

**After Transgression:  
Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigms of Contemporary Art**

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## Declaration of Authorship

I, Theodore Reeves-Everson, declare that this thesis is submitted to Goldsmiths, University of London in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been composed by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree. This thesis and the work presented in it are my own and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

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## Abstract

This thesis investigates the relationship between ethics and aesthetics by analysing several artworks produced over the last fifty years. It argues that ethics and aesthetics relate to one another in historically specific ways, and that artworks represent a privileged point of access for seeing how this relationship forms and changes. I show that within this period it is possible to discern the rise and fall of a paradigmatic bond between ethics and aesthetics articulated around the concept of transgression. The paradigm of transgression has, I argue, suffered a historical decline in a range of contexts. The theoretical resources used to navigate through this decline are drawn from the work of Jacques Lacan and Félix Guattari, among others. Lacan's work in particular is marked by a shift away from transgression that parallels the move within art. After focusing on figures such as Sade and Antigone in the early 1960s, a decade later Lacan turns to the work of James Joyce in order to reformulate the psychoanalytic concept of the symptom as 'sinthome'. This concept shifts the ethical accent away from transgression towards creativity, and can be pushed in new directions by drawing on the work of Guattari. More than just a curious symmetry, the shift away from transgression in both art and theory occurs in response to a larger set of social changes in the function of language and prohibition. I conclude that the historical decline of such Symbolic forms makes a new relationship between ethics and aesthetics possible. The marriage between the two, I argue, can be brokered through their mutual participation in the production of subjectivity. The argument culminates by suggesting directions, in the form of the concepts of 'repair' and 'fabulation', along which this new ethico-aesthetic paradigm might develop.

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>9</b>
Ethics beyond Morality .....	12
Aesthetics beyond Beauty .....	16
A Postscript to Transgression.....	19
A Preface to the Sinthome.....	22
<b>Part 1: Transgression.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Chapter 1. Transgression: The Dialectical and the Liminal .....</b>	<b>27</b>
The Dialectics of Transgression .....	28
A Tragic Fracture .....	32
Transgression at the Limits of Language .....	34
Anamorphic Actions .....	38
Actionism without a Cause .....	44
<b>Chapter 2. From Inversion to Disorientation .....</b>	<b>52</b>
A Thrust for Life .....	53
Inversion without Reprieve .....	54
Kant Upside Down .....	59
An Introduction to Disorientation .....	65
Motion Sickness: on the Work of Paul McCarthy .....	67
Commanded Enjoyment .....	74
From the Discourse of the Master to the Discourse of Capitalism .....	77
Pushing at an Open Door .....	81
<b>Chapter 3. Programmes for Life.....</b>	<b>84</b>
Open Forms, Closed Forms .....	89
A Servant with Two Masters.....	96
The Transition to Capitalism and the Decline in Symbolic Efficiency.....	100
Three Games .....	104
Viruses, Algorithms, Programmes .....	107
<b>Part 2: After Transgression.....</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>Chapter 4. Towards an Ethics of the Sinthome.....</b>	<b>113</b>
Ordinary Psychosis.....	114

Borromean Knots .....	118
Joyce the Sinthome.....	112
A Guattarian Graft.....	129
The Production of Subjectivity .....	131
Cracking the A-Signifying Kernel .....	137
Sidestepping the Steamroller.....	147
<b>Chapter 5. Ethico-Aesthetic Repairs .....</b>	<b>151</b>
Introduction to the Work of Kader Attia .....	152
Space, Time, and the Repair.....	158
Defining Repair .....	163
Sinthomatic Repairs .....	168
The Existential Pragmatics of Repair.....	173
I Repair, You Repair, We Repair .....	175
<b>Chapter 6. Experiments with Truth .....</b>	<b>177</b>
From Intention to Effect .....	179
Lying to Liars .....	185
Intimate Percussion .....	190
Talking Back .....	194
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>203</b>
Sublimation and its Discontents .....	205
From Diagnosis... ..	206
...To Production .....	208
<b>Works Cited .....</b>	<b>211</b>

## List of Illustrations

- Figure 1:** Domenico Piola the Elder (1627-1703), *Anamorphosis of Rubens*, oil on canvas. Musee des Beaux-Arts, Rouen, France ..... 39
- Figure 2:** Hermann Nitsch, Second day of the six-day-play of the *Orgies Mysteries Theater* (1998), Prinzendorf, Austria. © Studio Hermnn Nitsch... 42
- Figure 3:** Richard Kern, *Thrust in Me* (1985), film still. © Richard Kern..... 64
- Figure 4:** Paul McCarthy, *Spinning Room* (1971 / 2008), mixed media. © Hauser & Wirth, London/Zurich ..... 67
- Figure 5:** Paul McCarthy in collaboration with Damon McCarthy, *Cakebox* (detail, from *Caribbean Pirates*), (2001-2005), mixed media. © Hauser & Wirth, London/Zurich ..... 72
- Figure 6:** 'The Discourse of the Master', printed in: Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis. 1969-70*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: Norton, 2007) ..... 78
- Figure 7:** 'The Discourse of Capitalism', printed in: Jacques Lacan, 'On Psychoanalytical Discourse' <[http://web.missouri.edu/~stonej/Milan\\_Discourse2.pdf](http://web.missouri.edu/~stonej/Milan_Discourse2.pdf)> [accessed 01/06/2015]..... 79
- Figure 8:** Artur Żmijewski, *Repetition* (2005), film still. © Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw and Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich ..... 85
- Figure 9:** 'Three-Ring Borromean Chain' [my title], printed in: Roberto Harari, *How James Joyce Made His Name: A Reading of the Final Lacan* (New York: Other Press, 2002)..... 119
- Figure 10:** 'Sinthomatic Chain' [my title], printed in: Roberto Harari, *How James Joyce Made His Name: A Reading of the Final Lacan* (New York: Other Press, 2002)..... 120
- Figure 11:** 'Unlinked Three-Ring Chain' [my title], printed in: Roberto Harari, *How James Joyce Made His Name: A Reading of the Final Lacan* (New York: Other Press, 2002) ..... 124
- Figure 12:** 'Unlinked Three-Ring Chain with Repair' [my title], printed in: Roberto Harari, *How James Joyce Made His Name: A Reading of the Final Lacan* (New York: Other Press, 2002) ..... 125

<b>Figure 13:</b> 'Three-Ring Borromean Chain with Phallic <i>Jouissance</i> ' [my title], printed in: Roberto Harari, <i>How James Joyce Made His Name: A Reading of the Final Lacan</i> (New York: Other Press, 2002) .....	127
<b>Figure 14:</b> 'The Role of the Signifier in the Institution', printed in Félix Guattari, 'The Role of the Signifier in the Institution', in <i>Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics</i> (London: Penguin, 1984), pp. 73-81 .....	140
<b>Figure 15:</b> Lawrence Abu Hamden, <i>Conflicted Phonemes</i> (2013), digital print. © The artist.....	144
<b>Figure 16:</b> Kader Attia, <i>Holy Land</i> (2007), 45 mirrors. © The artist.....	153
<b>Figure 17:</b> Kader Attia, <i>The Repair From Occident to Extra-Occidental Cultures</i> (2012), mixed media, installation view at Documenta 13, Fridericianum Museum, Kassel, Germany (9 June 2012 – 16 September 2012). © The artist .....	155
<b>Figure 18:</b> Paul Landowski, <i>Monument to the Dead of the First World War</i> (1928). Stone and reinforced concrete. © Association des Amis du Musée Landowski .....	157
<b>Figure 19:</b> M'hamed Issiakhem, <i>Monument to the Martyrs</i> (1962). Reinforced concrete applied to existing monument.....	157
<b>Figure 20:</b> Kader Attia, <i>The Repair From Occident to Extra-Occidental Cultures</i> (2012), film still. © The artist.....	158
<b>Figure 21:</b> 15th century Japanese bowl with 18th century porcelain <i>yobitsugi</i> [borrowed patch]. Printed in: <i>Flickwerk: The Aesthetics of Mended Japanese Ceramics</i> (Münster: Museum für Lackkunst, 2008) .....	163
<b>Figure 22:</b> Pilvi Takala, <i>The Trainee</i> (2008), film still. © Galerie Diana Stigter and Carlos/ Ishikawa .....	186
<b>Figure 23:</b> Dora Garcia, <i>Heartbeaters</i> (2005), installation view at Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León, Spain (10 September 2005 - 6 December 2005). © The artist .....	193

## Introduction

Scatological shock-merchants, untrained social workers, conflict-zone tourists: from a certain standpoint the relationship between contemporary art and ethics involves a string of such negative conjunctions. At their centre stands the figure of the artist, whose personality and intentions often serve as an ethical measure of the work. This thesis operates on the basis of a slightly different premise: that the artwork *itself* has an ethical content, and looking at this content more closely can tell us about wider processes of social change.<sup>1</sup> More than simply condensations of an artist's own moral or ethical disposition, artworks fundamentally channel, express, and help shape the attitudes at play in their milieu.

This thesis also operates on the basis that there is no fixed relationship between ethics and aesthetics; each artwork negotiates the relationship between the two in its own way. The number of different forms this relationship takes in contemporary art highlights the fundamentally unstable nature of the concepts themselves. Trying to make sense of the interrelations between ethics and aesthetics can sometimes feel like walking the fault-line between two tectonic plates; the sensation of movement under foot is ever-present. Nevertheless, the historical variability of the relationship between ethics and aesthetics periodically stabilises, and patterns of interaction emerge. These periods of stabilisation are what I call ethico-aesthetic paradigms.<sup>2</sup>

The intention in part 1 is to show that an ethico-aesthetic paradigm can be articulated around the concept of 'transgression'. Perhaps for many readers this would not come as much of a surprise. The word ethics rarely enters the discourse around contemporary art in a 'positive' way, and contemporary artworks are rarely held up as symbols of virtue. Across the cover of a recent reader on art and ethics the word 'scandalous' is emblazoned in large letters, the book itself containing a catalogue of moral infringements.<sup>3</sup> Despite the existence of such texts, very few authors have attempted to make sense of transgression in a sustained critical fashion. And very few have attempted to make sense of its patterns of historical emergence.

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<sup>1</sup> This focus on the ethical content of artworks does not in itself constitute a radically new approach to the subject, as demonstrated by the existence of books such as *The Life and Death of Images: Ethics and Aesthetics*, ed. by Diarmuid Costello and Dominic Willsdon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> The term 'ethico-aesthetic paradigm' has been borrowed from Félix Guattari, and forms the subtitle of his book *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* (Sydney: Power Publications, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> *Scandalous: A Reader on Art and Ethics*, ed. by Nina Möntmann (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013).

Accounting for these patterns comprises the first of three ambitions in this thesis. The second ambition is to account for the fact that the ethico-aesthetic paradigm of transgression has, in a range of contexts, suffered a decline. It is my belief that this decline can be attributed less to the desensitisation of art audiences, as some might expect, and more to a set of wider socio-cultural changes. By definition, transgression cannot exist in isolation from the prohibitions it interacts with. The fact that transgression is dependent upon a specific set of socio-cultural norms means that looking at such norms is necessary in order to account for the decline of transgression itself. Perhaps the biggest claim this thesis makes, then, is that prohibition and its variants (boundaries, norms, rules, etc.) have *themselves* changed in function under late capitalism. Taking up and developing the theoretical resources of psychoanalysis, I argue that this can be adequately conceptualised as a decline in what Lacan called the Symbolic order; that is, the tissue of linguistic and social relations that condition subjectivity.<sup>4</sup>

Lacan's work runs like a red thread through this thesis, but it is not the primary object of investigation. The relevance of his work to the subject of transgression becomes clear when one turns to his well-known seminar on the *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*.<sup>5</sup> Together with its companion essay 'Kant with Sade', this seminar provides a rich set of resources for thinking through the multi-faceted nature of transgression.<sup>6</sup> As well as drawing on his 'classical' articulation of ethics in part 1, in the second half of this thesis I will follow Lacan's work forward in time. Throughout his life Lacan continued to return to the subject of ethics, constantly revising and reformulating his ideas. If transgressive figures such as Sade and Antigone served as key reference points in the early 1960s, in the mid '70s Lacan turns to the work of James Joyce in order to reformulate the psychoanalytic concept of the symptom as 'sinthome'. Although it is not framed as a concept that has anything to do with ethics, I aim to show that Lacan's late work justifies speaking of an 'ethics of the sinthome'.

The process of reformulation that generates this concept, among many others, is always informed both at the micro level by changes in psychoanalytic treatment and the macro level by larger socio-cultural shifts. As well as constituting an interpretative grid

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<sup>4</sup> Where the words 'Symbolic', 'Imaginary' and 'Real' are used in this thesis to designate the three Lacanian orders of experience, they have been capitalised, unless they appear in quotations where the author has chosen not to do so.

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis. 1959-1960*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller (London: Tavistock / Routledge, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Lacan, 'Kant with Sade', in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (London: Norton, 2006), pp. 645-668.

based on clinical symptoms, it was Lacan's position that psychoanalysis is itself a symptom that responds to changes in the social bond.<sup>7</sup> Rather than treating Lacanian theory as the locus of timeless concepts that can be applied to artworks, the approach will involve looking at how *both art and psychoanalysis* change over time. On the subject of ethics specifically, Lacan's work is characterised by a movement away from transgression towards a pragmatic ethics of creativity. I intend to show that this final theoretical adventure can be advanced by drawing on the work of Lacan's one-time student Félix Guattari, which represents both an extension and radical critique of some key Lacanian ideas. As will be discussed in more detail below, the potential dividends of taking up and developing Lacan's work in dialogue with Guattari can be found in its capacity to modulate a new ethico-aesthetic paradigm emerging today. This is the third and final ambition of this thesis: not only to analyse the ethico-aesthetic paradigm of transgression, nor to explain its historical decline, but to trace the contours of a new ethico-aesthetic paradigm 'after' transgression. If the paradigm of transgression is articulated around various kinds of 'boundary play' – a series of interactions with existing lines that demarcate the morally good from its inverse – I intend to show that the post-transgressive paradigm is more concerned with the incubation and deployment of 'lines of flight'; creative mutations that enliven their social milieu and bring about changes in the production of subjectivity.<sup>8</sup>

From transgression to the production of subjectivity, from Antigone and Sade to Joyce, this thesis aims to capture a certain movement in art and theory that has taken place over roughly the last 50 years.<sup>9</sup> If the first half operates in a primarily diagnostic

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<sup>7</sup> The claim that psychoanalysis is itself a symptom is made in Jacques Lacan, 'Conferences and Conversations at North American Universities', *Scilicet*, 6/7 (1975) 7-31 (p. 14).

<sup>8</sup> On the concept of the 'line of flight' see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Continuum, 1987).

<sup>9</sup> As Peter Osborne has recently argued, any attempt to establish the parameters of a period coinciding with 'contemporary art' purely on the basis of historical chronology is immediately beset by a number of problems, not least the difficulty in establishing a start date for such a period (is it 1946, when the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London was set up, 1989 after the fall of the Berlin wall, or somewhere in between – a response to the radical social, political and cultural upheavals of the 1960s?). Although all of the artworks discussed in this thesis have been produced in the period after the Second World War, their status as works of contemporary art does not rely on the dates or places in which they were produced. Rather than simply a periodising or spatialising category, for Osborne the contemporary is constituted both by 'the coming together or different times' and by 'the relations between the social spaces in which these times are embedded and articulated' (p. 23). On a temporal axis, contemporary art embodies a specific kind of futurity – one that differs from modernity's insofar as it has less political purchase on the future, 'contracting' its anticipatory structure. Nevertheless, the fact that works of contemporary art are still being made means that any definition will necessarily be anticipatory to a certain degree. For Osborne one of the necessary features of contemporary artworks is that they demand to be thought out, and this act of thinking is co-constitutive of the definition of contemporary art itself, which exists as an 'operative fiction'. My own use of the term 'contemporary art' follows such an approach (albeit in a productively loose way), both insofar as it seeks to think through the consequences of certain artworks, and insofar as doing so makes use of an operative fiction and 'fills it out' with

mode, attending to the specific conditions of an artwork's emergence, then part 2 shifts into more speculative territory. It seeks to demonstrate that at the same time that art reflects history's lines of force, it also has the capacity to deploy lines of its own. This shift from a reactive to an active mode – in a reconstructed Nietzschean sense of the words - is part of the overall shift this thesis seeks to identify and advance.<sup>10</sup> However creative its representatives may be, artistic strategies associated with transgression, I intend to show, are always trapped by the targets of their critique.

\* \* \*

Before these three ambitions can be progressively realised, a number of terms need clarifying. Ethics and aesthetics may denote historically variable formations, but in this thesis they nevertheless operate within certain boundaries circumscribed on the basis of particular theoretical traditions. Two other terms that appear repeatedly in the arguments that follow – 'transgression' and 'sinthome' – serve as major concepts that structure the first and second halves of the thesis. As such it is worth giving them an initial characterisation. Clarifying these four terms will also provide the opportunity for a number of key arguments to be laid out in embryonic form, while at the same time giving an account of how I intend them to grow over the chapters that follow.

### Ethics beyond Morality

During his yearlong seminar on the *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan made a passing reference to the 1960 film *Never On Sunday*, directed by Jules Dassin. Drawing attention to a scene of the film shot in a Greek restaurant, in which a character starts smashing glasses on the floor, Lacan points out that every time a glass is shattered the

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empirical material. (p. 26) Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London: Verso, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Nietzsche develops the distinction between passive and active modes in *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) and *Writings from the Late Notebooks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) where it denotes a qualitative difference that relates to forces. In these texts the relationship implies a hierarchy insofar as active forces are described as form-giving, whereas reactive forces are form-receiving. Deleuze's influential study *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006) frames the distinction as an ontological relation that differs from dialectics. For Deleuze active forces affirm an originary difference that reactive forces seek to neutralise or repress. Even though Nietzsche links reactive forces with law and justice in the *Genealogy*, it could be said that transgression is fundamentally reactive insofar as it partially receives its form from the boundaries it crosses. The shift to an active mode in part 2 of this thesis implies less the promotion of dominating, possessive characteristics of 'the active will' described in Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, pp. 52-5, than an attempt to escape such formal conditioning by affirming difference.

cash register in the restaurant vibrates frenetically, tallying up the cost it would take to replace the broken items.<sup>11</sup> When the glass smashing stops and a fight breaks out, the cashier continues, and a ring of the till accompanies every punch thrown.

Whilst anecdotal, this reference nevertheless provides a good characterisation of a certain strand of ethical thought. The scene's significance hinges on the centrality of counting. More than just a neutral tallying of accounts, each entry in the cash register amounts to an act of moral measurement, and this act of measurement is imbued with the force of a judgment.

Judgments are wielded in a similar way in a variety of contexts today. The rise of ethics committees, bioethics, business ethics, and doomed political appeals for an 'ethical capitalism' could all be seen to operate like the cash register in the film, subjecting actions to measurement in the hope that further transgressions will be deterred. In many of its contemporary instantiations ethics is reduced to little more than a machine for making decisions. Actions are abstracted from a web of relations brought before a set of pre-established rules or criteria. The criteria themselves, like the cash register in the film, often remain unchanged by the process.

For Alain Badiou the contemporary configuration of such mechanisms constitutes nothing less than an 'ethical ideology'.<sup>12</sup> While Badiou positions philosophy as an antidote to such ideology, in fact the structures that underpin many contemporary manifestations of ethics are not entirely absent from the history of philosophy itself.<sup>13</sup> Todd May provides a summary of a major shift in ethical thought when he claims that by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century the Socratic question 'how should one live?' is all but replaced by the question 'how should one act?' — the latter finding full expression in the enlightenment philosophies of Kant and Bentham.<sup>14</sup> While the first question attends to the full scope of a life's processual unfolding (a process inextricably entangled in the unfolding of other lives and the objects they come into contact with), the second question isolates individual acts or attitudes and feeds them into the machinery of moral judgment. Actions take place in neat parcels of time and space. The subject is alienated from their actions and the full scope of the environment in which they occur. If one

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<sup>11</sup> Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p. 317 (July 6 1960).

<sup>12</sup> Alain Badiou, *Ethics: an Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>14</sup> Todd May, *Gilles Deleuze: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 4. The first question appears in a modified form in Plato, *Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), p. 32. As Nathan Jun points out, the second question in fact pre-dates Kantian or Utilitarian ethics considerably, appearing in the medieval moral casuistry of Christian thinkers such as Raymond of Pennafort, Bartholemew of San Concordio and Sylvester Prierias. Nathan Jun, 'Deleuze, Values and Normativity', in *Deleuze and Ethics*, ed. by Nathan Jun and Daniel W. Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 89-107 (p. 91).

follows the etymological root of ethics back to *ethos*, which before Aristotle used it to describe moral character or virtue was used to refer to the home or habitat, then it becomes clear that any philosophy that wrenches specific actions from their ethos cannot, if one hews closely to the roots of the word, be an ethical philosophy.<sup>15</sup>

One of the strategies a number of thinkers have adopted to ‘purify’ ethics is to relegate such mechanistic approaches to the domain of morality. If ethics remains tied to the question ‘how should one live?’, then morality becomes a particular offshoot of the ethical associated with the question ‘how should one act?’. Hegel, Deleuze, and Williams each in their own way try to separate ethics from morality.<sup>16</sup> Deleuze characterises morality as a rule-based system of judgment, which ‘always refers existence to transcendent values’.<sup>17</sup> This act of referral enables the subject to cede responsibility to a higher authority, and reflection is reduced to a question of how to apply a rule correctly. By contrast, for Deleuze ethics involves a degree of flexibility, and as such requires deliberation, if not the construction of a new rule or solution to a problem. To add a further point of distinction, it could be said that ethics differs from morality on the basis that the former is historically linked to a tradition of thinking *positively* about the cultivation of specific virtues.<sup>18</sup> By contrast, morality could be seen as an essentially corrective science that seeks to tame unruly matter. Under this division the good of morality is defined by little more than the prevention of evil.<sup>19</sup>

In this thesis, I hope to demonstrate that if ethics has any meaning at all, it must be situated where such mechanistic moral judgment breaks down. Thinking about ethics in such a way does not automatically entail a return to ancient philosophy. Instead of bypassing ‘modern’ morality and advocating a return to the classical question of ethics,

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<sup>15</sup> The word ‘ethos’ is used to refer to home or habitat in Homer, *The Iliad* (London: Penguin, 2003), book 6, line 511; and Homer, *The Odyssey* (London, Penguin, 2003), Book 14, line 411.

<sup>16</sup> In *The Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel links ethical life, or ethical substance [*Sittlichkeit*] to immediate action, decisiveness, character and so on, while Morality [*Moralität*] is related to *reflexive* action, action referred to a transcendent value beyond the domain of entities. Ethical life for Hegel is also embedded, and operates on the basis of virtues, rather than prohibitions. Central to the organisation of these virtues is the idea of a shared way of life, a community, and individual agents within that community that fulfill particular duties that may or may not hold true for other communities. Morality on the other hand is something universal, not rooted in any particular community, and categorical (Hegel often uses the term in a way synonymous with Kantian morality). The moral position ‘knows duty to be the absolute essence’ and demands all agents, irrespective of differences in culture, community etc., to adhere to its tenets. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 365. In *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* Bernard Williams claims, in a similar vein to Todd May, that morality constitutes ‘a particular development of the ethical’ linked to ‘processes of modernization’, the reformation, and a rationalistic world-view more generally. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana Press, 1993), p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), p. 23.

<sup>18</sup> The key thinker here is Aristotle, whose ideas around ‘flourishing’ (*eudaimonia*) form the cornerstone of his ethics. See Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> Badiou argues that the doctrine of human rights conceives of ethics as ‘an a priori ability to discern evil’. Badiou, *Ethics*, p. 8.

‘how should one live’, it might be possible to reformulate the question itself. To the two questions above, May adds a third, which he links to a handful of 20<sup>th</sup> century thinkers including Sartre, Deleuze, Foucault and Derrida: not ‘how should I live?’, nor ‘how should I act?’, but ‘how *might* one live?’ The simple modal verb introduces the crucial ingredient of creativity into ethics that forestalls any attempt to temper it into a system of measurement.

An important point of origin for this creative approach to ethics is the work of Spinoza. The oft-repeated refrain that ‘no one has yet determined what the body can do’<sup>20</sup> does not only imply an act of temporal postponement, but also a self-differing movement that opens up a crack for ethics to crawl into; a crack that separates a body from the understanding it has of itself - or in other words, an unconscious. The two thinkers that play a decisive role in this thesis, Jacques Lacan and Félix Guattari, each in their own way occupy this crack and preserve the creative approach to ethics Spinoza’s work inspires. Although only a handful of scattered references to the latter can be found in Lacan’s work, details in Élisabeth Roudinesco’s biography show just how much influence the philosopher exerted on the young Lacan.<sup>21</sup> When he comes to delivering his seminar on *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan, like Spinoza, would place desire at the heart of his reflections on ethics, not as something that needs to be trained like a wayward dog, but as the driving force of self-actualisation.<sup>22</sup> Both thinkers emphasise the necessity of extricating oneself from conditions that would prevent such processes of self-actualisation from taking place, conditions that make the subject into a passive automaton of social norms, rather than the cause of their own actions. In part 2 of this thesis I argue that the accent in Lacan’s work shifts even more onto this idea of self-authorship, especially in *Seminar XXIII*, where James Joyce takes centre stage as the conceptual persona who in effect ‘authors’ himself through an act of extra-literary composition.

In Guattari’s work creativity also plays a crucial role. This is no more so than in his elaborations of what he alternately calls ‘the new aesthetic paradigm’ and the ‘ethico-aesthetic paradigm’. Here ethical choice no longer emanates from a ‘transcendent enunciation, a code of law or a unique and all powerful god’, but instead

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<sup>20</sup> Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics* (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 71.

<sup>21</sup> See Élisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997). The influence is sufficiently recognised by authors such as Shoshana Felman that she can claim that ‘the whole of Lacan can be understood as putting Spinoza and Freud together’. Shoshana Felman, ‘Between Spinoza and Lacan and Us’, in *The Claims of Literature: A Shoshana Felman Reader*, ed. by Emily Sun, Eyal Peretz and Ulrich Baer (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), pp. 448-474 (p. 461).

<sup>22</sup> Spinoza’s concept of conatus can be seen as a precursor to psychoanalytic conceptions of desire. Conatus will be taken up again in chapter 5.

flows from creativity itself, which necessitates an attitude of ‘responsibility of the created instance with regard to the thing created, inflexions of the state of things, bifurcation beyond pre-established schemas’.<sup>23</sup> In making a claim for such a creative approach to ethics, it might be objected that ethics has once again been severed from its etymological roots in *ethos*. Contrary to appearances, by placing the question ‘how *might* one live?’ at the centre of ethics, an *ethos* is retained, but not as a natural order in which a subject finds their place, as it did in ancient Greece. An *ethos* can instead be seen as a dynamic social body capable of being injected with fresh possibilities. When placed against a larger backdrop dominated by what Guattari calls the ‘steam roller subjectivity’ created by capitalism, posing the question ‘how might one live?’ takes on a distinctly political valence.<sup>24</sup>

### Aesthetics beyond Beauty

The concept of a ‘new aesthetic paradigm’ elaborated in Guattari’s final book highlights an idea of aesthetics that differs from some other understandings of the word. Tracing some of these points of difference will be useful in throwing his, and my own approach to aesthetics into sharper relief.

