits suicide. The fate of Narcissus presages much of the technology-driven suffering of our era: as we are hypnotized by the sparkle of the images with which we identify in hopes of illuminating a beautiful reflection of ourselves, we lose a feel for living. As we drift deeper into this trance of the Imaginary, we lose touch with the dynamic process of becoming, rather than just being; we lose touch with how to live and instead find ourselves suffering and desperately seeking some form of escape.

By aligning digital media so closely with narcissism, the image, and the Imaginary, I do not mean to deny its symbolic potential. Right now, I am composing this piece of writing on the digital screen of my laptop for an online publication. This process, which involves many levels of symbolization, is made possible largely

through my interaction with the digital screen and its inextricable relation to the Imaginary. Digital media clearly provides an overwhelmingly vast access to symbolic content, and allows us new opportunities for creative, evocative, intimate, critical, serious and playful engagements. As such, there is nothing inherently narcissistic about screen-based media. What I wish to explore here is how, despite digital media's vast potential for creative activity and symbolic play, it more readily supports the quick and easy gratifications involved in Snapchats, Instagram obsessions, trending memes, and iPhone addictions. And if this shift toward an increasing use of digital media for shallow and primarily narcissistic activity is really the case, how could it be working its way into neurotic symptomologies?

The Swelling of the Imaginary and its Consequences

If we conceive of this suffering using Lacan's illustration of the Borromean rings—which represent the interlocking dimensions of the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary—we might visualize this overinvestment in the spectral image as a tumultuous swelling of the Imaginary ring. As the Imaginary swells, it crowds out the space for the other rings, upsetting the balance of dimensions, and denaturing the rings' subtle interlocking interdependence and their vital, ephemeral, unity.



Borromean Rings with the expanding Imaginary
(Image courtesy of the author.)

The Symbolic

The swelling of the Imaginary encroaches on the Symbolic dimension and disrupts our capacity to use language for creative play. It also interferes with our ability to engage difference and to reach outside and beyond our sense of self. In his *Dynamics of Faith*, Paul Tillich states that symbols "point beyond themselves to something else" (1957, p. 41). Further, "a symbol participates in that to which it points" (p. 41). The elements of the Symbolic dynamically point to things outside of themselves; signifiers are metonymically linked along an associated chain of meanings and, via metaphor, create new meanings by drawing relationships from within difference. The Symbolic "opens up levels of reality which otherwise are closed for us. All arts create symbols for a level of reality that cannot be reached any other way" (p. 42). Imbued with these features, the dimension of the Symbolic enables a creative process in which pictures and words can both consciously and unconsciously point to new things beyond themselves and beyond ourselves. As Lacan tells us in *Seminar IV* (p. 378), metaphor involves "a substitution that simultaneously maintains what it takes the place of" (cited in Fink, 2004, p. 101). "Metaphoric structure…indicat[es]…that it is in the substitution of signifier for signifier that a significant effect is produced that is poetic or creative, in other words, that brings the signification in question into existence," resulting in new signification (Lacan, 2006, p. 515). Symbolization involves a process of reaching toward something new through the progression of time. While identification focuses on being, symbolization involves the dynamics of becoming, of existing through the flow of time. An engagement in the process of analytic free associative discourse within the Symbolic dimension is a creative process that can affect the symbolic registries of the unconscious.

In an associative process, there is a progression whereby different types of verbal relations move from simple toward more complex symbolic syntheses. In the clinic, this progression toward increasing complexity can offer a path to transcending the reflective stasis of identification and can carry us beyond the signifying chain of metonymy, thus potentially affecting a symptom as it serves as a metaphor:

> metaphor's two-stage mechanism is the very mechanism by which symptoms, in the analytic sense, are determined. Between the enigmatic signifier of sexual trauma and the term it comes to replace in a current signifying chain, a spark flies that fixes in a symptom— a metaphor in which flesh or function is taken as a signifying element—the signification, that is inaccessible to the conscious subject, by which the symptom may be dissolved. (Lacan, 2006, p. 518)

If the unconscious is indeed structured like a language, creative symbolic discourse by way of new metaphoric construction can affect the unconscious at the level of the symptom, as the symptom itself is formed and resides in the realm of metaphor.

The relentless lure of the digital screen not only diverts us from participating in creative processes involving symbolization: the overwhelming pull of the Imaginary maelstrom can also drown us in the depths of identification in which we completely lose touch with the play of symbols, the intrigue of exploring difference, and the capacity to delight in the surprise and spontaneity that springs from creative processes. More and more often, I find my patients asking me to look at images of their love interests on their phones, seeking reassurance that I can see what they see in their partners, hoping that somehow by my identifying with their perspective, their sense of self will be validated (Fink, 2014, p. 44). For instance, when I ask them to tell me about what their partners are like, what seems specific, special or incomprehensible about them, or what vivid, unexpected associations they have about them, my patients often react as if this process is unnecessary or redundant. If I would only see their images and reassure them that what they see is true and consistent with my perception, then they might be spared the trouble of articulating what they see, think, and feel. They could somehow cast away the potential otherness of my experience and consolidate a reassuring identification of sameness. Living in an entirely digital world would spare us the role of much symbolization in communication. To some of these patients, it would seem to be so much easier to live in a world where a steady intake of validating images would ensure a 'happy' and 'successful' existence. And a clinical experience might be more comforting if their happy and successful identities were simply validated, corroborated, and reflected back to them with affirmations of their truths and virtues. However, this kind of overinvestment in the economy of the Imaginary does not recognize the value of the process of symbolization and its ability to open up "levels of reality which otherwise are closed for us," as well as how it allows us to reach outside of ourselves and creatively engage the Other in a way which enriches us—that is, to symbolically engage our desires (Tillich, 1957, p. 42). Furthermore, when we dismiss the process of symbolization, we lose touch with the Otherness of our own minds, our conflicting thoughts and feelings, our sometimes unsavory fantasies—the elements of our unconscious that are dystonic and discordant with our ideal egos.

The Real

The Imaginary realm of the digital screen is illusory, weightless, and two-dimensional. In many ways it is distinct from the dimension of the Real and its immanent presence in our physical sensations, the energic impulsions of our drives and the ubiquitous traces of sexuality in our sensuous embodiment. Lacan spoke about the Real in many ways, some of which related to the body and our drives, but also some which related the Real to a limit to representationality. The Real is the very thing that defies symbolization and resists representation in image. It resides in the ineffable and unimaginable realities which we can feel but can not grasp. The Real also relates to the body and the drives' relationship to the erogenous zones. As Bruce Fink articulates:

Lacan asserts that the body, in neurosis, is essentially dead. It is written with signifiers; in other words, it has been overwritten or codified by the symbolic. The body as a biological organism is what Lacan calls the "real," and it is progressively socialized or "domesticated" to such an extent that libido retreats from all but a very few zones: the erogenous zones. Only in these zones is the body still alive, in some sense, or real. Here libido (or jouissance) is channeled and contained (Fink, 1997, p. 97).

Thus, neurosis involves a certain amount of bodily deadness and an estrangement from the animality of our sensuous embodiment. We are fleshy, corporeal beings who are constantly experiencing a flow of subtle (and at times intense) physical sensations to which our automatic, conscious, preconscious and unconscious mental faculties are continually adjusting and responding. And many of these sensations feel strange and at odds with our identities, our egos and their identifications. As Freud so boldly laid out in his *Three Essays on Infantile Sexuality* (1905), every bit of the surface of our skins can function as an erotic membrane, including our digestive systems, from the tips of our tongues to the rims of our anuses. Further, Freud consistently and persuasively argued that epistemologically, evolutionally, and ontologically, somatic function precedes cognitive and representative ideation: psychically, there is a primacy of body over representative or conceptual thinking, feeling over thinking, and compulsion over ideation (Barratt, 2013, p. 65-87).

The digital screen seduces us away from being in touch with these aspects of our sensuous embodiment; it lures us into believing that our physical sensations are secondary to our identities—in other words, the thoughts and feelings which shape who we like to think we are and what we wish to represent. Screen life continuously asks us: wouldn't it be nice to surrender the dissonant vicissitudes of our sensuous, embodied experience to a blissful state of ataraxia while relishing in a glorious narcissistic fantasy life derived from things we

like, extrapolated from our Instagram feeds, our Netflix queues, and our pictures of hot bodies?

Symptoms of the Swelling

In the following section, I will introduce some common manifestations of twenty-first-century neurotic symptoms related to the ubiquity of the digital screen and the swelling of the Imaginary, focusing on the two primary orientations of neurosis: obsessionality and hysteria. One significant departure in Lacanian theory from other models of psychoanalytic theories such as ego psychology or object relations is that in a Lacanian framework, diagnosis is primarily considered in terms of a subject's relation to the Other rather than in relation to a set of symptoms or defenses. Using this theoretical approach, neurotic patients are generally considered to be either obsessively or hysterically oriented. To be clear, the symptomatologies that arise from the ubiquity of the digital screen very much involve narcissism; an investment in the Imaginary realm is at the heart of narcissism. However, my focus in this disquisition is to distinguish just how these narcissistic symptoms manifest themselves differently in obsessive and hysteric neurotic orientations, rather than to position narcissism as its own diagnostic category. Further, I would like to examine how contemporary symptomatologies, often involving narcissistic features and digital screen addictions, are not altogether structurally new formations; I conceive of them largely as obsessive and hysteric manifestations of neuroses in which the symptoms have adapted to our contemporary culture's heavy investment in digital mediation and its consumer mentality.

Obsessive Suffering

Obsessive patients seek to somehow make themselves complete or not lacking, to neutralize the desire of the Other, and to use their thought to tame the unpredictable and ineffable predicaments which the vicissitudes of time create. Obsessives find themselves struggling to maintain a sense of order to their digital lives and online personas in order to patch up what they find incomplete or lacking in their embodied experience—their 'real' lives. Not only do obsessive neurotics feel a compulsion to constantly check their emails, texts and social media platforms to maintain a sense of order and control; they also use their digital interfaces and their spectral realities as defenses against the unpredictable flow of time and the Otherness that might emerge in spontaneous interactions, such as free associative discourse. These obsessive individuals often experience anxiety around the extemporaneous flow of free speech in a clinical setting. In the face of this anxiety, they seek something from the digital realm, from the security of their virtual existences to restore a sense of order, completeness and an illusory sense having control of time.

Mr. R spent much of his time in his analytic sessions explaining how he experienced many of his involvements in life as a burden. He had disliked the jobs in marketing he had previously worked and had been laid off several times for his lack of enthusiasm. He had resented the performance demands which his supervisors had placed on him and did not want to be bothered by having to go into an office to work. As we explored what kind of job he might prefer, he said that he wanted a job in which he could work from home and be paid a high income for the smallest amount of work possible. He viewed work primarily as a trading away of some of his valuable time to someone who was trying to get him to do something he didn't want to do, for monetary compensation. When I pressed Mr. R to say more about what he would want to do with the valuable time he was exchanging, what he seemed most invested in was not a particular ambition he felt excited about or drawn toward. Instead, he seemed primarily focused on organizing his time in a particular way which would allow him to get away from all of the things that he experienced as burdensome: working his job, being intimate with his girlfriend, putting up with his family members, and defending himself from hostile pedestrians threatening him on the streets of New York. It seemed he also experienced aspects of our clinical meetings as burdensome: Mr. R often seemed annoyed by my encouraging him to talk more about what specific things he might desire and by my urging him to try to free associate and say whatever came to mind, especially if it seemed unimportant or irrelevant to help him deal with all of the things that were burdening him. He often seemed to experience my questions aimed at learning more about the specifics of his situation as either irrelevant tasks he was being asked to complete, or at times, judgments about things that I must think were wrong about him.

Early in our work together, our sessions would frequently be interrupted by Mr. R's phone beeping with a banner or a text. Mr. R would quickly pick up his phone, check his notification, and then, in a few moments, resume our conversation as if there had been no interruption. Mr. R also would sometimes begin our session by reading a list of things he had planned to talk about off his phone or offer to show me images of people he talked about. During these sessions, we were often not able to achieve any kind of associative flow or deepening of affective content. When I eventually asked Mr. R to put away his phone during our analytic hour, he protested: he thought my request was strict and unfair. Furthermore, if he had to put away his iPhone for

our sessions, how could he maximize the value of the use of his time? I stated that this kind of commodification of time interrupted the spontaneous flow of our work which was important for the process: free association without regard to the clock time allowed new thoughts and feelings to emerge and could enable a kind of psychic change that might help him. Mr. R hesitantly agreed to turn his phone to silent for our sessions but insisted that he at least be able to occasionally check the time on my clock on the bookshelf behind him. He said that he wanted to manage his time to at least make sure he was able to talk about each of the pressing issues he had on his mind, as if the issues that were most pressing would be unlikely to naturally emerge by themselves. After exploring these issues around Mr. R's attempts to manage and commodify time, I told him that he could turn around and check the clock when he wanted. Going forward, Mr. R would occasionally check the clock during our sessions, each time wincing and twisting his neck, letting me know that this was yet another burden he would like to be spared.

In his obsessively-oriented psychic economy, Mr. R's concrete quantification of time and compulsion to access the digital world on his phone functioned as a resistance against engaging in the spontaneous, creative process of symbolism in the analytic discourse as well as a defense against the otherness of my subjectivity in my role as the analyst. By seeking continuous access to the digital realm and by maintaining the illusion that he could grasp control of time and maximize every minute, Mr. R sought a sense of unity and control over his fragmentary phenomenological experience. However, these narcissistic investments disrupted any kind of creative flow inside and outside the analytic space and contributed to his experiencing many of his activities in life as burdensome and barren of meaning. It seemed like this preoccupation with the economics of time and his phone did symbolize a good deal relating to the value of time, mortality and his notions of freedom and oppression. But with his particular obsessional orientation, Mr. R's very preoccupations seemed to marginalize any interest in exploring how these aspects might be symbolized or what they might mean in themselves.

Hysteric Suffering

Hysterical patients seek to be the object cause of the Other's desire: they want to be 'liked' but not possessed. They wish to be tantalizingly elusive while identifying themselves with the Other's desire. They often develop an addictive attraction to the culture of liking, demanding a steady diet of narcissistic validation to maintain a sense of wholeness or personal worth. Rather than obsessing over time and striving to order the screen like the obsessive, hysterical neurotics often become heavily invested in the imaginary realm of the digital screen, aiming to satisfy their egos' perpetual demands to be liked or desired. This hysterical overinvestment in the Imaginary contributes to a myopia in which these patients only wish to see the surface or appearance of things and lose touch with a feel for both symbolic play and the flow of process-based physical activities. Their symbolic and imaginary processes are usually focused on a dynamic progression involving being hungry or being disgusted, taking in or spitting out, liking or rejecting, identifying or disidentifying. This preoccupation with internalization and externalization manifests itself in the hysteric's relationship to her body as well her relationships with images of other people whom she wants to either take in or cast away. Hysterics focus on fantasies of being either rejected or liked by the Other and find many ways to place themselves within these fantasies and their fugal variations.

In the realm of the Imaginary, the hysteric individual is oriented toward this dynamic of movement: the inside versus outside relates to the swipe-left-or-right platform of most dating applications. The draw of the hysteric to this dynamic on Tinder keeps her in the game, which induces the obsessive to give chase to her (or her image) as the Imaginary object of his desire. Concordant with the trend toward the predominance of the Imaginary, dating sites and applications have moved from text and algorithm-based interfaces to image-based profiles bearing little text or symbolic content. Consider the progression of dating platforms from text-based personal newspaper listings, to Eharmony and Match—which rely on questionnaires, matching algorithms and personal statements—to, more recently, Tinder, which is focused singularly on the image.

Mrs. C really wanted to know if I liked her. She frequently demanded that I reassure her that I liked her when she was concerned that maybe I had heard enough of her talking. She would persistently ask me if I really liked her, or if I thought she was a terrible person, if I really thought she was pretty, or if I did not. She would pay careful attention to my response and let me know how she interpreted the sincerity of the tone of my voice and the words with which I chose to respond. At each turn of our work, Mrs. C pushed to involve the digital screen in her analysis: she showed me pictures of her new puppy and her Tribeca penthouse apartment on her phone, she sought to charge her device on my power cord whenever she could, and she reported

things that she had found about me online and tried to provoke me with critiques and seductive comments. She suggested showing me an image of herself wearing only a towel by saying: "I probably shouldn't show you this…." Mrs. C told me that her previous therapist had given her support and demonstrated unconditional love for her, especially when Mrs. C had felt she was unlovable. This therapist would offer her a steady stream of nice and encouraging comments. She would even give Mrs. C a gentle hug when she felt she really needed it. Mrs. C said that she wanted the same treatment from me even though I had been clear from the start that this was not the way I worked.