In the sense I use it here, aesthetics is not grounded in a study of beauty. Even in its radically stripped down Kantian form, the concept of beauty is ill-equipped to account for many of the artworks discussed in this thesis, particularly those in part 1 that could be labeled ‘transgressive’. As Kieran Cashell convincingly argues, artworks that deliberately solicit such emotions as disgust, anger, or outrage not only flagrantly contradict the key Kantian precondition to aesthetic judgment: disinterestedness, but are often directed precisely against this mode of appreciating art, encouraging the viewer to respond in what Kant would call a ‘pathological’ way.<sup>25</sup> As well as the aesthetic ideal of beauty, in this thesis I also take care to avoid reinforcing other values that might be said to underwrite aesthetic judgment, such as the good, the sublime, or the truthful.

Needless to say Kant’s aesthetic philosophy is not limited to reflections on the preconditions for apprehending beauty. In the third critique aesthetics is elevated to the

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<sup>23</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, p. 107.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>25</sup> Kieran Cashell, *Aftershock: The Ethics of Contemporary Transgressive Art* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), p. 7. The notion of disinterestedness does however percolate through Guattari’s account of aesthetics, resulting from an artwork’s ‘detachment’ from the ‘field of dominant significations’. Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, p. 13. This notion of detachment will be discussed in greater detail in the paragraphs that follow, as well as in chapter 4.

status of a faculty that deals with sensory cognition rather than simply an attribute of particular objects.<sup>26</sup> This means that aesthetics is not the preserve of art alone, but rather a fundamental faculty of human experience. In its new role, the aesthetic becomes a mode of perception that exceeds the cognitive or conceptual tendencies of the understanding. While cognition's quest for generalising laws and schemas tends to stifle the sensual particulars of experience, aesthetics attends to these particulars. It is the name for the activity that describes how reality is itself formed through sensory experiences, while at the same time preserving their character as resistant to conceptualisation.

In Kant's hands, aesthetics is also what allows a subject to deal with *new* situations that exceeds their cognitive means for making sense of the world. With aesthetics, 'the imagination is free to provide, beyond that concord with the concept; unsought extensive undeveloped material for the understanding'.<sup>27</sup> For Guattari the way aesthetics facilitates creativity is perhaps its most important feature, and although by no means a Kantian, Guattari often posits ideas that are not incompatible with Kant's aesthetics in this way. As for Kant, for Guattari aesthetics moves beyond the given, supplying 'a surplus value of subjectivity or, in other terms, the bringing to light of a negentropy at the heart of the banality of the environment'.<sup>28</sup> Here aesthetics is both the activity that makes new experiences possible and a means by which to discern restrictive modes of thinking.

Despite this Kantian inheritance there is an assertion in Guattari's last work that aesthetics is *both* on the side of the subject (as a faculty, in Kant's sense) *and* on the side of the object. To account for the relationship between the two, he draws on the work of the Chilean biologist Francisco Varela, whose groundbreaking concept of autopoiesis (initially formulated with Humberto Maturana) posits a reciprocal relation between living entities and the background environments to which they belong. In abbreviated form, an autopoietic relationship is one that accounts for the way in which entities 'self separate' from their background environment at the same time as they 'regenerate and realize the network that produces them'.<sup>29</sup> Freely expanding Varela's

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<sup>26</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>28</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis* p. 131.

<sup>29</sup> Francisco Varela, 'Autopoiesis and a Biology of Intentionality' in *Autopoiesis And Perception: A Workshop with ESPRIT BRA 3352 (Addendum)*, ed. by Barry McMullin and Noel Murphy (Dublin: Dublin City University, 1992), pp. 4-14 (p. 7, 4.) As Varela writes, 'an autopoietic system depends on its physico-chemical milieu for its conservation as a separate entity, otherwise it would dissolve back into it. Whence the intriguing paradoxicality proper to an autonomous identity: the living system must distinguish itself from its environment, while at the same time maintaining its coupling; this linkage

'bio-logic' concept to discuss aesthetic objects, Guattari speaks of artworks as both expressions of the environments from which they emerge and in some ways constitutive of new 'existential territories' at the same time.<sup>30</sup> In a characteristically lateral move, he associates this dynamic with the early aesthetic theory of Mikhail Bakhtin, for whom the aesthetic object detaches itself from 'the unity of nature and the unity of the ethical event of being', before it can speak back to an audience in a way that exceeds their pre-established ways of making sense of the world.<sup>31</sup>

My own account of artworks and their relation to the world is indebted to such an approach. Throughout this thesis I tack between what might be considered typically aesthetic discussions pertaining to the material composition of artworks, and wider ranging sociological concerns related to the conditions under which artworks are produced and apprehended. Ultimately the aim is to build a bridge between the two, to highlight the way in which the works discussed are inextricably woven into the social fabric from which they emerge, yet at the same time irreducible to this fabric. This irreducibility is what allows the artwork to overspill its social 'container' in an autopoietic movement that has the potential to feed back into the production of subjectivity at the level of individuals as well as groups.

The decision to ground the argument in a study of artworks should not be taken to impose limits on the definition of aesthetics in general. If, following Kant, the activity of aesthetics can be brought to bear on experiences beyond the realm of art, then it can also be brought to bear on subjectivity itself. This is one of the fundamental insights Guattari and Lacan bring to this thesis, and what makes it an essentially *ethico-aesthetic* enterprise, providing answers to the question 'how might one live?' Since its inception, psychoanalysis has dealt the means by which subjects change themselves. Guattari's broadening of the conceptual resources used to bring about this change is accompanied by a greater role for art and aesthetics more generally.

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cannot be detached since it is against this very environment from which the organism arises'. p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, p. 15.

<sup>31</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, 'The Problem of Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art', in *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), pp. 257-325, (p. 306). For Bakhtin the 'ethical event of being' is roughly equivalent to a chaotic material substance of life. Although he plays a relatively minor part in the overall theoretical trajectory of this thesis, Bakhtin's work will be invaluable in chapters 4 and 6.

## A Postscript to Transgression

Having grounded the approach to ethics and aesthetics in particular traditions, it is worth now turning to one of the possible conjunctions between the two: transgression. Rather than ridding this term of its equivocations, here I would like simply to sketch out a few broad characteristics of transgression and transgressive art, allowing space in chapters 1-3 for artworks to progressively add flesh to the concept, developing it in the process.

One characteristic of transgression is that it is an inherently *relational* concept. Any attempt to isolate a transgression from the law or limit it interacts with is doomed from the start. This relational aspect is already present in the letters of St. Paul, where transgression is shown to enter into a compact with the law, so that without one the other ceases to exist.<sup>32</sup> Given the interdependency this entails, it might be suggested that transgression always operates in a dialectical fashion. While dialectics undoubtedly saturates the transgressive imaginary, in this thesis I attempt to expose its other modes of interaction and interdependency. As Deleuze claims, the ‘dialectic thrives on oppositions because it is unaware of far more subtle and subterranean differential mechanisms; topological displacements, typological variations.’<sup>33</sup> One of the aims of part 1 is to enumerate a typology of different ‘logics’ of transgression that do not necessarily adhere to dialectical schema. For example in chapter 1 it will be argued that transgression can operate on the basis of an ‘anamorphic’ logic, revealing a space *beyond* the Symbolic categories of good and evil; in chapter 2 the bearer of such categories will be subject to a disorientating force that disengages categorical impulses, and in chapter 3 the constructive potential of transgression will be explored.

Despite the scope of its logical variations, transgression is nonetheless a relational concept always in some way bound up with *morality*. This point allows a distinction to be made between a transgressive relationship and one characterised by mere illegality. Transgression goes beyond illegality, not only breaking a law or limit, but also doing so in such a way that attracts moral condemnation. This does not automatically imply that transgression is itself a moral concept — in some cases the opposition to laws or limits becomes a way of life, an existential solution, and in doing so it becomes possible to speak of an ‘ethics’ of transgression. It simply means that

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<sup>32</sup> Romans 7. 8. ‘without the law the sin was dead’.

<sup>33</sup> Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 157.

transgression is irrevocably linked to morality, regardless of the form this link might take.

To these two broad characteristics it is possible to add a third: transgression is a *dynamic* concept, which describes an action, or operation, rather than a state of being. Even though I have claimed that it is possible to enumerate a number of different ‘logics’ of transgression, these logics should not be understood as structural constants that exist irrespective of history or geography. Needless to say, logic itself has a history and geography, even if it has the capacity to reconfigure the very spatial and temporal co-ordinates these concepts operate within. Transgression also has a history and geography, and the circulation of its logical forms constitutes a dynamic pattern of interactions.

It is not the intention to give an exhaustive account of these interactions. In this way my discussion of transgression stops short of following Chris Jenks, whose book centres on the concept itself as it appears in academic disciplines as diverse as anthropology, literary studies, philosophy and criminology.<sup>34</sup> The main focus of part 1 remains that of transgressive *art*, and in particular artworks that while temporally dispersed and geographically disparate nevertheless enter into dialogue with one another in their mutual construction of the ethico-aesthetic paradigm of transgression. Rather than uncovering this epistemological object in one monumental archeological enterprise, my own role should be seen as that of a co-creator of this paradigm, facilitating a dialogue between the artworks that constitute it.

Considered as an action or operation, transgressive art cannot be treated as a particular style, movement or method. If I stop short of following the concept of transgression to the ends of the trans-disciplinary terrain upon which it operates, my approach also avoids an art-historical nominalism that would impose artificial limits on what can be considered transgressive art by virtue of its production date, appearance, or the intention of the artist.<sup>35</sup> Speaking of transgression as ‘a logic’ (a primarily relational logic at that) compels me to attend to the non-linear patterns of transgressive art’s emergence. While historical precedents may indeed exist (in the literature of Baudelaire or the painting of Manet, to take two habitually repeated examples), these precedents

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<sup>34</sup> Chris Jenks, *Transgression* (London: Routledge, 2003). In her account of ‘contemporary transgressive art’ Cashell barely casts her gaze beyond the YBA phenomena associated with Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin, Marcus Harvey and the Chapman brothers (among others). In another sense the study is narrow insofar as it neglects almost all social factors such as the class dynamics at play in the YBA’s work or the burgeoning British art market at the time.

<sup>35</sup> Here my approach differs considerably from Anthony Julius’s when he speaks of a ‘transgressive period’ with its own back history and canonical stepping-stones throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Anthony Julius, *Transgressions: The Offences of Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002).

cannot be positioned as origins on a historical *telos*. As a dynamic and relational concept, transgression co-evolves in reciprocal dialogue with moral norms, institutional arrangements and legal forms — for example article 516 of the Austrian penal code that was repeatedly used to prosecute the Viennese Actionists, as will be discussed in chapter 1. As I hope to show, the extent to which an artwork can be called transgressive is tied to the fate of these arrangements and forms. An artwork cannot be designated transgressive once and for all, and filed in an art-historian's dossier of precedent cases.

Given these three broad characteristics — to recapitulate, that transgression is 1) relational, 2) bound up with (but irreducible to) morality, and 3) dynamic — a look at transgressive art necessarily entails the careful work of contextualisation that brings the laws, limits and moral norms of a particular socio-cultural context into sharper relief. As I have said, these laws and limits are themselves socially contingent forms, and any change in their nature brings about changes to the nature of transgression as well. If the first half of this thesis constitutes a critique of the transgressive ethico-aesthetic paradigm, this is crucially *not* a critique on the basis of moral categories of right or wrong. Rather it is an attempt to see what happens to such artworks when the socio-cultural co-ordinates of their production and reception change. Here the proposition put forward is a relatively simple one: that a 'strong' Symbolic order is a necessary precondition of transgression. The notion that the Symbolic order is in decline (a thesis inspired by the work of Lacan) seeks to account for a change in the logic of social organisation linked to capitalism.<sup>36</sup> While changes to the latter have had a visible effect on institutional arrangements and modes of production, it could be argued that they have also had a *less* visible effect on moral frameworks and the Symbolic bonds that mediate relations between people. This is not to say that laws, prohibitions, or cultural norms have ceased to exist in the contexts I engage with - contemporary society is

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<sup>36</sup> The phrase 'decline of the Symbolic' is used throughout this thesis as an umbrella term to describe a number of different changes in the way the Symbolic functions. It appears scattered across Lacanian inspired English language scholarship, but nowhere elaborated at any length. See Veronique Voruz, 'Ethics and Morality in the Time of the Decline of the Symbolic', *Psychoanalytical Notebooks*, 25 (2012), 167-178 and Neal H. Bruss, 'Lacan and Literature: Imaginary Objects and Social Order', *The Massachusetts Review*, 22:1 (1981), 62-92. The idea can also be traced back to two essays by Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'The Effectiveness of Symbols' and 'The Sorcerer and his Magic', where the author discusses the power of symbols in magical rites. The social consensus that surrounds the techniques of a particular shaman, Lévi-Strauss argues, is based on its relationship to wider systems of meaning that attempt to make sense of the world and preserve consistency in their systematic functioning. Magic constitutes a language, 'whose function is to provide a socially authorized translation of phenomena'. (pp. 184-185). At first gloss, the term 'decline of the Symbolic' could be said to describe a situation when this authorisation ebbs away, not simply because it is replaced by faith in the power of another language or symbolic system, but because of a more general decline in faith itself. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963).

arguably more densely regulated than ever before - but rather that the way authority percolates through them has changed, for better or worse.

If the fixed anchoring points of the Symbolic have indeed become untethered, then this undoubtedly also has effects on the production and reception of transgressive art. This argument, if correct, should not be used to lure artists into further dialectical games. Attempts to outmaneuver capitalism by somehow transgressing transgression itself often result in little more than ironic over-identification with norms and prohibitions.<sup>37</sup> A more pressing task is to look for alternative ethico-aesthetic paradigms that are emerging today. Rather than mourn the eclipse of a strong Symbolic order, this new paradigm may allow a space for the subject to be preserved through its occlusion.

### A Preface to the Sinthome

Moving beyond a critique of transgression, part 2 will focus its energy on developing an alternative ethico-aesthetic paradigm. Taking my cue from a similar shift away from transgression that occurs in Lacan's seminars, in this half of the thesis I will draw on the resources his later work has to offer.

Largely overlooked in the secondary literature, Lacan's late theoretical enterprise crystallises around the concept of the 'sinthome', and much of chapter 4 will be dedicated to piecing together the fragmentary exposition it is given in the unpublished seminar *Joyce the Sinthome*.<sup>38</sup> To give an initial gloss on this concept, the sinthome represents a reformulation of the classical psychoanalytic concept of the symptom, so that it no longer represents a message to be deciphered, or a metaphoric product of the unconscious, but a subjective creation that holds Lacan's three orders of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real together. Lacan hypothesises that Joyce's writing had a sinthomatic function for the author, creating a 'prosthetic' ego that allowed his psychic world to knot together. The expression 'knot together' is used here advisedly, for in addition to his reading of Joyce's text, it is by means of an engagement with the topology of knots that Lacan elaborates his concept of the sinthome. Insofar as

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<sup>37</sup> This is the position Anthony Julius puts forward in *Transgressions*, where he invites the reader to 'contemplate the vertiginous thought that the exceeding of boundaries itself represents a notional boundary to be exceeded.' (p. 198).

<sup>38</sup> This seminar has been published in French as Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan: Livre XXIII, Le Sinthome*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005). An official translation of the seminar has yet to be published in English. Throughout this thesis I will be quoting from an unpublished translation by Cormac Gallagher. To facilitate cross-referencing between the two, the original date that Lacan delivered his seminar will be provided. For sake of consistency, this information will also be provided when Lacan's other seminars are quoted, even those whose translations have been officially published in English.

topology focuses on geometrical figures that withstand continuous deformation, Lacan uses it to model processes of subjective change that stave off the devastating effects of a psychotic break.

The twin preoccupations of Joyce and topology that guide Lacan's final work could be seen as a distraction from the main focus of this thesis. However, when they are viewed as tools for thinking about processes of subjectivation, I would argue the subject of ethics once again comes into play. Put otherwise, Lacan's engagement with both Joyce and the topology of knots supplies tools for answering the question 'how might one live?' Insofar as these tools factor in artistic creation, they also bear on the domain of aesthetics. Furthermore, the implications of this ethico-aesthetic enterprise, I would argue, amount to nothing less than a non-oedipal reformulation of psychoanalysis itself. This of course is what Lacan's one-time student Félix Guattari would advance under the banner of schizoanalysis.<sup>39</sup> In part 2 I attempt to show that a partial synthesis between the two thinkers is possible. This attempt cuts against the grain of most contemporary scholarship on either Lacan or Guattari, which, with a few exceptions, erects persistent barriers to thinking through their work in combination.<sup>40</sup> Despite the

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<sup>39</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012). Much of this thesis could indeed be filtered through a certain reading of *Anti-Oedipus* — in particular, the notion of a 'decline in the Symbolic' has a strong relation to the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of deterritorialisation — yet to do so would fundamentally change the character of the argument in a number of ways. Firstly, a Lacanian approach scales back the sheer exuberance for deterritorialising flows that *Anti-Oedipus* unleashes, considering processes of subjectivation that are processual in a sustainable way. Secondly, it makes historical claims that are both more modest and more empirically grounded than those made in *Anti-Oedipus* — taking into account socio-symbolic changes that (in chapters 1-3 at least) have taken place over the last 50 years in specific places. By contrast, the processes of deterritorialisation discussed by Deleuze and Guattari are linked to a macro-historical transition between three 'social machines' in *Anti-Oedipus*: the savage-territorial, the barbarian-despotic and the civilized-capitalist. While these molar forms are not stages of development in any straightforward historical materialist sense (the reader is told, in an inversion of the Marxist formulation, that 'capitalism has haunted all forms of society' (p. 164)), in certain respects they are nevertheless linked to historically situated social formations that span vast stretches of history. A final reason for adopting a Lacanian approach rather than one inspired by *Anti-Oedipus* concerns the way in which their respective oeuvres historically develop in contact with the social. Fundamentally, it is easier to treat Lacan's work as a praxis that develops in response to social change, not only because of its yearly development in his seminars, but also because Lacanian psychoanalysis is attuned to the appearance of new symptoms presented in the clinic, which in turn, requires an attunement to new social formations that influence them. For the purposes of my argument, this has the secondary benefit of highlighting a shift *away* from transgression that simultaneously occurs in Lacan's work and in artistic practice, and the way in which this shift is conditioned by social change. On the notion of Lacanian psychoanalysis as a praxis, see Jacques-Alain Miller, 'Psychoanalysis in Close Touch with the Social' <<http://www.lacan.com/jamsocial.html>> [accessed 01/06/2015].

<sup>40</sup> These boundaries have, for example, been reinforced by Slavoj Žižek, who in *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* (Oxon: Routledge, 2004) claims that 'one can only regret that the Anglo-Saxon reception of Deleuze (and, also, the political impact of Deleuze) is predominantly that of a "guattarized" Deleuze' (p. 18). Guattari's crime, for Žižek, would seem to consist in ridding Deleuze of the Lacanian influence his early work attests to, and introducing a logic of becoming as production, rather

need to overcome these boundaries and deal with the complex relationship between Lacan and Guattari's work, this thesis remains primarily focused on the relationship between ethics and aesthetics in contemporary art. For this reason any synthesis is made on pragmatic grounds, and in chapter 4 Guattari's work will be enlisted as a means to solve a particular problem in Lacan's late work linked to his privileging of signification over and above other semiotic forms. This is the product of a structuralist inheritance that while stripped of its universal pretensions, nevertheless persists in upholding the same signifying cut. When it comes to Lacan's analysis of Joyce and the sinthomatic formation that his work manifests, this has the knock-on effect that lends his work a certain a-sociality; incapable, according to the psychoanalyst, of having group effects. By contrast, Guattari (writing with Negri) stakes a claim for the 'the collective creation of subjectivity through individuals'.<sup>41</sup> As I hope to show by engaging with Guattari's work, this is a process that has the capacity to occur through a-signifying means.

Despite its drawbacks, there are numerous advantages of drawing on Lacan's late work, not least the fact that the concept of the sinthome is 'conditioned' or contaminated by Joyce's works of literary art. This thesis could therefore be considered to bring about a second process of contamination, considering and developing a 'sinthomatic' approach to specific works of contemporary art.<sup>42</sup> To encourage contamination of this sort is to take a necessarily irreverent stance towards theoretical conventions. After a careful reading of *Seminar XXIII*, I attempt to add new, creative inflexions to the concept of the sinthome by discussing the ethico-aesthetic concepts of 'repair' in chapter 5 and 'fabulation' in chapter 6. The concept of repair is inspired by

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than becoming an effect. Among the studies that seek to avoid such stark characterisations and find a productive engagement between the two thinkers are Simon O' Sullivan, *On the Production of Subjectivity: Five Diagrams of the Finite-Infinite Relation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) and Janell Watson, *Guattari's Diagrammatic Thought: Writing Between Lacan and Deleuze* (London: Continuum, 2009).

<sup>41</sup> Félix Guattari and Antonio Negri, *Communists Like Us* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1990), p. 19.

<sup>42</sup> Of the two studies that also make use of Lacan's concept of the sinthome in the discussion of artworks, Marc James Léger, *Brave New Avant Garde* (Alresford: Zero, 2012) is problematic insofar as it scales up psychoanalytic concepts to the level of the social without providing any of the necessary scaffolding to support them. (p. 121) What he calls 'sinthomeopathic practice' mysteriously becomes a feature of neo-avant-garde attempts at institutional transformation, which Léger opposes to a Deleuzo-Guattarian position that supposedly calls 'for an "exodus" from the established institutions of cultural production' (p. 3) In this case Léger defines sinthomeopathy negatively on the basis of old battle lines drawn between different schools of continental philosophy, seeming to forget that it was Guattari who coined the term 'institutional analysis' and that his work at la Borde in many ways adheres to much that he valorises in contemporary avant garde art practice. The second study, an edited book by Parveen Adams entitled *Art: Sublimation or Symptom* (London: Karnac, 2003), hews more closely to the Lacanian text. This means that many of the chapter contributions follow up existing leads, for example providing additional (Lacanian) readings of James Joyce. Two chapters by Adams herself use the concept of the sinthome to discuss David Cronenberg's *Crash* and the photography of Joel-Peter Witkin respectively, and what emerges is an argument that attempts to expand the concept of the sinthome to account for 'group effects', an attempt I make myself in chapter 4 via a different route.

the sculptures and installations of Kader Attia - an artist whose work testifies to a messy set of interactions between peoples and cultures. An attempt to think through the ethico-aesthetic implications of Attia's work will allow me to expand the notion of a 'repair' beyond its quotidian meaning. More than just a set of reflections on material practices of repair, this chapter will mobilise the concept to explore its place as a middle term between change and continuity, sameness and difference, and matter and meaning. Ultimately, it will be claimed, the *sinthome* is a concept that is inextricably linked to processes of repair. Chapter 6 will depart in a similar fashion from concrete works of art – in this case by the artists Dora Garcia and Pilvi Takala – in order to consider practices of deception, fiction and fabulation (as well as the differences between them). Here Bakhtin's work will reenter the discussion, as his concept of 'gay deception' is mobilised to account for the critical effects such experiments with truth can have. As well as having a critical focus, I intend to show that deception, fiction and fabulation can also have a constructive dimension, which creates effects that can in turn feed back into the production of subjectivity. While both chapters include extended analyses of works of art, they do not so much constitute 'case studies' as opportunities for the broader implications of a post-transgressive ethico-aesthetic paradigm to be elaborated.

This could also be said of the first three chapters as regards the ethico-aesthetic paradigm of transgression. Focused discussions of a number of artworks by the Viennese Actionists in chapter 1, The Cinema of Transgression and Paul McCarthy in chapter 2, and Artur Żmijewski in chapter 3, will each offer up different logics of transgression. The critique of these logics will progressively build from chapter to chapter, amounting to a more general critique of the ethico-aesthetic paradigm of transgression. This critique will be based on the assertion that such transgressive logics are undermined by a 'decline in the Symbolic' – a notion that will run through each of the chapters of part 1, and also provide a backdrop to part 2. Before this argument can be made, the work itself must be described, beginning with a notorious performance that took place in a cellar in Austria in 1962.

**Part 1**  
**Transgression**

## Chapter 1

### Transgression: The Dialectical and the Liminal

With the formality of a radio announcement Hermann Nitsch described the intended content of an early performance: 'On the 4<sup>th</sup> June, 1962, I shall disembowel, tear and pull to pieces a dead lamb'. This statement of intent is the opening line of an early text by the artist entitled 'The O.M. Theatre'.<sup>43</sup> The essay continues by means of a string of explanations and justifications that hinge on the dialectical play of opposites. In Nitsch's universe blasphemy provides access to the sacred, brutality leads to ecstasy, and artifice collides with the highest of ontological truths.

Along with Günter Brus, Otto Mühl, and Rudolf Schwarzkogler, Nitsch was a key figure in a group that came to be known as the Viennese Actionists, an appellation that was not generated by the artists themselves, but by Peter Wiebel in his 1970 co-edited book of the same name.<sup>44</sup> Within its short lifespan of just 6 years (1962 - 1968), the group performed acts that shocked the Austrian public and resulted in almost continuous criminal prosecution throughout the decade. Actions regularly incorporated animal carcasses, mock crucifixions, bodily fluids, and bloodletting. Just as Nitsch's first statement about his work contains a string of oppositions, the Actionist's back catalogue as a whole is underpinned by a strong dialectical undercurrent. And yet this undercurrent periodically gives way to another, altogether more complicated logic of transgression, whereby a 'liminal' space beyond both transgression and the law is momentarily revealed.

In order to account for these different logics of transgression, the focus in this chapter will narrow on two different readings of Sophocles' *Antigone*, the first by Hegel, and the second by Lacan. At the same time, it will be necessary to place the work of the Viennese Actionists in context. The relevance of post-war Austria as a backdrop to the group's actions has been well documented in the art-historical literature on the subject. This literature often focuses quite narrowly on the socio-political events that took place

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<sup>43</sup> Hermann Nitsch, 'The O.M. Theatre', in *Theories and Documents on Contemporary Art*, ed. by Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz (Berkeley: University of California press, 1996), pp. 747-748 (p. 747). 'O.M.' stands for Orgies Mysteries, the collective title for a body of actions Nitsch has choreographed and performed over the last 50 years.

<sup>44</sup> *Wien. Bildkompendium Wiener Aktionismus und Film* ed. by Peter Weibel and VALIE EXPORT (Frankfurt am Main: Kohlkunstverlag, 1970).

before and during the group's short, intense life span.<sup>45</sup> While this is essential to understanding the Actionist's significance, it comes at the expense of thinking about how Austrian society has changed since then, and how the reception of the group's work has changed with it. By widening the parameters of this historical bracket, I will attempt to show that a change has occurred in the way the state reacts to transgressive art, and draw from it a lesson about the diminished force of transgression in the Austrian context. As the only group member still working in Austria today, largely in the same artistic idiom as he did in the 1960s, a more narrow focus on the work of Hermann Nitsch will provide a useful vehicle to look at this change.

### The Dialectics of Transgression

While the majority of part 1 follows the Deleuzian injunction to look for 'subterranean differential mechanisms' beyond dialectics, when it comes to the work of the Actionists it is worth first lingering above ground.<sup>46</sup> An initial focus on the dialectics of transgression is warranted not only by the theoretical rationalisations produced by Nitsch, which show a strong tendency to think in terms of opposites being reconciled, nor simply in the elements of the performances themselves, but also in the relationships between the works and the state apparatus they inevitably came into contact with.<sup>47</sup> This relationship will be easier to discern once a specific work has been described in detail.

Nitsch's short text quoted above served as an announcement for the group's first collective action entitled *The Blood Organ*, which took place in the summer of 1962 in a cellar belonging to Otto Mühl in the Perinetgasse district of Vienna. Nitsch, Mühl and Frohner announced that they would be interning themselves in the cellar for 3 days and nights without food, a newly constructed brick wall blocking the entrance and thereby preventing them from leaving. In fact the artists had made sure there was a back door allowing free access for the duration of the performance. Once inside the cellar, Nitsch alternated between working on the dead lamb, using his hands, teeth and tools to tear, chew and slice the animal, and creating a nine-metre long drip and pour painting. Mühl and Frohner created a number of sculptural assemblages individually that then merged into one another. At the end of this period, the public and members of the press were

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<sup>45</sup> The main example of this approach can be found in *Vienna Actionism: Art and Upheaval in 1960s Vienna*, ed. by Eva Badura-Triska and Hubert Klocker (Cologne: Walter König, 2012).

<sup>46</sup> Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 157.

<sup>47</sup> In Nitsch's performances the tendency to think in terms of opposites can be seen most vividly in the ascription of sharply delineated passive and active roles to performers, a dynamic that carries connotations of the master-slave dialectic and sado-masochistic elements.

assembled to witness the literal and metaphorical 'opening' of the show. A woman wearing high heels and a ball gown was instructed to kick down the brick wall separating the performers from their audience and the flashlights of the press photographers revealed the results of three days of activity. In a matter of hours the police had arrived, and the exhibition was promptly closed.<sup>48</sup>

This first, brutal performance by the group should be considered in part a reaction to an Austrian social sphere that had not been fully de-Nazified, and an art field that Gerald Raunig describes as 'rigidly conservative.'<sup>49</sup> In this context the choice of the cellar as a site for the action is significant. It both served as an approximation of the kinds of spaces in which the victims of Nazism met their death, and represented the physical corollary of a psychological 'depth' to explore. Upon entering the space the artists were not only descending into a cellar, but also immersing themselves in the flux of repressed libidinal flows in the depths of the psyche. When the performance came to an end, this private space was opened to the glare of the public spotlight, and the repressed libidinal energies were supposedly unleashed for the psychic good of Austrian society. Such therapeutic intentions were openly declared by Nitsch before the performance, when he wrote that 'Through my artistic production [...] I take upon myself the apparently negative, unsavoury, perverse, obscene, the passion and the hysteria of the act of sacrifice so that YOU are spared the sullyng, shaming descent into the extreme.'<sup>50</sup> Nitsch's talk of a 'descent' highlights his fidelity to a depth model of the psyche, and his writings freely synthesise the work of Jung, Freud and Reich – the latter two being intellectuals the National Socialists had expelled from Austria.<sup>51</sup> Above all else, however, it is a fairly narrow appropriation of the Freudian theory of abreaction that underpins the work, whereby pent-up instincts are released in a supposedly liberating discharge.<sup>52</sup> In the now voluminous literature on the group, following up such stated psychoanalytical intentions has, perhaps unsurprisingly, become a dominant

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<sup>48</sup> Philip Ursprung, "'CATHOLIC TASTES": Hurting and healing the body in Viennese Actionism in the 1960s', in *Performing the Body / Performing the Text*, ed. by Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 129-142 (p. 136).

<sup>49</sup> Gerald Raunig, *Art and Revolution: Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), p. 188.

<sup>50</sup> Hermann Nitsch, 'The O.M. Theatre', p. 747.

<sup>51</sup> See Kerstin Barnick-Braun 'Vienna Actionism and Psychoanalysis: Freud, Jung, Reich', in *Vienna Actionism: Art and Upheaval*, pp. 67-68 (p. 67). This quote also highlights the Christian motif of sacrifice that permeates Nitsch's work.

<sup>52</sup> The Actionist's reading could be considered narrow because it positions violence, sex (almost exclusively heterosexual in their work), and the fundamental desire for excess as *natural* human instincts that are subsequently repressed by an artificial culture, ignoring the subtleties the term *Trieb* [drive – often wrongly translated as instinct] carries in Freud's work, and the more constructivist interpretations these subtleties have generated.

means of interpreting their output.<sup>53</sup> Rather than follow these arguments myself, it will be more instructive to look at the way in which they are mobilised as justification for the work's transgressive content.

Transgressive art has historically been justified in a range of ways, perhaps most frequently through recourse to discourses of aesthetic formalism. This justification was popularised almost a century before by artists such as Zola, whose disingenuous defence of Manet in 1867 implored audiences that 'He should be judged simply as a painter'.<sup>54</sup> Just as a purely formal reading of *Olympia* pales in the face of the painting's subject matter (not only a naked prostitute, but a naked prostitute whose confrontational gaze looks out of the picture plane at a time when the average Parisian viewer was probably a visitor of brothels himself), so too would a purely formal reading of *The Blood Organ* be patently insufficient. The Actionists were undoubtedly aware of this, and it is uncommon to find defences of their work that claim its formal qualities outweigh any offence incurred. Rather than appeal to formalism to justify their work's transgressive content, the Actionists rode the coattails of the still burgeoning discourse of psychoanalysis. To the rational, repressive law of the state they opposed a law of the psyche, which functioned as a repository of 'instinctual' energies and repressed traumas. The therapeutic benefit of working through these traumas and channelling these energies was upheld over and above the right of the state to maintain an order that was deemed repressive.

The psychoanalytic rationale for the Actionist's work was supplemented by a number of religious and mythical motifs, many of which testify to an encounter with the work of Nietzsche. Nitsch writes that 'The mauled Dionysus merges with the crucified Christ. Dionysus and Apollo unite in the person of Christ [...] A chain of ideal figures, dreamed out of humankind, whose actions and assertions guided the community, becomes manifest.'<sup>55</sup> If the first move is to invoke a secular law of psychic functioning, this is then both spiritualised and plotted on a grand historical narrative by means of references to religious figures and motifs drawn from a classically Eurocentric vision of

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<sup>53</sup> For example Eva Badura-Triska, 'Hermann Nitsch's *Orgies Mysteries Theater*' in *Vienna Actionism: Art and Upheaval*, pp. 33-34 (p. 33).

<sup>54</sup> Emile Zola, 'A New Manner in Painting: Edouard Manet' in *Portrait of Manet by Himself and his Contemporaries* ed. by Pierre Courthion and Pierre Callier (London: Cassell, 1960), pp. 13-39 (p.18). This line of defence was also notably adopted by lawyers representing Cincinnati Contemporary Art Center, who had obscenity charges brought against them in 1990 for a display of Robert Mapplethorpe's work in 'The Perfect Moment' exhibition (1989). See Daniel McClean, *The Trials of Art* (London: Ridinghouse, 2007)

<sup>55</sup> Hermann Nitsch, *das Orgien Mysterien Theater 2, Theoretische Schriften, Partiturentwurf des 6 Tagespiels* (Munich: Chiessa und Morra, 1976), pp. 118-20, quoted in *Vienna Actionism: Art and Upheaval*, p. 33.

world history. By marshalling the language of psychoanalysis, as well as drawing continuity between their work and the historical rites of Dionysus and Christian imagery, the Actionists oppose the written, juridical laws of the state with a competing right, one that they enact in the very interests of the Austrian collective psyche, the roll call of historical precedents justifying their intent.

This relationship between two competing rights is mirrored by a second dialectical play that can be discerned in *The Blood Organ* itself. In this performance the wall separating the cellar from the street is not simply an analogue for the ego's barricade against the chaotic libidinal energies of the Id — the surface against the depth — it is also a temporary membrane between a group of artists wishing to break with the culturally sanctioned norms of behaviour, and the state apparatus that would wish to keep them in place. In short, it is the physical manifestation of the boundary separating the law from its inverse: transgression occurring when the two come into contact. By staging this moment of contact between two forces — one residing in the private sphere of the cellar, the other in the public sphere of the street — the Actionists sought to expose the strong arm of the state and jump-start the juridico-legal powers it wielded. Phillip Ursprung even argues that 'the state was the main addressee of Austrian Actionist politics, [and] the police were the “ideal” audience.<sup>56</sup> The group's repeated brushes with the law, Ursprung goes on to argue, effectively compensated them for the lack of official recognition from the art world. Whether or not recognition was the underlying motivation of the group's engagement with the law is questionable, but the point remains that there was a dynamic of engagement built into the very structure of the performances themselves. Daub furthers this point in a discussion of the photographs of the actions that were commissioned by the group and often later used as evidence in court:

[T]he performance, albeit hermetic and exclusive in its conception, has its scandalisation, its submission before an uncomprehending public, and its criminalisation by an overweening state apparatus already built in. It wants to be preserved by and integrated into the punitive and penal public discourses through which Austrian cultural politics has frequently and traditionally proceeded.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ursprung, “CATHOLIC TASTES”, p. 137.

<sup>57</sup> Adrian Daub, 'Hermann Nitsch — Austria in the Age of Post-Scandalous Culture' *German Life and Letters*, 67:2 (2014), 260-278 (p. 270). Judging by their decision to include an appendix listing all incidents where the Actionists came into contact with the police in their 1970 compendium (cited above), Weibel and EXPORT seemed to have shared the opinion that these encounters were central to the works themselves.

For Daub this argument extends to the group's choice of titles such as *Blood Orgy*, which when performed in London supplied the press with a ready-made sensationalist headline - the front of the Evening Standard reading 'Fleet Street "Blood Orgy" — 2 For Trial'.<sup>58</sup> Here the choice of location for the performance also suggests that the Actionists saw the press as an important section of their audience, or at least a conduit to reach a wider public. The titles of the works themselves seemed ready made for the newspapers, and given Nitsch in particular has cited lyric poetry as one of the influences on his work, it is perhaps surprising to find such wilfully direct titles making up the majority of his back-catalogue.

In the brief account of the Actionist's work given thus far, it is easy to recognise the play of opposites emerging in their interactions with the state and the press. But to what extent is the opposition truly dialectical, in the sense given the word by Hegel? To answer this question it is worth turning to the latter's analysis of Sophocles' *Antigone*, where the central character also rallies against the repressive logic of the state.<sup>59</sup>

### A Tragic Fracture

In Hegel's discussion of the play a fundamental tension is set up between the universal and the particular, the state and the family, and human and divine law. In each of these oppositions it is not simply the case that one term falls on the side of right and the other wrong. Rather, just as the Actionists claimed to be acting in the interests of Austria's psychic wellbeing, the fundamental structure of tragedy for Hegel is always that of competing rights. Both positions are justifiable; Antigone's justification comes from divine (family) law, while Creon's comes from the law of the city. In the words of Walter Kauffman, Hegel's central insight was that 'at the center of the greatest tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles we find not a tragic hero but a tragic collision, and that the conflict is not between good and evil but between one-sided positions, each of which embodies some good.'<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Antigone is notably absent from Nitsch's list of references to Greek myth and tragedy, which include 'the unmaning of Attis, the killing of Adonis, the killing of Orpheus, the ritual castration, [...] the blinding of Oedipus'. If the mythic images embodied in these tales are being positioned as emblematic of deep psychological structure of humanity *itself*, Antigone's absence could be taken as revealing a particular gender bias in this macro-historical narrative. Hermann Nitsch, *das Orgien Mysterien Theater 2*, p. 87, quoted in *Vienna Actionism: Art and Upheaval*, p. 33.

<sup>60</sup> Walter Kaufmann, *Tragedy and Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 201-202.

In each case the ‘good’ involved leads to catastrophe precisely because the claim is one-sided. Both Creon and Antigone adhere to one value system alone, and this blinds them to the other’s competing right. As Hegel writes, each

sees right only on one side and wrong on the other, that consciousness which belongs to the divine law sees in the other side only the violence of human caprice, while that which holds to human law sees in the other only the self-will and disobedience of the individual who insists on being his own authority.<sup>61</sup>

It would be wrong to suggest that the Actionists were similarly one-sided in their transgressive pursuits, but the language Hegel uses is nonetheless striking in the context of their work. Not only were many of the actions precisely intended to critique 'the violence of human caprice', Nitsch's O.M. theatre being particularly illustrative here, but in their wilful criminality the group also asserted the right of groups and individuals to act on their own authority, circumventing the authority of the state.<sup>62</sup> And yet if one reads further into Hegel's analysis of the play, it becomes clear that it is not simply a question of opposed sides, but of sides whose reliance on each other has somehow been disavowed. Antigone and Creon are in fact constituted of one and the same ‘ethical substance’. This implies that the two positions the characters embody do not exist independently from one another before being brought into conflict. They are inseparable in the first place, as Hegel makes clear:

Neither of the two is by itself absolutely valid; human law proceeds in its living process from the divine, the law valid on earth from that of the nether world, the conscious from the unconscious, mediation from immediacy – and equally returns whence it came. The power of the nether world, on the other hand, has its actual existence on earth; through consciousness, it becomes existence and activity.<sup>63</sup>

In other words, human law is in the first place derivative of divine law and should not disavow the root of its own power. Conversely, divine law is by its very nature ‘unconscious’, ‘unwritten’ and ‘unmediated’, and therefore requires human law as a conduit through which to find expression. Human law gives strength and light to ‘the

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<sup>61</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 280.

<sup>62</sup> Numerous references to modern warfare were present in Nitsch's six-day staging of the O.M. Theatre in 1998, but perhaps the most redolent of the 'violence of human caprice' was the sight of two Panzer tanks repeatedly grinding over animal carcasses in a trench, pointlessly rolling back and forth on their caterpillar tracks.

<sup>63</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 275.

law of weakness and of darkness', and yet the law of 'force and publicity' (human law) is in the first place an offshoot from the divine.<sup>64</sup> The relationship between competing rights in *Antigone* is therefore more of a violent fracture of a single 'ethical substance' than a tragic collision of discrete elements. According to Hegel, both characters are blind precisely because they do not see the connection between the laws they invoke. In viewing the other's right as external to their own they unwittingly undermine the very foundation of their own position.

The interconnectedness of the competing rights that Antigone and Creon evoke in Hegel's analysis of the play is mirrored by the Actionist's entanglement with the Austrian state. Not only were the Actionists continually engaging the state as a potential audience, openly publicising their actions in the knowledge that this publicity would ultimately find its way into the hands of the authorities, they also made use of the press as a means to distribute and thereby amplify their message. As well as acting as an engine for the production of scandal (and discourse more generally) the press literately and metaphorically illuminated *The Blood Organ*. If, in Hegel's analysis, the unmediated divine law uses human law as a cypher, this dynamic finds its visual analogue in the illumination of the blood-spattered cellar by the flashlights of the press.

### Transgression at the Limits of Language

Nitsch's last public performance took place on the 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1967, when a particularly chaotic event in a Viennese restaurant entitled *Zock-Fest* ended in the arrival of two hundred riot police and their dogs.<sup>65</sup> The following year, the rest of the group participated in a notorious event at the University of Vienna entitled *Art and Revolution*. At the invitation of the Austrian Association of Socialist Students, Brus, Mühl, Peter Weibel and Oswald Wiener staged a series of provocations in a lecture theatre that began with a speech insulting the recently murdered Robert Kennedy, as well as the Austrian minister of finance Stephen Koren (Mühl and Weibel), continued with Brus cutting his chest with razor blades, drinking his own urine, defecating on stage and smearing himself with his own faeces while singing the national anthem, and ended in Mühl whipping a masochist and drinking some beers before organising a pissing contest

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., pp. 286-287.

<sup>65</sup> Susan Jarosi, 'Traumatic Subjectivity and the Continuum of History: Hermann Nitsch's Orgies Myseries Theater', *Art History*, 36:4 (2013), 834–863 (p. 844). For a full description of this action see Otmar Bauer, *Autographische Notizen zu Wiener Actionismus, Studentenrevolte, Underground, Kommune Friedrichshof, Mühl, Ottos Sekte* (Meria Enzerdorf: Rosesner, 2004), pp.18-20, quoted in Raunig, *Art and Revolution*, pp.194-196.

on stage. All the while Oswald Wiener attempted to deliver a lecture on consciousness and cybernetics and Weibel set his arm on fire whilst giving a talk on the Leninist question 'What is to be done?'<sup>66</sup>

As the apogee of the group's provocations, the *Art and Revolution* event resulted in a series of prompt exits from the Austrian public sphere. After relocating to Berlin in the summer of 1967 and meeting the psychologist and poet Beate König, Nitsch purchased Prinzendorf castle in 1971 (largely with König's money), which would become the focus of his energies for the next 40 years and the staging ground for his *Orgies Mysteries Theatre*.<sup>67</sup> Mühl spent four weeks in prison for flagellating the masochist, then established his Action-Analytical Commune in Burgenland, which survived until 1990 when he was tried and sentenced to six-and-a-half years in prison for child abuse. Following the action at Vienna University Brus received a six-month sentence for disturbing public order and violating the Austrian flag and in order to avoid the charges fled to West Berlin where he remained until the late 1970s when his sentence was reduced to a fine. In 1969 Schwarzkogler either fell or jumped to his death from the window of his apartment in Vienna.

This series of escapes following the *Art and Revolution* event is mirrored in many ways by the Actionist's repeated efforts to escape the limits of language in their performances. In a quite literal sense, the physical actions performed in the *Art and Revolution* event and the sheer chaos they generated not only rendered Weiner's verbal contribution inaudible, it also sought to parrot the discourse of the students themselves, by reducing their serious-minded ruminations on the relationship between art and politics to an on-stage pissing competition. In both cases the verbal was very much displaced by the physical – also illustrated in the use of screaming and noise in various Actionist performances.<sup>68</sup> These examples highlight the drive to exceed the limits of language in the group's work. The performances of Nitsch notably exclude any textual or verbal component, and in his writing the voyage to the far reaches of language is given a quasi-mystical character.<sup>69</sup>

In many ways this characteristic resonates with Hegel's reading of *Antigone*, insofar as a connection between the unwritten and the divine is established in the latter's appeal to the Gods. However, a more illuminating point of reference can be found in

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<sup>66</sup> A more detailed account can be found in Raunig, *Art and Revolution*, pp. 197-198.

<sup>67</sup> Jarosi, 'Traumatic Subjectivity' p. 844.

<sup>68</sup> Adrian Daub, "'The Abyss of the Scream' – The Music of Hermann Nitsch', in *Blood Orgies: Hermann Nitsch in America*, ed. by Aaron Levy (Philadelphia: Slough Books, 2008) pp. 35–72.

<sup>69</sup> Hermann Nitsch, *Orgien, Mysterien, Theater / Orgies, Mysteries, Theatre* (Darmstadt: März-Verlag, 1969).

Lacan's reading of *Antigone*, conducted in *Seminar VII*. Here it is not my intention to add yet another interpretation to the secondary literature on either Lacan or Sophocles. Numerous book length studies on *Seminar VII* already exist.<sup>70</sup> What follows is as much a 'raiding' as it is a reading; a look at this seminar justified on the basis that it will allow me to elaborate a second logic of transgression at play in the work of the Actionists.

The main significance of Lacan's analysis of the play is that it dispels the notion of two competing rights. In this way it shatters the symmetry of Hegel's reading. Lacan emphasises that *Antigone* is not a play about one law against another – the law of the state against the law of the family, backed up by the law of the gods – but rather a play about one law against *something else*. This 'something else' is perpetually encircled in the play, and the symmetry is broken decisively towards the end, when Antigone gives up justifying her actions on the basis of divine law and yet continues on her trajectory towards death. 'What law of the mighty Gods have I transgressed?' she asks, 'Why look to the heavens any more?'<sup>71</sup> With these words Antigone ceases to invoke the laws of the Gods as the basis for her actions. After initially transgressing Creon's edict with this law on her side, she now wonders whether she has in fact transgressed *both* laws – Creon's *and* the God's – and yet this does not deter her from insisting on the necessity of her actions.

In turning away from the heavens Antigone does not however use a secular principle of justice or morality in her brother's defence. For Lacan, Antigone is 'autonomous'.<sup>72</sup> The 'something else' that she opposes to the law is not something that can be tempered into the measure of an action's moral worth. Lacan introduces Antigone 'with a view to finding something other than a lesson on morality.'<sup>73</sup> Her action neither follows nor produces a law, unwritten or otherwise.

Creon could not be more different in the way he provides justification for his edict. In contrast to Antigone's autonomy, he marshals the whole juridical apparatus of the state in defence of his actions, claiming to be acting in the neutral interests of maintaining order. With a rationally codified system of norms and morals at his

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<sup>70</sup> See for example Charles Freeland, *Antigone, in Her Unbearable Splendor: New Essays on Jacques Lacan's The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (New York: SUNY, 2013); Frances L. Restuccia, *Amorous Acts: Lacanian Ethics in Modernism, Film, and Queer Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); Calumn Neill, *Without Ground: Lacanian Ethics and the Assumption of Subjectivity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014); Marc de Kessel, *Eros and Ethics: Reading Jacques Lacan's Seminar VII* (New York: SUNY, 2009).

<sup>71</sup> Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus* (London: Penguin, 1984), p. 106 (lines 1013-14).

<sup>72</sup> Lacan comments on the adjective 'autonomous', used by the chorus, in *Seminar VII*, p. 282 (June 8 1960).

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 307.

disposal, he has ‘the good’ on his side. Within the logic of the play, his edict to prevent Antigone’s brother Polynices from receiving a proper burial would have been perfectly understandable to a Greek audience. Polynices had, after all, led an invasion against the city of Thebes. Why should public enemy number one be granted funeral honours by the state he sought to conquer? And yet if the edict is filtered through Lacan’s interpretation, it begins to seem that Creon, while not unreasonable in the justification for his actions (indeed, reason is part of the problem), has nevertheless overplayed his hand.

For Lacan, the significance of forbidding Polynices a proper burial can be seen in the notion, borrowed from de Sade, of a ‘second death’.<sup>74</sup> If a first death is biological, a second death is Symbolic. Needless to say, the purpose of a gravestone is to preserve the memory of a person’s life, marking their biological death, while ensuring the continued existence of their name as a signifier within the Symbolic. Creon’s edict can be interpreted as an attempt to remove the signifier ‘Polynices’ from public memory altogether, as if he had never existed. By forbidding him a proper burial, with a name above his grave, Creon effectively condemns Polynices to a second death. The reason he fails is essentially because all he has at his disposal are Symbolic means. The law is always Symbolic, working with language and legislation, and Creon’s blindness consists in not being able to see this fact. He stands for ‘the law without limits, the sovereign law, the law that goes beyond or crosses the limit.’<sup>75</sup> As Lacan points out, ‘The good cannot reign over all without an excess whose fatal consequences are revealed to us in tragedy.’<sup>76</sup>

To summarise this line of argument, the play contains not one but *two* transgressions, each carried out by one of the two main characters. In standing up for her brother, Antigone transgresses the rational and codified law of the state. For his part, Creon’s transgression consists in attempting to extend this law too far: transgressing the limits of the law *through* the law. How do these transgressions relate to one another, if not through dialectical opposition?

To answer this question, it is necessary to remember that Lacanian theory posits the existence of an order beyond the limits of language where meaning breaks down, an order outside the Symbolic order, but which nevertheless sustains the desire that inhabits it. This order, for Lacan, is the Real. The point at which the two transgressions of Creon and Antigone meet is precisely the point at which the Symbolic and the Real

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<sup>74</sup> Marquis de Sade, *Juliette* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), p. 772.

<sup>75</sup> Lacan, *Seminar VII*, p. 259 (June 1 1960).

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, p. 319.

come into contact. In her specific mode of transgression, Antigone guards the ‘criminal excess’ that cannot be absorbed into rational law. In the words of her sister Ismene, Antigone is ‘in love with impossibility’, which, following Lacan’s analysis, can be interpreted as meaning she is in love with the Real.<sup>77</sup> If Creon’s edict represents an attempt to extend the Symbolic over the Real, eliminating the latter, Antigone’s gesture is to halt this advance. In a final twist, this gesture is one that preserves a space for desire. By seeking the ‘good of all’, Creon is effectively trying to make sure that the law prevails over desire, including his own. Antigone, by contrast, protects the Real that sustains the desire in the Symbolic.

Lacan’s reading of *Antigone* is useful because it moves beyond a straightforward dialectic between the law and transgression. There is clearly something a lot more intricate at play, involving more than one transgression, and yet only one law that maintains its function as a principle of action (the second law of the Gods slowly melts away). Both transgressions take place at the point where the Symbolic and the Real meet, and yet each functions in a different way. The relationship between the two does not result in the ‘sublation’ of one by the other, as it might in a dialectical model. What is left is a peculiar kind of opposition *without* synthesis: neither character triumphs. The nature of this relationship can be discerned more clearly by following up a reference to the visual device of anamorphosis Lacan discusses in *Seminar VII*.

### Anamorphic Actions

A few months prior to conducting his reading of the play, Lacan discusses anamorphosis with brief reference to Holbein’s famous painting *The Ambassadors*, before showing his audience a smaller example borrowed from his friend Jacques Prevert.<sup>78</sup> This last example consisted of a flat painted surface on which a mirrored cylinder is placed. Without the mirror, the image on the flat surface appears as an indecipherable smudge of paint. Yet when the cylinder is applied and both elements are looked at from the right position, a painting of the crucifixion by Reubens snaps into focus.

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<sup>77</sup> Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays*, p. 64.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166-7.



Figure. 1: Domenico Piola the Elder (1627-1703), *Anamorphosis of Rubens*, oil on canvas with mirrored cylinder.

The anamorphosis in question (figure 1) can be paired down to two essential components: a flat painted surface and a mirrored cylinder. For Lacan, the way these two components relate to one another bear directly on the effect tragedies such as *Antigone* have, and allow an alternative logic of transgression to be elaborated.