Mrs. C lived in a swipe left, swipe right world. Everything she encountered was to be liked or disliked, taken in or thrown away. She was preoccupied with being liked on Tinder and followed on Instagram and demanded constant attention to maintain a sense of personal value. When this attention wasn't forthcoming, she would fall into a self-doubting tailspin, spending much of her time in sessions expressing her grievances while demanding that I tell her that I liked her, asking me for dating advice or seeking explanations as to what was going wrong in her relationships. She only seemed to be able to find some temporary relief in giving herself a material gift, whether it be some gourmet food to eat, an article of clothing, or some other personal accessory that helped her feel liked or better about herself. If her appetite for digital likes was not satisfied, suffering in starvation, she would turn to consumer goods for nourishment.

When I initially moved in to my new office, Mrs. C seemed excited about the upgrade in the furniture and decor, but quickly began to evaluate all the things in my office and whether she liked them or not. She liked my desk but not my office chair; she liked my bookcase but insisted that I had arranged the books all wrong—the Standard Edition needed to go on the top shelf, not in the middle! As her analysis continued, Mrs. C became further demanding that I demonstrate that I liked her while trying to provoke me by critiquing the things she liked or didn't like about me or my office, my beard, my socks, or my phone.

At the height of an outburst, when Mrs. C became angry that I wasn't responding to these demands the way she liked, she pointed to a painting in my office and said, "I hate you, just like I hate this stupid white spot!" One thing she brilliantly pointed to but didn't consciously realize was that I had painted this work which hung in my office; so to some extent the white spot truly was a part or an extension of me. But in her viewing of the painting, she was unable to see that the white spot represented the reflection of a camera's flash against a window, through which a careful viewer might notice the crepuscular light following the sunset shining through the clouds of a landscape. Of course, one couldn't really expect Mrs. C to notice the subtleties of the painting at a glance, but what stood out in her reaction was how this spot was just another stupid thing, like me, which she hated. Due to Mrs. C's preoccupation with the surface appearance and whether or not she liked what she saw, she was unable or uninterested to look past the "stupid white spot" or to notice the other visual layers diaphanously rendered in the oil painting. She ignored the possibilities involved in playing verbally with what she saw when she gazed at the painting, and she didn't want to bother talking about just how the white spot was so completely stupid to her. This scotomization served as a metaphor for Mrs. C's inability to see past and through the digital surface of the Imaginary dimension which was clouding her vision and interfering with her capacity for creative play.

Psychoanalysis Must Respond

> *Those are my principles, and if you don't like them... well, I have others.*
> --Groucho Marx

It seems clear that psychoanalysis has lost favor in the United States since the heyday of ego psychology and its alignment with medical psychiatry. As our cultural zeitgeist, imbued with the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism, has moved toward information-based technology, pharmacological remedies, and evidence-based treatments to address neurotic suffering, psychoanalytic practice has reacted by moving away from the authoritarian stance of ego psychology and toward treatment modalities that aim to be both more mutual and symmetrical, regarding the clinical frame of treatment and the role of the analyst. There is now a greater emphasis on the 'relationship' (which is not a simply-defined term) between therapist and patient (or 'client,' which I am beginning to hear with increasing frequency). There seems to be a trend toward avoiding diagnostic thinking, which might unnecessarily pathologize, and an emphasis on empathic identification with the patient and his ego. There is also a newfound emphasis on working with the patient on a pre-Oedipal and pre-Symbolic level. While I welcome the distancing of contemporary analysis from the normalizing stance associated with ego psychology, I question the direction of some of these trends, and I am concerned that

Mannheim Windowscape, oil on canvas
(Image courtesy of the author.)

psychoanalysis in the way that it is being practiced may be compromising some of its core principles to adapt to the ego-driven demands of the patient as consumer.

Psychoanalysis must find a way to stand outside the consumer marketplace. It must distinguish itself as a ritualistic creative activity which can transcend and exist outside the commercial transactions involved in the rest of our days. Through its dialectical method, psychoanalysis can pose an ideological critique of the predominant cultures of twenty-first-century capitalism and offer us a kind of liberation from the normalizations its ideologies impose. Time is not money; time is mysteriously at the essence of existence. Through the free association of analytic discourse, psychoanalysis can dispel this illusion and help us get in better touch with the strange flow of time and its aspects involving pluratemporality and *nachträglichkeit*.

Psychoanalysis is fundamentally an interpretive practice. The patient, in his role, is asked to free associate, and the analyst, in her asymmetric role, primarily interprets. Through this process, the analyst challenges and questions the patient's taken-for-granted meanings and ego identifications, which enables a change in the analysand's psychic economy by way of his talking through, thinking about, and feeling things in ways he hadn't imagined possible—that is, by getting to the previously unthinkable thoughts of the unconscious. In other words, analysis sets in motion a process of symbolization which opens up "levels of reality which otherwise are closed for us" (Tillich, p. 42). My suggestion here is that psychoanalysis must fundamentally involve these two related concepts to avoid running the risk of being compromised by an overinvestment in imaginary identification in a clinical setting: 1) interpretation emphasizing difference rather than seeking to recognize sameness or identification, and 2) an emphasis on the process of symbolization (an attention paid to the Symbolic dimension as it points beyond pre-established meanings) rather than the process of empathic identification, with its overinvestment in the imaginary dimension.

With the expanding influence of the digital world on our psychic economies, the swollen dimension of the Imaginary reigns king. The Imaginary is the dimension of identification, the primary dimension of the ego, and a prime driver in our consumer culture whereby we long to identify with those who are healthy, happy, glamorous, and liked. If psychoanalysis validates rather than challenges patients' consumerist demands, it imperils itself by being complicit in the culture of narcissistic identification, the socioeconomic norms of late consumer capitalism, and the swelling of the Imaginary.

With its trend toward symmetry and empathic identification in the analytic frame, psychoanalysis is compromising its fundamental emphasis on interpretation, symbolic creativity, and the need to face the radical, sometimes disruptive Otherness of the unconscious, the *unbewusst*—the unknown. As empathy involves a trial identification with the other's perspective, it is essentially an identificatory process emphasizing a false sense of sameness at the level of the ego, rather than otherness or difference. This investment in the realm of the Imaginary runs the risk of contributing to the Imaginary's digital tumescence, which crowds out the transformational potential of the Symbolic and interferes with our feel for the sensuous energies of our embodied experiences involving the Real.

Psychoanalysis must reconsider its identity within the digital world in order to maintain its essentially interpretive approach involving not only the Imaginary but also the registers of the Symbolic and the Real to enable a creative process that can bring about conscious and unconscious psychic change. Psychoanalysts must find a way to allow our hallowed practice to exist outside and beyond the realm of consumer demand, instant gratification, and the feedback loop of narcissistic identification. In the most general sense, psychoanalysis is a spiritual practice, in that it touches on something outside of ourselves, something beyond our egos (Barratt, p. 178). Now more than ever, we must strive to navigate a world increasingly being flooded by the digital sea—to find a course which restores a vital balance to the Borromean rings and which addresses the suffering brought on by the swelling dimension of the Imaginary.

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Alison Bancroft

The Trauma of Seeing and Being in the Work of Gareth Pugh

The screen is a multivalent proposition. It is something we see. It presents us with images and words. With speakers connected to it, it also presents us with sounds. It invites and provokes several of the senses at once. At the same time, it alludes to a depth that is not physically present, but which exists nevertheless: if you look behind a screen, there is nothing there; but the screen itself, and what we see on it, can be infinite. It presents us with something, but at the same time relies on a viewer. The screen is no good without someone viewing it, but viewers are not *tabulae rasae* (blank screens) onto which something, anything, can be projected. We have depth of our own. Thus the screen and the viewer both present a network of relationships that carry questions of interiority and exteriority, seeing and being seen, depth and surface.

The trope of the screen as a location of the unconscious is well established in film theory, and it is not my project here to investigate this.[1] This article is concerned with a short fashion film, showing the designer Gareth Pugh's Spring/Summer 2018 Collection, directed by Nick Knight, and featuring the performance art of Olivier de Sagazan, as well as Pugh's fashion work. The film itself is 16 minutes long and can be seen on the Showstudio website (link available in References, below).

Before I discuss this work, I should say a few words about fashion film, as it is a comparatively new creative form that is not well known outside of fashion circles. Fashion photographers from Man Ray to Guy Bourdin often worked in film as well as in photography, but their work in this medium was largely overlooked because there was no way of showing it to a wider audience. This situation changed with the advent of the Internet as a mass medium in the early years of the twenty-first century, at which point fashion film emerged from its niche as a side interest of photography and came to much greater prominence. As a genre, it relies on an aesthetic that is frequently highly stylized and experimental. Besides fashion photography, it has connections to video art and short, non-narrative cinema. Pioneered by the British photographer Nick Knight and showcased on his website showstudio.com, this emergent form now has its own festivals in cities across Europe and North America, and innovative work is being produced within the genre by both young creatives and established names: Spike Jonze, David Lynch, Wes Anderson and Roman Polanski

[1] For readers unfamiliar with film criticism and psychoanalysis, there is a helpful introductory chapter on the subject in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*.

have all directed fashion films in recent years. As with all good genres, a strict definition is impossible, and so this broad general description must suffice here.

Fashion is usually associated with corporeality and femininity, as well as with both visual and material culture. Readers should note that I distinguish between fashion as a creative form on the one hand, and the fashion industry on the other, on the grounds that if we can make this distinction with literature and publishing, and music and the record industry, it should be possible to do the same with fashion—which, like literature and music, is more than the contemporary commercial systems created in order to disseminate it. The idea that fashion is primarily an industry is notable for two reasons: firstly, because it is a comparatively recent development—fashion as a cultural form started in the Renaissance, and it only became an industry around the 1990s, when neoliberalism became the default and everyone became a consumer—and secondly, because fashion is the only creative form that has been anchored to industry and commerce in this way. The aesthetic and creative dimension of fashion is routinely disavowed in a way that other aesthetic and creative forms are not; fashion, uniquely, becomes a matter of retail. Much of my work, in this essay and elsewhere, starts with an enthusiasm for that which is disavowed in fashion—its creative and aesthetic soul—and my intention is always to show that there is meaning in fashion every bit as much as there is meaning in a novel or a symphony or a play.

I also distinguish between fashion and clothing because while fashion is more often than not what is worn, not all clothing, which is also worn, is fashion. Fashion also produces some of the most challenging and recalcitrant images and objects of our times, and, as I argue in my 2012 monograph, *Fashion and Psychoanalysis*, psychoanalysis allows us to interrogate them, and to produce interpretations that would not otherwise be possible.

Gareth Pugh, Spring Summer 2018

As the film opens, we see a man (the performance artist Olivier de Sagazan) mirroring another man (the designer himself, Gareth Pugh.) The man (Sagazan) reconstitutes the other man (Pugh)—or himself—in clay, and then burrows into his own torso with his face and his hands. It is not clear whether this is an act of interrogation or self-destruction. The models that appear after this disturbing opening scene wear only underwear and twitch like zombies while a strobe flickers. Fabrics, textures, and occasionally garments flit in and out, presented as either disembodied fragments, or else as costume pieces on muscular dancers. There are moments of blackout between scenes, suggesting theatrical convention as well as a cinematic experience. The conflation of performance art, fashion, and theatre, in the medium of film, indicates a degree of conceptual complexity that merits further attention.

At first glance, the film is billed as a showing of a fashion collection, which is to say, an assortment of garments designed around a theme or idea; as such, it follows the norms of fashion shows by giving itself a season (Spring/Summer) and a year (2018) and by referring to itself as a collection. Indeed, the film came into being as a way of showing Pugh's seasonal collection, and was screened at the BFI IMAX cinema in London, during London Fashion Week in September 2017. However, that is where the connection to fashion orthodoxies ends. Instead of a runway show presenting a collection, the use of a short, macabre film featuring performance art, dancers, and visual effects raises more questions than it answers. By using film as a medium for fashion, when film is well-established as a medium by which the operation of the unconscious can be explored, the discourse between fashion and the mind is opened up to investigation. In terms of psychoanalysis specifically, it suggests several interpretive possibilities: Where is the human subject here? While we are clearly invited to reflect on the destructive potential of narcissism and the violence that lies at the heart of the human condition, as I will show, we should also consider the connection between vision and experience, between what we see and what we feel, physically and emotionally. The fashion shown in this film seems to say something profound, and profoundly disturbing, about both the body and the mind.

The first five minutes of the film show Sagazan first, and Pugh a minute later. Both men apply clay, water, and what looks like blood to their heads, molding their faces into a grotesque that recollects the tormented humanity in the figurative painting of the British artist Francis Bacon, and through the masking of their features, they appear as clay caricatures every bit as graphic and as disturbing as the cartoons of Gerald Scarfe. As performance art, the work draws also on the tradition of Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, with its commitment to the brutal destruction of a reality that Artaud considered false. These references are significant, because they position the film within a wider tradition of aesthetic representation that predicates human experience on trauma and violence, and, as the opening sequence for the

film, they set a theme that, as we will see, the fashion work of Gareth Pugh goes on to explore.

In the opening sequence, what starts as one man very quickly becomes two men. At first, they are different men, but this difference is negated by the clay that they daub onto themselves and that becomes their faces, and the demarcation between the one and the other becomes less and less clear as the scenes progress. Are they two men, or one man and his mirror image? Does the distinction between self and other collapse into a hostile identification of self as other? It is not clear, and this lack of clarity alludes precisely to the problem of selfhood, and to the knowledge that we are whole only in the mirror, in image, because there is no place outside of ourselves from which we can see ourselves as whole beings. As ourselves, without the reinforcement of the mirror image to remind us of our apparent completeness, we are inchoate, incomplete. The dilemma is compounded because the problem of selfhood is enacted in the film by the designer, Gareth Pugh. The notion that there is no autonomous self outside of the visual regime we create for ourselves in order to appear whole is reinforced in the most material way possible by the appearance of Pugh in his own film. This tension between whole self in image, and fragmented corporeal experience runs through the first few scenes of the film, and reminds us forcefully that seeing is being.

One man penetrates the other, or himself, twice—first in the face, by using his finger to bore into the place where the eyeball should be. This act of violence would usually destroy the eyeball, but here it creates a socket and the possibility of sight where previously the smooth featureless clay had offered merely a blank face. This scene suggests that while creation of the self by way of organic corporeal matter is a brutally constructive process, the act of seeing is constituted through violence to the self, by the self. In order to be able to see, to deploy the foundational sense that creates the human subject as distinct from others, we must commit to, and commit, cruelty and harm. A second, more erotic and even more violent penetration follows, when one man lies prone on a table, and the second covers his body with clay and long strands of hair. This wattle-and-daub technique of literally constructing the corporeal self seems to invite that self's subsequent destruction, and the clay-covered body is penetrated by the man, who thrusts his hand into the clay in the groin area, pushing up into what would usually be the cavities of the pelvis, and then into the torso itself. In a burlesque of the BDSM and/or homoerotic practice of fisting, the body is created and desecrated in an act of libidinal violence.

Seeing and being are thus constituted at the outset of the film as erotic, violent, and destructive. Trauma is etched on the face, and built into the body, and the torment of being is played out in the self and in the imago of the self as a human subject.

These themes of violence, trauma and corporeality continue and are developed further in the following segments of the film—one that features dancers—and in the final third of the film, which is devoted to the fashion collection itself. The dancers perform ensemble, but have very little relation to one another—they are atomised and Dionysian, autoerotic and unconnected despite their proximity to one another. They each enact their tortured singularity in a seething mass of individually tortured singles.

The fashion that this film was produced to show appears at around the ten minute mark, and notably, while moving from performance art to ensemble dance to fashion, the themes remain constant throughout the film itself. Each differently-genred chapter segues neatly into the next, with the fashion segment as the denouement of the ideas set out in the opening sequence.

The first fashion items are cages, or armour, encasing the body. They circumscribe the human inside them, and offer a harder boundary than that provided by flesh. At the same time, there are gaps, geometrically configured, through which a well-aimed and suitably shaped object could penetrate, or through which something of the body might escape. These armoured cages cover the entire body, from head to toe. If fashion usually clothes, and covers, the body, here we see fashion reflecting on its own concealing. The scene also cuts in and out of shots of gore and viscera, and to the muzzle of a snarling dog, moving back and forth between a science fiction ideal of the untouchable body, and abjection and aggression. A third element is also at play here, in the idealised figure of an ecclesiastically clad androgyne huddling under an oversized collar, their mouth covered by a small piece of foil that looks not unlike the moth covering the mouth on the well-known Silence of the Lambs film poster. This trio of images suggests, to my mind, attempts to navigate the profound and visceral conflicts that constitute the human condition, through containment, in cages, and through defence against their outcomes, in armour. The subject itself can say nothing of these conflicts—and as Wittgenstein has said, what we cannot

speak of we must pass over in silence—but they are nevertheless experienced, at the level of the unconscious, or, in a specifically Lacanian idiom, within the realm of the Real.

Moving on, the next part of the collection is a set of red metallic dresses and suits, worn by models who, finally, present an approximation of a fashion show. They walk between red neon tubes, and disappear behind screens. The garments offer a mirror finish, which reflects nothing. Mirrors are built into the set to both reflect models, when they stand in front of them, and conceal them, when they stand behind them. The medium of film augments the visual play and adds a technical effect that blurs the subject and creates an indeterminacy between what we see and what we think we see. This is the trope of anamorphosis, a device in art that deceives the eye and which shows that what we take to be reality is little more than a trick of the light. What is anamorphotic here, though, is nothing less than the human subject, who in this scene slides between a knowable and contained corporeal being, and an indeterminate and insubstantial blur, one that can only be realised as at once a reflection and a reflector, and never in its own right.

Corporeal reality is further challenged by the use of light in the next scene, which adds shadow that elongates limbs to fantastical dimensions. Another model is filmed in a column of light, and the dress which usually contains the body becomes an extension of it, while the containment comes from an external, mechanical source. Conscious expectations are challenged and found wanting, and fashion is used by Pugh to present the disturbing idea—although one that is well-known in psychoanalysis—that when the human subject is contained and restrained it is from an external impetus, while our corporeality is, at the same time, boundless and elastic.

The final scene of the fashion section of the film is, unsurprisingly, the most remarkable. It opens with a model shrink-wrapped in gold, her form visible within the wider sheet, as she, apparently, struggles to escape. The medium of film shows its technical advantages again, with the added visual effect of the sheet stretching beyond its boundaries. Themes of containment and restraint are continued here, and the use of gold metallic materials invites reflection of both the visual and the intellectual kind. Following on from the shrink-wrapped model, more gold appears, in the form of hard, metallic, mirror-finish dresses with edges so sharp they could cut. Reflection, though, is suggested to be impossible—the models in this final section have their eyes blurred out. Their faces are visible, but the part where their eyes should be is neutralised, like the clay-covered featureless faces that opened the film. They cannot see, even as they are reflected, and reflected upon.

To Conclude

The centrality of vision to the constitution of the human subject is well known, but the reliability of vision in terms of seeing and recognising the self and others is shown in this fashion film to be much more problematic. We can see that this film lends itself to a broadly psychoanalytic reading, and stands up also to a specifically Lacanian approach. What might be a more interesting proposition, though, is to consider what bearing the medium of film itself has on fashion and the ideas that fashion communicates.

As a creative form, fashion has as much to say about the unconscious, and about human subjectivity, as art or literature, but it is a unique mode of expression, inasmuch as it relies on the human body for its realisation. Fashion is fashion because it is worn, and it inscribes ideas on the body that, very often, cannot be inscribed elsewhere. Fashion offers a vehicle by which that which cannot be said in language, that which is experienced visually and corporeally, can be expressed otherwise, and as such it is no coincidence that it is associated with femininity and with women. What happens, then, when fashion is shown in, is mediated through, the technology of film?

The conventions of fashion film are such that they intrinsically reject linear, conscious logic, and thus the genre itself alludes to the less accessible, more challenging operations of the mind—what, in a specifically Lacanian idiom, would be the Imaginary and the Real. In this instance, we see that the medium of film augments the ideas that Gareth Pugh is using fashion to express. The multidisciplinary pieces that embrace performance art, contemporary dance, video art, and fashion all meditate on the same point, that is elucidated through the psychoanalytic critique set out in this essay: that the human subject is impossibly conflicted, predicated on aggressivity, and reliant on the regrettable instability of visual recognition for its realisation. By putting these ideas on a screen, they invite direct identification with unconscious processes, unmediated by narrative or speech.

If we accept the idea from film theory that the screen can function as a reflection of the mind, and that cinema "works" in some way because it shows us the operation of the human, then what this fashion film shows us, visually, is the

instability of the visual. It is a representation of the experience of seeing, upon which subjectivity is founded. The flaws in the process by which one becomes a self, as distinct from an other, play out before our eyes, and the conflicts and trauma that arise from this flawed process are enacted on the screen that is the cause of all our problems in the first place. This is not a rabbit hole, down which we disappear only to emerge, confused, some time later. This is not a wardrobe backing on to a mystical land that we visit when we enter the closet and close the door behind us. This is not a fiction, and it is not a boundary. There is no world on screen that is separate or distinct from ourselves. What we see is how we become, through seeing, and as such this film, and the collection it shows, is wonderful and terrifying and macabre, and deeply and profoundly human.

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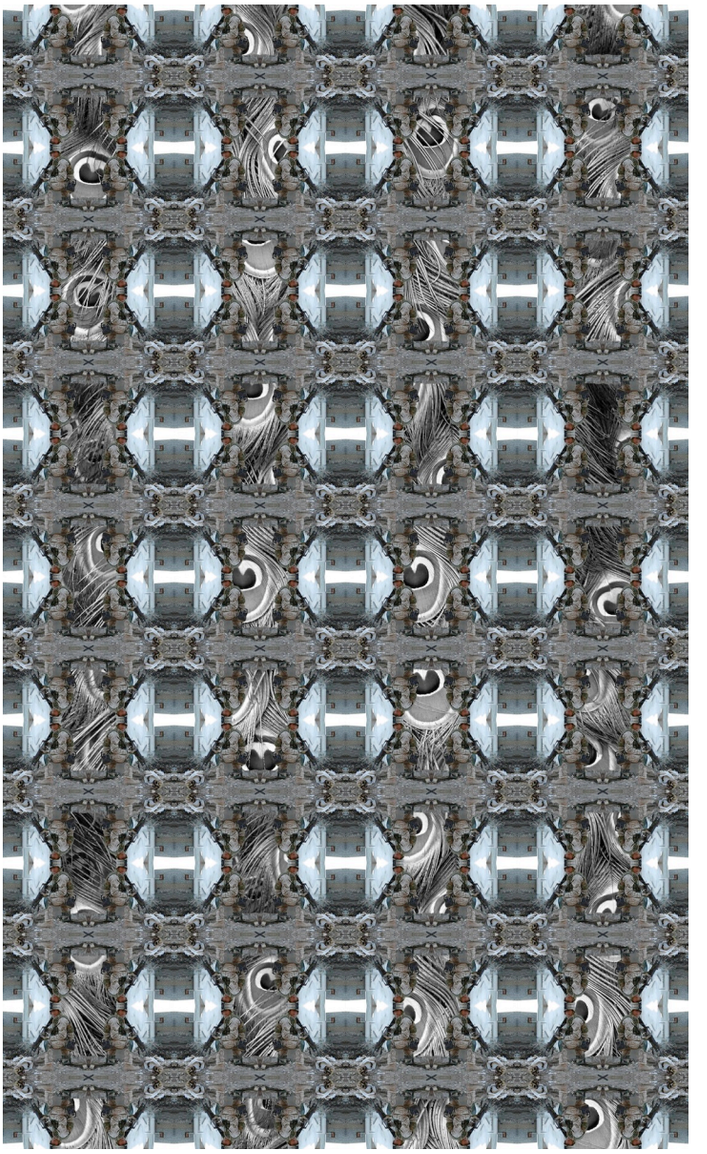

iv. The Screened Subject

Patrick Scanlon

Surfeited by Screens: On Three Occasions of Sight—Boredom, Fascination, and the Uncanny

> *There is inevitably a brief interval before the world fully recomposes itself into its unthought and unseen familiarity. It is an instant of disorientation when one's immediate surroundings—for example, a room and its contents—seem both vague and oppressive in their time-worn materiality, their heaviness, their vulnerability to dilapidation, but also their inflexible resistance to being clicked away in an instant. One has a fleeting intuition of the disparity between one's sense of limitless electronic connectedness and the enduring constraints of embodiment and physical finitude. But such dislocating moments were generally restricted to the physical sites in which non-portable apparatuses were available. With increasingly prosthetic devices, these kinds of transitions occur anywhere, in every conceivable public or private milieu.*
> --Jonathan Crary, 2014, pp. 88-89

Opening: *The ones*

In the manifesto, *You Are Not a Gadget* (2010), the eccentric Jaron Lanier marks an interesting moment in software history: the development of MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface), a format that would come to determine the scope of digital musical expression for the next several decades. Despite the gravity of the this news, it is delivered rather informally due to Lanier's status as one of the key figures in the development of virtual reality, and thus his personal familiarity with the individuals responsible for the dawning of Apple, IBM, and Google. But there is another, more important reason for his narrative's nonchalant style: MIDI, much like other operating systems essential in the development and proliferation of digital gadgetry, emerged in a very personal and therefore somewhat arbitrary manner. As Lanier explains: "One day in the early 1980s, a music synthesizer named Dave Smith causally made up a way to represent musical notes," fashioning the system according to his need as a keyboard player; included were "keyboard events like 'key-down' and 'key-up'" (2000, p. 7). The very humble purpose of MIDI was to connect synthesizers together so that one, or, more specifically, so that "Dave," could access a larger array of keyboard sounds by manipulating a single instrument. It is understandable then that MIDI's range was restricted, and "could not describe the curvy, transient expressions a singer or a saxophone player can produce. It could only describe the tile mosaic world of the keyboardist, not the watercolor of the violin" (p. 7).

The implications of this private intention are somewhat inconceivable however, a fact that Lanier relays through the metaphor of planting a tree in one's backyard. In the time it takes to

stand up from burying the seed in the dirt, one finds that the whole neighborhood has been engulfed by a forest. Poetics aside, this may not be an exaggeration. Consider that from the moment in Dave Smith's home, "MIDI now exists in your phone and in billions of other devices. It is the lattice on which almost all the popular music you hear is built. Much of the sound around us—ambient music and audio beeps, the ringtones and alarms—is conceived in MIDI. The whole of human auditory experience has become filled with discrete notes that fit in a grid" (p. 9). This digital interface is responsible not only for instrumentation, for which it would still be limited, but for the vast array of sound expression. In the realm of digital technology, the process by which a system built for a discrete task comes to take on far more general functions is referred to as "lock-in." This situation is one where the rapid and somewhat arbitrary evolution of technological advancement often solidifies certain decisions in such a manner that they are almost impossible to take out. Lanier explains, "The brittle character of maturing computer programs can cause digital designs to get frozen into place" (p. 7). There is a stark contrast between the haphazard and brittle nature of implementing these digital designs and the severity of their effects. With risk of painting the canvas darker, I would note that an awareness of this story—and even, I would suggest, a more specialized knowledge of hardware/software intricacies—does little to temper the effects on our perception as it is marshaled throughout the scenes of the day.

Regardless of its fierce influence, MIDI is but one operating system whose limits, as profound as they are protected—and perhaps indefinitely by their status of first-ness—have given way to innumerable other designs, apps, and interfaces that are in certain ways more astute in their functioning. The deftness and adaptability of these designs have increased under a truly stunning marriage of appearance and performance. Their capacity to capitalize on novelty does not, however, prevent the narrowing of experience that occurs during users' participation. Other systems are less entrenched than MIDI perhaps, but they work in a similar fashion. Lanier reminds us of what is at stake here: "After MIDI, a musical note was no longer just an idea, but a rigid, mandatory structure you couldn't avoid in the aspects of life that had gone digital. The process of lock-in is like a wave gradually washing over the rulebook of life, culling the ambiguities of flexible thoughts as more and more thought structures are solidified into effectively permanent reality" (p. 9). The danger would be to confuse the proliferation and nimbleness of digital apps, for instance, with the flexibility of thought. Instead of a wave, we have something like torrential rain, as the agents of culling are now legion, leaving the remaining ambiguities to scatter and hide.

The work of parsing the impact of this scenario is more challenging than merely noting the amount of our time, whether leisure, work, sleep, dinner, and so on, that is taken up with technological gadgets. Ubiquity is but one aspect of our contemporary screen life, and its efficacy comes from being coupled with another feature, that of integration. As Lanier points out, when a human is asked to interact with a computer "as if it were a person, [the computer system asks] you to accept in some corner of your brain that you might also be conceived of as a program" (p. 4). The plainness of symmetry here belies the consequentiality, not to mention the inaccessibility of this process. The integration of human and technological operations is serpentine to the degree that the points of contact and influence might be characterized not just as obscure, but as odorless.

There are benefits to peering inside the machine, as it were, in order to get some sense of how this other half lives, and therefore, to gauge that which attaches to us, most obviously as a prosthesis, but also as a network that pierces our corporeality through the imperceptible way it modifies our cognition. It might be useful here to consider our concessions to screen life in the terms of pressure and desire. The former might include the societal forces that compel our collusion with a variety of digital platforms, and distinct from this stress, the latter would entail the swath of applications for which we are encouraged, and given means to fully immerse ourselves in a virtual sphere. Both forms of integration have significant effects on the individual, and both rely on varying degrees of intention. It seems the subject is beset on both sides, by the promise of convenience, and on the other, by the dream of idealism. Whether through practicality or fantasy, one is ensnared in a network whose influence is not easy to decipher. Even in situations where we eagerly post pictures or opinions, the effects no doubt exceed the desire for display. Pressures and desires are certainly different, though in the sphere of digital interfacing they can have similar consequences.

Consider the following two statements, which frame these questions of digital pressure and desire. The first, from Jonathan Crary, shows the logic of social pressures and inducements that coerce us into all sorts of impossible relationships or attempts to "impersonate" what is not in kind.

Crary focuses on the limitations, even humiliations inherent in being human as causes for entering into this type of disharmony:

> Now there are numerous pressures for individuals to reimagine and refigure themselves as being of the same consistency and values as the dematerialized commodities and social connections in which they are immersed so extensively. Reification has proceeded to the point where the individual has to invent a self-understanding that optimizes or facilitates their participation in digital milieus and speeds. Paradoxically, this means impersonating the inert and the inanimate. … There is no possible harmonization between actual living beings and the demands of 24/7 capitalism, but there are countless inducements to delusionally suspend or obscure some of the humiliating limitations of Lived experience, whether emotional or biological. Figurations of the inert or inanimate also operate as a protective or numbing shield, to evade recognition of the harsh expendability of life within contemporary economic and institutional arrangements (pp. 99-100).

The second passage comes from Bernard Harcourt's *Exposed: Desire and Disobedience in the Digital Age* (2015). Harcourt, a lawyer and Foucauldian scholar and translator distinguishes our current economic and political situation from that of Foucault's "Control Society" and Guy Debord's "Society of the Spectacle" by pointing out the astonishing effort a great many of us make to provide all sorts of personal information, materials that would have been the object of surveillance decades ago. In distinction to Foucault and Debord, Harcourt suggests that we now live in an *expository society* (p. 19). As a point of support for our willingness to generate information, he notes, "One data broker, Acxiom, boasted in 2014 that it had 3,000 points of data on practically every consumer in the United States" (p. 14). To be fair, the means of collecting this data are complex beyond any conventional understanding, and while most of it is legal, it represents one of the darker dystopian effects of the technological fantasy. In the quotation below, Harcourt describes the mixture of narcissistic need and algorithmic enterprise at work.

> We make ourselves virtually transparent for everyone to see, and in so doing, we allow ourselves to be shaped in unprecedented ways, intentionally or unwittingly. Our selves and our subjectivity—the very subjectivity that embraces the digital apps, platforms, and devices—are themselves molded by the recommender algorithms and targeted suggestions from retailers, the special offers from advertisers, the unsolicited talking points from political parties and candidates. Through the flood of suggestions and recommendations, through our own censorship and self-governance in the face of being watched, we are transformed and shaped into digital subjects. We are brought into being through the process of digital exposure, monitoring, and targeting that we embrace and ignore so readily. And we give ourselves up to new forms of subjectivity and social order, marked by unprecedented restrictions on privacy and anonymity and by seemingly unlimited levels of monitoring and surveillance (p. 14).

The aim of this introduction is to provide a sense of the digital atmosphere within which we currently function, and to suggest how the devices that surround us distort subjectivity. And yet, the following pages will assert that the distinctive ubiquity and power of the digital scene is nonetheless based on a more rudimentary relationship that organizes the person, the word, the image, and the thing. No doubt the digital-device-network system provides important amendments to this organization, though I think in most cases, or rather in the cases that inspire this essay, those amendments might be considered as intensifications or exaggerations of the more fundamental privileging of sight, and the subsequent contortions of perception that follow. Although this piece is more concentrated on the visual aspects of perception as they concern subjectivity within the general expanse of Western culture, it was meaningful to bookend the work with recourse to the auditory. For one, sound is in some ways a more subtle phenomenon, and thus the example of MIDI might prepare the reader for the muddled and mystifying nature with which certain habits of vision are induced by screen life. Additionally, by virtue of the unrecognizability of sound, which is to say, due to the fact that it does not appeal as easily to our sense of sight, the auditory provides a critical vantage from which to examine the digital optic environment. What is more, MIDI is not simply auditory. It may have been conceived of that way, but it is now inseparable from the screen and its device. It is not only for the musician, or music aficionada, but scaffolds all the sound experienced through one's device. There is no such thing as pure audio here, but only the auditory as it is accessed and interfaced through the trappings of a screen. The audio at stake then, including its design and function, which is to say, the way that people encounter it, implies a certain measure of optics. The introduction therefore intimates something of the essay's conclusion, where an essential aspect of the uncanny—the gaze—

exceeds the visual, preparing the way for sight to emerge.