The starting point for these effects is the plot of the play. Breaking with Aristotle's theory of tragedy, according to which a highly complex chain of causes and effects suddenly explodes at the moment of the tragic hero's downfall, Lacan considers tragedy as operating on the basis of something initially more opaque.<sup>79</sup> Rather than a logical construction that can be followed as the narrative unfolds, for Lacan the plot of *Antigone* involves a number of confusing omens and events that no one character fully controls, and which the audience, unless they already know the story, would be hard pressed to fully understand. It is only once Antigone's actions reach their extreme limit that they snap into focus with a startling 'éclat'. In their modes of interaction, Lacan is comparing the two characters of *Antigone* to the two elements of the anamorphosis he has at his disposal, further filtering this through his conceptual categories. The plot loosely represents the flat painted surface. It is the Symbolic domain that Creon

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<sup>79</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* (London: Penguin Classics, 1997). This argument is made in de Kessel, *Eros and Ethics*, p. 210.

operates within. Insofar as this domain contains a series of confusing facts and events, it can be described as a set of signifiers without signifieds. It is only through the application of the mirrored cylinder to the flat painted surface that these signifiers stabilise and find their point of reference. Following this line of analysis, is it therefore possible to equate *Antigone* with the mirrored cylinder? For Lacan, rather than the cylinder itself, *Antigone* is rather the ‘victim at the center of the anamorphic cylinder of the tragedy’.<sup>80</sup> Or rather, *Antigone* passes into the centre of the cylinder by the end of the play, into the space of the Real.

Before showing how this relates to the work of the Viennese Actionists, it is worth looking further at the dynamics this anamorphic logic implies. For one, it is unidirectional. While the cylinder lends coherence to the meaningless smear of paint on the flat surface, the same cannot be said in reverse. The anamorphic cylinder does not reciprocate by reflecting its image back onto the smear below. All action tends towards the centre of the cylinder, which pulls characters and events into its gravitational field like a strange attractor. Both *Antigone* and *Creon* move towards this dark centre of the tragedy (albeit in different ways), they do not move in opposite directions, as Hegel’s reading of the play would imply.

Another significant point regarding anamorphosis in general, which can take forms other than the one illustrated above, is that it shows the process of representation in action; the passage from non-meaning to meaning coinciding with the ‘translation’ of the painted smear into the reflected image. Like a watch with its clockwork exposed, the painted surface stretches out in front of the cylinder, showing an observer the workings of its construction. Similarly, the play works in such a way to allow the limits of the Symbolic to be exposed, creating a time lag where signifiers momentarily fail to create recognisable meaning effects. The ethical significance of the play arguably lies not in any example it might offer for ethical action – either a positive example in the case of *Antigone*, or a negative example in the case of *Creon* – but in the anamorphic ‘effect’ it generates, revealing the nature of the interrelation between the Symbolic and the Real.<sup>81</sup>

Returning to the work of the Viennese Actionists, it is possible to discern a similar set of dynamics in some of their performances. The two threads of Lacan’s analysis of *Antigone* that I have isolated above – one relating to the content of the play,

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<sup>80</sup> Lacan, *Seminar VII*, p. 282 (June 8 1960).

<sup>81</sup> Treating *Antigone*’s actions as an example would amount to an exhortation to suicide. Nevertheless, this has not deterred Žižek from doing just this, insofar as *Antigone*’s act can be understood to ‘exemplify the unconditional fidelity to the Otherness of the Thing that disrupts the entire social edifice’. Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?* (London: Verso, 2001), p. 157.

the other to its underlying anamorphic structure — each provide tools to think through some of the Actionists' works non-dialectically. In light of the anamorphic logic outlined above, it is interesting to consider Susan Jarosi's description of Nitsch's six-day *Orgies Mysteries Theatre* performed in the grounds of his castle in Prinzendorf in 1998:

Each day's events took place from sunrise to sundown and comprised multisensory, synchronous, thematic actions interspersed with breaks for eating and drinking [...]. While the flexible structure ultimately allowed the individual viewer to adjust the rhythm of his or her own experience after a few days, the immediate and overwhelming stimulatory demands imposed by the performance quickly led to physical, sensory, and psychological exhaustion. [...] On the afternoon of the second day, for example, the major action staged in the courtyard comprised a series of vignettes that layered elements of religious ritual and mythological narrative. [...] Nitsch orchestrated the events, directing his chief assistant, who in turn supervised actors assigned to undertake either 'passive' or 'active' tasks, which served as metaphors for contrasting states of being: passive performers remained inert, tied to crosses, blindfolded, often naked, and subject to actions such as being inundated with blood and draped with entrails; active performers transported the bound actors, poured the blood and rent the entrails, and also smashed and stomped on grapes and tomatoes. Carefully composed, the assemblage of tableaux traced the pattern of a cross in the space of the courtyard, wherein the longitudinal and vertical axes themselves consisted of a series of crosses from which the blindfolded actors were suspended next to flayed animal carcasses. The effect was of choreographed chaos, produced from highly structured, programmed, and precisely executed tasks characterized by dynamic excess and frenzy. The string orchestra, the heurige band, and the church bells played raucously; the synthesized sounds droned incessantly; sirens blared, bodies milled, geese ran about. The reek of blood and viscera permeated the air, blending incongruously with the enticing smell of fried dough being prepared during the action and served in a makeshift kitchen on one side of the courtyard.<sup>82</sup>

Despite the highly choreographed nature of the performance and the dialectical play of passive and active elements within it (echoed, in many ways, in the passive role accorded to the audience as bystanders), Nitsch's *Orgies Mysteries Theatre* seems intent on staging the visceral extremes of human experience, layering sensory assemblages on top of one another in an arrangement that eschews linear narrative flows. Just as Lacan's anamorphic reading of *Antigone* highlights the chaotic 'smear' of actions and events that

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<sup>82</sup> Jarosi, 'Traumatic Subjectivity', pp. 835-838.

give way to a striking éclat, so too in the *OMT* do images of war and suffering crystallise as actors group and re-group, and symbols stabilise into meaningful forms without the aid of written or verbal language.



Figure 2: Hermann Nitsch, Second day of the six-day-play of the *Orgies Mysteries Theater* (1998), Prinzensdorf, Austria. © Studio Hermnn Nitsch

None of the roles adopted by the participants represent examples to be followed. To interpret the *OMT* as an exhortation to transgress the moral prohibition against, for example, the ritual use of blood, would fall seriously wide of the mark. The significance of the performance can be located in the anamorphic 'effect' it generates, temporarily exposing the liminal space between the Symbolic and the Real, ultimately aiming, in Nitsch's words, to obtain a 'pure, unburdened contemplation of the substance' – that is, unburdened by language itself.<sup>83</sup>

But Lacan's reading of the play does not only apply to the internal dynamics of Nitsch's more recent work, it also resonates with the Actionists' relationship with the Austrian state in the 1960s. If, for Lacan, the character of Creon represents a Symbolic order that knows no limits, issuing edicts in order to distinguish good from bad, right from wrong and friend from enemy, so too did the Austrian state wield an expansive set of socio-symbolic tools at the time. As Daub puts it, 'Actionism arose in a culture of inflationary respect, in which a great many institutions that elsewhere have no association or alignment with the government or state apparatus require or solicit respect as somehow official organs of the state.'<sup>84</sup> Not only were they up against a state quick to flex its juridical muscles, this state also encouraged widespread amnesia regarding the Second World War, and therefore amnesia about the origins of its own power rooted in the desire of the populace. Just as Creon attempted to eliminate the signifier 'Polynices' from the Symbolic sphere of Thebes, so too did the Austrian government advance a 'victim' narrative in order to cover any hint of complicity with the Nazis. As Badura-Triska and Kandutsch write, after the war 'numerous former Nazis or Nazi sympathisers emerged comparatively unscathed and were indeed able to reoccupy influential positions, which is why the political, social and cultural climate of the post-war decades had many "post-fascist" traits'.<sup>85</sup> As a reaction to this lasting legacy of the war, the Viennese Actionists could be said to have provided an x-ray of the ailing body of the state, revealing the source of the country's wounds to be internal. Again, their actions were neither intended as an example to be followed (perhaps with the exception of Mühl's commune, which spawned a number of similar groupings) nor

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<sup>83</sup> Nitsch quoted in Stefan Beyst, 'Hermann Nitsch's Orgien Mysterien Theater: The Artist as a High Priest?' <<http://d-sites.net/english/nitsch.htm#.VV72b1VViko>> [accessed 01/06/2015].

<sup>84</sup> Daub, 'Austria in the Age of Post-Scandalous Culture', p. 275.

<sup>85</sup> Eva Badura-Triska and Kazuo Kandutsch, 'The Political Situation in post-War Austria and its Historical Background', in *Vienna Actionism: Art and Upheaval*, p. 12 (p. 12).

as an incitement to debauchery in the manner of Sade.<sup>86</sup> Their actions rather had the effect of guarding the limit between the Symbolic and the Real, providing an ethico-aesthetic image that brought this limit into focus.

The anamorphic logic teased from Lacan's reading of *Antigone* suggests that the Actionist's work is not only significant because of the way it manipulates signifiers and places them in dialectical opposition. Nor does its value necessarily lie in its much lauded therapeutic intent, which served as a competing right that dialectically opposed the rights of the state. Considering the Actionists in light of the unidirectional nature of anamorphosis is useful here insofar as it shows that the group and the state were often encircling the same point of excess; and yet where the state sought to eliminate it, the group resisted. The force of their work does not consist in its ability to overthrow the Symbolic order *tout court*, just as the force of transgression does not lie in its ability to overturn the law. In the work of the Actionists, at least, it constitutes a strategy to prevent this order from overstepping a limit. In the process it has the ability to lay bear the support the state's authority relies upon.

### Actionism without a Cause

To bring the discussion up to date it is worth citing a number of recent events that indicate a shift in the reception of the Actionist's work in Austria. In 2004 three of the country's largest art museums - The Museum Moderner Kunst, the Museum of Applied Arts (both in Vienna), and the Neue Galerie Graz — staged retrospectives of the group and its members, and a further exhibition on the theme of 'the Feminine' in Viennese Actionism was mounted in 2012-13 in Prague.<sup>87</sup> Nitsch now has not one but two museums dedicated to his work, the first in the Austrian town of Mistelbach, the second in Naples. This institutional recognition has been matched by official state awards, and in 2005 Nitsch was singled out as 'a central figure in Austrian art creation' by the artistic senate of the Austrian state and awarded the Grand Austrian state prize (Brus had

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<sup>86</sup> Seven years after it was initially set up in Vienna, the Aktionsanalytische Organisation had several communes in West Germany and other groups in Toulouse, Lyon, Oslo, London, Nuremberg, Amsterdam, Düsseldorf and Vienna. Karl Iro Goldblat, 'The Commune – a Chronology', in *Otto Muehl, Leben / Kunst / Werk: Aktion Utopie Malerei 1960-2004*, ed. by Peter Noever (Vienna: MAK, 2004), pp. 195-209.

<sup>87</sup> The exhibition 'AMOR PSYCHE ACTION – VIENNA. The Feminine in Viennese Actionism' ran at the Dox Centre for Contemporary Art in Prague from the 19<sup>th</sup> October 2012 – 28<sup>th</sup> January 2013. A catalogue was published to accompany the exhibition: Karl Iro Goldblat and others, *Amor, Psyche, Action - Vienna: the Feminine in Viennese Actionism* (Nürnberg: Verlag für moderne Kunst Nürnberg, 2012).

previously picked up the award in 1996).<sup>88</sup> In the same year the *OMT* even made an appearance in the 2005 edition of the *Lonely Planet* guide to Austria,<sup>89</sup> prompting Bernhard Doppler to note that Actionism has now become 'quite compatible with the concept of "provincial tourism" in Austria.'<sup>90</sup>

All this could be taken as evidence of the time-limited nature of transgression and the calming influence of almost 50 years history.<sup>91</sup> Or it could equally serve as a parable of the institutional recuperation of transgression at the hands of a global culture industry that has demolished almost every barrier in the conversion of art into profit. While neither of these factors can be denied, it is my belief that the diminished force of the Actionist's transgressions is also linked to a more deep-seated social change in the way transgression functions.

If the two forms of transgression discussed in this chapter can be distilled into a series of relationships between a law or limit on the one hand, and an actor or group of actors who somehow overstep this limit on the other, then a consideration of the diminished force of transgressive art in Austria necessarily requires the changing role of laws and limits to also be considered. From a Lacanian perspective, the latter operate within the Symbolic order. As is well known, the two primary inspirations for Lacan in his theorisation of the Symbolic order were structuralist linguistics and anthropology. In both cases, the Symbolic is figured as a locus of differential elements that allows for social mediation and exchange. If, following Saussure, language is considered to comprise a tissue of signifiers, each relating to one another within a system of difference, then for Lacan at least one signifier is required to prevent this tissue from blowing away all together — to provide a temporary 'quilting point' [*point de capiton*] that anchors language to the Real. The privileged Lacanian name for this signifier is 'the name of the father'. The concept has relevance to this discussion because it serves as an anchor to prohibition, thereby providing the structural conditions that make transgression possible. Following this concept forward in Lacan's work will allow me to show how these conditions might have changed, and will by extension shed light on

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<sup>88</sup> The German term used was 'eine zentrale Figur österreichischen Kunstschaffens', Volker Ladenthin, 'Literatur als Skandal', in *Literatur als Skandal: Fälle – Funktionen – Folgen*, ed. by Stefan Neuhaus and Johann Holzner (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), pp. 19-28, quoted in Daub, 'Austria in the Age of Post-Scandalous Culture', p. 262.

<sup>89</sup> Neal Bedford, Mark Honan and Gemma Pitcher, *Austria* (London: Lonely Planet, 2005).

<sup>90</sup> Bernhard Doppler, 'Hermann Nitsch's Festivals: Observations from the Prinzendorfer Six-Day-Play in 1998', in *Literature, Film, and the Culture Industry in Contemporary Austria*, ed. by Margarete Lamb-Faffelberger, (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), pp. 64-76 (p. 65).

<sup>91</sup> Daub makes the point that Nitsch's work represents an attempt to create a truly trans-historical scandal, and when this reaction is not forthcoming, it consequently fails on its own terms of success. See Daub, 'Austria in the Age of Post-Scandalous Culture', p. 264.

the changing nature of transgression itself.<sup>92</sup> Although the focus will be mainly on the internal dynamics of Lacanian theory, it should be recalled that this theory was essentially conceived as a praxis continually formed and reformed in relationship to social change, and that the notion of the 'name-of-the father' undergoes revisions precisely for this reason, rather than as a means to otherwise bolster the Lacanian conceptual armature.

The term is first introduced in the early 1950s in a paper on 'The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis'.<sup>93</sup> Here and elsewhere the homophony between *le nom du père* (the name of the father) and *le non du père* (the 'no' of the father) is exploited to emphasise the dual function of the father as both the one who prohibits incest in the Oedipus complex, and the name that symbolises the Law in Freud's myth of the primal horde. Lacan writes that 'It is in the *name of the father* that we must recognise the basis of the symbolic function which, since the dawn of historical time, has identified his person with the figure of the law.'<sup>94</sup> A few years later in *Seminar III* the concept is written 'Name-of-the-Father' and elevated to a fundamental structuring principle of the Symbolic order. In abbreviated form, Lacan's argument here is that in the Oedipus complex, the historical function of the father is to enact a separation between the child and its mother. The child must substitute the desire of the mother for the Name-of-the-Father. This process of substitution has the effect of creating a template for all future metaphorical substitution, enabling the subject to manipulate language and ultimately produce meaning.

As he edges towards outlining a post-oedipal vision for psychoanalysis, in the year 1963-1964, Lacan announces 'The Names of the Father' as the title of his seminar. In the wake of his fateful excommunication from the International Psychoanalytical Association, the first session of this seminar also turned out to be the last. Nevertheless, here and almost a decade later in *Seminar XXII*, it is significant that one is no longer dealing with *one* Name-of-the-Father, but *many*.<sup>95</sup> What does this shift imply? In the first place, that the name is no longer unique, and that both the Law and the Symbolic

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<sup>92</sup> Lacan's use of gendered language here and elsewhere bears scrutiny. While it does display a certain degree of casual sexism, Lacan nowhere claims that it is *necessarily* the physical father who names or lays down the law in the family. The father is simply a function. Furthermore, the gendered language is in part explainable (but not entirely excusable) when the term is considered in the context of Lacan's 'return to Freud', which involved the appropriation and formalisation of pre-existing Freudian concepts.

<sup>93</sup> 'The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis', in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (New York: Norton, 2006), pp. 197-268.

<sup>94</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (New York: Norton, 2006), p. 230. The reference here is to Freud's myth of the primal horde in Sigmund Freud, 'Totem and Taboo', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. by James Strachey, Vol. 13 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), pp. 1-162.

<sup>95</sup> Jacques Lacan, *On the Names of the Father* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013)

have changed as well. According to Marie-Hélène Brousse, in this period of Lacan's work 'there's a change from the power of one element organizing all the other elements to the swarm implying a multiplicity of signifiers functioning together but not centralized in relation to one which they would obey.'<sup>96</sup>

In 1973 Lacan stretches the term to breaking point when he calls his seminar 'les Non-dupes errant'.<sup>97</sup> This can be roughly translated as 'the non dupes stray', but doing so misses the homophony between *les non-dupes errant* and '*les nons/noms du père*'. Here 'the non-dupes' should be understood to be those who claim to know a truth outside of discourse, thinking they have shattered its fictions and pinned the father down once and for all. In their constant invocations of the 'base' instincts of violence and sexuality that need to be unleashed by stripping back social imperatives and language more generally, the Actionists seem to approximate this stance. Their mistrust of language reveals an affirmative *trust* in its exterior. A critique drawing on this period of Lacan's work would posit this as fundamentally misguided. Instead of ignoring or seeking to escape discourse it would advocate a submission to its logic in order to actively 'become its dupe'. Only then is it possible to recoup some agency from its Symbolic webs. Parenthetically, this is at least one way of justifying Lacan's seemingly excessive wordplay; he is allowing himself to be duped by language.

As if in reply to these 'non-dupes', in *Seminar XXIII* Lacan puts forward a confounding claim, that one can 'do without the Name-of-the-Father [...] provided one makes use of it.'<sup>98</sup> What does this mean? In the first place, that one cannot *just* 'make do without the name of the father' and leave it at that. From a Lacanian perspective, doing so could bring about a psychotic break, as I will argue in more detail in chapter 4.

The idea that some principle of unity needs to be retained in the wake of a pluralisation of the N.O.F does not resolve the paradox that Lacan puts forward, namely, that 'making use of something' excludes 'doing without something'. This supports the assumption that Lacan is talking about two different Names-of-the-Father, a point confirmed by Jacques-Alain Miller, who glosses the expression in the following way: 'One can make do without the Name-of-the-Father *qua real* on condition that one

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<sup>96</sup> Marie-Hélène Brousse, 'Ordinary Psychosis in the Light of Lacan's Theory of Discourse', *Psychoanalytical Notebooks*, 26 (2013), 23-33, p. 26. The notion of the master as a 'swarm' is already present in *Seminar XVII*, when Lacan pronounces his algebraic symbol for the master signifier S1 as l'essaim [swarm]. See *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis. 1969-70*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: Norton, 2007).

<sup>97</sup> This could also be interpreted to pun on the English 'parents', both pluralising the locus of power, and further evening out its gender bias.

<sup>98</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XXIII*, p. 166 (13 April 1976).

makes use of it *as semblant*'.<sup>99</sup> To qualify the expression still further, it could be said that the Name-of-the-Father *qua* Real is the principle underpinning the Symbolic order, as a foundation of meaning, while the Name-of-the-Father *qua* semblant is a constructed principle that comes to operate in its stead as a subjective 'repair'.<sup>100</sup>

In summary, over the course of Lacan's work the Name-of-the-Father is progressively eroded, emptied out, until with this final formulation it is nothing more than a semblant, a construction that one 'makes use of'. At each stage of his work, Lacan develops his work along this axis in response to wider socio-cultural changes: the events of 1968, changes in family dynamics, and the appearance of new symptoms in the clinic. The rise of a 'new spirit of capitalism' that Boltanski and Chiapello have identified as embracing connexionist, networked, and 'flat' management structures, rather than all-powerful directors and centralised corporations could also be tied to this shift.<sup>101</sup>

To return to the two models of transgression discussed above, it should be clear that both the dialectical and the liminal models rely, at least in part, on a strong Symbolic order, and by extension, a univocal Name-of-the-Father. In 1960s Austria, this is precisely what the Actionists were up against. Not only was there a restrictive permit system for performances and events such as those held by the Actionists, institutions that were otherwise unaffiliated with the state commanded respect and wielded power as if they were acting on its behalf. At a more fundamental level, a particular entanglement of Catholicism and fascism survived the war and resulted in what Daub calls a 'vast harmonising consensus between nominally disparate institutions or apparatuses'.<sup>102</sup> In short, it could be said that at the time the Actionists were making their most transgressive performances, there existed a strong socio-symbolic authority coloured with religious and fascist elements, which ultimately paralysed political discourse. As I have said, one significant aspect of the Actionist's work is its ability to make this organisation of power more visible.

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<sup>99</sup> Jacques-Alain Miller and Eric Laurent, 'The Other Who Does Not Exist and His Ethical Committees', *Almanac of Psychoanalysis*, 1 (1998) 15-35 (p. 19) [my italics].

<sup>100</sup> An additional point of reference here can be found in Jean Baudrillard's discussion of transgression in *Seductions* (Montréal: New World Perspectives, 1990) where he seeks to distinguish the law from the rule, writing of the latter that 'One neither believes nor disbelieves a rule – one observes it. The diffuse sphere of belief, the need for credibility that encompasses the real, is dissolved in the game. Hence their immorality: to proceed without believing in it, to sanction a direct fascination with the conventional signs and groundless rules.' (p. 133) Factoring in this description, the Name-of-the-Father *qua* semblant could be considered closer in form to a rule than a law.

<sup>101</sup> Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2005).

<sup>102</sup> Daub, 'Austria in the Age of Post-Scandalous Culture', p. 276 .

The dialectical model, relying as it does on the interaction of two parties who each invoke a competing right, be it 'decency' or 'order' on the part of the Austrian state apparatus in the 1960s, or 'psychic health' on the part of the Actionists, relies on just such an edifice of power.<sup>103</sup> Once the edifice starts to crumble and the right to overtly police culture is revoked, then the transgressive pole in the dialectic is fundamentally weakened. The authorities are now more likely to offer crowd control for Nitsch's performances than persecute him, and following a period of public soul-searching in the 1980s, when Austria's official 'victim' narrative regarding World War II was finally put into question, claims about the therapeutic effects of Nitsch's work have slowly faded into the background; they now advertise themselves as offering audience members an opportunity for 'self-discovery'.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, Nitsch no longer relies on the press to create discourse about his work — his writings are published by a state owned publishing house, and there has been a considerable amount of ink spilled by art historians in recent years on all four main protagonists of the Actionists.<sup>105</sup>

In respect to the liminal model of transgression, Lacan's anamorphic reading of *Antigone* positioned her at the limits of the Symbolic, resisting Creon's over-extended sovereign power. Her effort to protect the Real void at the heart of the community was seen as a response to the attempt to condemn her brother Polynices to a 'second death'. As I have shown, in the Austrian context, a similar dynamic was at work in the 1960s as regards the cultural amnesia that still reigned over the nation. Not only were some of those in positions of authority directly linked to actual acts of killing, but the attempt to eradicate the memory of these killings from the cultural discourse, (to forcefully eliminate them as signifiers from the Symbolic) approximates the idea of a 'second death' highlighted by Lacan.<sup>106</sup> On a more abstract level, the idea that liminal transgression relies on a strong Symbolic order finds metaphorical expression in the example of a missing book in a well-ordered library. When the library is thrown into disarray and the indexing system scrambled, the gap where the missing book was removed is more difficult to locate. Similarly, when a Symbolic regime is weakened, as

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<sup>103</sup> The law most frequently used against the Actionists was article 516 of the penal code which concerned gross violations regarding decency and public nuisance. Eva Badura-Triska, and Kazuo Kandutsch, 'Art and the Authorities: Criminal and Police Prosecutions of the Vienna Actionists', in *Vienna Actionism, Art and Upheaval*, pp. 188-189 (p. 188).

<sup>104</sup> Nitsch quoted in Doppler, 'Hermann Nitsch's Festivals', p. 75.

<sup>105</sup> These publishers include 'Residenz' and 'Edition Brandstätter' that are subsidiaries of the state-owned 'Österreichischer Bundesverlag'.

<sup>106</sup> As a point of fact, the psychologist called to give an assessment of Brus at the trial that followed the *Art and Revolution* event was Henrich Gross, who had worked for the Nazis at the 'Am Spiegelgrund' psychiatric clinic for children where he was involved in the murder of disabled children and adolescents in order to examine their brains. Gross was indicted but never convicted and continued to work as a doctor in Vienna. Badura-Triska, and Kazuo Kandutsch, 'Art and the Authorities', p. 188.

it appears to have been in Austria, then the very liminal space that it 'produces' is harder to locate.

As the last remnants of the old political consensus all but vanish in Austria and power starts to function in a different way (no less perniciously perhaps), then strange things start to happen to the logics of transgression discussed above. In response to barriers which are now porous, or power which is now networked to a much greater extent, Nitsch's *OMT* could be viewed as a peculiar reaction formation. Staged in the private grounds of a castle, and drawing on a range of classical art forms such as lyric poetry and opera, as well Greek mythology and ecclesiastical iconography, Nitsch's work possesses a distinctly aristocratic tenor. The artist has repeatedly called Prinzendorf 'his Bayruth' (after the town in which Wagner's performances are regularly staged) and expressed a strong desire that his festivals pass into tradition and continue to be celebrated for centuries to come.<sup>107</sup> In the context of a society where class stratifications still have an influence on cultural life, these references will have 'blue blooded' connotations for many Austrians. Once the roll call of historical and mythical figures invoked by the Actionists is no longer mobilised against the laws of the state, they take on a less oppositional function, and seem to serve as a means to inscribe the artist's work in a long history of 'important' names. In Nitsch's work, classically Eurocentric references are supplemented with a number of specifically Austrian folkloric traditions, incorporating musical elements to dancing and drinking games into his performances.<sup>108</sup> If power no longer functions in a univocal way in Austria, as I have suggested it did in the 1960s, then these references in Nitsch's work can be seen as embodying nostalgia for modes of power that have long since vanished.

With these references in mind, it is perhaps curious that in the instances Nitsch's performances have attracted criticism in recent years, it is not from the government or the popular press, but from right-wing parties such as the FPÖ (Austrian Freedom Party [*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*]), who use Nitsch's work as a battering ram to attack the state, invoking familiar questions about the use of tax-payer money to support artistic productions which are 'anti-Austrian'.<sup>109</sup> Perhaps this configuration sets the stage

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<sup>107</sup> Nitsch quoted in Doppler, 'Hermann Nitsch's Festivals', p. 74.

<sup>108</sup> The 1998 play incorporated folkloric elements and traditional Austrian dances such as the Schuhplatter – a rural dance that involves clapping rhythmically with one's shoe – and the wine-drinking tradition of the Heuringen, according to Doppler, 'Hermann Nitsch's Festivals', p. 73.

<sup>109</sup> As Doppler points out, Nitsch has in fact never received federal tax euros in support of his actions. They are mostly funded from the sale of tickets and post-performance reliquaries. Doppler, 'Hermann Nitsch's Festivals', p. 69.

for a new cultural era of transgression in Austria, paradoxically with Nitsch on the side of the state, and the FPÖ on the side of the transgressors.

## Chapter 2

### From Inversion to Disorientation

Of the many metaphors used to talk about morality, the notion of a 'moral compass' is particularly revealing, underscoring the role accorded to adequation in much moral thought. Just as a compass requires two essential elements — a fixed base inscribed with cardinal points and a moving needle — moral judgment requires a set of pre-established norms and a moral actor who uses them to navigate through life. According to this model, moral judgment would seem to require little more than alignment with the fixed points of morality. This chapter is about two different ways in which art might be able to alter a moral compass by means of transgression.

The first entails the straightforward inversion of the cardinal points, so that good takes the place of evil, top becomes bottom, and right replaces wrong. While this model might suggest the Nietzschean idea of a transvaluation of all values, in fact it falls some way short of such a radical proposition, remaining within the bounds of morality.<sup>110</sup> Inversion simply entails the swapping of good for evil, and the obstinacy to explore what Paul de Man called 'the imaginative possibility of an upward fall.'<sup>111</sup> In the first half of this chapter inversion will be isolated in the work of a loose-knit group of filmmakers operating in 1980s New York known as 'the Cinema of Transgression' (henceforth CoT). The work of these filmmakers will be used as a springboard to explore the themes of Lacan's essay '*Kant with Sade*', which hinges on the idea that Kant's moral system is in surprising allegiance with the anti-morality of the Marquis de Sade.<sup>112</sup>

The second way that art might tamper with one's moral compass is to send the needle spinning. Disorientation can occur when one or more objective points of identification are put into question. While the word is more commonly used to describe

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<sup>110</sup> The transvaluation of values [*Umwertung aller Werthe*] is a concept elaborated by Nietzsche in *The Anti-Christ*, where he uses it to argue that Christianity inverts the 'natural' values of life, (for example countering the natural value of procreation with the virtue of chastity). Nietzsche argues that these Christian values should, in turn, be transvalued. This transvaluation therefore entails identification with the natural values of 'life', and Nietzsche's position could be interpreted to pit an ethics of immanence against a morality of transcendence. In this chapter inversion is treated mainly within the bounds of morality alone, where its inversion becomes an anti-morality, rather than ethics. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>111</sup> Paul de Man, 'Ludwig Binswanger and the Sublimation of the Self', in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971) pp. 36-50 (p. 46)

<sup>112</sup> Lacan, 'Kant with Sade'.

a perceptual-affective state, in this chapter it will be shown to operate in a number of different domains, including morality. Unlike the two logics of transgression discussed in the last chapter, disorientation does not automatically entail the crossing of limits. That is to say, disorientation is not endogenous to transgression. To work out the precise relationship between the two, I will turn to the work of Paul McCarthy, an artist well known for provocative performances and installations that can have a disorientating effect on the viewer. Here, as in all of the chapters of this thesis, it is not my intention to give a comprehensive account of McCarthy's output over the past 50 years. Instead a close look at two of his works in particular will allow another logic of transgression to be articulated around the concept of disorientation.

In the same way that the transgressive strategies of the Viennese Actionists were shown to possess limited force in the context of Austria's current socio-political reality, in this chapter it is my ambition to show that the paradigms of inversion and disorientation have also diminished in power. Building on the notion of a 'decline of the Symbolic', it is my contention that the CoT and McCarthy (and the ethico-aesthetic paradigms their works embody) are not so much opposed to the contemporary social bond, but in surprising accord with processes of social change that have led to its production.

### A Thrust for Life

The short film *Thrust in Me* (1985) opens with a shrill guitar riff and a pair of feet pacing the streets of New York's Lower East Side. Cymbals splash and the camera pans up to show a man in his mid 20s wearing mirrored sunglasses and a trench coat. After a few seconds the film cuts to show the same man, only this time he's staggering around a dishevelled apartment in a dress, a wig and smudged lipstick. Both characters are played by Nick Zedd, the principle architect of an '80s underground film movement known as 'The Cinema of Transgression'.

Comprising one third of *The Manhattan Love Suicides*, a trilogy of films directed by another of the movement's central figures, Richard Kern, *Thrust in Me* follows a linear narrative to its dark and shocking conclusion. Dejected, the woman slumps down on a couch and flicks through a self-help book called *How to be Your Own Best Friend*. Seemingly dissatisfied with it she then turns abruptly to a book on suicide before tossing that to one side just as quickly. The man strides along aggressively kicking rubbish and colliding with other pedestrians. He passes rows of

boarded-up shops and derelict buildings, one of which carries a piece of graffiti reading 'exist exist exist' or 'exit exit exit'.

As the narrative unfolds it becomes clear that this sign provides a coda to the film as a whole. The woman, now apparently intent on taking her own life, rips a picture of Jesus from a prayer book and pins it to the wall of the bathroom. She runs a bath, gets in, and picks up a knife from behind the taps. Without pause for reflection she makes two deep cuts to her wrist and collapses backward as the blood drips onto the bathroom floor. Meanwhile the man continues to act out his frustration on the streets of New York; he pushes violently through a fighting couple before stumbling up the steps to his apartment. The editing speeds up and two still images quickly follow each other. The first is the picture of Jesus, crowned in thorns and eyes turned upwards to God. The second is a black and white photograph of the man, looking up in the same direction as Jesus, yet the look in his eyes is one of defiance rather than rapture.

What follows this already violent narrative is an angry scream of images that include blasphemy and necrophilia. The film plays almost like a music video, the low-grade super 8 footage serving as a visual analogue of the post-punk soundtrack that scores the film from start to finish. Filmed on an ultra-low budget, sometimes on stolen equipment, and screened alongside music and performance acts in New York clubs such as CBGB's, films like *Thrust in Me* arose out of the fringes of the New York no-wave and post-punk culture. Nick Zedd, Richard Kern, David Wojnarowicz, Tommy Turner, and Lydia Lunch formed the core of a movement whose work displayed the unwavering ambition to outrage and annoy as many people as possible.

On the face of it, *Thrust in Me* would seem to display traits of the dialectical mode of transgression identified in the last chapter. The film stages a series of oppositions: bible morality is countered with blasphemy, self-help with suicide, and the two characters embody existential solutions that come into violent conflict with one another. As an embodiment of the kind of virulent nihilism inherited from punk, the CoT was a movement that essentially defined itself *against* other cultural forms. In this section the nature of this opposition will be explored. To do so, it will be necessary to first give a brief characterisation of the socio-political backdrop to the group.

### Inversion without Reprieve

Neither Reagan nor the Moral Majority are referenced explicitly in *Thrust in Me*, and yet they both serve as implicit targets for the blasphemy and anger the film channels. At

a time when Jerry Falwell and his followers were opposing equal rights for homosexuals, pornography, and sex education in schools, the CoT broke as many of these moral prohibitions as they could. Employing typically inflammatory rhetoric, in 1988 Falwell rallied his followers against the Civil Rights Restoration Act by warning that it could force churches to hire 'a practicing homosexual drug addict with AIDS to be a teacher or a youth pastor.'<sup>113</sup>

Against this backdrop the CoT must have embodied the worst fears of the Moral Majority. Many members of the group *were* active drug users, a fact reflected unflinchingly in some of their artistic output. Kern's film *Zombie Hunger* (1984) is a straightforward depiction of a man shooting up before demolishing an apartment, and Tommy Turner and Tessa Hughes-Freeland's grim collaborative film *Rat Trap* intercut images of a rat drowning with footage of a man injecting heroin. Certain members of the group were openly homosexual, such as David Wojnarowicz, who died of AIDS in 1992, and others experimented with various forms of sadomasochism, such as Richard Kern, whose film *Fingered* (1986) opens with the warning: 'Although it is not our sole intention to SHOCK, INSULT, or IRRITATE, you have been warned that we are CATERING only to our own preferences as members of the SEXUAL MINORITY.' The film is perhaps one of Kern's most offensive, consisting of variety of violent sexual fantasies strung together into the narrative form of a road movie.<sup>114</sup>

This disclaimer highlights an essential difference between the CoT and the Viennese Actionists. While both opposed the establishment values of their time, the Actionists claimed to do so in the interests of society at large, invoking psychoanalytic arguments about abreaction to justify artworks that would supposedly 'heal' Austrian society. By contrast, the CoT embodied a minoritarian spirit, as Carlo McCormick puts it: 'The cinema of transgression was a deliberate attempt to regain that essence of a community, to create something in every way unpalatable for broader public consumption'.<sup>115</sup> This withdrawal also meant that the group rarely used their films to campaign on the issues that affected them. They simply took what was endorsed by the state and inverted it, for the most part eschewing social commentary or any affirmative values that would redeem them in the eyes of mainstream America.

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<sup>113</sup> Gustav Niebuhr, 'Why "Moral Majority," A Force for a Decade, Ran Out of Steam', *Wall Street Journal*, 25 September 1989, p. 1.

<sup>114</sup> When screened publicly, the film *did* insult and irritate. At the Kino Eiszeit in Berlin for example, Franz Rodenkirchen reported that 'ten men and women attacked the staff, stole the money, destroyed the projector and sprayed the film with paint.' Rodenkirchen quoted in David Kerekes, *Sex, Murder, Art: The films of Jörg Buttgereit* (Manchester: Critical Vision, 1994), p. 33.

<sup>115</sup> Carlo McCormick, 'Cinema of Transgression: Reprisal in Rewind', in *You Killed Me First: The Cinema of Transgression*, ed. by Susanne Pfeffer (London: Koenig Books, 2012), pp. 34-41 (p. 39).

A notable exception to this general characterisation can be discerned in a number of filmmakers who operated on the periphery of the Cinema of Transgression. Casandra Stark's delirious depiction of domestic abuse in *Wrecked on Cannibal Island* (1986) was not intended to titillate a minority with a sexual preference for sadism but rather highlight and condemn masculine aggression. Similarly, Tessa Hughes-Freeland's stark depictions of rape in a late film, *Nymphomania* (1994) caricature and critique sexual aggression in the myth of Pan. Additionally, the fiction of David Wojnarowicz and the films of Beth B (made both collaboratively with her former husband Scott B and individually) could also be said to display a number of 'redeeming' qualities in their overtly political content.<sup>116</sup> *Black Box* (1978), directed by the B's, for example, depicted the nauseating effects of a torture device used by the US military known as 'the refrigerator'. In each of these cases, it could be said that the mode of transgression is more explicitly dialectical insofar as a competing right is invoked in opposition to perceived social injustice, often distancing these films from directors more central to the movement for whom any positive value, even those typically associated with the punk heritage they inherited were to be avoided at all costs.

This general lack of appetite for the promotion of values was also played out in the spatial politics of New York where the members of the CoT lived. The art critic Cynthia Carr compared the experience of living in the East Village in the 1980s to living in the 'epicenter of the world heroin trade', encountering 'whole blocks that would be deserted except for the vague drug itch hanging in the air.'<sup>117</sup> In a wide ranging article about the effects of gentrification on the East Village, Deutsche and Ryan claim that over fifteen per cent of residents left the neighbourhood between 1970 and 1980, attributing this exodus not to upward mobility, but to 'arson and the wholesale abandonment of buildings by landlords.'<sup>118</sup> According to the authors, this was part of a coordinated strategy to gentrify the Lower East Side and make way for a new class of white-collar employees working in the nearby financial district.<sup>119</sup> In a familiar narrative, the burgeoning arts scene and beat heritage of the Lower East Side came to

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<sup>116</sup> This point is made by Sargent, who sets the B's movies apart from some of the other members of the group. See Jack Sargent, *DeathTripping: The Cinema of Transgression* (San Francisco: Creation, 1999) p. 24.

<sup>117</sup> Cynthia Carr, 'Hanging Out on the Lower Worst Side', *The New York Times*, 22 October 2006, <[http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/22/nyregion/thecity/22downt.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/22/nyregion/thecity/22downt.html?_r=0)> [accessed 01/06/2015].

<sup>118</sup> Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan, 'The Fine Art of Gentrification', *October*, 31 (1984), 91-111 (p. 98)

<sup>119</sup> Deutsche and Ryan describe the process as follows: 'Through a strategy of urban neglect, the city has been biding its time until enough contiguous lots can be put together to form what is known in the real estate business as "assemblages." These are sold for large sums of money at municipal auctions to developers who thus amass entire blocks for the construction of large-scale upper income housing.' 'The Fine Art of Gentrification', p. 97.

serve as an attractive selling point to prospective investors, inevitably driving many of the artists living there to leave as soon as the rent spiralled upwards. With ‘operation pressure point’ in 1984 Major Koch made the area a safer bet for investors by cleaning up some of the drug trade, an operation that Zedd describes as an ‘occupation army’ in the Lower East Side.<sup>120</sup>

Given the fact that the deserted blocks Carr refers to often served as makeshift projection spaces, squats, or film sets for the CoT filmmakers, one would expect gentrification and the ‘war on drugs’ to have provided the raw materials for an open engagement with the state, using them in the same knowing way the Actionists did. While certain themes did seep into the work of the CoT, such as heavy handed policing in Zedd’s film *Police State*, for the most part the group avoided direct contact with the authorities.<sup>121</sup> At best, it could be said that they produced work that was unlikely to add to the selling point of the area. Operating somewhat separately from the small and ‘vibrant’ art scene that was increasingly being made complicit in the wholesale displacement of a community, the group’s output was shocking enough to exclude it from mainstream conceptions of ‘bohemia’, thereby rendering it unsuitable marketing material for the agents of gentrification. Nevertheless, to claim this was a conscious strategy on the part of the CoT would be misleading. Once again, the primary mode of engagement with the dominant Symbolic values of the day seemed to be one of inversion — affirming the aesthetic qualities of a city where people argue, buildings lay dormant, and needles litter the streets. Though they lack the same political intent, here the CoT’s strategies are reminiscent of the message on the back cover of the 1983 ‘Yes Sir, I Will’ LP by Crass: ‘BE WARNED! THE NATURE OF YOUR OPPRESSION IS THE AESTHETIC OF OUR ANGER’.<sup>122</sup> The aesthetic of the CoT’s anger can be seen in this way, and yet their hesitancy to connect it directly to oppression was part of a more general aversion to positing political values.

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<sup>120</sup> Sargent and Zedd, ‘An interview with Nick Zedd’ in Sargent, *DeathTripping*, pp. 57-78 (p. 65). The fact that Zedd doesn’t make the connection between the police operation and the wider gentrification of the Lower East Side is perhaps symptomatic of his resistance to being seen as a political filmmaker. Here he simply claims that heavy-handed policing was due to ‘a lot more cops [being] in the neighbourhood who didn’t understand the people living in the neighbourhood, because they didn’t live there.’

<sup>121</sup> *Police State* (1987) depicts the arrest and torture of a young man accused of taking drugs. The film becomes increasingly absurd as the man is asked to alternately stand on a table and sit on a chair by the two police officers. Notably, however, it does not hint at any systematic corruption within the police force, but rather focuses on sadistic and thuggish individual police officers. In an interview with Jack Sargent, Zedd recalls spraying the title of the film on the back of a police car, which then served as the title credit of the film. Sargent, *Deathtripping*, p. 65.

<sup>122</sup> Crass, *Yes Sir, I Will* LP (back), 1983, record cover, in Russ Bestley and Alex Ogg, *The Art of Punk* (London: Omnibus Press, 2012), p. 169.

A final example of the group's opposition to dominant values can be seen in their attitude towards avant-garde films produced at the time. This opposition was not particularly subtle, and in the group's manifesto, Zedd bombastically proclaims that 'all film schools be blown up and all boring films never be made again', encouraging other filmmakers to 'violate the command and law that we bore audiences to death in rituals of circumlocution.'<sup>123</sup> The life span of the CoT coincided with a period when film theory was being elevated to the level of a recognised discipline in universities across America. David Bordwell describes the film theory of the 1970s and 80s pejoratively as 'SLAB', because it routinely invoked the ideas of Saussure, Lacan, Althusser, and Barthes — theorists that had little or no influence on the CoT.<sup>124</sup> This newly found academic recognition brought about a traffic of ideas between avant-garde filmmakers and the academy. Stan Brakhage for example, described his films as a kind of 'moving visual thinking'.<sup>125</sup> It would be difficult to imagine Nick Zedd or Richard Kern describing their films in such a way, as it would to imagine them working in a university, as many avant-garde filmmakers such as Brakhage did at the time.

At a more formal level, there is a stark difference between films such as Brakhage's, which draw on a modernist tradition of interrogating the medium of film itself, translating 'the intrinsic grammar of the most inner [...] structure of thought'<sup>126</sup> into pulsing, swirling and flickering sequences of light and colour, and the output of the CoT, which followed conventional linear narrative forms such as parallel montage, and gave rise to few, if any formal innovations. Even the medium of Super 8 itself, which was developed as a substandard to the substandard (beneath both the industry standard of 35mm and the cheaper alternative of 16mm) and marginalised by the film industry and established avant-garde filmmakers alike, was adopted by the group enthusiastically. As the inheritors of 'trash aesthetic' developed by the likes of Jack Smith, the Kuchar brothers and John Waters, the CoT celebrated everything that was generally deemed to be amateur, illegitimate, or unfashionable by avant-garde

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<sup>123</sup> Nick Zedd, 'The Cinema of Transgression Manifesto', in *You Killed Me First: The Cinema of Transgression*, ed. by Susanne Pfeffer (London: Koenig Books, 2012), pp. 10-17 (p. 17). In the same vein, Carlo McCormick describes the CoT sweepingly as a 'vital corrective moment' that comes into play when the avant-garde gets 'smug, complacent and overly ossified in its orthodoxies.' McCormick, 'Reprisal in Rewind', p. 40.

<sup>124</sup> David Bordwell, 'Historical Poetics of Cinema', in *The Cinematic Text: Methods and Approaches*, ed. by R. Barton Palmer (New York: AMS Press, 1989), pp. 369-398.

<sup>125</sup> Brakhage described moving visual thinking as 'a streaming of shapes that aren't nameable — a vast visual 'song' of the cells expressing their external life.' Suranjan Ganguly, 'All That is Light: Brakhage at 60', *Sight and Sound* 3:10, (1993), 20-23 (p. 21).

<sup>126</sup> Stan Brakhage, 'Arabic 0 + 10' <<http://canyoncinema.com/catalog/film/?i=286>> [accessed 01/06/2015].

filmmakers of the day.<sup>127</sup> Aside from Zedd's polemic in his manifesto, the group did not really engage with the discourse generated by avant-garde filmmakers, except by way of simply affirming a set of values that they excluded, resulting in films that often displayed an openly anti-intellectual stance.

In summary, it could be said that while there were a number of exceptions, the dominant spirit of the CoT was characterised by two things: the inversion of majoritarian or mainstream values, and the unwavering reluctance to posit any new values of their own. If the group asserted any competing right, it was simply the right to be different (where different often meant opposite) and if it posited any affirmative value, it was simply the value of transgression in and of itself. In this spirit, when asked in an interview by Mark Doucet to give a nutshell definition of the Cinema of Transgression, Nick Zedd's answer is emblematic: Fuck You.<sup>128</sup>

### Kant Upside Down

The logic of inversion in the work of the CoT is also central to Lacan's essay 'Kant with Sade', and unpacking some of its arguments will bring the concept into sharper focus. A turn from the CoT to Kant's moral theory may seem like an abrupt shift in register - a *perverse* (perhaps even 'père-verse') response to the CoT's aversion to theory. And yet when read alongside the work of the Marquis de Sade, a set of relationships will emerge that justify this theoretical experiment, which seeks to isolate a logic of turning, of perversions and aversions, beyond any one domain.

As is well known, in the history of moral philosophy Kant is largely responsible for emptying concepts such as 'the moral law' of their empirical or emotional content, or at least arguing that they cannot be derived from this content *a posteriori*. With Kant morality cannot be derived from any pre-determined value, and this is precisely what forces the subject to take responsibility for their actions, rather than blindly pursuing

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<sup>127</sup> Jack Smith's name is now firmly inscribed in underground cinematic history for films such as *Flaming Creatures* (1963), which was filmed on out-dated celluloid, giving the film a bleached effect. As a resident of the Lower East Side until 1989 (when he died of AIDS related illnesses), Smith worked with filmmakers associated with the CoT on a number of occasions, starring in Beth and Scott B's *The Trap Door* in 1980. George and Mike Kuchar's films were also notably trashy, and works such as *Thundercrack* (1976) displayed a transgressive impulse that influenced the CoT. John Waters is perhaps the most infamous of the three directors. His trash trilogy (*Pink Flamingos* (1972), *Female Trouble* (1974), and *Desperate Living* (1977)) featured transgressive acts such as a character eating real dog shit in one unedited take. Jack Sargent describes the trilogy as 'a blueprint for punk aesthetics and behaviour, with the emphasis on the screeching desperation of the protagonists, anxious to annihilate every value', Sargent, *Deathtripping*, p. 12.

<sup>128</sup> Mark Doucet, 'Nick Zedd Interview', *Subterrenea*, 7 (1991), 5-10 (quoted in Sargent, *Deathtripping*, p. 27).

moral imperatives specified by particular societies, rulers, or ideologies. False incarnations of the law, such as moral imperatives associated with nationhood, loyalty, or religion, shift responsibility for the moral act onto a range of authorities external to the subject themselves, and instantiate positive values where pure duty alone should reign. As soon as this duty is contaminated by motivations such as self-interest, a desire for happiness (either for oneself or for others), or in fact anything other than duty itself, then an act can no longer be considered moral in a strict sense. In fact, for Kant, any motivation other than duty is consigned to the realm of 'pathological interests', a move which decisively distances his philosophy from the eudaimonic ethics of Epicurus or Aristotle. The only other stipulation that Kant imposes on a moral act is that it should hold true as a principle of universal action, a stipulation that finds its most concise expression in the famous categorical imperative. It is this formal 'emptiness' of the moral law in Kant's work — expressed through the principles of duty and universality — that opens his system up to the operations of inversion.<sup>129</sup>

Perhaps the obvious targets for such an operation are the classical poles of good and evil. If the moral law is defined in Kant's system as a law which commands a subject to purge themselves of all pathological interest in respect to the moral law and act in a way that holds true for all, then a preliminary definition of 'the good' would be an act that fulfils these criteria. Given this definition of the good, how is a definition of evil produced? In fact Kant provides a range of evils from which to choose. There is the evil of failing to apply a moral law consistently or in full, either out of weakness of heart or logical error; the evil of allowing pathological motivation to impact upon moral decision-making, and the related evil of acting in accordance with the moral law *only* when it coincides with one's pathological motivation — a species of evil Kant labels 'radical'.<sup>130</sup> To these three categories of evil, Kant adds a fourth: diabolical evil. It is here that one finds the possibility for inversion, for in this concept there lays a principle of action that follows evil neither out of self-interest nor out of a moral failing, but out of duty alone. Diabolical evil elevates the transgression of the moral law to a law in itself, and in this respect it is indistinguishable from the highest good.

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<sup>129</sup> To be more precise, what I am calling the 'operation of inversion' is not so much applied to Kant's work itself in the essay 'Kant with Sade'. Rather, Lacan shows that Kant's moral philosophy renders the opposition between good and evil in *classical* systems of ethics less stable (and therefore reversible), rather than rendering its own definitions of these concepts less stable.

<sup>130</sup> The concept of radical evil is developed in Immanuel Kant, 'Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason', in *Immanuel Kant: Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. by Alan W. Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 39 -216.

Although he doesn't call it by name, it is clear that Lacan discerns just such an expression of diabolical evil in the work of the Marquis de Sade. If Kant's ethics has a desubjectifying effect on the moral actor, requiring her to purify her will of all pathological motivation and make herself into an agent of the moral law, this structure is mirrored in Sade's willingness to endure considerable personal sacrifices in pursuit of transgression. At times this sacrifice is carried out in the name of a higher authority, such as 'mother Nature', and in *Philosophy in the Bedroom* Sade writes that 'were she to order us to set fire to the universe, the only crime possible would be in resisting her: all the criminals on earth are nothing but agents of her caprice....'<sup>131</sup> It is in such passages that Sade's work takes on a peculiarly moral flavour, and his characters' dutiful submission to a law of transgression would seem to adhere to Kant's definition of the morally good. But what about Kant's other stipulation required for an act to be moral — the criteria of universality?

On this point Lacan's argument gets more complex. In *Kant with Sade* he zones in on two expressions of the moral law. The first, taken from Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*, is none other than the categorical imperative itself: 'So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle in a giving of universal law.'<sup>132</sup> The second expression of the moral law is what Lacan calls 'a rule for *jouissance*' derived from Sade's writings. Lacan expresses this second law as follows: "I have the right to enjoy your body," anyone can say to me, "and I will exercise this right without any limit to the capriciousness of the exactions I may wish to satiate with your body."<sup>133</sup> Despite the element of caprice in the maxim derived from Sade, it nevertheless formally adheres to the requirement of universality in Kant's work, precisely because this caprice is not expressed on the side of the subject, but is something *done to* the subject by the Other. In this way it takes on the characteristics of an impersonal command to do one's duty, and to act only for the sake of this duty alone.

Lacan writes that Sade's maxim is 'more honest than Kant's [...] since it unmasks the split in the subject that is usually covered up.'<sup>134</sup> To understand this point, it is necessary to look again at the two maxims Lacan provides. Whereas the categorical imperative is univocal, a product of the 'common rational moral cognition' that

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<sup>131</sup> Marquis De Sade, *Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom, & Other Writings* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), p 361.

<sup>132</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 164.

<sup>133</sup> Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 648. A more direct quote from Sade is provided in Lacan, *Seminar VII*, p. 202 (March 30 1960): "Lend me the part of your body that will give me a moment of satisfaction and, if you care to, use for your own pleasure that part of my body which appeals to you."

<sup>134</sup> Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 650.

supposedly resides within each and every subject, Sade's rule for *jouissance* is bi-vocal, containing two subjects.<sup>135</sup> This is clear at the level of grammar. Taking the form of reported speech, the Sadian maxim possesses two voices; an enunciating subject– the ‘I’ appearing within quotation marks – and the subject of the statement – the ‘me’ appearing in the middle of the sentence. The enunciating subject proclaims the right to enjoy the subject of the statement's body, and furthermore, 'anyone' can stake this claim and in doing so occupy the position of the enunciating subject. This 'anyone' can therefore be allied with the Other. Furthermore, the relationship between the subject of the statement and the Other is non-reciprocal.<sup>136</sup> The enunciating subject (as Other) is free in comparison to the subject of the statement, who is bound by the duty that the former proclaims, and it is this structure that once again brings Sade's maxim into congruence with Kant's moral law.