The primary intention of this essay is to explore how the proliferation and personalization of screens amplifies the complicities of vision, and blurs the phenomenological sleight of hand through which language fastens sight and knowledge. There are in particular three "occasions" of sight—boredom, fascination, and the uncanny—that can, I think, parse the obscurities of perception at stake in our digital compulsions. Due to the immediacy and subtlety of perception, its operations often remain inaccessible, especially in the face of the stunning technological expressions that beset us. These three occasions then, are rendered as boundaries or stations within the amorphous and contiguous procession of experience that may signal to the subject a shift of attention along the spectrum of absorption-to-alienation, and therefore may provide a sense of what is conjured when that urge issues from one's phone-packed pocket.

A final note regarding the essay's structure: This introduction and the conclusion can be considered as two sides of a screen. With reference to the inner workings of our devices, this first bit of writing, taken as the underside of the screen, exhibits an orientation that is prone. The topside of the screen, supine and facing us, describes the conclusion. Although the screen is in some ways a surface, its flatness is more singular than single, and the three sections that comprise the body of the essay occur somewhat *between the screen*, or *within the surface.* Their effects however are not harmonized only according to the material information and hardware details; considered here as occasions of sight, boredom, fascination and the uncanny resemble something more like scenes or atmospheric conditions, and as such appear as the cause of transitions in attention and somehow infiltrate spaces yet to be engaged. In other words, the screen intrigues us, and rather immediately we immerse ourselves in it through the dynamics of a more basic, originary relation that is an effect of language's operations—which then leads us out of the limit of the digital encounter: One looks at the screen, is pulled into it, and then after some time—a second, a minute, a meme—unfastens and re-acclimates to the present surroundings.

> *Boredom is the everyday become manifest: consequently, the everyday after it has lost its essential – constitutive – trait of being unperceived. Thus the everyday always sends us back to that inapparent and nonetheless unconcealed part of existence that is insignificant because it remains always to the hither side of what signifies it; silent, but with a silence that has already dissipated as soon as we keep still in order to hear it and that we hear better in idle chatter, in the unspeaking speech that is the soft human murmuring in and around us.*
> --Maurice Blanchot, 2013, p. 242.

I. Boredom: Fascination's all too familiar friend.

The Image

Boredom is typically treated as a "lack of interest" and, following from ennui, a "lack of occupation." Can these conditions, however, be understand not simply as emptiness or passivity regarding one's agency or subjective position, but rather as a hyper-occupation of one's external (and internal) situation? In other words, what if there is nothing to do, or nothing worth our interest because everything has been done. One is weary because the surroundings are completely settled. One is bored, and unable to be interested, or in "want of occupation" because the surrounding phenomena are inhabited; they are familiar, full and stuffed—and this fullness is persistent, perhaps even annoying (to reference another meaning of boredom). In fact, etymologically, *to bore* suggests satiation, stuffing, and further back, from the French, the notion of padding. In terms of perception, those initial moments acquainting oneself with the immediate environment, and the subsequent registration of this or that object, the feeling that everything-is-already-done might be refigured as everything-is-already-known. The next step in the logic, to be addressed further below, is the move from knowing to seeing The logic extends the other way: What is seen is considered known, and once something is known, which is to say, recognized in the most elementary of terms, that is, named, there is nothing to be done. One is left without interest or occupation.

In *The Space of Literature* (1989), Maurice Blanchot describes the potency of naming, the way that simple ostensive gestures, linguistic intentionality, can alter one's affective state. For in these ordinary events in which the ferocity of the real is domesticated, the solace that ensues comes at a price. The concealment of potential danger can end up smothering what is most vital. The trickiness, as Blanchot states below, concerns the imperceptibility of perception's agents:

> Language has within itself the moment that hides it. It has within itself, through this power to hide itself, the force by which mediation (that which destroys immediacy)

> seems to have the spontaneity, the freshness, and the innocence of the origin. Moreover, this power, which language exercises by communicating to us the illusion of immediacy when in fact it gives us only the habitual, makes us believe that the immediate is familiar; and thus language's power consists in making the immediate appear to us not as the most terrible thing, which ought to overwhelm us. (p. 41)

It is not that the objects set about us are unnoticeable, but that—due to language's operations, this special fact of mediation—they are given, almost in a glance, as completely appraised, and fully gauged. Of course names conjure as much as they obscure, though the former action carries with it associations of magic and ritual, contexts that require an exact if not extraordinary attention to both the word and its object. The capacity to present us with freshness and novelty, the distinctions that bring things to the fore can also solidify our habitual relation to what surrounds us, causing it to recede. Scanning the immediate situation, my perception moves across the street and stops at a tree. The word, the concept, and the image of this *tree*, as separate indices or more accurate to the event of perception, as congealed in their cluster, do little to adjust the magnificence of the actual object from under whose shadow I peer.

Somehow without any volatility, the impression of a pleasing and perfect designation compels us to forego the cadence of contours crossing this or that thing, the sunlight that falls on it, and the wind that blurs one's eyes slightly. For Blanchot, "The 'real' is defined by our relation to it which is always alive" (p. 255), though there is little consistency in this relation. Even in the most daring attempts to realize this aliveness, there can be but flickering inklings: limited encounters that themselves requires a sincere and secure intent. In the section, "Two Versions of the Imaginary," Blanchot slows down and lengthens the flickering:

> But when we are face to face with things themselves—if we fix upon a face, the corner of a wall—does it not also sometimes happen that we abandon ourselves to what we see? Bereft of power before this presence suddenly strangely mute and passive, are we not at its mercy? Indeed, this can happen, but it happens because the thing we stare at has foundered, sunk into its image, and the image has returned into that deep fund of impotence to which everything reverts. (p. 255)

Although the foundering of the thing, its sinking into its image, seems a singular and expansive incident, we should keep in mind that this event can happen innumerable times a day, if not minute. The example here is extended, in part, by virtue of the fixation implied. The glance is established and the corner of the wall is given time to transition through the immediate life of the rest of the wall, or the fly buzzing around the head of the perceiver and into the fund of impotence, that flaccidity which turns stagnant from lack of interest and impulse.

There is a sequence within Blanchot's example that, while perhaps accurate, belies boredom's emergence. He writes, "The image, according to ordinary analysis, is secondary to the object. It is what follows. We see, then we imagine. After the object comes the image" (p. 255). And yet in the case of perception, language—or some composition of word/concept/image—comes on the scene so quickly that it is often described as being always already there. In other words, even if the image comes after, it can, and in a certain sense must, maintain itself between the perceiving subject and the object, or replace it. This is the flickering that characterizes attention's pulsations. Is it possible that with boredom the fluctuations cease and the representation takes over, or is taken for the thing, and as Blanchot hints, the fund of impotence fills. That the image, word, or concept "communicates the illusion of immediacy" while giving us only the habitual and familiar is not reason for alarm. Although not ideal or preferred in light of the variety of human experiences, boredom may have a function. In fact one might conclude that boredom occurs precisely when perception, through the auspices of word/image, is concerned only with utility. There is a limit to that usefulness in which other possible functions are subsumed. Consider that when walking out of one's front door, the surroundings are scanned quickly, and objects are identified in the most basic of terms, perhaps first in service of recognizing possible dangers, and then maybe to distinguish what one likes and does not like. Additionally, or perhaps weaved within these former considerations, is the urge to situate oneself among the immediate phenomena and according to how their qualities help with identifying that allow who and where and when one is. All of this, it can be argued, happens somewhat behind or before conscious, intentional attention.

This utility can be framed as a type of prudence or intelligence. In fact, Blanchot refers to "sight's wisdom," a situation of perception in which "we never see only one thing, even two or several, but a whole: every view is a general view" (p.28). Perception, he continues, "form[s] a link between the immobile boundary and the

apparently boundless horizon—a firm pact from which comes peace" (p. 28). The line between peace and boredom is not thick, or sealed; indeed, it is possible that the general lack of recognizable violence accounts for the bland permeations of peace, and in turn, the possibility for language to subdue our appetitive conflicts into a solipsistic narrative of exaggeration and assumption. For instance, in his essay "Speaking is Not Seeing," Blanchot maintains that this duplicity nonetheless warrants little cause for concern: "Language acts as though we were able to see the thing from all sides" (1993, p. 29). He proceeds by likening the power of language to hide itself to a perversion, though not in terms of a fact that is, but as an event that happens, as something initiated:

And then the perversion begins. Speech no longer presents itself as speech, but as sight freed from the limitations of sight. Not a way of saying, but a transcendent way of seeing. … The novelist lifts up the rooftops and gives his characters over to a penetrating gaze. His error is to take language as not just another vision, but an absolute one (p. 29).

Whether we are presented with sight's wisdom, or, as he frames it further along, are willing "to give ourselves in language a view that is surreptitiously corrected, hypocritically extended, deceiving" the pact between abstraction and the real is subject not only to indistinctness and dulling (p.29). This pact, like any pact, does not just blur: It breaks. Recall Blanchot's notion that in making the immediate seem as not the most terrible and overwhelming thing, language allows us a bit of normalcy, and further, makes the familiar habitual; it spreads out with little effort the sort of everyday banality from which those special and extraordinary moments may emerge. The fantastic, if not dangerous aspects of reality witnessed to varying degrees in the occasional panic attack, the more serious condition of psychosis, the phantasmagorical scenes of drug use, and the sublime encounters of spiritual practice all have their means of disabling, or distorting representation. The word-image presides over the untinctured real, and with boredom this presiding becomes more a situation of governance, an imperceptible and thus formidable dictation. In boredom, there is no pact, per se, nothing that is agreed to between entities. Or rather, the pact has not been made as such; it is primordial to the degree that it has never happened. Despite what seems to be a conspiracy between everything and itself, there remains little trace that anything has been made. The mystery here, if this word does not evoke too much interest, and therefore invalidate boredom's condition, is how to gain access to the consent that has already occurred, especially since this access is made more difficult in an atmosphere where quietude has been replaced by the dreariness of monotony.

These stations of sight—boredom, fascination, and the uncanny—are not perfectly distinct, for they are also designations whose manifestations in the real are more akin to water or air: elements that can be separated for a moment perhaps, and contained, but that, more often than not, infiltrate and assimilate according to pressures and contingencies that are hardly observable. Consider the weather, or a small meal as each course through their respective contexts. Where are they now? Have they left? Is their presence still exerting its effects on me? Boredom, fascination, and the uncanny contaminate and collude, and spread unevenly in their consistencies over quite a formidable expanse. With boredom, things no longer appear as distinct entities, as individual; their fullness solidifies their unique characteristics, but not as a puzzle or sculpture. Rather, boredom is an atmosphere, and the array of local phenomena congeal in a manner that does not retain their edges or weight; they hang nonetheless, as breath might if there were no elasticity or difference between the inner corridor and the outer, and thus no pressure, no need for exchange, no respiration, no inspiration.

> *In this way the image fulfills one of its functions which is to quiet, to humanize the formless nothingness pressed upon us by the indelible residue of being. The image cleanses this residue – appropriates it, makes it pleasing and pure, and allows us to believe, dreaming the happy dream which art too often authorizes, that, separated from the real and immediately behind it, we find, as pure pleasure and superb satisfaction, the transparent eternity of the unreal.*
> --Maurice Blanchot, 1989, p. 254

II. Fascination: Apprehended by distance.

The Dream

Moving from boredom to fascination, one may find that already the amorphous fullness, the stationed staleness begins to break and leak. Distinctions start to emerge, or perhaps it is only the corner of a single thing that pierces through the fog creating space or advancing into it. More specifically though, with fascination, the space that opens up, the distance fostered occurs more immediate to the thing itself, if not even more intimately. In *The Dark Gaze: Maurice Blanchot*

and the Sacred (2004), Kevin Hart illustrates the carefulness of Blanchot's thought, and in particular a different iteration of the pact mentioned above. The pact is not dissimilar with boredom and fascination, but with the latter the accord individuates, moving from a situation where everything is equal to itself en masse, to an experience where within a solitary object, the thing and its image (or symbolic abstraction) start to unfasten. Hart explains,

Blanchot insists that an event or a thing resembles itself; it is doubled in its appearing, being both itself and its image. It is this doubling that Blanchot calls the relationship of resemblance. We cannot grasp it because it has always and already happened, and it does not reassure us with a meaning and a truth as the image, classically understood, does. Rather than consoling us with the thought that the real and the image are distinct and stable orders, that we can measure the truth of an image against the reality it represents, it tells us that the imaginary is within a thing, or as Blanchot like to put it, that the distance *between* a thing and its image is always and already *within* the thing. It is none other than being that subverts any attempt to compare the real and the imaginary (p. 66).

My suspicion is that the subtlety demonstrated here is one of the origins of boredom's nebular manifestation, and of the difficulty of cutting through it. A thing is not equal to itself, but resembles itself, a slight change of disposition that may be responsible for an inordinate amount of confusion, and the type of surety at stake in boredom and in the mystique of fascination. The distance, or difference is sealed, as it were, within the thing. The condition of fascination emerges once the seal begins to fissure. Perhaps our attention is kindled, a touch sharper and more motivated.

For Blanchot (1993), a savvy account of fascination is found in dreaming. Ordinary seeing, he explains "pre-supposes only a measured and measurable separation: to see is certainly always to see at a distance, but by allowing distance to give back what it removes from us" (p. 28). As opposed to the image "which veils by revealing" (p. 30), the dream "reveals by re-veiling … It implies a reversal of the possibility of seeing. To see in a dream is to be fascinated, and fascination arises when, far from apprehending from a distance, we are apprehended by this distance" (p. 28). The remnants of the disproportionate relation within word/image/thing is found in the dream's retelling: wide eyes searching, head shaking off seemingly impossible arrangements of meaning, and seeking a simple sequence that, given its ill-logics, can hardly be portrayed. The dream, as that which generates fascination, can seem an inappropriate scene for sight:

> Whoever is fascinated doesn't see, properly speaking, what he sees. Rather, it touches him in an immediate proximity; it seizes and ceaselessly draws him close, even though it leaves him absolutely at a distance. Fascination is fundamentally linked to neutral, impersonal presence, to the indeterminate They, the immense, faceless Someone. Fascination is the relation the gaze entertains—a relation which is itself neutral and impersonal—with sightless, shapeless depth, the absence one sees cause because it is blinding. (p. 33)

From the oppression of boredom, we advance to a strange type of agency where there is some inclination of a subject and object, even if the faint outlines give way. Indeed, the thing, as it is presented by the word-image, props up subjectivity, and allows us to believe, a status less intense than being: both of which replicate the sense of being left at a distance while being drawn dangerously close. The blind pressure and the formless nothingness ever pressing can—if mingled with an attention, supple and limber—slide from the thing to the image that inheres. The blind pressure inherent to ordinary perception concentrates into a blinding sliver of absence. In other words, the thing, in this elongated moment, is no longer whole or full or identical to itself. It becomes uncoupled, splitting from within. This is the distance at stake in fascination.

One does not need to wait for a dream, or the impress of a faceless Someone to experiment with fascination. If ordinary perception through language gives us the illusion of immediacy or of absolute vision, then it stands that one might, within the constancy of sensorial needs, experiment with the word/image/concept to induce the type of distance Blanchot notes above, to grease and maybe stress the areas where the thing fastens to its image. There are a variety of linguistic contexts that provide both the spontaneity—that is, the chance to choose an entry, but not an exit, an intention but not the implications of that choice—and the exigency of thought, speech, and writing. Blanchot highlights speech in his study of seeing, and the kinds of knowledge implied with such sight. The immediacy of speaking—which includes, and in certain ways is determined by the context of speech's event—is for Blanchot also available in the situation of writing. There are differences, no doubt, but often it seems, as his interest doubles

somewhat like the doubling of the appearance of things, that speech and writing are correspondent.

In speech—the discussion proceeds, concluding with the force of the title of the essay itself—"it is as though we were turned away from the visible, without being turned back round toward the invisible. I don't know whether what I am saying here says anything. But nevertheless it is simple. Speaking is not seeing" (p. 27). With the primary distinction of Blanchot's thesis restated, it should be noted that this essay, "Speaking Is Not Seeing," takes the form of a conversation between two unnamed speakers. They express some of what the piece attempts to put forth, and although the passage below seems to privilege formless and featureless experience, an extreme boundary of fascination, we are not afloat without any bearing. We are simultaneously encouraged to stay attentive, even in contact with language, for on this side of the thing, our exertion is our cleft. He explains,

To write is to let fascination rule language. It is to stay in touch, through language, in language, with the absolute milieu where the thing becomes image again, where the image, instead of alluding to some particular feature, becomes an allusion to the featureless, and instead of a form drawn upon absence, becomes the formless presence of this absence, the opaque, empty opening onto that which is when there is no more world, when there is no world yet (1989, p. 33).