Lacan believes that there are also two subjects implied in Kant's maxim, but one of them is hidden. As a product of the autonomy of the will, the moral law in Kant's ethics supposedly comes from the subject herself, as a voice from within. Lacan accuses Kant of exaggerating the tranquillity of this voice of conscience, but this accusation is contradicted by a look at the *Metaphysics of Morals*, where the moral law is cast in a more pernicious light: ‘Every man’, Kant writes ‘has a conscience and finds himself observed, threatened, and, in general, kept in awe (respect coupled with fear) by an internal judge.’<sup>137</sup> Here a string of affects characterise the moral law: awe, respect, fear.<sup>138</sup> For Lacan, the threatening judge Kant speaks of may seem internal, but in fact it is nothing less than an *internalisation* of wider social imperatives. The voice of conscience that constantly pursues the subject is nothing other than the wrathful voice of the superego.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>136</sup> Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 649: ‘we can already credit our maxim [Sade's] with serving as a paradigm for a statement that as such excludes reciprocity (reciprocity and not “my turn next time”)’

<sup>137</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 189. In the footnote accompanying this passage Kant writes revealingly that ‘a human being who accuses himself in conscience must think of a *dual personality* in himself, a doubled self which, on the one hand, has to stand trembling at the bar of a court that is yet entrusted to him, but which, on the other hand, itself administers the office of judge that it holds by innate authority.’ [my italics]

<sup>138</sup> See Alenka Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real* (London: Verso, 2000) on the role of affect in Kant's work, especially chapter 7: ‘Between the Moral Law and the Superego’.

<sup>139</sup> It was Freud who first hinted at the presence of the superego in Kant's work, for example in ‘The Ego and the Id’ writing that ‘As the child was once under a compulsion to obey its parents, so the ego submits to the categorical imperative of its super-ego’. Sigmund Freud, ‘The Ego and the ID’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. by James Strachey, Vol. 19 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1961), pp. 12-66 (p. 48).

The logic of the superego is such that the closer one gets to fulfilling one's duty, the more one admonishes oneself for not living up to its demands. In this way it displays overtly sadistic traits, pushing one ever further in the realisation of its will. Turning back now to the CoT, it is just such a sadistic impulse that can be discerned in Zedd's programmatic manifesto for the group:

Since there is no afterlife, the only hell is the hell of praying, obeying laws, and debasing yourself before authority figures, the only heaven is the heaven of sin, being rebellious, having fun, fucking, learning new things and breaking as many rules as you can. This act of courage is known as transgression.<sup>140</sup>

More than anything else, it is the idea of 'courage' that stands out in this passage, and it highlights the function of the superego in Zedd's declaration of intent. Here transgression is elevated to the status of a moral imperative, an imperative that entails subjecting the 1980s bible morality to the logic of inversion. In the description of the film that opened this section, *Thrust in Me*, it is possible to find almost a condensation of this operation. Here an image of Jesus is quickly followed by another of Zedd, both with eyes turned upwards and mouths agape (figure 3). The relationship between the two images manifests the iconoclastic spirit of much punk and post-punk imagery, from Jamie Reid's Sex Pistols album cover featuring a swastika embellished Queen Elisabeth, to Gee Vaucher's incorporation of religious imagery into her work with Crass.<sup>141</sup> In all three cases icons of authority are defaced, challenged and inverted. Although on first glance the two images in *Thrust in Me* appear to be a relatively straightforward example of such strategies, a neat separation between the images and the ideas they represent is rendered more complicated in the detail. In particular, the words 'Kill me' written on the epaulette of Zedd's black leather jacket are significant, constituting a message to God, a challenge that bridges both the cinematic cut between the two images and the separation between good and evil. Like the grammatical structure that characterises Sade's maxim, this challenge represents a relationship that is non-reciprocal. God can choose to kill Zedd if he wants to, the message seems to imply, and the latter remains at the mercy of this decision. Here it would seem that by willing destruction, a more general state of indeterminacy is also destroyed. The inscription on

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<sup>140</sup> *You Killed Me First*, p. 17.

<sup>141</sup> For further examples of punk and post-punk artwork and graphic design displaying these traits see Bestley and Ogg, *The Art of Punk* and *Punk: An Aesthetic*, ed. by Johan Kugelberg and Jon Savage (New York: Rizzoli, 2012).

Zedd's jacket is above all a challenge for God to exist. By sending such a message, Zedd not only entangles himself in the nets of religion, but also reveals his desire to eliminate contingency. This highlights a feature fundamental to all of the various inversions discussed in this section: they each in one-way or another *will* the Other into existence. In this way the image displays the logic of sadism, in which, as Lacan claims, the pain of existence (which for him is fundamentally a pain associated with indeterminacy and lack) is discharged on to the Other, which takes the form of an authority who replaces agonising deliberation with clear, univocal imperatives.<sup>142</sup> Accompanying this discharge is a transfer of responsibility, and in turning him or herself into the object of the Other's enjoyment (Kill me if it pleases you) the sadist becomes the instrument of the Other's will.



Figure 3: Richard Kern, *Thrust in Me* (1985), film stills. © Richard Kern.

Instead of producing new values, or producing new subjects that might act as bearers for these values, many of the films associated with the CoT simply take the underside of the law and elevate it to a principle of action. Just as for Lacan Sade's 'apology for crime impels him to an oblique acceptance of the Law'<sup>143</sup>, the batteries that discharge the electric shock in films such as *Thrust in Me* are batteries first of all charged by the Law. Bound up with a supergoic imperative to transgress at all costs, these works display a curious rigidity in both their commitment to transgression and their formal properties. In summary, it could be said that whereas in psychoanalysis the superego is conceptualised as an internalisation of society's imperatives, in the work of the CoT this internalisation occurs with a twist: in their work it is the *inversion* of majoritarian social

<sup>142</sup> Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 656.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 667.

values that are given the force of an imperative, and in doing so, these inverted values become the sticks with which they beat themselves.

### An Introduction to Disorientation

When such inversions are repeated several times their effects can no longer be limited to an exchange, a flip, or a 180-degree turn. They start to mutate into processes associated with disorientation. Looking in greater detail at this concept of disorientation will provide the basis for another logic of transgression to come to the fore.

Disorientation implies the loss of one's bearings, a fact already suggested by the range of landscapes that are considered disorientating: the shifting ground of the desert, where sand dunes decompose and recombine again in new locations, or the empty expanse of the ocean, where the swell of waves and an unbroken horizon make navigation difficult. In both cases the Symbolic referents used for orientation disappear and the ground is rendered unstable. But an environment characterised by change is not enough to cause disorientation by itself. As Kant points out in his essay 'What Does it Mean to Orientate Oneself in Thinking?', it is only possible to orientate oneself geographically by combining the objective data in one's surroundings with the subjective ground of differentiation.<sup>144</sup> Without an *a priori* conception of the difference between left and right, or top and bottom, a feeling of disorientation could arise on the straightest of paths and the firmest of grounds. Disorientation is therefore a concept that straddles the subjective and the objective. It could be caused by the introjection of an environment in flux, or involve the projection of a disorientating state of mind onto the things that surround a subject.

Disorientation is above all a feeling, but this feeling is often alloyed to other feelings, such as pleasure. The survivors of shipwrecks lost at sea rarely claim to have relished the experience, but they might confess to enjoying wandering around a maze or a hall of mirrors. The disorientating effects of psycho-active substances, alcohol, and fairground rides are actively sought on a regular basis, but for every pleasantly disorientating experience there is the bad trip, the spinning room, the vomit left after the fair leaves town.<sup>145</sup> In most cases it is controlled disorientation that yields pleasure,

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<sup>144</sup> Immanuel Kant, 'What Does it Mean to Orientate Ourselves in Thinking', in *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. by George di Giovanni and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 1-18 (p. 9).

<sup>145</sup> It is also worth noting the use of disorientation in practices of interrogation and torture. In the 1970s the so called 'five techniques' of wall-standing, hooding, subjection to loud noise, deprivation of food and drink, and sleep deprivation were used by the British government in Northern Ireland, and various

whereas being caught in 'spatial systems beyond [one's] control', to use the words of Anthony Vidler, have a tendency to induce anxiety.<sup>146</sup> Vidler argues that architecture's historical attempts to hold off this feeling of anxiety by means of rigid geometries and rational planning were thwarted by another history of thinking about space that attempted 'to permeate the formal with the psychological'.<sup>147</sup> Art, too has had a role in this, and over the past century a number of artists have induced, staged, or symbolised acts of disorientation. In this section the work of Paul McCarthy will serve as an example.

Long hailed as a central figure in the history of American performance and installation art for his visceral performances in architectural enclosures involving food substances and psycho-sexual pastiche, in recent years McCarthy's back-catalogue has been reappraised and a quieter side to the artist's work has been emphasised.<sup>148</sup> This was especially so in a recent exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, which, to paraphrase the exhibition's curator Chrissie Iles, explores the themes of rotation and dislocated space in a number of McCarthy's works from the 1960s-1990s.<sup>149</sup> While offering an important vantage point on the artist's oeuvre, this exhibition isolated a series of themes related to disorientation but failed to shed light on its connection to the more overtly transgressive elements that span his work from the last five decades.<sup>150</sup> It would be wrong to claim that disorientation is itself a form of transgression, as I said in the introduction to this chapter, but there nevertheless exists a relationship between the two. It is by looking at the work of McCarthy that this relationship will be brought into clearer focus.

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practices of disorientation and sensory deprivation have been used more recently in Guantanamo bay. See Stephen Soldz and Julian Assange, 'Guantanamo document confirms psychological torture', *Wikileaks*, November 17 2007 <[https://wikileaks.org/wiki/Guantanamo\\_document\\_confirms\\_psychological\\_torture](https://wikileaks.org/wiki/Guantanamo_document_confirms_psychological_torture)> [accessed 01/06/2015].

<sup>146</sup> Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), p. 1.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>148</sup> Sarah Thornton, 'Paul McCarthy', *Art Forum*, April 2008, pp. 320-321, p. 321.

<sup>149</sup> 'Paul McCarthy: Central Symmetrical Rotation Movement. Three Installations, Two Films', curated by Chrissie Iles, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, June 26 - October 12, 2008. Accompanying exhibition catalogue published as Chrissie Iles, *Central Symmetrical Rotation Movement* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008)

<sup>150</sup> 'Disorientation' is not positioned as the pre-eminent concept in the exhibition, and appears clustered with other concepts relating to movement, including rotation, mirroring and vertigo. *Ibid.*

## Motion Sickness: on the Work of Paul McCarthy

In many ways Paul McCarthy's *Spinning Room* (1971 / 2008) is atypical of the artists oeuvre.<sup>151</sup> There are no scatological or pop cultural allusions, no nudity or horseplay, and his signature materials of ketchup, mayonnaise and mustard are notably absent. But it is by looking at this piece before better-known works that it will be possible to isolate the trope of disorientation with greater ease.



Figure 4: Paul McCarthy, *Spinning Room* (1971 / 2008), mixed media. © Hauser & Wirth, London/ Zurich.

The first thing one notices about *Spinning Room* is that it is made up of a room that does not spin. A cuboid frame supports four large double-sided projection screens that remain rooted to the spot. From outside, this makeshift enclosure looks like something that might be taken on tour with a band, the lightweight metal frame allowing for easy assembly and disassembly. Outside the enclosure four projectors beam images onto the screens, the latter leaving openings at the corners to allow viewers to enter into the cube's interior. Once inside, a tiered cylindrical pedestal becomes visible at the centre of

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<sup>151</sup> Conceived in 1971, *Spinning Room* was only realised in 2008 for the exhibition 'Central Symmetrical Rotation'. Ibid.

the structure. This pedestal supports four cameras arranged like points of a compass on a platform that spins irregularly, changes direction, changes speed, and periodically stops altogether. Coloured electrical wires carefully routed through the centre of the pedestal disappear into a custom made computer at the base. This is what controls the spinning movement, as well a series of visual effects applied to the imagery after it has been captured. Other than the camera pedestal the only thing the viewer sees inside the space is themselves; enlarged, distorted, and back-projected onto one of the four screens. Because the cameras also film projections of the images they capture, this creates a mise-en-abyme, and the viewer is trailed by a series of recursive ghost images that recede to the limit of the projector's resolution.

If the mise-en-abyme were the only visual effect that the piece created then this discussion would be able to proceed on familiar critical territory. Since Andre Gide, numerous artists, authors, and theorists have discussed the device as indicative of self-reflexivity. Gide drew attention to the role of mise-en-abyme in the 'play within a play' in Shakespeare's Hamlet, as well as Velázquez's painting *Las Meninas* (1656), and the term has been employed extensively in various fields, from literary theory to film studies.<sup>152</sup> But *Spinning Room* attacks the viewer with a range of visual and spatial effects: the video-feed periodically flips upside down, changes speed or direction, is put into photographic negative, or subjected to a small delay, throwing it out of sync with the viewer's live movements. Four overhead studio lights suspended on the corners of the frame flash off and on without ever creating a genuinely stroboscopic effect. While this ensemble of effects may be caused by pre-programmed invariants, no discernible pattern stabilises to put the viewer at ease. Periodically, one of the cameras will project the coloured bands of a test pattern instead of the video feed, providing a point of orientation that serves the machine and its colour matching imperatives rather than the viewer themselves.

Several associations immediately spring to mind when considering *Spinning Room*. McCarthy has himself made references to Michael Snow's film *La Région Centrale* (1971) and it is worth following up this comparison.<sup>153</sup> Set in an area of wilderness in northern Quebec, *La Région Centrale* was made by stationing a camera on

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<sup>152</sup> Lucien Dällenbach, *Le récit spéculaire: Essai sur la mise en abyme* (Paris: Seuil, 1977) was the first book length study of the subject. Various works in the field of film studies have foregrounded the concept, for example Deborah Linderman, 'The Mise-en-Abyme in Hitchcock's "Vertigo"', *Cinema Journal*, 30:4 (1991), 51-74. Velázquez's painting *Las Meninas* is also discussed by Michel Foucault in the opening section of *The Order of Things* (London: Routledge, 1989).

<sup>153</sup> Although made in the same year that 'spinning room' was conceived, McCarthy claims not to have seen the film until the late '70s. According to the artist, he did however see images of the spinning camera mount used by Snow earlier in the decade. Iles, *Central Symmetrical Rotation Movement*, p. 64.

a mountaintop. With the exception of the first thirty minutes, which contains footage of the crew setting up the camera, the landscape is entirely devoid of evidence of human or animal activity. The star of the film is arguably a pre-programmed rotating camera mount that traces a series of horizontal and vertical pans, lens rotations and zooms. In using this device Snow claimed to be breaking with the tradition of subjecting camera movement to the dictates of plot, or consigning it to the role of imitating the human eye, by giving the camera 'an equal role in the film to what is being photographed.'<sup>154</sup> The film has a cosmological dimension, and over the course of 180 minutes the sun rises and sets, the clouds pass, and the camera movement builds into a crescendo of twisting and swirling motions that cause the images to become increasingly abstracted.

While the effect created by both *La Région Centrale* and *Spinning Room* is above all disorientation, a number of subtle differences exist between the two works. For one, Snow's decision to place the camera in such a landscape is clearly not without significance, and the film vibrates with references to science fiction, the footage of the first moon landing broadcast just 12 years before, as well as a long preoccupation with wilderness in Canadian art that stretches back to Emily Carr and the Group of Seven.<sup>155</sup> Such an element is entirely lacking from McCarthy's work, which reflects viewers back at themselves in a contextually unremarkable space. Despite Snow's efforts to avoid making the camera into an extension of the human eye, the film nevertheless forces a viewer to identify with the camera and position themselves at the fulcrum of its movements (the only part of the landscape which remains hidden). This is true even when it supplies us with what Harun Farocki called 'phantom images' - that is, images that are not normally accessible to a viewer without technical mediation.<sup>156</sup> McCarthy's film also does this, but identification is destabilised by means of a video feed that shows the viewer his or her own image. They no longer put themselves in the place of the camera because it is standing in front of them (the nearest one gets to this in *La Région Centrale* is catching a glimpse of a the shadow of the camera mount). In *Spinning Room* the viewer's image returns as if from another place, and the feeling of disorientation is redoubled by the fact that they are robbed of the fixed centre of vision that Snow's film provides.

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<sup>154</sup> Michael Snow and Louise Dompierre, *The Collected Writings of Michael Snow* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1994), p. 53.

<sup>155</sup> A number of critics have pointed out the importance of landscape to the film, for example Bill Simon, 'A Completely Open Space: Michael Snow's *La Région Centrale*', *Millenium Film Journal*, 4-5 (1979), 93-100. Snow himself alluded to the group of seven - a group of Canadian Landscape painters who worked together from 1920-1933 and included Tom Thomson and Emily Carr. *The Collected Writings of Michael Snow*, p. 53.

<sup>156</sup> Harun Farocki, 'Phantom Images', *Public*, 29 (2004), 12-24.

Despite these differences, both films unleash a force that is first and foremost corporeal, presupposing a particular sensory apparatus to act upon. This is a point that Tila Landon captures well in a discussion of Snow's film:

[*La Région Centrale*] calls upon a spectator with mobile, stereoscopic vision, with hearing and the ears' semicircular canals, and with the long habitual experience of being vertical and seeing at eye-level, of handedness, dorso-ventrality and human gait. The screen image rends the eyes, attacks balance in the inner ear, challenges the stomach, contests eye-ear integration, and denies the pace and focus of perception constrained in a head that looks forward, on a neck with restricted rotation, on a body that walks, turns, stops and blinks to see.<sup>157</sup>

As Landon makes clear, *La Région Centrale* is as much an embodiment of manifold sensory assaults on the human body as it is a film about the Canadian wilderness. The film dramatises the convergence of a range of analogue camera effects on the viewer's motor-sensory apparatus. As in *Spinning Room*, the primary effect is disorientation. Recalling Kant's claim that orientation requires as its pre-requisite the *a priori* distinction between left and right (or top and bottom), it could be said that both works seek to collapse this distinction at a physical-perceptual level, sweeping away habituated distinctions in favour of speeds and intensities. As one critic put it, in *La Région Centrale*, 'the world is inverted for so long, that when the camera swings vertically through a full circle to restore the horizon line to its rightful position, above the earth, it looks wrong.'<sup>158</sup>

The psychological dimensions of disorientation are exposed in two other associations the film sets off: fairground rides and psychedelia. The generation of West Coast American artists McCarthy is often associated with — among them Mike Kelly, Raymond Pettibon, and Tony Oursler — is usually allied to a punk sensibility rather than the psychedelic countercultural movements that came before it. Many of the clichés of psychedelic art such as lurid or neon colour schemes, obsessive detail, amoebic blobs, or fluid forms are absent from McCarthy's oeuvre. And yet within *Spinning Room* other psychedelic tropes are clearly at work. Those used in the camera feed verge on the kaleidoscopic or fractal, and the multi-screen projection environment is reminiscent of the liquid light shows of psychedelic groups such as the Brotherhood

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<sup>157</sup> Tila L. Kellman, *Figuring Redemption: Resighting My Self in the Art of Michael Snow* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2002), p. 117.

<sup>158</sup> Peter Rist, 'La Région Centrale: The most spectacular experimental film', *Off Screen*, 6:11 (2002) <[http://offscreen.com/view/region\\_centrale](http://offscreen.com/view/region_centrale)> [accessed 01/06/2015].

of Light or The Heavy Water Light Show in the 60s and 70s. The elaborate visual performances mounted by these groups, sometimes using little more than overhead projectors, colour wheels, heat responsive pigment, or liquid crystal, were almost exclusively designed to accompany performances of live music. By contrast, when exhibited at the Whitney Museum the only sound that filled the space emanated from another nearby kinetic sculpture entitled *Bang Bang Room* (1992), in which a four-walled room continuously pulled itself apart into two right angle corners. As these corners converged and detached the doors on each of the walls repeatedly slammed closed.<sup>159</sup> *Spinning Room* presents a kind of cooled down trip; slow moving globular forms in warm hues are replaced by digital video feeds of figures that seem more mineral than larval. The slamming doors do not contribute to an immersive soundscapes but resound like gunshots through the gallery space. From the beginning psychedelic art both sought to replicate the subjective states brought about by substances such as LSD and mescaline and provided imagery that intensified these states, or steered them in a 'positive' direction.<sup>160</sup> While *Spinning Room* in some ways borrows the visual vocabulary from psychedelic art (a vocabulary that has become so ubiquitous that it is admittedly difficult to call it specifically psychedelic), the effect is anything but conducive to a 'good trip'. Like much psychedelic art *Spinning Room* could be said to be concerned with the effects of a loss of control. But there are many different ways to lose control. Here the exit from reality is not an escape from the body or an exploration of its internal depths, but rather a recursive splintering of the surface. In a small, almost negligible way this could be said to offer passage to an 'altered state', but this altered state is characterised by disorientation that yields little in the way of insight.

In the same exhibition space at the Whitney Museum is *Mad House* (2008), a work that takes the form of a fairground ride and empties it of any actual or anticipated pleasure. Comprised of a small room with four windows and one chair inside, the box spins manically on a vertical axis in an opposite direction to the chair inside. Like many of McCarthy's architectural spaces, the box has an anthropomorphic quality, and the piece as a whole confronts a viewer with the image of psychological disorientation - the collective 'family fun' of the theme park experience reduced to a solitary vertigo. Imagery drawn from fairgrounds and theme parks, particularly Disneyland, can be seen

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<sup>159</sup> The bleeding of the sound from one piece to another was part of a strategy on the part of McCarthy and the curator to make works less discrete from each other. The customary labels identifying the title and dates of the works were missing, and a large mirror covered the back wall of the space.

<sup>160</sup> See Lars Bang Larson, 'A History of Irritated Material: Psychedelic Concepts in Neo-Avant-Garde Art' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Copenhagen, 2011) for a comprehensive discussion of psychedelic art.

in many of McCarthy's works, and often acts as shorthand for a critique of American consumer spectacle. The most elaborate example of this to date is an exhibition conceived and executed together with the artist's son Damon McCarthy at a project space in London.<sup>161</sup> *Caribbean Pirates* (2005), was inspired by the Pirates of the Caribbean Disneyland theme park ride in California, and predates the release of the subsequent films produced by Jerry Bruckheimer. Filling a vast warehouse space off Brick Lane, the exhibition featured various vessels: a houseboat, frigate, and a pirate ship heaving back and forth on a giant mechanical frame. Props and detritus from a film shoot littered the space and filled the nostrils, as severed prosthetic limbs lay in pools of ketchup and wrecked power tools dripped with chocolate sauce.<sup>162</sup> Videos of pirate themed bacchanalia were haphazardly projected around the space, and involved 30 buccaneers enacting violent scenarios of pillage and terror for a month. Any speech or dialogue in the films was lost as the soundtracks merged into a chaotic maelstrom of babble, shrieks and cries.



Figure 5: Paul McCarthy in collaboration with Damon McCarthy, *Cakebox* (detail, from *Caribbean Pirates*), (2001-2005), mixed media. © Hauser & Wirth, London/ Zurich.

<sup>161</sup> 'Paul McCarthy: Caribbean Pirates', Whitechapel Gallery (off-site), 23 October 2005 - 8 January 2006.

<sup>162</sup> According to Adrian Searle, McCarthy's son Damon (a frequent collaborator with his father) lost two real fingers in an accident that took place during filming. One can only speculate whether or not these fingers were left as post-performance reliquaries in the exhibition. Adrian Searle, 'Shiver Me Timbers', *Guardian*, 24 October 2005 <<http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2005/oct/25/1>> [accessed 01/06/2015].

If *Spinning Room* embodies disorientation on a primarily perceptual-affective level, then *Caribbean Pirates* combines this with both moral and semantic disarray.<sup>163</sup> The large kinetic sculptures are a nauseating sight from the beginning, and the feeling is augmented by almost every other element in the exhibition, from jerky video projections to a confusing mess of scattered limbs. The transubstantiation of body fluids for foodstuffs in the piece (and in many others by McCarthy) is not only an abject appropriation of American family brands such as Hershey but also a semiotic substitution in which one signifier assumes the place of another in a disorientating metaphoric movement. McCarthy argues that

objects don't necessarily have to relate to themselves, they can be a symbol for something else. Ketchup can represent blood, it's not necessary that it be blood. [...] I'm proposing that reality itself can fluctuate. The bottle of mayonnaise within the action is no longer a bottle of mayonnaise; it is now a woman's genitals. Or it is now a phallus.<sup>164</sup>

The theme of moral disorientation in the exhibition bears more scrutiny. As well as referring to Disney, the exhibition literature positions the pirate theme as a trope of 'invasion and occupation of foreign lands [...] that resonate[s] with contemporary global events'.<sup>165</sup> More generally, the pirate is a figure of disorientation *par excellence*, existing in a Symbolic space where the legal and moral structures of the land cease to govern so tightly. The pirate is an outlaw with respect to these structures, and in associating the outlaw with the American state McCarthy is reversing the usual transgressive arrangement where the former is acting *against* the interests of the latter. Here the authority that underpins the law and the actor that undermines it become one and the same thing, and the state assumes the power to suspend prohibitions when this coincides with its own interests. This places McCarthy himself in a rather ambiguous position. While his work is frequently labelled transgressive for its sexual and violent content, here he seems to be using these strategies to critique transgression itself, using it to cast a spotlight on American foreign policy. From this standpoint, McCarthy's work does not therefore embody a transgression *against* the law (the dialectical model),

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<sup>163</sup> The term 'semantic disarray' is borrowed from Ralph Rugoff, 'Mr. McCarthy's Neighborhood' in Ralph Rugoff, Kristine Stiles and Giacinto Di Pietrantonio, *Paul McCarthy* (London: Phaidon, 1996) pp. 30-87 (p. 33).

<sup>164</sup> Paul McCarthy, 'Interview by Kristine Stiles', in Rugoff, Stiles and Di Pietrantonio, *Paul McCarthy*, pp. 6-29 (p. 14).

<sup>165</sup> Paul McCarthy, 'LaLa Land Parody Paradise' [exhibition hand-out] (London: Whitechapel, 2005).

a transgression at the limits of the law (the liminal model), nor even a transgression elevated to the status of morality (the model of inversion), but a species of transgression that turns back on itself, suspending the boundary lines that divide the law from its transgression in the first place.<sup>166</sup>

To draw the discussion of McCarthy to a close it will be necessary to recapitulate on the relationship between transgression and disorientation that his work embodies. If transgression is first of all considered a concept tied to morality, disorientation could be considered an amoral concept that either results from a transgressive act, or creates the conditions of possibility for transgression. In the first case, acts associated with the consumption of substances considered in themselves transgressive might bring about a subjective state of disorientation. In the second case, an experience of disorientation might cause limits to blur or disappear entirely — the moral equivalent of being spun around on a fair ground ride so fast that the limits separating the objects in one's field of vision disappear into a smear of colours. Here disorientation serves as the pre-condition for an act of transgression that may be only partially deliberate. To these two possibilities a third could be added: that disorientation serves as *the symbol* of transgression.<sup>167</sup> It is just such a relationship between transgression and disorientation that can be seen in the work of McCarthy. If *Spinning Room* shows a drive to place the viewer's habituated categories of perception under duress, then this drive migrates into the domain of morality in works such as *Caribbean Pirates*. In this installation the usual codes and categories that shape the world are deformed on multiple planes at the same time: moral, semantic and perceptual-affective, with each stratum reinforcing the powers of the others. The result is not intended to be progressive, constructive, or conducive to new subjective forms. Here disorientation is the clearinghouse for a new value that McCarthy, like the CoT, is unwilling to deliver.

### Commanded Enjoyment

The two logics of inversion and disorientation discussed in this chapter have so far been isolated and described in relationship to the primary topic of transgression. What

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<sup>166</sup> This point is made in Cary Levine, *Pay for Your Pleasures: Mike Kelley, Paul McCarthy, Raymond Pettibon* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 6: 'McCarthy and Pettibon can likewise be described as simultaneously transgressive and antitransgressive. Or, put more precisely, all three artists [Mike Kelley being the third] are transgressive in their refusal to blindly accept established myths of artistic transgression.'

<sup>167</sup> It would be interesting to develop this in dialogue with Kant's much discussed assertion that beauty serves as a 'symbol of morality'. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, p. 225.

remains to be done is to open these arrangements up to critique by showing that they are not altogether dissimilar to the more general engines of social transformation associated with capitalism. To do so, I will once again draw inspiration from the 'decline of the Symbolic' thesis in the work of Lacan and his interpreters.

One such interpreter is Todd McGowan, who follows Lacan in arguing that there has been a fundamental shift in the logic of social organisation along the axis of enjoyment: 'Whereas formerly society has required subjects to renounce their private enjoyment in the name of social duty, today the only duty seems to consist in enjoying oneself as much as possible'.<sup>168</sup> The simplicity of this quote belies both a complicated social shift in the operations of consumerism, and a paradoxical relationship between enjoyment and its renunciation. Rarely one to address socio-economic questions directly, in *Seminar II*, Lacan recycles a story from Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* to illustrate the relationship at stake. A man walks into a bakery and asks for a cake, but before being asked to pay he changes his mind and asks for a glass of liqueur instead. When he's asked to pay for the liqueur he replies that he paid for it with the cake. 'But you haven't paid for the cake either', replies the baker, to which the man replies, but I hadn't eaten it.<sup>169</sup>

From a psychoanalytic perspective the price a subject is asked to pay upon entering society is enjoyment. Like the man in the bakery however, the subject never really had this enjoyment in the first place. It is only created retroactively on the basis of prohibition. It is not simply that in 'traditional societies' people enjoyed less, and that today's social forms create a haven of enjoyment. Rather, the renunciation of enjoyment is precisely what introduces the possibility of its attainment. Enjoyment is always already figured as a sacrifice, and for this reason, it is what constitutes subjects as desiring. As McGowan summarises: 'Desire is, in this sense, part of what one gets in exchange for the sacrifice of one's enjoyment.'<sup>170</sup> This supports the notions that while the decline of the Symbolic may on the face of it represent the erosion of social barriers to enjoyment, this does not necessarily mean that enjoyment becomes readily accessible. For McGowan, since the Symbolic is what prohibits enjoyment and

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<sup>168</sup> Todd McGowan, *The End of Dissatisfaction?: Jacques Lacan and the Emerging Society of Enjoyment* (New York: SUNY, 2003), p. 2. McGowan uses the word 'enjoyment' as a translation of Lacan's *jouissance* throughout the book.

<sup>169</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. by James Strachey, Vol. 8 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1960), pp. 9-238 (p. 60), quoted in Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis. 1954-1955*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: Norton, 1991), p. 234 (18 May 1955)

<sup>170</sup> McGowan, *The End of Dissatisfaction?*, p. 16.

therefore makes it possible, with its decline the possibilities for enjoyment become even more remote, along with the capacity of a subject to desire.

Another aspect of this movement is embodied in a relationship between the superego and enjoyment. As was said above, for Lacan the superego encourages a subject to think that they can eliminate lack altogether. It fills out the gaps in the Symbolic order with Imaginary supplements. On the face of it, this would appear to run counter to Freud's assertion that the superego acts as a buttress to Symbolic prohibition, serving as a 'vehicle of tradition and of all the time resisting judgments of value'.<sup>171</sup> In fact the superego's demands are only partly bound up with tradition. Where traditional Symbolic prohibitions stop, the superego continues. As was claimed above, the superego only becomes more demanding the more one complies with its commands. There is a certain violence in the way the superego relentlessly pursues the subject beyond the limits of the Symbolic law. As Walter Benjamin argued, there is violence at the origins of every law.<sup>172</sup> For Lacan, this violence survives in the superego, which represents a law 'insofar as nothing more than its root remains'.<sup>173</sup> As I argued with respect to the CoT, this root is planted upside down, so to speak, so that it is the opposite of traditional and mainstream social values that constitute the 'content' of the superego's commands.

Nevertheless, the superego is still social in origin. As well as the obligatory references to fascism to illustrate the logic of the superego, McGowan also draws on a range of (mostly American) examples to support his argument. Among them is George Bush's message to the American public that it was their 'patriotic duty' to go shopping, and following September the 11<sup>th</sup>, that the public should 'get on board' and 'go to Disneyland'.<sup>174</sup> Although rarely so explicit, what these official messages reveal is a more general social shift that positions enjoyment as a social duty. The contemporary superego, as an internalisation of these messages, has the effect of constructing an illusory image of total enjoyment. Because this image is totalising, which is to say without lack, it simultaneously strips a subject of their desire and leaves them unsatisfied. It does not mean that they enjoy themselves more, or that authority ceases

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<sup>171</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. by James Strachey, Vol. 22 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1964), pp. 5-182 (p. 67).

<sup>172</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings: Volume 1, 1913-1926* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 243-4. 'The power that guarantees a legal contract is, in turn, of violent origin even if violence is not introduced into the contract itself'.

<sup>173</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique. 1953-1954*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: Norton, 1991), p. 102 (10 March 1954).

<sup>174</sup> McGowan, *The End of Dissatisfaction*, p. 36.

to exist. Only that they no longer experience authority as taking a bite out of their enjoyment.

### From the Discourse of the Master to the Discourse of Capitalism

As I have shown, the idea of a ‘decline in the Symbolic’ essentially denotes a change in the logic of social organisation. McGowan follows Lacan in placing emphasis on enjoyment in the contemporary social configuration, which has a destructive relationship to Symbolic prohibition. In *Seminar XVII* Lacan frames the issue in slightly different terms, as a change of discourse. Like Foucault after him, Lacan grants discourse an expansive conceptual range, defining it broadly as a ‘social link [*lien social*], founded on language’.<sup>175</sup> In his seminar he identifies four types of social link — the discourse of the university, the hysteric, the analyst and the master — and two years later in a paper delivered in Milan he identifies a fifth: the discourse of capitalism.<sup>176</sup> Although these discourses do not eclipse one another in a historical sequence, Lacan does point out that ‘something changed in the master’s discourse at a certain point in history’.<sup>177</sup> In this section I will look at how this change contributes to the decline in the Symbolic.

For Lacan, a ‘discourse of the master’ anchors the transindividual relationships at work in traditional societies based on prohibition. The figure of the master could apply to the traditional role of the father in family structure, the monarch or ruler in social structure, or any transcendent Idea structuring knowledge. Lacan condenses his reflections on discourse into several ‘mathemes’, which he returns to throughout *Seminar XVII* and beyond.<sup>178</sup> Rather than structures that are ontologically prior to reality, as can be inferred from Lacan’s discussion of these mathemes in his seminar, it is my claim, contra Lacan, that they should be treated as cartographies of particular and contingent social relationships.<sup>179</sup> From this standpoint the possibility of imagining

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<sup>175</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XX: Encore. 1972-1973*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: Norton, 1998), p. 17 (December 19 1972). For Foucault, ‘discourse is not a slender surface of contact, or confrontation, between a reality and a language (*langue*), the intrication of a lexicon and an experience; [but] practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak.’ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), p. 54.

<sup>176</sup> Jacques Lacan, ‘On Psychoanalytical Discourse’ <[http://web.missouri.edu/~stonej/Milan\\_Discourse2.pdf](http://web.missouri.edu/~stonej/Milan_Discourse2.pdf)> [accessed 01/06/2015].

<sup>177</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XVII*, p. 177 (10 June 1970).

<sup>178</sup> Of Lacan’s seminars currently published in English, the four discourses are also discussed in *Seminar XX*.

<sup>179</sup> The ontological ‘priorsness’ of the four discourses can be inferred from the following remarks in *Seminar XVII*: ‘[I] specify an arrangement that has absolutely not been imposed in any way- as they say, from a certain point of view, nothing has been abstracted from any reality. On the contrary it’s already

alternatives to the five arrangements Lacan outlines is held open.<sup>180</sup> Rather than exploring this possibility here, a closer look at the discourse of the master and the discourse of capitalism will facilitate the consideration of a significant vector of social change congruent with the decline of the Symbolic.

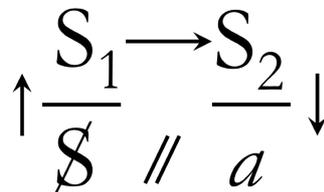


Figure 6: The Discourse of the Master.

In each *matheme* the position of the symbols is as important as what they represent. Broadly speaking, the symbols above the bar are official, or overt, and those below are unofficial, or repressed, with the top left position claiming primacy over the entire discourse. In this discourse the master ( $S_1$ ) makes every effort to conceal his nature as a split subject ( $\mathcal{S}$ ), addressing the Other ( $S_2$ ), who in turn produces a surplus ( $a$ ) that is hidden and cannot be reabsorbed ( $//$ ).

Lacan's most obvious point of reference here is Hegel's master-slave dialectic, and just as for Hegel the master is only dominant by virtue of his saying so, for Lacan the master signifier as such means nothing. The master's position is established simply by decree, it cannot be justified and requires him to continually exercise his power. The passage from one symbol to another takes the form of an interrupted circle, and every time this circuit of power is traversed a remainder ( $a$ ) is produced. In a fairly loose appropriation of the terms of Marx's labour theory of value, Lacan dubs this remainder surplus *jouissance*.<sup>181</sup> In fact, at this stage surplus *jouissance* is very different from surplus value. It stands for an ineliminable remainder that cannot be integrated back into the system, whereas surplus value can absolutely be reintegrated for Marx. Lacan shows

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inscribed in what functions as this reality I was speaking about before, the reality of a discourse that is already in the world and that underpins it, at least the one we are familiar with. Not only is it already inscribed in it, but it is one of its arches.' pp. 14-15 (26 November 1969). Oliver Feltham discusses the difficulties such a classically structuralist position causes for Lacan when he is faced with the issue of historical change. See Oliver Feltham, 'Enjoy Your Stay: Structural Change in Seminar XVII', in *Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Justin Clemens and Russell Grigg (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 179-194.

<sup>180</sup> One commentary on this seminar and its subsequent interpretations that expands the number of discourses is Levi R. Bryant, 'Žižek's New Universe of Discourse: Politics and the Discourse of the Capitalist' *International Journal of Žižek Studies*, 2:4 (2008) <<http://zizekstudies.org/index.php/ijzs/article/view/163/257>> [accessed 01/06/2015].

<sup>181</sup> The term also functions as a loose translation of Freud's '*lustgewinn*', typically translated as 'yield of pleasure'.

that the production of surplus *jouissance* in feudal societies causes problems for the master, and he works hard to limit its impact. In an interesting but vague association, Lacan claims that surplus *jouissance* is in many ways at the root of the ethical systems of antiquity:

The problems of ethics here, suddenly, start to abound [...] Nobody knows what to do with this surplus *jouissance*. In order to successfully place a sovereign good at the heart of the world, you need to be as embarrassed as a fish with an apple.<sup>182</sup>

Here ethics serves an essentially regulatory function. The master is embarrassed by an excess beyond his control, and by generating a system of ethics (or according to the division set up in the introduction, morality) he attempts to tie it to a specific place through prohibition, staving off the effects of moral disorientation in the process. For Lacan, Symbolic prohibition is a necessary accompaniment to the master's discourse.

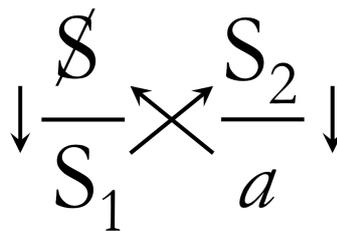


Figure 7: The Discourse of Capitalism.

Lacan says very little about the discourse of capitalism, but in a paper presented at the university of Milan in 1972 he formulates another *matheme*. This discourse is a variation on the discourse of the master, which as Lacan points out, is formed by making ‘a little inversion between  $S_1$  and  $S$ .’<sup>183</sup> It seems possible to read into this *matheme* two crucial points.

Firstly, by placing  $S_1$  ‘below the bar’ Lacan is highlighting the fact that under late capitalism authority takes a different form. The split, supposedly liberated subject is the agent in the discourse of capitalism, but this freedom is illusory, because its hidden truth is mastery. Needless to say, beneath the clamour of voices proclaiming freedom of choice for the worker or the consumer lies a vast tangle of macro and microeconomic mechanisms, nudge tactics, employee evaluation procedures, pharmaceutically guaranteed psychological solutions, codes, scripts, and surveillance apparatus that are

<sup>182</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XVII*, p. 175 (10 June 1970).

<sup>183</sup> Jacques Lacan, ‘On Psychoanalytic Discourse’, p. 11.

designed precisely with control in mind. In contrast to the master's discourse, where the 'split' nature of subjectivity is hidden and power is positioned as univocal, in this new discourse the split is plain to see, but this does not have the effect of removing authority from the equation.

A second, altogether more interesting implication of this new social structure is implied by the removal of the blockage between the subject and surplus *jouissance*. In a point that speaks to the theme of disorientation, the discourse of capitalism can be read accordingly as a sequence of infinite circulation ( $\infty$ ), which 'works as if on wheels'.<sup>184</sup> For Lacan, this is something that emerges at a specific historical juncture, and contributes to the emergence of Capital proper. Whereas in the master's discourse surplus *jouissance* posed a problem that required prohibition, under capitalism the surplus is packaged up and reintegrated into circulation. 'The important point is that on a certain day *jouissance* became calculable, could be counted, totalized.'<sup>185</sup> This logic can be seen at work in a range of contexts, from the capitalist construction of 'leisure time' as critiqued by Lefebvre, to Laporte's account of the history of shit and its profitability.<sup>186</sup> In both cases that which formerly served as waste for capitalism comes to be integrated into the system.

Two secondary consequences arise from these changes that support my earlier arguments. As claimed in the last section, the saturation of the social order with *jouissance* leads, paradoxically, to its absence. Lacan goes as far to identify this as 'imitation surplus *jouissance*'.<sup>187</sup> This should not be opposed to any 'authentic' *jouissance* that can be located in the social order, because the only authentic *jouissance* is experienced as impossibility, as a gap in the Symbolic. To use the vocabulary of Deleuze and Guattari, under capitalism the location of this point of impossibility is constantly deterritorialised and reterritorialised — a process that has disorientating effects. The drive to *jouissance* serves as a motor that continually opens up new

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<sup>184</sup> [*Ca marche comme sur des roulettes*]. Lacan, 'On Psychoanalytic Discourse', p. 11.

<sup>185</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XVII*, p. 177 (10 June 1970).

<sup>186</sup> Lefebvre shows both how the freedom to indulge in leisure activities exists in an economy that requires citizens to 'buy' this time with work, and how it is inextricably bound up with consumption. Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life Volume One: Introduction* (London: Verso, 2008), p. 31. See also Dominique Laporte, *History of Shit* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002). Another point of reference here might be Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London: Verso, 2013), in which he argues that sleep provides one of the last frontiers to capitalism and its various technical apparatus of control.

<sup>187</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XVII*, p. 81 (11 February 1970).

possibilities for profit.<sup>188</sup> Under this regime surplus *jouissance* becomes a potentially infinite source of surplus value.

This has a dramatic effect on the logic of social organisation. As Frédéric Declercq points out, ‘For Lacan a society that revolves around the production and consumption of objects of libidinal enjoyment connects subjects with objects and not with other subjects.’<sup>189</sup> This has a destructive effect on social relations within and between groups, which are largely based on shared Symbolic frames of reference. Where the discourse of the master is based on Symbolic recognition, on a relation between the subject and the Other — albeit one mediated by a master signifier ( $\$ \rightarrow S_1 \rightarrow S_2$ ) — in the discourse of capitalism the subject is continually bombarded with objects of enjoyment ( $a \rightarrow \$$ ). The Symbolic is still in place, but it serves not as a locus of social organisation but as a storehouse for illusory parcels of *jouissance*.

### Pushing at an Open Door

What becomes of the transgressive logics of inversion and disorientation under the conditions of commanded enjoyment and the discourse of capitalism? Before answering this question it is worth recapitulating the basic argument so far. This has centred around the work of two American artists, Paul McCarthy and Nick Zedd, the latter of which was the main ideologue of the Cinema of Transgression. It was argued that certain works by Zedd and the CoT embodied the transgressive logic of inversion, and that by elevating transgression to the position of an imperative the group became victims of their own supergoic commands. The work of McCarthy on the other hand was shown to embody a spirit of disorientation that operated in multiple registers: semiotic, perceptual-affective, and moral. While working in different artistic milieus and living on opposite sides of North America, McCarthy and the filmmakers associated with the CoT nevertheless share a certain punk sensibility. This is manifested in their mutual iconoclastic reprocessing of mainstream American visual culture, as well as the values this culture carries. It is also manifested in a common lack of appetite for

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<sup>188</sup> As Zupančič puts it, ‘Drives are plastic; just let them come up with another Symbolic (or Imaginary) configuration of enjoyment that can then be detached from enjoyment per se.’ Alenka Zupančič, ‘When Surplus Enjoyment Meets Surplus Value’, in *Reflections on Seminar XVII*, ed. by Justin Clemens and Russell Grigg (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 155-178 (p. 173).

<sup>189</sup> Frédéric Declercq, ‘Lacan on the Capitalist Discourse: Its Consequences for Libidinal Enjoyment and Social Bonds’, *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, 11, (2006) 74–83 (p. 75). Broadly speaking this is also Marx’s argument, that under commodity fetishism relationships between people are confused with relationships between things.

positing any values of their own. Yet while the CoT elevated transgression to the status of morality, giving it a value in and of itself, McCarthy does not even give the viewer this option; his work pushes beyond the logic of inversion and shows that transgression is itself compromised, and ultimately associated with dubious supra-legal state power.

The antagonistic attitude shared by McCarthy and the CoT has not however precluded them from gaining institutional recognition and support. In the case of the CoT, this can be seen in a recent survey exhibition at the KW Institute in Berlin.<sup>190</sup> Eschewing the usual white emulsion and polished concrete of the art museum, the exhibition's curators instead recreated a strange facsimile of '80s New York. For three months in the Spring of 2012, *Thrust in Me* was projected for a strictly 18+ audience amongst freshly spray-painted graffiti, painstakingly smudged windows and stuffed beanbags that resembled rats — an unusual solution to the problem of gallery seating. Like many other transgressive artists before them, Nick Zedd and Richard Kern had finally entered the museum. For his part, McCarthy has never left. Although large museum retrospectives were devoted to the artist only later in his career, and in Europe before they were in America, McCarthy remains very much an art-world insider — a fact reflected in both his visibility in the art-press and the more recent commercial success of his work. In both cases, this institutional recognition does not mean that the transgressive nature of their work is automatically compromised. To stop here would be to level a rather superficial critique. More significant than the dynamics of recuperation is the relationship between the transgressive strategies of inversion and disorientation and the aspects of the decline of the Symbolic discussed above.

In many ways, the conceptual figure of inversion finds its perfect illustration in the case of commanded enjoyment. If the CoT can be said to have applied a twist to the usual operations of the superego, flipping the script on timeworn values and fixed moral codes, then this inversion now dovetails neatly with a set of social pressures that actively command enjoyment. While religion undoubtedly still enjoys a privileged place in American society, buttressing all manner of prohibitions and prejudices, these have slowly yielded to the pressures of a consumerism. The Reagan era imperative to 'just say no' has arguably been eclipsed by the exhortation to 'just do it'.<sup>191</sup> Under this

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<sup>190</sup> 'You Killed Me First: The Cinema of Transgression', curated by Susanne Pfeffer at KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, 19 February 2012 – 9 April 2012.

<sup>191</sup> Nike's slogan was reportedly inspired by the last words of the serial killer Gary Gilmore before he was executed by a firing squad, lending it a further frisson of transgression. Jeremy W. Peters, 'The Birth of "Just Do It" and Other Magical Words', *The New York Times*, 9 August 2009 <[http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/20/business/media/20adco.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/20/business/media/20adco.html?_r=0)> [accessed 01/06/2015].

regime, strategies of transgression associated with inversion no longer oppose the norm, but find their apogee in various mainstream practices and products.<sup>192</sup>

The shift from the discourse of the master to the discourse of capitalism bears less affinity with the operations of inversion than with disorientation. In replacing a univocal, fixed point of identification with a tangle of control mechanisms that operate in a less overt manner, the discourse of capitalism is one that acts as a corrosive on social forms that stand in its way. The removal of blockages in the circulation of capital often coincides with the removal of the Symbolic prohibitions that serve as points of orientation. Despite a desperate effort on the part of mainstream politicians to retrofit a certain conception of morality onto the mechanisms of capitalism, the latter is fundamentally beyond good and evil, overturning moral prohibitions when they stand in the way of profit. McCarthy's work could be said to allow the viewer to navigate through the wreckage of morality by offering up a kind of cognitive map. This is a paradoxically disorientating map, for it produces a cartography of disorientation itself. In his work the infinite transformation of surplus *jouissance* into surplus value under capitalism finds its visual analogue in the substitution of consumer condiments for bodily substances, where food and excrement ultimately become part of one and the same infernal flow of capital. The 'internal' critique of transgression within his work also exposes a contemporary bind between the law and transgression in mainstream politics. Together, these elements may temporarily send a viewer spinning, but they also stabilise into an image of disorientation itself, isolating it in a series of aesthetic forms.

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<sup>192</sup> This point could be linked to a number of recent cultural franchises, from the hugely popular *Sex and the City* to the more recent *50 shades of Grey*, both of which commodify sexual transgression and present it as a consumer choice. See Alex Dymock, 'Flogging sexual transgression: Interrogating the costs of the *Fifty Shades Effect*', *Sexualities* 16 (2013), 880-895.

## Chapter 3

### Programmes for Life

In perhaps one of the most famous and discredited psychological experiments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Phillip Zimbardo boarded up both ends of a large corridor in the basement of the university department where he worked and constructed a mock prison. Zimbardo paid 24 male students \$15 a day and randomly assigned them the roles of prisoner and guard, enlisting the local police force to ‘arrest’ the prisoners in their homes and bring them to the facility. The primary aim of the Stanford prison experiment was to study the effects of deindividuation and institutional validation on an individual's behaviour. Despite Zimbardo's intention to run the experiment for 2 weeks, it was aborted after just 6 days, by which time the guards had begun to display increasingly sadistic behaviour. After the experiment had finished, Zimbardo declared it fundamentally unethical to carry out research in such a way.<sup>193</sup> Repeating the experiment in America today would be impossible in a research context, breaching both the American Psychological Association code of ethics and the widely implemented Belmont report.<sup>194</sup> As well as these concerns, there have been serious questions raised about the scientific validity of the experiment, the way in which the participants were hired, and the fact that the results were never peer-reviewed.

From the outset then, the decision by the artist Artur Żmijewski to re-stage the experiment in 2005 was a wilfully transgressive gesture. While most of the details were duplicated as closely as possible, several key differences in the way the second experiment differed from the original make for an interesting comparison. In Żmijewski's experiment, the participants were not students but unemployed men, and

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<sup>193</sup> Furthermore, in his book *The Lucifer Effect*, Zimbardo apologised for his role in the experiment, writing that ‘I was guilty of the sin of omission — the evil of inaction — of not providing adequate oversight and surveillance when it was required.’ ‘The findings came at the expense of human suffering. I am sorry for that and to this day apologize for contributing to this inhumanity.’ Philip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: How Good People Turn Evil* (London: Random House, 2011), pp. 181, 235.

<sup>194</sup> The Belmont Report is a document published in 1979 that outlines a set of ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects. Despite the fact it was written with behavioural and biomedical research in mind, according to Papademas the Belmont Report set out ‘basic ethical principles for the many particular ethical prescriptions and evaluations of human actions in general.’ See Diana Papademas, ‘Editor's Introduction: Ethics in Visual Research’, *Visual Studies*, 2:19 (2004), 122-126. For a full text of the Belmont Report see United States National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, *The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research, Volumes 1-2* (Washington: United States. Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1978). There would be grounds to argue that the Stanford prison experiment itself contributed to the perception that formal codes of ethics were needed for research.

the prison was located not in the basement of a university but in an industrial unit on the outskirts of Warsaw. Furthermore, while the experiment ended prematurely, it did so not through the intervention of the ‘warden’, but rather through mutual agreement between the prisoners and the guards. Another crucial difference between the two films involved the surveillance employed by Żmijewski — 5 cameras placed behind mirrored glass and several CCTV cameras inside the ‘prison’ — the footage from which was then edited into a 75-minute film entitled *Repetition*, which was displayed in the Polish pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2005.



Figure 8: Artur Żmijewski, *Repetition* (2005), film still. © Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw and Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich.

The title of the book published on the occasion of this exhibition is suggestive: *If it happened only once it's as if it never happened*.<sup>195</sup> Rather than being simply a disavowal of contingency, it highlights an ambition to challenge the status of the knowledge produced by Zimbardo's experiment, and suggests that art is equally entitled to answer

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<sup>195</sup> Joanna Mytkowska, *Artur Żmijewski: If it happened only once it's as if it never happened* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2005). The title is a translation of a German proverb, *Einmal ist Keinmal*.

such questions.<sup>196</sup> In an interview with Daniel Miller, Źmijewski claims that ‘I repeated the Phillip Zimbardo experiment because, unlike scientists, I can do this, because in art it is still allowed. It doesn’t mean that there is more freedom in art; it just means that there is cultural permission for rebellion in art.’<sup>197</sup> This comment opens out onto a range of points about the contextual differences between the two fields and the different moral parameters they operate within. It also lends support to the arguments made in previous chapters concerning the paradox of socially sanctioned transgression. While these considerations are no doubt central to *Repetition*, they only take the argument so far. In this chapter I want to approach Źmijewski’s practice from a different angle, one that takes into account not only the ‘negative’ logics of transgression in its relation to existing laws or rules (logics embodied in different ways by each of the artists discussed so far) but also the way in which a set of rules might be actively created in a work of art, being the very material out of which it is constituted. Two further examples drawn from Źmijewski’s oeuvre help this aspect of his work to be discerned.