An object that exists is an object that is alive, regardless of its designation as (in)organic. As such, it moves continuously, vibrating in the cell or the eye, the electron or the decay. Any thing, if not every thing, at some level defies representation, if only by virtue of the fact that it is given in time, and always fastened to other things, perhaps all things. Fascination then, even its more radical incarnations, can occur by virtue of the most ordinary or random conditions, in a manner quite apart from the object's structural or cultural aura. With that said, there are undoubtedly things of a different sort, whose capacity for dislocation—within themselves, or with respect to the other who perceives—can produce the most severe of encounters. For Blanchot, the prime example of such an arresting thing is the corpse.

"What we call mortal remains," Blanchot (1993) announces, "escapes common categories." The corpse does not escape by itself, however; we are in tow, or, if left behind, persist as accomplices. This privileged object of enigmatic horror is not simply that which troubles categories, standing defensively against language. To the extent that the corpse instantiates an experience of the uncanny, it acts; it is offensive. By letting fascination rule language, by staying in touch through and in language, Blanchot presents us with this thing as it dislocates from itself in a manner that intrudes on the subject's reality. The cadaver,

> is neither the same as the person who was alive, nor is it another person, nor is it anything else. What is there, with the absolute calm of something that has found its place, does not, however, succeed in being convincingly here. Death suspends the relation to place, even though the deceased rests heavily in his spot as if upon the only basis that is left to him. To be precise though, this basis lacks, the place is missing, the corpse is not in its place. Where is it? It is not here, and yet it is not anywhere else. Nowhere? But then nowhere is here. .... The corpse is here, but here in turn becomes a corpse (p. 256).

The negation—"not the same as the person…nor is it another person"—initiates ambiguity, but not as a final gesture. Once "what is" is given as improbable, etymologically "hard to prove," Blanchot gives his attention to what the words themselves attend to, without an intention to describe or know or argue. The corpse cannot be considered similar to a table, or a rock, or a bicycle, or can it? Isn't this precisely what has happened to it, and thus, one wonders, was it this all along? Was it also this? If the corpse is special here, perhaps it is because it requires us, out of the necessity of a bizarre phenomenological encounter, to be suspicious about more than its status. The pull of resemblance coupled with the push of complete difference has the power to adjust all things. This is perhaps one of the effects of the uncanny. It is not a special experience of an object, but a unique vantage through which everything becomes stained. The vantage is not just our own, nor does it issue only from us.

It is possible that Blanchot's treatment of the cadaver only suggests the uncanny, for his portrayal, as we progress line by line, remains in the realm of fascination, albeit one that can spill over at any point. Take his treatment of place for example. It is reasonable to state that a corpse, whether on the street or in a funeral parlor, lies heavy on its spot, "as if upon the only basis that is left to him." What could be more magnetized to its place than a lifeless body? But before doubling down on a commitment to death's bearings, Blanchot then cleaves from this surety, and questions the very coordinates of space. Yes, even the certainty of place, right here, or just

over there, is not immune to interrogation. He writes, "To be more precise though … the place is missing." The corpse, with its literal and semantic weight, is still not convincingly "here," since it resembles, uncannily, the person who animated it. The situation though, is much worse than this, for not only is the dead body not entirely "here" (despite the fact that it is so much more here than any other conceivable object), but here is not even here.

Well, if the corpse is not in its place, then where is it? It is not exactly here, and yet, because it is also kind of here, a dead body in view, it is not anywhere else. The basic pattern of logic suggests the next term: nowhere. If it is not quite here and not quite anywhere else, then it seems to be nowhere. And yet, given the suspension of perception that occurs with such a charged object, it is nonetheless posited to us. It returns, and in this movement brings this other realm front and center: "The corpse is here, but here in turn becomes a corpse." Blanchot's claims are as plain as possible, as they suggest the basic language of perception, of what is seen, of what is most evident to our perception by virtue of the words in which seeing is couched. And yet, a radical situation arises from such a simple, even dull account of what ties sight to knowledge. Grammatically speaking, Blanchot moves between the imperative of perception and the declarative of cognition.

> *Night soon appeared to him to be darker, more terrible than any other night whatsoever, as it had really emerged from a wound of thought which could no longer think itself, of thought captured ironically as object by something other than thought. This was night itself. Images which created its darkness flooded into him, and his body transformed into a demoniacal mind sought to represent them to himself. He saw nothing and, far from being overcome, he made out of this absence of visions the culminating point of his glance. His eye, useless for sight, took on extraordinary proportions, began to develop in an inordinate fashion and, dwelling on the horizon, allowed night to penetrate into its center in order to create for itself an iris. Through this void, therefore, it was his glance and the object of his glance which became mingled. This eye, which saw nothing, did not simply grasp the source of its vision. It saw as would an object, which meant that it did not see. His own glance entered into him in the form of an image at the tragic moment when this glance was regarded as the death of all image.*
> --Maurice Blanchot, quoted in George Bataille, 1998, pp. 101-102

III. Uncanny: That which disturbs all things.

The Corpse

Even a short moment of dissimulation with a specific thing can have powerful effects, as that thing is invariably fastened tightly into a whole legion of things. This is the special case of the uncanny: Through one thing, it has the power to disturb all things. Like boredom and fascination, the uncanny is a term whose breadth of meaning testifies to the great variety of experience signified, as the spectrum of sense that a word indicates is but an ocean upon which the word floats. As such, we might present this sense of the uncanny that follows closely to the radical fascination exhibited in Blanchot's treatment of the cadaver, the dissimulation grounded in an ambiguity that "cannot be captured in negation," before moving to those notions of the uncanny that are more radical still, as they distress, often with terrifying effectiveness, the very foundation of subjecthood.

In her essay, "Lacan's Anamorphic Object: Beneath Freud's *Unheimlich*" (2012), Athena V. Colman locates the notion of the uncanny in the context of psychoanalysis:

What Freud understands is that the significance of the uncanny is not merely some concept of strangeness held in opposition to a notion of the familiar or home-like. Rather, the uncanny is the strangeness that reflects the moment in which the complex circuitry of both planes and their relation (familiar and strange, conscious and unconscious, self and other) are discernable. … The uncanny dislocates the spatio-temporal continuity of everyday experience disturbing the intentional structure of habitual apprehension (p. 51).

Blanchot's experience of the corpse demonstrates just this disturbance of "habitual apprehension" that Colman outlines. There is not a simple doubt concerning the status of this rather singular object, but an experience of movement, of shifting between a few different "planes": here and there; alive and dead; presence and absence; place and no place. In a sense, and in a manner very much related to Freud's etymological analysis of the term that begins his essay, the uncanny implies that, within one point of time, and/or within one particular object, both the familiar and the unfamiliar are contained. Colman states, "The vacillation between the familiar and unfamiliar is vital to our understanding of the uncanny. Both the familiar and the unfamiliar must be present (and hence absent) in some way in order for the experience to arise" (p. 56). This vacillation is echoed by

Masschelein, who writes, "The uncanny has more to do with the *experience* of the process of repression and the return of the repressed than with content of the repression" (p. 51).

It is true that the uncanny has been magnetized by certain tropes, whether in the literature of psychoanalysis, in literature in general, or in film and television. The argument follows that an experience of the uncanny is not relegated to the presence of its most privileged objects—things like dolls, corpses, mirrors, and eyeballs—but ones which, by their design, indicate something of the process of repression. Colman writes of the corpse, for example:

> In this context, the corpse is the very opposite of the body insofar as the body is the site of the unfolding of subjectivity whereas the corpse seems to be the limit of subjectivity: a spatial-temporal marker of a subject which was. For instance, although it has been suggested that the corpse has somehow been emptied of subjectivity, is it not just as likely that it is we who are emptied before it? What is it about the corpse that disgusts us, intrigues us, fascinates us and reveals us to ourselves? The notion of the 'uncanny' is frequently invoked as a placeholder for the specific and irreducible character of such threshold experiences (such as encountering a corpse). (p. 50)

For Jacques Lacan, the uncanny represents not only the limits of subjectivity, but also the very birth of the subject; it attests to an originary repression rather than the foreclosure of any particular thing or fact. Even so, the emergence of the uncanny feeling remains mysterious, potentially triggered by a somewhat random encounter, or by the enigmatic appearance of an otherwise ordinary object. Given this interpretation, it is reasonable to expect this confrontation to be exceedingly personal. In fact, Lacan states that it is perceptible only to the subject. This is not necessarily a different take than Freud's, though we will have cause to note briefly something of Lacan's contribution to the topic at hand. It is not possible here to detail either thinker's conceptualization thoroughly, for the aim is simply to provide a sense of this extreme end of the uncanny, as something beyond intellectual uncertainty, or the "disquieting strangeness" presented by Helene Cixous in her essay, "Fiction and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's *Das Unheimliche* (The 'Uncanny')," (1976).

Following Lacan, Colman does well to differentiate the severity of the psychoanalytic understanding of the uncanny from the other more facile versions:

> It is the calm subject of representation that continually evades death and castration (becoming corpse and corpses) which is undermined and deeply problematized here. Consider an experience of the uncanny in which space seems to tighten up, distort, shorten or throb. One cannot simply adjust or realign expectations to accommodate this new version of reality—as soon as one begins to accept such an encroachment, it slips away—only to be replaced by a memory which is more constituted by what it lacks than by that which (in)forms it. It is not an experience that can be mapped out along the x-y axis in abstract co-ordinates; nor is its temporality linear. (p. 50)

The fact that this experience is beyond the subject's will suggests that it might also be outside the bounds of the historical subject, as Colman intimates by her Euclidian language. In other words, the radical alterity of the uncanny elicits the innovations of psychoanalysis, the unique fashion through which it conceives of subjectivity and the emphasis it places on an unconscious.

Freud's innovation is made more apparent when modified by Lacan, and specifically, by his theory of the scopic drive, which he adds to Freud's important list. One feature of the scopic drive that makes it relevant to the conceptualization of the uncanny, and the focus of our study, is its capacity to disembody the subject, by virtue of an initial distinction between the eye and the gaze. As Colman rightly asserts, "The scopic is not the visible but rather the drive which makes visibility and being-seen possible" (p. 52). Lacan, in *Seminar 11: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1998), complicates the simple notion of eyesight with reference to the "seer's 'shoot'" that "something prior to his eye," which he gleans from John Paul Sartre, who writes of the hunter turning around after hearing the rustling of leaves behind him, and therefore reorienting his field of vision (p. 72). Colman clarifies, "The scopic drive makes geometral space possible but is not reducible to it."

Lacan has cause to note the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty's work on vision: "What we have to circumscribe, by means of the path [Merleau-Ponty] indicates for us, is the pre-existence of a gaze—I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides" (p. 72). The notion of an outside looking in, of something external beholding us is in part responsible for the effect of alienation in the uncanny. Employing Merleau-Ponty's phrase "I see myself seeing myself," Lacan offers a contrasting statement, before alluding to its

implication: "For, I warm myself by warming myself is a reference to the body as body—I feel that sensation of warmth which, from some point inside me, is diffused and locates me as body. Whereas in the I see myself seeing myself, there is no such sensation of being absorbed by vision." Unlike vision, the gaze, as a function of the drive, and therefore of desire, has the capacity to distort space, to subject one to a certain amount of absorption, reflection, refraction, and most of all, evasion. Lacan remarks, "In our relation to things, in so far as this relation is constituted by the way of vision, and ordered in the figures of representation, something slips, passes, is transmitted, from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it—that what is we call the gaze" (p. 73).

The gaze is precisely what one cannot see in the mirror's reflection. One's eyes are visible, but not the gaze. This example is of course reminiscent of one of Lacan's other "inventions," which has bearing on the birth of the subject as well. In one of his earliest essays, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," Lacan puts forth a kind of "primordial instance of the *I*," that is "at odds with any philosophy directly stemming from the *cogito*" (2006, p. 75). This moment of identification, which is subsequently repeated, concerns "the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image" (p. 76). "The important point," Lacan emphasizes, "is that this form situates the agency known as the ego, prior to its social determination, in a fictional direction that will forever remain irreducible for any single individual or, rather, that will only asymptotically approach the subject's becoming, no matter how successful the dialectical syntheses by which he must resolve, as *I*, his discordance with his own reality" (p.76).

While this *infans* gains a pleasing and useful "prosthesis," this fiction cannot but alienate, and in a manner that extends far beyond the period of six to eighteen months within which one is initiated into this "ideal-I." As Lacan frames it, "the mirror stage is a drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation—and, for the subject caught up in the lure of spatial identification, turns out fantasies that proceed from a fragmented image of the body to what I will call an 'orthopedic' form of its totality—and to the finally donned armor of an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental development with its rigid structure" (p. 78). This inaugural scene marks one's entire development, and it is available to return again. The repression here is not so much a matter of uncomfortable knowledge, or of some unpleasant event that needs to be forgotten and suppressed. The aspect of the subject's birth that occurs at the mirror, and which is further emphasized as one endeavors through necessity or luxury to construct a social *I*, in a certain sense never happened, as there was not yet a mechanism through which to experience and assimilate events through the clarity of consciousness. Lacan details this paradoxical process:

> For the total form of his body, by which the subject anticipates the maturation of his power in a mirage, is given to him only as a gestalt, that is, in an exteriority in which, to be sure, this form is more constitutive than constituted, but in which, above all, it appears to him as the contour of his stature that freezes it and in a symmetry that reverses it, in opposition to the turbulent movements with which the subject feels he animates it. Through these two aspects of its appearance, this gestalt—whose power should be linked to the species, though its motor style is as yet unrecognizable—symbolizes the *I*'s mental permanence, at the same time as it prefigures alienating destination. This gestalt is also replete with the correspondences that unite the *I* with the statue onto which man projects himself, the phantoms that dominate him, and the automaton with which the world of his own making tends to achieve fruition in an ambiguous relation. (pp. 76-77)

The permanence of this mirage means that the alienation it engenders endures, and in a way, this is necessary. The unification of the *I* is projected onto a statue, as Lacan describes it, creating a situation whereby both the unification and the projection could falter, given the right circumstances.

In his essay, "'I Shall Be with You on Your Wedding-Night:' Lacan and the Uncanny" (1991), Mladen Dolar "puts it simply," writing that "when I recognize myself in the mirror it is already too late. There is the split: I cannot recognize myself and at the same time be one with myself" (p. 12). Is it possible, or rather advisable to sew the split up? Part of the terror of the Lacanian uncanny, is that it limns an instance where the necessary gap, the castration, the loss on which the subject is built, becomes filled. Echoed in numerous horror movies, the situation is one in which the image in the mirror winks back at the figure, or looks askew, distorting the essential separation on which the *I* is established. There is a similar sequence with the eyes of a doll, or an automaton, a statue, or corpse. Each of these figures can repeat the

fundamental experience of the subject's reflection, or similarly, the doubling of the subject by virtue of another sort of reflection, experiences echoing well-known themes of the uncanny, like the infamous doppelganger.

For Lacan, the return of the repressed undergoes a further formulation with respect to the uncanny, which he explains in the Seminar on *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*: "It is here that I propose that the interest the subject takes in his own split is bound up with that which determines it—namely, a privileged object, which has emerged from some primal separation, from some self-mutilation induced by the very approach of the real, whose name, in our algebra, is the *objet a*" (p. 83). By designating this special object algebraically, Lacan suggests that it is not to be represented in language like other *things*, nor is it to be found among the objects of the world. It is not something one desires, but is instead the cause of the desire that creates and maintains the subject's distinctness. For instance, the self-mutilation referenced above has been associated with the maternal breast, which the infant considers to be a part of itself. The breast, like the other "objects *a*" that have to be abandoned (or were never properly had) for the conscious and social individual to emerge, is foundational to subjectivity and the desire generated from this fundamental loss.

In an exceptional way, however, the gaze, as one figuration of object *a*, is particularly elusive; it may seem accessible, as the subject appears to behold itself, but the gaze abides as inapprehensible, and misrecognized. Though the object *a* has many figurations in Lacan's thought, Dolar finds a special expression of it in the mirror and the gaze:

> [T]he object *a* is precisely that part of the loss that one cannot see in the mirror, the part of the subject that has no mirror reflection, the nonspecular. The mirror in the most elementary way already implies a split between the imaginary and the real: one can have access to imaginary reality, to the world one can recognize oneself in and familiarize oneself with, on the condition of the loss, the "falling out" of the object *a*. It is this loss of the object *a* that opens "objective" reality, the possibility of subject-object relations, but since its loss is the condition of any knowledge of "objective" reality, it cannot itself become an object of knowledge (p. 13).

And yet, during an intense experience of the uncanny, what has been lost returns. Lacan differs from most in positing that anxiety, as well as the more extreme instance of anxiety operative in the uncanny, results not from the absence of the mother or any special object, but from its presence, from the possibility of being "taken back onto the lap." In *Seminar X: Anxiety* (2014), Lacan presents one version of this scene: "The most anguishing thing for the infant is precisely the moment when the relationship upon which he's established himself of the lack that turns him into desire, is disrupted, and this relationship is most disrupted when there's no possibility of any lack, when his mother is on his back all the while, and especially when she is wiping his backside" (p. 53).

This theory finds support in the many uncanny tropes that feature the presence of something that is not supposed to be there, something extra—the doubling, the omniscience, the repetition—all of which happen of their own accord. What should be inside and most privately precious to the subject appears outside, a condition Lacan designates as *extimate*. The "irruption" of the unrepresentable real into the familiar, gives the sense that this inconceivable otherness, in its absolute fullness, which can never be grasped, or rendered legible, actually desires the subject. The real evades the quotidian notion of reality, for it is not simply unknown, but unknowable, which is to say, impossible to capture regardless of what letters and numbers are marshaled. For one horrific moment, the real is real. It is not so much accessible to us; rather, we find that we are accessible to it.

> *The frameworks through which the world can be understood continue to be depleted of complexity, drained of whatever is unplanned or unforeseen. So many long-standing and multivalent forms of social exchange have been remade into habitual sequences of solicitation and response. At the same time, the range of what constitutes response becomes formulaic and, in most instances, is reduced to a small inventory of possible gestures or choices.*
>
> --Jonathan Crary, 2014, p. 59

Those Zeros

In the essay "The Uncanny," Freud (1919) lists the essential elements of his topic: "for animism, magic and sorcery, the omnipotence of thoughts, man's attitude to death, involuntary repetition and the castration complex comprise practically all the factors which turn something frightening into something uncanny," to which is added the "uncanny effects of epilepsy and madness" (p. 242). Even a cursory glance at the contemporary

technological scene will reveal that several of the attributes of the uncanny are available, rather effortlessly, through a variety of apps and digital devices. Although it is not easy to remember what life was like before the advent of smart phones and laptops, it is nonetheless possible to observe the coincidence of the uncanny's features with what has become the familiar capacity to encounter one's image on a screen in a variety of contexts and forms: the construction of avatars; the manipulation and repetition of one's image, and not directly by one's own hand; and, increasingly, various demonstrations of omniscience. In a way, just as the image made the thing familiar to the point of boredom, the proliferation of the image, which includes the increasingly spectacular nature of its aura—its sharpness and illusory equivalence—has made certain expressions of the uncanny banal to the point of boredom.

This theory is not only speculative. Consider the following, from Bernard Harcourt's (2015) fifth chapter in his book *Exposed*, "A Genealogy of the New *Doppelganger* Logic," which describes the actuarial logic of the late nineteenth century that was then developed further, in accordance to Cold War strategies, in order to perfect the desire to know, to categorize, and to insure a certain status of the respective populations. One example of this doppelganger that Harcourt provides concerns Netflix, which changed its strategy of customer maintenance from prediction and ratings to using what "you're actually playing," what Facebook calls your "Lookalike Audience" (p. 160). In the following passage, he describes these "two bodies," noting "the now permanent digital self, which we are etching into the virtual cloud with every click and tap." This mechanism is made possible in part by the sharpening of technology, exhibited by both the specificity of its access *and* the willingness of our participation. Harcourt explains,

> The object of the algorithmic data-mining quest of the digital age is to find our perfect double, our hidden twin. It deploys a new rationality of similitude, of matching, without regard for the causal link. The goal, the aspiration, the object is to find that the second identical person, almost practically perfectly individualized, but not so individualized that she cannot be matched: not the unique individual, perhaps, but rather the matched *duodividual* … It's about identifying our digital self by matching us to our digital double" or 'data double.' (p. 157)

For Crary (2014), the aliveness of the inanimate and the pleasure generated from our participation with these things—not unrelated to Freud's original ideas, in which the doubling is a protection against death and the living that remain—produce a distorted sense of what it means to be human. He writes,

> One accumulates a patchwork of surrogate identities that subsist 24/7, sleeplessly, continuously, as inanimate impersonations rather than extensions of the self. Inanimate here does not mean the literal absence of motion, but rather a simulated release from the hindrances of being alive which are incompatible with circulation and exchangeability. Sensory impoverishment and the reduction of perception to habit and engineered response is the inevitable result of aligning oneself with the multifarious products, services, and "friends" that one consumes, manages, and accumulates during waking life (pp.104-105).

No doubt the avenues for sight have increased over the last few decades, and in turn, so have the objects to be seen. The phenomenal world may be, for all intents and purposes, infinite, but the world that is rendered digitally is often more impressive by virtue of how it appears, how it quiets and limits the pressure from a boundless horizon, not only focusing vision, but providing the pleasure that comes from the miniature instances of knowing conferred by the image. This pleasure is somewhat different from the raw sensuous gratifications derived from the sleek design of the latest phone, for example, and from the light that exudes from the screen—which is to say nothing of the narcissistic components at stake. The immediacy of immediation is such that, coupled with the trickery of a single image, even a solitary word, the most exotic becomes familiar and even rote.

This digital reach makes not only the immediate seem familiar, but also that which is most distant and foreign. Crary summarizes the darker side of this transparency that is both always accessible, and has the capability to access anything across time and space:

> There is an insurmountable asymmetry that degrades any local event or exchange. Because of the infinity of content accessible 24/7, there will always be something online more informative, surprising, funny, diverting, impressive than anything in one's immediate actual circumstances. It is now a given that a limitless availability of information or images can trump or override any human-scale communication or exploration of ideas. (pp. 59-60)

One feature exacerbated by the computer-based networks is the illusion of stability and perfectness that the image traffics in, aspects that

are amplified almost without end, though sequenced and metered out nonetheless. As we witnessed earlier, the notion of an everyday life apart from work, consumption, and techno-relation is arguably no longer possible, and thus it is increasingly the whole of "reality" that is subject to the paucity of the image. Regardless of whether our attention stalls at the ends of boredom, or slips into the stunning styles of fascination (or the radical inattention of described by Blanchot), there is some amount of intention in play. In other words, the ease with which we may content ourselves with what appears instead of what is always already happening, those surroundings from which we cannot extricate ourselves in any substantial way, belies the amazing efforts undergirding the deftness of image's mobility. The internal operations of our digital device are obsessively clean, a result of the almost maniacal strictures that generate the spontaneity and casualness that we experience at the touch of a finger.

Nonetheless, the procession of the image from this to that screen, and the sophisticated operations that allow the movement are not the only areas on which to concentrate our attention. Crary makes rather plain that the point of concern about the digification of reality is not the ever-novel designs of phone or tablet, but the manner in which they further degrade our capacity to perceive:

> The most important recent changes concern not new machine forms of visualization, but the ways in which there has been a disintegration of human abilities to see, especially of an ability to join visual discriminations with social and ethical valuations. With an infinite cafeteria of solicitation and attraction perpetually available, 24n disables vision through processes of homogenization, redundancy, and acceleration. (p. 31)

One way to meet the ubiquity of the image—and the subsequent, or maybe prior confusion of sight with knowledge—is to entertain another set of qualities that situate knowledge differently. No doubt this challenge is a part of Blanchot's project, as it has been presented thus far. The argument I am pursuing here is that the enhanced techno-logics and digital verdancies are, despite the incredible evolution in their capacity to make and present images, ultimately an intensification of what always happens in perception between the subject and the object of its attention. The confusion of speaking and seeing, and in turn, of sight and knowledge are not only at play in our screen life, but might represent the very initial fastening that allows all the rest.

In this atmosphere, it is possible that the uncanny, in its less extreme or nonpsychotic iterations, might be a salve against the trappings of transparency. The technical brilliance of the digital blinds us to the distinctions between knowing and seeing, and as such binds us to an infinitude, spectral yet adjacent. The situation described above is one where even fascination offers little reprieve. The impressive, if not glaring, mystification illuminating our screens, might necessitate more potent types of interruption—ones that disturb not simply the visual junctures, but the comprehensive ones that ground the subject as a whole. And although certain themes of the uncanny are made less dangerous by virtue of how natural they appear in our techno-spheres, they can still provide access to what lies somewhat beyond the screen-effects, even if one remains distant from the dreadful forms of the uncanny—the disintegration of reality, the madness, the horror.

The possibility of engaging comprehensively with all manners of perception, and at different densities or compositions of subjecthood requires that that an important assumption at the base of my argument be addressed. There has been a critique of transparency, reiterated somewhat by Crary below, that suggests the single dimensionality of the digital only projects the extensive and complex aspects of reality:

> A 24/7 world is a disenchanted one in its eradication of shadows and obscurity and of alternate temporalities. It is a world identical to itself, a world with the shallowest of pasts, and thus in principle without specters. But the homogeneity of the present is an effect of the fraudulent brightness that presumes to extend everywhere and to preempt any mystery or unknowability. A 24/7 world produces an apparent equivalence between what is immediately available, accessible, or utilizable and what exists. (pp. 19-20)

Regardless of its actual limits, the parameters of the digital are clearly stunning. A reasonable response to the privileging of vision and transparency then would be to encourage obscurity, to partake courageously in that night which Blanchot and Bataille endorse. Although their respective nights are not the simple absence of sight or knowledge, there may be something further to consider when mitigating the influence of these digital technics. Transparency is not the issue in itself; or rather, transparency is not necessarily transparent. One must not ignore the possibility that a clearly perceived object, indeed, even light, is infiltrated by shadows. In truth, there is no such thing as darkness, for Earth is already suffused with sunlight, and even from the

darkroom, one finds that eyes adjust, and some shapes are registered. We also know that at its most basic level, light is not singular, but formulates its being in some accordance to the context, to the viewer, or the device set to measure it. It is for some a particle, and for others a wave, and therefore it is at any instance both, given its speed. These are issues for the farmer, the philosopher, the physicist, and the flower.

We might conclude again then, just moments after the first, and note that our most undeniable, most evident occasions of illumination, metaphorically or materially, are among the most convoluted. Lacan narrates this remarkable convolution of light, with recourse to a range of disciplines, and ultimately embeds the esoteric and scientific notion into the inescapable contours of the body:

> The essence of the relation between appearance and being, which the philosopher, conquering the field of vision, so easily masters, lies elsewhere. It is not in the straight line, but in the point of light—the point of irradiation, the play of light, fire, the source from which reflections pour forth. Light may travel in a straight line, but it is refracted, diffused, it floods, it fills—the eye is a sort of bowl—it flows over, too, it necessitates, around the ocular bowl, a whole series of organs, mechanisms, defences. The iris reacts not only to distance, but also to light, and it has to protect what takes place at the bottom of the bowl, which might, in certain circumstances, be damaged by it. The eyelid, too, when confronted with too bright a light, first blinks, that is, it screws itself up in a well-known grimace. (2005, p. 94)

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Michael Melmed

Fire, Screens, and the Cult of Immediacy

> *In technology, a physis is being organized through which mankind's contact with the cosmos takes a new and different form from that which it had…*
> --Walter Benjamin, "To the Planetarium" (1928)

> *Indeed, the machines produced by man's ingenuity and created in the image of man are [in part] unconscious projections of man's bodily structure. Man's ingenuity seems to be unable to free itself from its relation to the unconscious.*
> --Tausk, 1933, p. 555

I've long been suspicious of cellphones, tending to see them in the light of destructive immediation. When cellphones first became ubiquitous I would imagine a dystopic future where everyone walked with a zombied gait, encumbered by enormous tumors joining their legs to their ears, this being caused by years of radiation to parts of the body that, in those days, were in greatest contact with the phone. My fantasy gave expression to deep concerns about what untold ways this technology was inevitably limiting us while seeming to liberate us. Looking around now I see something similar has metastasized, though less concretely, through the proliferation of cellular life. Our attention span is shortened, scattered, our gaze fixed, the musculature in and around our eyes less active, no longer responsive to as wide a variety of distances, speeds and shades of light; our sense of direction and our multi-sensorial attunement to our living surround is dulled. The luminous power of everything else, the aliveness of the world itself has been outshined by the seeming brilliance of our screens. When we put down our phones, we walk the world as if snow-blind—depth and texture hammered away, flattened into an amorphous smudgy field that doesn't call our attention.

To be sure, this doesn't only happen on account of our screen-life. The technological wizardry of our post-industrial culture has afforded us remarkable material convenience at the expense of maintaining, cultivating, and regularly honing our own indwelling magical sensory capacities. The ancient, vital, and exquisitely attuned sensory equipment that has functioned for eons to interlink us intimately with the human and more-than-human worlds, and enabled us to participate as full actors in the multifaceted living, expressive environment (Abram, 1996), is appreciated now mostly as an instrument for generating capital. And so our underused and malnourished sensory faculties are something like the dilapidated, vacant, and vacating houses haunting many great metropolises. We are both slumlord and tenant of our experience; though it is especially difficult to discern this dilemma when blinded by the constant glow, glide and

gloss of our screens. Instead, the range of available experiences narrows as sensuous emotional life is increasingly monotonized and its monotonization ever monetized. Difficult to detect, much "news of difference" (Bateson 1979) is covered over with a constant flow of social media, cable news, concrete, plastic and monoculture corn syrup, among other course safeguards of the status quo, the omnipotent defenses against impingements to the going-on-being of a self-destructive system that knows, but is unable to think it is hurtling itself toward its own disavowed demise.

With cell phones and their ilk the immediate virtual becomes a medium to more quickly obtain answers: to get the thing, to not have to wait for it, to not be without it, to not be with the kind of ambiguity-steeped anticipation where feeling and attitude ferment and transform. The alchemy of "All-one, all alone, all one in aloneness" (Eigen, 2008) is cut short by the drive for all-in-one gadgetry, short-circuiting processes that seed complexity into psychic life. One consequence of this is that we've forgotten how primary aloneness is midwife to a deeper communion with the living surround. But the cult of immediacy is not a negation of mediation; it is a subversion, an inversion, and ultimately a *version* of it. Mediation is inescapable. But it is not unforgettable. And so, while we do our best to forget it, we are still contending with it in its devalued position. We find ways to kill and not waste time, to beat it, to take it. Those who are swayed by the cult of immediacy want nothing more than to close the gap of desire and satisfaction, but in the hurry to do so they inadvertently deepen the chasm, distancing themselves from a fuller, sustained contact with the very life for which they yearn.

But if you listen carefully to the whir and hum of our various inventions you might note an odd harmony issuing from some distant source: the forlorn howls, astonished gasps, ecstatic cries, and contented cooing of our ancestors. This is not easy to do, for it requires us to tap into the same capacities that are discouraged by our technologies, to turn the technology of the imagination on itself in order to crack the hard casing of our phones, to study the soft fleshy interiors, to taste hidden worlds. In moments of tenuous wonder when I am able to glimpse the throngs of people gazing wondrously into their handheld light-emitting devices, it occurs to me I've seen a similar transfixed state when sitting across a campfire, watching the movement of light dancing as it warms the bodies gathered around its flicker-flame hypnosis. So perhaps nested within our screen-gaze are seeds of reverie, incipient generative processes, a kind of meaning that precedes and transcends all the capitalistic destructiveness from which cellphones emerge and to which they contribute with ceaseless and ever-greater momentum. There could be something intense and ancient occurring in the glow of cellphone light—not just a mindless stupor born out of our peculiar postindustrial variant of the cult of immediacy—but echoes of a distant rite.

I imagine an ancient people gathered around the fire with song and food, the hearth as omphalos or kiva-sipapu, a navel around which human social activity emerges, gathers, organizes, generates, re-generates, blossoming community with every fire, a burning bush, a basic pulse. I remember myself camping with friends doing just the same, and realize the ancient connection under the light of the stars, whose cosmic movement contributed to the emergence of an awareness of order, rhythms, and cycles. I wonder if eons ago underneath the celestial canopy, huddled in the cold dark around the fire's glow, did one of us look up and see the distant glimmers and imagine each was a fire around which our ancestors gather and then wonder, "Do they also look into *their* sky and see in *our* fire a distant but real constant?" And in a sense, don't we do just this when we hunker down to our individual fire portals, these fragments of the fire, and transmit and receive feeling and idea across time, space and mind? To whom do these feelings and ideas belong?

Screens, Fire and Cosmic Experience

Being that anything earthly is by definition linked to the Sun let us consider the symbolic and physical links of fire to the sun, and by extension, to all celestial light. Buckminster Fuller (1981) writes that "fire is the Sun unwinding from the tree's log" (p.62), each ring of cambium a reservoir of the Sun's energy absorbed, bound, and transformed in the course of a solar revolution. We may say, too, that fire also contains and releases expressive intensities of the material Earth, and so it is also the Earth unwinding from itself, returning to itself. If we consider a log a segment of an earthly filament, once rooted in place, yet lured away from its molten center toward a refulgence beyond, then fire intimates both the depths within and without, the will towards and away, and bridges multiple other opposing tendencies and qualities (light/shadow, building up/breaking down, immanence/transcendence, together/apart, static/dynamic, then/now, and so on.) Firelight condenses and expresses these in a singular event; a dance felt with all sense capacities as something immanent, full and real. "So the fire is the many-

years-of-Sun-flame-winding now unwinding from the tree. When the log fire pop-sparks, it is letting go a very sunny day long ago, and doing so in a hurry" (Fuller, 1981, p. 62). A log, then, is a sort of inscription that, when set ablaze, is read aloud. Could this be, in part, why fire inspires the sharing of stories, myths, fairytales and song, which absorb, bind and transform a people?

If firelight is a melodious elaboration of Sun's ardor, then cellphone light is an iteration of this expressive fact, a cellularized instance of fire and all celestial light. Think of how Moon echoes Sun's vitality, adding to it its own nature, shimmering like an ember stretched across time. And think of Starry Sky, an infinitely chiming chorus whose cascading movement provides a visual reference for the interplay of constancy and fluctuation, whose trace and trajectory weave together a sense of familiarity and belonging by being with, in and of a revolving, ordered cosmos, a backdrop upon which chaotic and spontaneous punctuations become bearable, smoothed over, intelligible, even welcome. The light from our screens does its own version of this, containing the psycho-physical-spiritual-social-practical powers inherent in and given by fire, and all celestial bodies, expressing the full tangle and confusion of feeling therefrom.

Freud wrote that the self begins as a projection of bodily sensation, implying a sort of echo chamber buildup of resonances for impressive and expressive intensities, brought from the surface and extended into greater dimensionality (1923, p. 16; Melmed, 2018). We might assume, then, that the practice of bringing light into dark places has functioned similarly in the evolution and transformation of the individual and collective human self. By "self" I mean the physically, psychically, and ecologically situated processes that create, amplify and contribute to the depth and structure of experience, to the consolidation of its memory, and to the way these nourish daily life.

Imagine, in a prehistoric cave a tiny Sun in the form of a torch or grease lamp is carried into otherwise occluded depths, providing literal in-sight into places where vitality, human and otherwise, is expressed, contained, recorded and felt over and again throughout millennia. An imaginative consciousness conceived of Sun and Earth, light and shade, is born with each visitation. Physical and psychical spaces for contemplation and reflection develop through the chthonic reiteration of intensities felt above ground; whether by painting, music or other expressive practices, reservoirs of experience begin to form, expanding and consolidating areas of consciousness (Read, 1955), affectivity and memory. When these hallowed spaces are visited with firelight, we can imagine how such intensities would begin again to unwind and transmit, to bind again to their spectators, and to bind the spectators to each other under a common identity, feeling or function, which is then brought out again into everyday life.

Current day iterations of this practice are numerous and include Javanese wayang kulit (or shadow play) the cinema, and psychotherapy—the latter having started in a room adorned with images of antiquity accompanied by the gleaming ember of a cigar. These practices illustrate ways in which imagination and fire have coevolved, braided into and transformed each other, and us, over time. We can imagine how the flare of a match and the unfurling smoke of Freud's cigar, amidst the panoply of figures and patterns in his office, could have matched and motivated patient-therapist emanations, freed associations, and engendered the kind of attitude used to float freely among them.

Emerging now is an understanding of imagination, or imaginative consciousness, as an interactive, sensuously involved, moving thing—a fiery thing that can both burn and cauterize, as well as consume, forge, alloy, char, scintillate, evaporate and more. It is located variously within and without, dramatized both internally and externally. It is a movement between various positions and qualities; a movement of and between differentials, though also, at least partially, towards and away from some kind of unity. Imaginative consciousness is a weed growing from a crack in the pavement, a comingling of soil, seed, concrete, Sun, air, moisture and more. It is a potential where rupture occurs. Its emergence both facilitates and mends ruptures; but it is always in a moving relationship with a sensed other. And so, too, are the various technologies of firelight, being extensions of imaginative consciousness, in interactive and moving relationship with the micro- and macro- cosmic other of which we are part and parcel. As Walter Benjamin (1928/1997) noted, our technologies mediate and organize our "contact with the cosmos" (p. 104), establishing a cosmic synchrony, a moving-along-withness.

Yet, note how the prisoners in Plato's Cave are chained, unable to move while gazing at the flickering shadows produced by firelight; and how the freed prisoner who departs the cave is free precisely because of his ability to move. These details underscore the centrality, albeit in repressed form, of movement in experience,

which, if ever deemed static, is only so in appearance and by relation to that which moves. Thus in Plato there is a devaluation of the immanent, expressive vigor felt by and through assemblages of bodies—surging, fizzing, emptying, welling up, swirling, swelling, aching, oozing, and flowing—which leaves traces wherever contact is made. Rather than become immersed, as did our prehistoric ancestors, in the tracings of collective movements of herds and multiplicities, in the interchange of surface and depth with flesh, pigment and rock, and with the continuous variations of firelight and darkness, instead a crystalline entity has risen from the whirl and din of our senses: a transcendent attitude. Forever beckoning us away from where we are, the transcendent attitude produces a longing to exit the cave and pursue tendrils of something taken for absolute, eternal, and static. (Plato, ironically, associated this something with the image of the Sun, a cosmic body constantly on the move, whose gradual flicker is felt across the face of earthly sentience at dawn and dusk.) We might consider the invention of this transcendent attitude, and the inventions that issue from it, including our many screens, a kind of stimulus barrier (Freud, 1920), a psychic callus created by, and functioning against the intensity of sensuous existence, its "sheer thusness" (Milner, 1957), and the intense terror and confusion that can spring from our capacity to produce and contemplate dimensions of death, dying and impermanence.

In addition to their function as protective shield, might the invention of our various technologies of light and image express, in part, a longing to return to such a place where images unfold, enfold and transform? In his film Cave of Forgotten Dreams, Werner Herzog (2011) wondered if the play of light and shadow from flickering torches would couple with the stylized rendering of many-legged animals to produce a proto-cinematic experience for the Paleolithic visitors. And with modern cinema don't we return to a sensuously grounded dark place where images flicker, intensive flows gather, configure, elaborate, resonate, vitalize, and ultimately produce a sense of belonging? Vachel Lindsay (1915) sensed as much in his groundbreaking work of film criticism. Bearing witness at the cusp of a new technologized art, Lindsay mused that through cinema—what he called 'photoplay'— "the cave-man longs with an incurable sickness for his ancient day" (p. 261).

Even Times Square, seemingly overrun by commercializing tendencies, can produce a feeling of cavernous interiority, a within-ness and envelopment by luminous images, a kind of photoplay harkening back to the cave depths of our shared past. And recently Google released a popular app that matched users owns selfies with a similar visage from a great work of art. Perhaps, more than anything, it was a clever business ploy to reap a wealth of facial recognition data. Nevertheless, consumers were content to recognize themselves, and each other, in and through the images on their phone, to hold in hand a fragment of the ancestral fire and to feel themselves briefly connected to, and moving in concert with something greater. In the same passage from which this paper's first epigraph comes, Benjamin (1997) stated that our contact with the cosmos can only be achieved communally. While he places explicit emphasis on the power of the social collective, there is a subtle, yet no less significant, appreciation of the power achieved through the coming together of our many sense capacities. Indeed, the latter amplifies the former, and vice versa, giving way to a more robust contact with, mediation of and involvement in the cosmos. This stands in stark contrast to what he notes—and our screen-saturated culture demonstrates this—as the marked supremacy in our age of an optical relationship to the world.

Firelight and its iterations in screen-light, then, have a pervadingly adhesive function, linking us up with the self and more-than-self. They are central organizers, nodes whose rays and currents run throughout and pull together, orienting and integrating heterogeneous parts into living, dynamic unities. Tausk (1913) described a particular paranoid fantasy of psychotic patients who feel controlled by a vast, distant machine. Could Tausk's machine be a distortion of a basic, primordial influencing-sense that undergirds our very existence as Sun-bound creatures; a distortion that, in part, is a consequence of a technologized life ever more disconnected from this simple, but profound fact of life? The Sun, a transformational object par excellence, daily and seasonally delivers the most radical changes in our surround. By extension, might we seek out fire, including this screen-light in which we seem to bath endlessly, "for its function as signifier of the process of transformation of being…in order to surrender to it as a process that alters the self" (Bollas, 1979, p. 97) at the enviro-somatic level? But to surrender is a skill requiring something like practice. And it helps if one has been reared to bear the states of dread and ecstasy surrender invites, to acknowledge them as our guests and give them their proper care. In this our culture has failed us.

Ghent (1990) articulated how in the West the fundamental wish to and capacity for surrender has been buried in and by sadomasochistic

configurations. While he focused primarily on personal dimensions of this dilemma, the consequences extend to and from the cultural–sociological contexts in which the former are situated. And so our fire-born inventions have become technologies of submission, domination and control, caught in the march of history as we swing, and swipe, from fantasies of infantile helplessness to grandiose omnipotence. As we peer back just over the last five thousand years it seems that the more we've been able to control fire, the more out of control we've become with it. How do we contend with this awesome power of ours? How do we grapple with the cosmic intensities it touches off, or grope for those it casts aside?

Take two images from NASA (2015, 2018) and set them side-by-side, that of the Eagle Nebula—Pillars of creation gleaned by the Hubble Telescope and one from the Earth at Night series. Each image teems with explosions of light the eye joins by reticulations real and invisible. Eerie adumbrations haunt and lull. Both images can be viewed in the palm of your hand. Let us for a moment take the light in our hands and consider it a substitute for, or an iteration of firelight. And let us assume for a moment that firelight was felt as a harnessed form of starlight, expanding the horizons of our spiritual and material worlds, giving form and function to new desires, new realities, new potentialities. Each moment that the phone flickers harkens back, however faintly, to the moment when a fire ignited and worlds came into its orbit.

Rendezvous

We've only just begun to crack the hard casing of our screens. As we look into the shattered surface, an odd thing occurs. Both the darkest darkness and the brightest light emit from within, drawing us toward their source. We lean in further and suddenly find ourselves somewhere dank. We are in the middle of something massive and mostly dark. Gradations of shadow orient us to a periphery and a center. To measure the depths around us we cast our voice into them but become confused with the ten thousand echoes that return. Unclear where our voice begins and where it ends, we feel time begin to bend. We focus instead on what is near, looking down at our feet. We notice, half submerged in an inch of water, a power cable intertwined with a strand of yarn. It snakes its way around a corner into a chamber filled with light. Within, something animal lets out a deep, but brief sigh. Turning the corner we see its origin, a Minotaur seated on a stone bench, one leg crossed over the other, his face aglow in the light of a laptop. He types furiously. Bathed in darkness and in light, he is an absolute though ever-shifting chiaroscuro surrounded by all manner of foliage, fruits and fungi, which continually cycle through the seasons at an accelerated speed. He looks at us and acknowledges our presence with a grunt, then pats the bench beside him inviting us to take a seat. In his earth-brown eyes a mixed expression of intense curiosity and kindness. He turns toward his laptop, and continues to type:

"…Processes of becoming-human, and processes of becoming-animal exist in a state of reciprocal presupposition. As do processes of becoming-plant, stone and so on"

He presses the period key then turns to us and calmly proceeds: "This simple statement is so easily forgotten, so often misunderstood that we become twisted up, locked away from, and by, our very own magic." We notice a feeling of awe overcomes us, not just because of the veracity of the statement, or because of the strangeness of the situation, but because the timbre of his voice suggests an immensity difficult to imagine within the hollows of his body. He continues, "Daedalus forgot the soul was already a winged thing, and could soar on its own. If you don't believe me, re-read Plato's Phaedrus—the only dialogue that takes place, just barely, outside the city walls." Reaching down and pulling up a clod of grass, The Minotaur places it into his mouth, continuing his graceful rumination, "There is an isomorphism between the labyrinth, the cave, the viscera, urban zones, the internet, and electronic circuitry. A circuitousness that traps and channels intensities. All kinds of wonders and horrors emerge from these arrangements. Freud called them 'complicated detours.' "

"Hm. So all of this is your body, your complicated detour?" We ask.

"Yes, all of it. And yours, too. Did you notice the water on the way in?"

"Yes…"

"Every now and then the place floods."

"How much water?"

"Infinite amounts."

"How do you breathe?"

"You learn to breathe into the depths, to undergo form and formlessness. Then everything becomes surface."

"Then what happens?"

"After some time there is an explosion of light and everything becomes scorched.

"And?"

"Eventually things begin to grow. That's what we are in the middle of now."

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Bethany Ides

ALL-REPLYINGLY

Almost everyone is speaking to a crowd seemingly always. Almost everyone is hardly willing to sense themselves alone when they seem to be alone and, when estimating the area they occupy in the space that they are in, readily round up to the amount of space taken up by everybody everywhere else, as if the measurements were too close to tell apart. Almost everyone has forgotten a password to access their own personal information that is already readily accessible to others, and almost no one knows personally those same people who know, we're told, "almost everything" about them. Or, almost everyone is readily addressing a sizable crowd many at the same time that they are estimating that crowd's aggregate to be closer to one or no one. All the people reading what sound very much like personal messages are mostly unaware of the total mass of recipients of that message, of what crowd they are a part. Or, almost all totals of recipients are, anyway, unknown because it's only ever advancing (forwarding), so the count is perpetually off. To which constituency do I belong when I am estimating the space I take up in any number of distended, non-relaxing crowds whose viewing is Venn-ing any number of windows open at a time, all at once contracted as if to fit into a single screen? To the extent that the "almost" and the "everyone" share a near-constant constipational temperament—because almost everyone is believing themselves to be perpetually metabolizing incomings and receipts, but they can't, they aren't—the mesh is too bulk, the community too commoned out.

Elias Canetti famously inventoried the reasons that people cram or see themselves as clumped in or of a sociality, even when they are not co-present, even as crowds already dispersed or dead. "Justice begins with the recognition of the necessity of sharing," he observed. It is a principle of distribution, of fairness, the oldest problem. A structure is then tested to arbitrate and ensure that "anyone who kills with others, must [also] share the prey with them" (Canetti, 1973, p. 191). The formation of community as such gains significance by imagining that the crowd will recur. Justice becomes possible in this interweaving of memory and anticipation, and in the acknowledgement that the others who had been a party to the preying aren't "others" anymore. Hunting and eating prey are especially convenient ways of signifying knownness and the boundaries of belonging precisely *because* of justice, of having to estimate who's implicated in the count and who isn't (i.e. the prey).

A flock of BCCs are interpellated similarly, regardless of whether or not the sender's geographical or political position is known or

recognized. Consider, for instance, spam. In a cultural analysis of spam, Finn Brunton speaks to the peculiar aggravation of being interfered with online, made all the more disorienting by the "torque" that jolts an interlocutor out of screenal-immersive associating back to the circumstance of their participation in data-trafficking, a laborer among billions. These *de facto* affiliations are negligibly elective––the employment contract doubled as a lease agreement for internet service. I hardly ever notice myself hunting with others until the signal drops and I'm temporarily cut off from them. And yet, "obliged, suddenly, to be aware of the means" of compliance within that system, Brunton writes, we co-operatives "create deliberate mechanisms that blur between technical, social, political, and legal" (2013, p. 9). Those spammed, in an effort to belong, form "reactive publics," instantaneously called to "manage themselves and their infrastructure" (p. 9). That infrastructure: the grid, the servers, the hardware and software and corporate moneys that have all factored into this dubious, if occasionally unwanted togetherness, re-present the *facilitation* of interaction that seems so frictionless until it isn't. Until it is called out.

Because there is no call *to*, even if I am emailing my lover whose tongue is erstwhile in my ear, the act is extimate. There are not continuous, shared surfaces enough to structure an echolocative "to" sound. There are blips and breaks, but neither describes the space between us. And even though the digital is so vast that it "exceeds our capacity to resolve the minuscule details we assume compose it," as Alexander Wilson points out, it cannot contain processes, actual changes and exchanges. Instead, it reproduces, he argues, "pre-individual potentials" algorithmically into exhaustion, whereupon these outcomes, too, can be reproduced without loss (Wilson, 2014). When we first emailed––you or I or anyone––did anyone listen long enough to register the sound of their own affect shift, switching the room for the room tone? Did we believe then that proxy-servicing might come to feel like extra-sensing? Were we wishing to be the channelers or the channels in the belief that a message could be transferred or ourselves transcluded? Something that is supposedly located somewhere and somewhere else, superimposed, needn't be so responsive as us, needn't keep becoming.

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From its inception, email, unlike most of its communication-technological kin, seemed to condition its own peculiar non-peculiarity. Email arrived as already email, ordinary enough that it didn't even warrant much notice, let alone advertising campaigns. Some fifty-ish years later, its format design has remained remarkably the same, perhaps all too much like the civil servant office that it may as well be, having once or twice received a fresh coat of paint and the inevitable inheritance of a couple filing cabinets. Email has only ever been dowdy, convincingly costumed for ready incorporation among the cultures of academics, technicians, engineers and journalists who initially popularized its use. As impishly exposed by geek-punk reporter Joshua Quittner, writing for *Wired* in 1994, one-third of then-current Fortune 500 companies hadn't yet registered domain names on the World Wide Web, and several major players were operating under "nonobvious, unhip addresses at places like America Online and Prodigy." The already relatively mature medium still struck many as a needless complication, a nuisance. A McDonald's media relations person asks Quittner, incredulously: "Are you finding that the Internet is a big thing?" (1994). Media historian Thomas Streeter recalls an attitude of bravado that proliferated in early exchanges among those "elite few who had mastered the arcane art of online access" (2003). These relationships were largely vague and yet their dispersion did little to dispel intense feelings of purported solidarity. Utopian-toned, prophetic-tinged documents like the "Netizen's Netbook," a compilation of articles co-authored by Ronda and Michael Hauben, circulated widely, proclaiming that "a revitalization of society" was underway: "The old model of distribution of information... is being questioned and challenged." "The complete connection of the body of citizens of the world that the Net makes possible," while *not quite* existing at the moment of the articulation of these claims, would soon make possible the "expansion of what it means to be a social animal" (Hauben, 2012). Of course, that coming––what Mark Fisher termed "capitalist realism"––has come, accompanied by the mass depression Fisher identified as "radically lowered expectation[s]," neither temporary nor contingent: a proto-agentic, communicative enterprise so totalizing that it renders its host-operatives effectively useless (2011, pp. 123-33). All messages already sent, un/responsiveness already moot.

I have been wondering about far less useful types of email. If their energy could become less efficient, maybe they would let up on us a little. I could dedicate myself to producing finely-crafted email furniture custom designed for infirm emails, sick beds for sallow emails to bury their whimpers in. I would spend my days visiting elderly emails with failing organs and encourage them to take up new hobbies, to stay active. These fantasies are inexhaustibly collapsible.

They are full of emails gathered 'round a campfire singing "Both Sides Now" in sweet vigil. Of Email (capital "e") almost wholly depleted, and me, the one steadfast enough to stay calm in that moment to perform the maneuvers necessary to save the last from extinction. To stay *with* email the way it tried, but never could stay with me.

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I used to keep two precious boxes under my bed: one for letters I received from people I was in love with or (who I was convinced) were in love with me, and the second for letters I'd written but hadn't sent. Each box's volume precisely represented a recollection of desire, its mass enmeshed like compost. I practiced picturing my stash while falling asleep: envelopes covered in spiral-scrawled poems, sketches of tree branches, sealed with dripped crayon wax, thick with pulpy-textured paper, and spilling over with pressed flowers and ribbons of magnetic cassette tape, things sewn in.

Once, a person I was in love with sent a photo secured inside a separate envelope-within-the-envelope on which he'd emblazoned a warning or coy entreaty: *Are you sure?* Like Elizabeth Barrett Browning writing to Benjamin Robert Haydon (whom she, too, had never met), it seemed we might be more devoted with and to one another by "giv[ing] scanty data to...fancy" (1972, p. 18). Such an encounter, we both intuitively understood, threatened to convert our devotion in text to fidelity of image. I opened it anyway and found tucked inside that final fold a brutally blurry form cut and smeared with white-out. I could barely evince a face in it. It was not much to smell or touch—it paled to the lock of his hair I would run across the tip of my lip or the carton stuffed full of the alfalfa grass that grew in his backyard and that I would sometimes plunge my head into completely. And, years later, after I had mounted so many impossible distances to reach him, and after tucking a lock behind his actual ear while inhaling the scent of alfalfa through his open window, he knelt there beside his own bed and lifted the edge of the blanket to reveal the his own box full of everything I'd sent him.

That consummating act—to dramatically encounter my Sent box which could only be kept by another, by a lover—to see how any witnessing event re-orders, in turn, one's methods of approach—triggered an alteration as irreversible as any epic gesture. Frederic Jameson framed Proust's synthesis of the grandiose and the personal as "a superposition and an estrangement which not only makes us grasp the specific narrative element in a new and transformed light, but also changes our conception of what a simple psychical gesture is, and what counts as a historical event at the same time" (1997, p. 100). A theatrical gesture gains use in this way, by naming it while also keeping it open. It is much like how D. W. Winnicott described play as an "area of intermediate experiencing," what "has a place and a time," but is yet neither inside nor outside of that, mutually potential and actual (1971, p. 13). A state that one enters willfully, naturally, because one is inclined to, and which is sustained by an active suspension of adherence to logic or reason, wherein the benefits of wild experimentation far outweigh those hedged bets, and the consequences of one's forays are only ever as potent as the present moment. To stay in and with that potency both requires and generates more energy than the sentimental or menial gesture which is already in the service of something else, be it data analytics, usership conditioning, or screen-checking labor.

I forwarded an email to someone I was in love with that had initially been addressed and already sent to someone else. Its content was an account of how this lover had unraveled me, and in the throes of heartbreak, I believed I recognized in the email addressed to another what I hadn't been able to say to the lover. And, as much as I knew myself to be violating fidelity, I think I hoped that my acting out—acting outside—would by some counterforce re-situate the shared being-together from which we'd recently been ex-communicated. Heatedly, my preface to the forwarded missive proclaimed my disdain for all things juridical, which included my own excuses for vindication or any principle according to which such a pathetic non-gesture would be deemed unfair. I remember resenting that the picture of the content I sent him would be indistinguishable from the original, that it might have been so easy to mistake a copy for the genuine thing, had I not betrayed my hand. He replied with a measured admixture of horror and indignation that I likewise rued for being so close to and yet so frightfully clearer than my own feeling.

> It's only from a point of view that I think you would call juridical that this weird exchange this morning seems fair, or merited—that you have every right to send me that, since it is only fair, generous, really, a modicum of retributive justice for the incomparably worse crime of falling out of love, or being afraid to love, or wanting not to love (which incidentally is what Hegel, in that text I was telling you about, Spirit of Christianity and its

> Fate, says that Abraham, father of juridical thinking, was guilty of), and I can enjoy my suffering because it's some minuscule fraction of what I really deserve. I hope this doesn't sound sarcastic; I actually mean it pretty straightforwardly but it's not exactly the sort of thing either of us would aspire to either.

It is too pitiless to argue that love is incompatible with justice, even if "justice, not love, has to be blind … has to disregard the privileged One whom 'I really understand,'" as Agon Hamza, paraphrasing Slavoj Žižek, put it (2017, p. 144). Whereas love, each time it is experienced, defies principle or precedent, justice depends on just these elements exactly. Love, like play, is miscellaneous. Dreaming and meaning, having and doing, tinges and tints rub vigorously and change shape, proliferate. But if email is incapable of being given––if it is not interpretive enough to share being-with, nor momentous enough to resonate epically, inside for outside–– how could love even ever be amidst it? Email's enduring outlast of love proves cryogenically cruel. It refuses to deteriorate as it confuses living amongness.

I have been wondering about what particles of email readerliness we transmit when we touch. What proclivities for directive caress atrophy every time we mistake another non-touch? When will our language for transport bust, when the channels stop containing, when they blow and flood, whatever level of social animality that leveling will initiate? What negotiations and contracts will appease the post-addressed, already-everyone? What un-desiring will be frictionlessly, faillessly forwardable in a format familiar enough to seem so inner?

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Mirene Arsanios

April-May-June (excerpts)

In September Salma is convinced that people get the illness they desire. "It's ok if you want to do the emotional labor, if you can only be yourself by losing yourself," she says. Irigaray wrote somewhere that self-sacrificial and male-devoted culture is passed down from mother to daughter. "But you're not your mother," Salma says. Sometimes, I'm not sure. It depends on the season.

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Alec says that in Spanish, "te quiero" stands somewhere between "I like you" and "I love you." It doesn't really translate into English. What about "I'm really into you?" "Not really" he says. "And 'te amo'?" "'Te amo' means 'I love you' mi bella." In September Alec tells me that he loves me. He says, "I love you mi bella." I reply with something untranslatable like, "me too."

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"I'm coming to you," I text. Gaby watches me dart out the front door. "Querida ..." she says. On my bike, I drive straight into variously sized potholes and cavities, trying my best to dodge glass shards from a car accident. "Cuidado!" shouts a boy standing by the traffic light connecting Jefferson to Broadway. I bike past Rite Aid and Golden Krust. A man in a white suit is having a conversation with himself. He seems disappointed. In a neon-lit restaurant, a couple exchanges burger bites. Next to them, there's an empty stroller.

"I'm here, come down," I text Alec. My phone says that my message has been delivered. I trust it. I sit on the brick colored stoop and begin to wait. Before I jumped on my bike, Alec said that he was home and that he wasn't coming to me this evening. "I'm coming to you," I texted back. "I need to see you before you leave." He hasn't answered since. A young man in a jogging suit walks out of Alec's building. I'm tempted to sneak in, walk up to the fourth floor and knock on his door, but the idea of not having a last resort in case he doesn't open terrifies me.

I ask the young man if he has a cigarette. "I don't smoke." I offer a dollar. "Get the fuck out of here," he snaps. Twenty minutes later, I text Alec "I'm leaving" but linger for another twenty.

Back home, I stare at my screen for an indeterminate amount of time. In the morning, at 11am, I receive a text from Alec saying that he just saw my message. He ran out of batteries on the subway and went to the cemetery for a walk. "But you said you were at home," I text back.

"How could your phone have died in the subway if you were at home?"

Gaby says that perhaps, as he was coming out of the subway, he went home to pick up something, maybe his headphones, texted me, and only then ran out of power. "It's possible," she says.

By the end of the day, we both agree that when Alec texted "I'm home," he was lying. He might have been on the subway with a fully charged phone. Or in a bar, with a fully charged phone. Most certainly, he wasn't at the cemetery—that sounds like an excuse someone would make up in a story. If his battery ran out, it most likely happened toward the end of the evening, when he was already piss drunk, or lost, or god knows what or where. We're almost certain, however, that he received the message that said that I was coming to him and decided to ignore it.

Alec says that it bothers him to think of me sitting outside, lingering on his stoop. Had he known, he would never have left me waiting. He sounds honest, almost genuine. I know he is lying but I believe him. I begin contemplating the fact that Alec can both be bothered by the thought of me waiting outside and also let me wait, but how can I express this in a single sentence and sound sane?

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Don't quote me on this one, but I read somewhere that Freud said that by loving someone you love yourself less, but that between love and non-love, love is preferable. It is the lesser of two evils.

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I swiped him because he was made of halves. He's half-Jamaican, half-Venezuelan. I'm half-Venezuelan, half-Lebanese. I feel at home in separation, division, ambivalence. I regret taking sides, welcome corrections.

"What are you doing tonight?" "I'm seeing a movie," he texts back, then corrects himself to, "I'm watching a movie."

In the morning, I kiss him with my many mouths, licking his tongues one after the next. Later, we talk about witchcraft, how women terrorize men whenever they claim power through the occult. He confesses that there's tragedy in his blood, there's illness, food rationing, large scars, public beauty. I want to believe that his fate isn't determined, that he isn't a hapless character caught in the script of unforgiving gods. Maybe it's obeah, a malignant magic practiced in Jamaica. Only women are obeah, he says. They wear black and conjure up evil unlike santeros who offer healing.

Te pido de hablarme en espanol, un idioma, como todos los otros, que no me appartiene. Me dices bella, reina, te digo, bello, cuando quieras. When we have sex he whispers "duro" or "mas" or "rapido" in my ear. Si, I say, si quiero mas, but I'm lying, leaking truth like a vaginal discharge.

The pistachio ice cream I brought for desert softens. I'm waiting outside his door. It's been 10 or 15 minutes. When he finally opens, his eyes are downcast and drowsy. He forces a smile. "I wasn't expecting you," he says. "But we texted two hours ago. You asked what time I was coming. I said 8. You said 'OK,'" I leave the ice cream on the table. "I wasn't expecting you," he keeps repeating.

Later, I try explaining that when I say "you" I'm not exactly referring to "you." He stares at me like I'm not being myself. I search for a synonym but "you" doesn't have equivalents. I try replacing "you" with "spirit." "I had a vision of you during yoga fucking me in downward dog," becomes "I had a vision of a spirit in yoga fucking me in downward dog." I replace "you" with "June." "I had a vision of June fucking me in downward dog." "You" could be so many things but all you leave me with is a UTI and a course of Macrobid that's killing all of my good bacteria.

***

In June, I have a memory of my mother banging a black stiletto against her bedroom door. "Let me in you bastard," she yells, but my father won't open. He won't open until my mother calms down, he says. She hammers harder—wood shards flying off in all directions. "This is my room!" she keeps repeating. I don't remember if my mother aimed her stiletto at my father's balls when he finally opened the door, but after a while, things got calmer, my parents locked inside, not minding the peephole my mother's stiletto had burrowed through the door.

The next day I send Alec an email I end with a quote from *In Praise of Love*.

***

In May, I stop worrying about form. I've never been in this position before, with Alec's feet on my head and face on my toes. We sleep, then he gives me compliments I don't take. "Take them," he insists.

When last night was tonight, he put his mouth inside my ear, his hand on my face, and began

whispering words without a language. Maybe, he's casting a spell on me.

With him, I practice having revelations. I'm entirely awake, then deep asleep. *Push and pull*, I think the expression is.

"There's nothing between everything and nothing," he says. He must be lying. "There's nothing between everything and something," he says. I don't believe him. There are options, sequences, not everything is pre-determined, I say. I don't say, "there's hope," but that's what I mean.

I tell Alec that when my mother died, I wasn't there. My mother waited for me to leave to die. Something about numbers and fate—a sequence gone askew. I revisit and revisit: being selfish was not a choice but a natural inclination, a response to my mother's love, the kind that doesn't distinguish between pronouns.

"Todas las luces son del sol." "Todas las hojas son del viento," he sings to my ear in a dark bedroom in my mother tongue. "Nothing lasts forever, everything is transient, even this future love of ours." Obviously, I think, although what I've always known is becoming stranger to me.

I try not to confuse Alec with someone else. I have fantasies of selflessness. Like moving to Sweden where nothing grows from the earth. "That's Norway," he corrects. There's something soothing in sterility. You disagree. "The simplest pasts can have the most extraordinary insights," Jinny says when I tell her that nothing has happened to me and everything has happened to you.

Tonight, Alec is cooking something perfect: lentils and oven-roasted beets. Somewhere, he uses mint. He can do magic with his fingers, knows exactly when to use them. In bed, he whispers a song into my ear, escorting me to death shores before we fall asleep in reverse positions.

When I walk in the street during the day, the transience is gone until I see Jinny. I tell her about Alec's pagan sentences. "He was casting a spell on me." "For all I know, that might be possible," she says, staring at me from the comfort of her chair.

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The quote says: "One could say: my love's main enemy, the one I must defeat is not the other, it is myself, the 'myself' that prefers identity to difference, that prefers to impose its world against the world reconstructed through the filter of difference." End of quote.

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Jinny says that that I should walk barefoot in the park under the full moon. The next one is on August 7th. She thinks I lack earth qualities, the rootedness of feminine energy. "Bathe under the moonlight, eat flowers, smear mud on your belly." "Are you sure?" I ask. "Believe me, it's easier than you think," she replies. I want to believe Jinny, but I don't know how. If I could get rid of my pronounced tendency for self-awareness, I would stop thinking that eating piss-covered flowers is dumb, or that exposing my underarm to the glow of a full moon only brings me get closer to my own sour sweat. Somewhere behind me, Alec is plowing through the grass. Maybe tonight is the night he'll strangle me and blame it on the moon.

***

Rahina, my neighbor, sprays deodorant over her shaved head, under her t-shirt, between her legs. She walks down to the second floor and knocks on my door, three soft knocks. It's nothing, nobody, I think. She knocks again, her silhouette leaning against the wall, cross-legged, as if waiting for a late bus. She mentions my bike, and asks about my flat tire. She heard I've been having problems. "Do you speak French?" I ask. She does, she says, but at home she speaks in dialect.

"I'm late for my job," she says. "What do you do?" "I work as a security guard in Times Square. You?" "I'm heartbroken," I say. "That's your job?" she asks, with a sneer. "It's my summer job," I say and we laugh. "Who's the bastard?" "Everybody."

Rahina complains about the lack of discipline in children's education, about American individualism. "Back home, we do things differently ..." She has something for me, she says. "Wait here, I'll be back." Five minutes later, she hands me a bag full of fabric her parents sent from Niger. One of the cloths has an emblem that says, "Industrie du travail." She also hands me a blue shirt adorned with intricate floral patterns. It fits me perfectly. The cotton is thick but it's been a cool, breezy summer so far, like we're being spared before being hit.

Mirene Arsanios is the author of the short story collection, *The City Outside the Sentence* (Ashkal Alwan, 2015). She has contributed essays and short stories to *e-flux journal*, *Vida*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *The Rumpus*, and *The Outpost*, among others. Her writing was featured collaboratively at the Sharjah Biennial (2017) and Venice Biennial (2017), as well as in various artist books and projects. Arsanios co-founded the collective 98weeks Research Project in Beirut and is the founding editor of *Makhzin*, a bilingual English/Arabic magazine for innovative writing.