The first of these is set in an environment resembling an art school. In a large whitewashed space with painted stud walls and overhead strip lights groups of participants apply paint to supported sheets of paper. The participants belong to one of four groups: elderly Catholic women, members of the neo-nationalist Union of Polish Youths, Jewish teenagers and young left-wing activists. In *Them* (2007), the task Źmijewski has set them for the day is to make a symbol of their organisation and their beliefs. The results range from a boldly outlined painting of a church to a mixed media collage of the Szczerbiec sword - a nationalist symbol of Poland. When the groups are satisfied with their efforts Źmijewski takes photographs of the works, and the next day hands them T-shirts with their designs printed on the front. He announces what will happen next: "our game begins here. If you don’t like something about this situation you can change it. You can re-edit it, re-write it, draw it again, destroy or add something. There are no restrictions". The groups go to work on each other’s paintings, at first working tentatively: the activists carefully cut between the church doors to open them up; the Jewish teenagers apply a rainbow flag across the Szczerbiec sword. As the exercise continues however, the alterations get increasingly destructive, culminating in

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<sup>196</sup> Insofar as the original experiment can be said to have produced knowledge, the title of the works it generated such as *The Lucifer Effect: How Good People Turn Evil* would suggest that the status of this knowledge is not only scientific but also moral.

<sup>197</sup> Daniel Miller, ‘The Politics of Fear: Artur Źmijewski interviewed by Daniel Miller’, *Art Monthly*, 333 (2010), 1-4 (p. 2)

several of the pieces being entirely burnt, and one of the elderly Catholic women having her mouth taped shut with gaffer tape.<sup>198</sup>

A third example, *The Game of Tag* [Berek] (1999), is ostensibly a lot simpler than the other two works. For just under four minutes a group of around 8 participants of mixed ages and genders play the game naked. They shuffle into a small concrete room timidly, swinging their arms or jumping up and down to keep warm. As the game begins they become more relaxed, laughing and engaging in horseplay as the power shifts around the room. The game picks up a rhythm and they run around in circles or group together in corners. Mid way through the film the camera cuts to another space that appears very similar to the first. The participants are playing the same game with similar exuberance. It is only when the credits roll that the viewer is told in a matter-of-fact way where the film was shot: in the first place the basement of a private house, in the second, the gas chamber of a former concentration camp. The veracity of this information is worth questioning, but has until now passed without interrogation in the art press.

When it was exhibited at the exhibition *Side by Side. Poland – Germany. A 1000 Years of Art and History*, at the Martin-Gropius-Bau Berlin<sup>199</sup>, the video was removed from the exhibition at the request of Jewish leaders, specifically Hermann Simon, the director of the New Synagogue Berlin and Centrum Judaicum Foundation, who wrote a letter to the director of the gallery expressing his condemnation of the video. A year later, when Żmijewski was appointed curator of the Berlin Biennial, he chose to re-exhibit the piece, in his own words, ‘to react against this impulse to censor, self-censor, and close off discussion.’<sup>200</sup> Reacting against such an act of censorship was again clearly a transgressive gesture, especially since this censorship was enforced on primarily moral grounds.

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<sup>198</sup> A very similar ‘game’ was played between Żmijewski and Paweł Althamer on the occasion of their joint exhibition at CCA Ujazdowski Castle Warsaw in 2005, entitled [S]election.pl. Żmijewski and Althamer invited former colleagues to contribute to the exhibition on the condition that anyone could adapt, improve or destroy the work on display. As the exhibition developed, Althamer invited more and more participants, including a group of children, his daughter, and at one stage a group of prostitutes. The English title of the exhibition hints at a range of possible meanings. The idea of ‘selection’ highlights the ongoing input of each participant, who effectively select the works they would like to preserve and those they would like to change. Understood in this way, it could be said that the exhibition evolved over time by means of ‘natural’ selection, with only the ‘fittest’ artworks surviving. The loosely democratic nature of the process is denoted by the word ‘election’, and ‘.pl’ could reference the polish web domain.

<sup>199</sup> The exhibition was curated by Anda Rottenberg and took place from September 23, 2011–January 9, 2012.

<sup>200</sup> Artur Żmijewski, ‘Berek’ <<http://www.berlinbiennale.de/blog/en/projects/berek-by-artur-zmijewski-22243>> [accessed 01/06/2013]. The decision to place the video in a black-box viewing room on the top floor of the K.W. institute in Berlin makes for a more tepid challenge to the ‘censorship’ than the Biennial literature makes out.

*The Game of Tag* is perhaps the starkest example of the two features of Źmijewski's work I want to foreground in this chapter. The first concerns the way in which the artist designs visual or verbal games that performers then play out. All of the works above involve games of one sort or another, and these games only function by means of a set of rules of engagement, stages of progression, and roles assigned and exchanged among participants. For now all of these features could be subsumed under the Lacanian category of the Symbolic (later in this chapter I will attend to the specificity of the different functions at play). While Źmijewski's games could be said to involve the creation of Symbolic microcosms, in each case the boundaries of these microcosms are unstable, extending beyond the apparent bounds of the artwork itself - for example in the case of *Repetition* connecting up with the unemployed status of the men taking part, and in the case of *A Game of Tag* with the cultural sensitivity that usually surrounds discussions of the Holocaust. The second feature is the transgressive strategies that each of these works employ. In the 1990s Źmijewski was a key proponent in the 'Critical Art' movement in Poland, which included Katarzyna Kozyra, Zbigniew Libera and Grzegorz Klaman among others.<sup>201</sup> As distinct from some of the artists associated with The Cinema of Transgression discussed in the last chapter, the Critical Art movement in Poland made work that was avowedly political. What then is the relationship between transgression and political intent in Źmijewski's work? Is transgression being positioned as a predominantly political tool? And if so how is this tool wielded?

These two overarching concerns — the game-like character of Źmijewski's work and the relationship between transgression and political intent — could be treated separately. However, to do so would be to miss the significance of their interrelation. For one, both transgression and the creation of games involve an attitude towards the Symbolic. Identifying the specific character of this attitude requires a look beyond the artworks themselves and into the socio-political context in which they were made. By looking at this wider backdrop, as well as a handful of artistic precursors to Źmijewski's work, I hope to discern a submerged logic that bridges the gap between a predominantly

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<sup>201</sup> A good round up of the 'Critical Art' movement in Poland is provided in *Trembling Bodies: Interviews with Artists*, ed. by Artur Źmijewski (Krakow: Kronika, 2010). Several of the artists interviewed are known for work that could in one way or another be considered transgressive, among them Zbigniew Libera's *Lego Concentration Camp* (1996), which drew legal complaints against the artist from Lego, Katarzyna Kozyra's *Olympia* (1996), an uncompromising series of photographs and a video that documents the artist's fight with cancer, and Grzegorz Klaman's *Flag for Third Polish Republic* (2001), a violation of the ban on placing a three coloured polish flag on the facade of the building in Gdańsk.

negative impulse to transgress, and the experimental modelling and remodelling of reality and behaviour.

### Open Forms, Closed Forms

What are the historical precedents for the performances described above? Insofar as they proceed from a set of authored rules, or constraints, they bear a resemblance to the scored happenings and performances of Allan Kaprow and John Cage (in particular the latter's use of the I-Ching) in the 1960s, as well as many others associated with the Fluxus movement around the same time.<sup>202</sup> There is however a lesser-known history of Polish artists who explored similar issues around structure and agency in their work. In the following paragraphs I will attempt to trace this history and its influence on Źmijewski's practice.

As one of several internationally known Polish artists (including Katarzyna Kozyra and Pawel Althamer), Źmijewski was educated at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw in the 1980s and 90s. The 'game' that acts as the motor of *Them* is largely based on a similar game that Źmijewski played when at art school under the tutelage of Grezegorz Kowalski, who was in turn influenced by the avant-garde architect Oskar Hansen (1922-2005).

As an architect, educator, theorist and urban planner, perhaps the most significant influence Oskar Hansen exerted on Polish art hinged around his concept of the 'open form'. This theory was elaborated in *The Open Form Manifesto*, which was enthusiastically received at the Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) in Otterlo in 1959. Hansen put great store by his concept, writing that the open form 'will awake the desire of existence for every one of us, it will help us to define ourselves and find ourselves in the space and time in which we live.'<sup>203</sup> The theory as a

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<sup>202</sup> John Cage's *Music of Changes* (1951) is a composition for piano in which a chart system allowed the composer to consult the I-Ching and convert the book's symbols into musical notation. See John Cage, 'To Describe the Process of Composition Used in *Music of Changes* and *Imaginary Landscape No. 4*', in *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, 57–59 (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), pp. 57-60. Although less preoccupied with the issue of contingency, Kaprow is well known for the guidelines he provided for the participants in his happenings. These were often sequential in nature, and prescribe a set of actions or conditions that should be fulfilled for the happening to be successful. See Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>203</sup> Oskar Hansen, 'Forma Otwarta', *Przegląd Kulturalny*, 5:5 (1959), 5-6 (p. 5), English translation available from: <<http://open-form.blogspot.co.uk/2009/01/original-1959-open-form-manifesto.html>> [accessed 01/06/2015] There has been a recent resurgence of interest in Hansen's work within the art-world leading to a number of major museum exhibitions such as 'Oskar Hansen – Open Form' at Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), 10 July 2014 to 06 January 2015 (curated by Soledad Gutiérrez and Łukasz Ronduda in collaboration with Aleksandra Kędziorek.)

whole can be described as an early attempt to make architecture more responsive to individual and group desire. Amenable to multiple uses and scales of operation, the theory extended over art, architecture and urban planning, and in each case foregrounded social use over and above 'rational' planning, presupposing a form of subjectivity based on diversity and process, rather than unity and stasis.<sup>204</sup> For Hansen, the ideal outcome of any given project involved the ascendancy of the 'user' to the position of co-author. This was decisively not the case in what he called 'closed forms', 'in which the formal and often also the contextual components are fixed.'<sup>205</sup> Closed forms objectify those who live in them, making them feel as if they were living among 'somebody else's souvenirs, feelings, somebody else's houses and housing settlements.'<sup>206</sup> As much as possible, a building or urban space should facilitate the subjective emancipation of its users, rather than their objectification and alienation. Although these ideas are relatively commonplace today, in their time they ran against the grain of technocratic rationalism that characterised much early modernist architecture, and the group of architects known as 'Team 10' of which Hansen was a part gradually distanced themselves from the orthodoxy of Le Corbusier and his followers, eventually creating a schism within the CIAM organisation itself.<sup>207</sup>

Despite the emphasis he placed on process and indeterminacy, Hansen also wished to cultivate a quasi-scientific approach to his projects. As Łukasz Ronduda et al write, the theory and practice of the open form combined a 'determination to move experimentation from the field of art to the socio-political sphere [with a] fascination with the attitude of the scientist-artist participating, on par with the contemporary science, in the transformation of reality.'<sup>208</sup> One way Hansen occupied the role of the 'scientist-artist' was to minimise his own subjective input in various projects, distilling his creativity into a series of objective rules or functions that were nevertheless flexible enough to respond to the user's needs. Although there is little to suggest Hansen had anything other than a passing acquaintance with cybernetics, the subsequent

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<sup>204</sup> Łukasz Ronduda, Michal Wolinski, and Alex John Wieder, 'Games, Actions and Interactions: Film and the Tradition of Oskar Hansen's Open Form', in *1,2,3... Avant-Gardes Film/Art between Experiment and Archive*, ed. by Łukasz Ronduda, Florian Zeyfang (New York: Sternberg Press, 2007), pp. 88-103 (pp. 91-2).

<sup>205</sup> Oskar Hansen, 'Forma Otwarta', p. 5.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> One of the events that signalled disquiet within CIAM was Hansen's presentation at the 1949 Bergamo congress, where he used the opportunity to publicly criticise a speech by Le Corbusier, an action that earned him the support of another Polish architect Jerzy Sołtan. See Łukasz Stanek and Dirk Van Den Heuvel, 'Introduction: Team 10 East and several Other Useful Fictions' in *Team 10 East: Revisionist Architecture in Real Existing Modernism*, ed. by Łukasz Stanek (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 2014), pp. 11-33 (p. 14).

<sup>208</sup> Ronduda et al 'Games, Actions and Interactions', p. 92-3.

interpretation of his work by a generation of artists he trained in the 1970s, in particular Przemysław Kwiek and Zofia Kulik (together known as KwieKulik), suggests that the open form theory contained within it principles that were easily filtered through a cybernetic frame of reference.<sup>209</sup> For one, the objective rules and functions mentioned above could be described as command structures within a cybernetic model, and their responsiveness to the behavioural 'output' of the people who used them could be said to constitute a feedback loop, in that the principles underpinning the design of buildings were open to reformulation.<sup>210</sup> This extended to the principle of open form itself, which was left constitutively vague as a means to accommodate change. Furthermore, various projects by Hansen display what Pask has described as a 'system orientated thinking' in architecture, in which buildings were not designed as discrete entities but components in larger arrangements.<sup>211</sup> This is no more the case than in Hansen's Linear Continuous System project, which was developed together with his wife Zofia Hansen, and constituted a wildly ambitious master plan for the reorganisation of Polish urban space that would replace the concentric model with four large settlement strips spanning the width of the country.

Before reaching Żmijewski, many aspects of Hansen's theory of open forms found artistic expression in the work of Grzegorz Kowalski, who after studying at the

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<sup>209</sup> Zofia Kulik and Przemysław Kwiek worked together between 1971-1987, mainly in the medium of film and performance. In 1971 they collaborated with various other students at the academy of Fine Arts Warsaw on the film *Open Form*, which interpreted Hansen's theory by means of a series of visual games and structured performances. Elsewhere Kwiek discussed his interest in cybernetics as it related to television: 'The cybernetic model says that what and how we know is the result of the way we currently organize reality. This is one of the central tenets of cybernetics, a science that organizes reality into systems and sub-systems and examines the relations among them. The creation of value is based on the same mechanism.... What fascinated me about television was the simultaneity in observing the effect and the working cause so that one could create model situations in which the effect of an action was instantaneous, and in which one could observe and turn that observation into another object of cognition to be manipulated in turn.' Przemysław Kwiek quoted in a hand-out accompanying the exhibition 'Operator's Exercises: Open Form Film & Architecture' at Arthur Ross Architecture Gallery, Buell Hall, New York. March 30–May 7, 2010. Curated by Łukasz and Mark Wasiuta. p. 6. In line with this interest, in 1971 KwieKulik, together with a number of other artists, attempted to set up a section on aesthetics at the Polish Society of Cybernetics. This resulted in a series of meetings between artists and cyberneticists, one of which involved the artists presenting their artwork *Activities and Visual Games*, which was then analysed in the cybernetic vocabulary of 'input', 'output' and 'feedback'. KwieKulik were also invited to discuss their work at Professor Stanisław Piekarczyk's seminar in mathematics and logics at the University of Warsaw. While few other students threw themselves at the field with such enthusiasm, the efforts of KwieKulik provided a conduit for ideas associated with cybernetics to influence great number of other artists of the era. 'Operator's Exercises' p. 20.

<sup>210</sup> Insofar as cybernetic principles can be retrofitted to Hansen's theory of Open Form, these theories bear more resemblance to ideas associated with the 'New Cybernetics' of Humberto Maturana, Francisco Varela, Felix Geyer and Hans van der Zouwen that emerged in the 1970s. Bailey characterises this body of work as having a focus on 'information as constructed and reconstructed by an individual interacting with the environment.' Kenneth D. Bailey, *Sociology and the New Systems Theory: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis* (New York: SUNY, 1994), p. 163.

<sup>211</sup> Gordon Pask 'The Architectural Relevance of Cybernetics', *Architectural Design*, September 1969, pp. 494-6 (p. 496). Pask wrote in 1969 that 'nowadays there is a demand for system orientated thinking [within architecture] whereas, in the past, there was only a more or less esoteric desire for it.

Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw worked as a teaching assistant in Hansen's studio. Kowalski also established the *Repassage* gallery in Warsaw along with a number of other young artists. In an autobiographical essay, Kowalski writes that 'Ninety-nine per cent of those people had [been] through Hansen's studio and, to a greater or lesser extent, assimilated the principles of "Open Form"'.<sup>212</sup>

In the 70s and 80s Kowalski made a series of performances at the gallery he loosely called 'action-questions'. The format of these performances involved a range of Kowalski's friends responding to a question such as *Could You and/or Would You Like to Treat Me Like an Object?* (1979), for which Kowalski put his body at the mercy of his friends and fellow artists.<sup>213</sup> One response came from Wiktor Gutt, who tied a hammer to one of Kowalski's hands, and a metal spike in the other. He asked Kowalski to imagine an earthworm under the peen of the hammer, and his son under the point of the spike. Having tied Kowalski's hands up in such a way that they dangled on puppet strings, Gutt let them fall to the floor with a crash. His response to Kowalski's action-question was intended to embody another question: 'Could you and would you like to be treated as an object in the mental sphere?'

Performances such as these positioned the artist as an initiator and regulator of the artwork, setting up a series of inputs or constraints, but minimised his or her authorial voice in their processual realisation. In this respect they drew on the cybernetic characteristics and dialogic nature of Hansen's approach, while at the same time broadening the parameters to include a wider range of potential effects and responses. Ronduda et al argue that 'Kowalski always tried to imbue the quasi-scientific (objective and rationalist) paradigm of games and interactions [...] with humanist elements, powerfully existential, sensual, subjective, irrational, psychological, subconscious (even spiritual), and was open to situations eluding rational analysis.'<sup>214</sup>

Żmijewski came into contact with Kowalski when he studied under him at the sculpture department at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, which has been nicknamed 'kowalnia' (the smithy) for the number of well-known artists that were trained there. Some of Kowalski's pedagogic activities functioned in a formally similar way to his artworks, and in cases such as *Common Space, Individual Space, Realisation VIII* (1993), a filmed version of which is now held in the Museum of Modern Art in

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<sup>212</sup> Żmijewski, *Trembling Bodies*, p. 169.

<sup>213</sup> This piece is also highly reminiscent of an artwork by Marina Abramovich, *Rhythm 0* (1974) held at the student centre in Zagreb, in which she placed 72 objects on a table, and invited the audience to use them on her body in any way they chose.

<sup>214</sup> Ronduda et al 'Games, Actions and Interactions', p. 102.

Warsaw, it is difficult to pinpoint where one ends and the other begins.<sup>215</sup> Previous realisations of *Common Space / Individual Space* involved a group of participants who interacted with each other by means of non-verbal communication. As the title suggests, the performance area was divided into collective spaces and individual spaces. When the participants were in the common spaces, they were encouraged to react to one another's gestural or physical messages, simultaneously checking whether or not someone else is interpreting them. The primary aim of the exercise seems to be to encourage students to cultivate a sense of the communicative power of art. The common space (as a field of inter-subjective communication) stood in for public space in general, and having the students occupy this space was intended to teach them the responsibility that work in the socio-political sphere entails.<sup>216</sup> This responsibility is distributed evenly among the participants. As Kowalski himself described the piece:

We all find ourselves in “*common space, private space*,” students and teachers, on equal terms... The goal of the exercise... is to ensure active participation in the process of non-verbal communication. The course of the process is unpredictable and depends on the participants' ingenuity and the temperature of the interaction between them. We agree on one thing: we avoid destructive behaviours.<sup>217</sup>

In Źmijewski's reworking of Kowalski's activity, the major difference seems to be that this agreement is suspended. Destructive behaviours are given full expression just as they sometimes are in society at large.

Aside from the direct comparisons between *Common Space, Individual Space* and Źmijewski's work *Them*, there are several threads running from Hansen, through Kowalski, and into the work of Źmijewski. The objective to participate in 'the transformation of reality' in Hansen's architectural work and Kowalski's pedagogic approximation of public space translates into Źmijewski's work as a refutation of art's autonomy, a gesture that has added significance in Poland, as will be shown in the next section.<sup>218</sup> The dialogue with science is also carried forward from Hansen to Źmijewski,

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<sup>215</sup> A full version is available from <<http://www.artmuseum.pl/en/filmoteka/praca/kowalski-grzegorz-kowalnia-obszar-wspolny-obszar-wlasny>> [accessed 01/06/2015].

<sup>216</sup> For further information on this point see Karol Sienkiewicz, 'The Necessity of Existence: Grzegorz Kowalski and the Milieu of the Repassage Gallery in Warsaw', *OwnReality*, 4, (2013) 2-25 (p. 23).

<sup>217</sup> Grzegorz Kowalski, 'Excerpt from Sculpture Studio Programmatic Premises' (1985), quoted in Ronduda et al, p. 103.

<sup>218</sup> For a programmatic elaboration of this point see Artur Źmijewski, 'The Applied Social Arts', in *Trembling Bodies: Interviews with Artists*, ed. by Artur Źmijewski (Krakow: Kronika, 2010), pp. 25-33. After the historical avant-garde, perhaps the movement most closely associated with the ambition to 'transform reality' was the Situationists. Although the connection is not elaborated in any great detail,

although whereas for the former it represented an ideal to be aspired to, for the latter its ideologically reinforced credibility needed to be questioned. Above all else however, it is an exploration of the paradox of ‘prescriptive freedom’ that unites the work of all three practitioners. All of the artworks discussed thus far construct a set of Symbolic constraints and relationships that determine to a greater or lesser extent how participants act. While Hansen and Kowalski deliberately chose to do this as little as possible, neutralising their own input in order to make room for processes of subjectivation to take place within their games, structures and pedagogical exercises, a number of critics have roundly criticised Źmijewski for doing the opposite.

In an article in *Frieze* magazine, Nina Möntmann reductively opposes Źmijewski’s work to ‘genuinely participative’ art, writing that

Despite the differences in the treatment of those involved, the vaguely defined community in the projects of Alimpiev, Bartana and Źmijewski is ultimately united by the defencelessness of the human individual at the mercy of a power structure set up to control, discipline, or destroy them.<sup>219</sup>

This passage highlights the moral tenor of many of the responses to Źmijewski’s work. In the last twenty years artworks that take models of collaboration and participation as their form have brought about the emergence of new critical frameworks underwritten by vague ideas about what it means to act ‘ethically’ as an artist.<sup>220</sup> Much of this art theory and criticism effectively advocates the renunciation of one’s authorial input as much as possible. To transpose it into Hansen’s terms, the more open the form, the more ethical the form. As you would expect, there are a number of writers who oppose the imposition of such an ethical framework on works of art. Claire Bishop, for

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Hansen did claim that his work developed the ideas of the Situationist movement. Oskar Hansen, *Towards Open Form*, (Frankfurt: Revolver, 2005), p. 203. His ambition to elevate the position of a building’s user to the position of co-author could further be related to the Situationist’s early concern with ‘Unitary Urbanism’, which eschewed a narrowly conceived functionalism in order to integrate notions of play and exploration into the design and use of urban space. See Bradley J. Macdonald, ‘From the Spectacle to Unitary Urbanism: Reassessing Situationist Theory’, *Rethinking Marxism*, 8:2 (1995), 89-111.

<sup>219</sup> Nina Möntmann ‘Community service’, *Frieze*, October 2006, pp. 37-40 (p. 39). To this judgment could be added that of Ken Johnson, who on the occasion of Źmijewski’s solo show at X Initiative in New York in 2010, described Źmijewski as a ‘puppet master who uses people less sophisticated than himself as marionettes in a game whose point they may not fully understand.’ Ken Johnson, ‘An Artist Turns People Into His Marionettes’, *New York Times*, 29 November 2009 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/30/arts/design/30zmijewski.html>> [accessed 01/06/2015].

<sup>220</sup> See for example Maria Lind, ‘Actualisation of Space: The Case of Oda Projesi’, in *Contemporary Art: From Studio to Situation*, ed. by Claire Doherty (London: Black Dog, 2004), pp. 109-121 and Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

example, counts Źmijewski among a number of artists who ‘do not make the “correct” ethical choice, they do not embrace the Christian ideal of self-sacrifice; instead, they act on their desire without the incapacitating restrictions of guilt.’<sup>221</sup> In another text Bishop draws inspiration from Lacan’s *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* to support this argument, and repeats an obstinate misreading of this seminar by focusing on the apparent 'maxim' 'do not give ground relative to your desire'.<sup>222</sup> This misreading compels her to support artworks that supposedly manifest the desire of their author over and above any socio-cultural restriction (problematically assuming both that these desires are legible to an observer in the first place, and that socio-cultural restrictions cannot themselves be taken as objects of desire). Furthermore, Bishops’ misreading has the secondary effect of subordinating aesthetics to ethics, as the figure of *Antigone* enters her argument not as an anamorphic image (as it did in my own reading of the seminar), but as an example to be followed.<sup>223</sup>

Both the idea of ‘genuine participation’ that Möntmann’s argument rests upon, and the notion of an 'ethics of desire' in Bishop's work represent conceptual dead-ends. If one agrees that greater participation should warrant greater merit (a position that would be difficult to apply to other fields of creative production, such as theatre for example), then one is still left with the problem of defining ‘genuine participation’. If one follows Bishop's hasty injunction to throw off the shackles of social pressure and act on one’s desire alone (a formulation which misses the connection between the two) one risks elevating transgression to the status of an imperative. Instead of following either of these lines of approach, it is my contention that by drawing on the contextual background of Źmijewski’s work it might be possible to show that the crucial dynamic concerns not the issue of authorial renunciation, but rather the relationship between the

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<sup>221</sup> Claire Bishop, ‘The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents’, *Artforum*, February 2006, pp. 179-185 (p. 183). The other artists Bishop places in this camp are Jeremy Deller, Phil Collins, and Carsten Höller.

<sup>222</sup> In fact, the wording of Lacan's phrase is slightly different. He writes that ‘from an analytical point of view, the only thing of which one can be guilty is of having given ground relative to one’s desire’. Lacan, *Seminar VII*, p. 319 (July 6 1960). Here three things should be emphasised: 1) that when quoted in full the passage does not, in fact, take the form of an imperative; 2) that the first clause of the sentence limits the reference point to the situation of the analytic cure, as de Kessel argues in *Eros and Ethics*, p. 262; and 3), the fact that the construction ‘having given ground’ refers to a past experience, rather than a future imperative, implies that the analytic couple should pay attention to instances in which the analysand has given ground relative to her desire, rather than avoid giving ground on desire in the future. The tendency to extract a maxim from Lacan’s Ethics seminar parallels the tendency to reduce the figure of Antigone in his discussion to an example for ethical conduct, and the two misreadings often buttress one another, as they do in Bishop’s argument.

<sup>223</sup> Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), p. 39.

types of Symbolic structures within the work — which I have characterised variously as constraints, rules of engagement, or simply games — and those in society at large.

### A Servant with Two Masters

To better understand the relationship between Żmijewski's work and those that influenced him it will be necessary to give a brief characterisation of the power relations, political tensions and social structures in Poland after the second world war. Without entirely reducing artworks to the historical context in which they were made, such an historical overview will help shed light on both the structural character of Żmijewski's work, as well as the transgressive strategies he employs in the service of political aims. A secondary ambition will be to provide some historical examples for the concept of 'the decline of the Symbolic' elaborated in chapters 1 and 2.

The so-called political 'thaw' in eastern Europe following Stalin's death in 1953 represented less the smooth transition to a liberal democracy than the beginning of three decades of social unrest, suppression and economic hardship. Successive autocratic leaders - Cyrankiewicz, Gomułka and Gierek - were ushered into power on the basis of reforms that were promised but never made, either for economic reasons or due to pressure from Moscow.<sup>224</sup>

Given the authoritarianism that characterised this period of Polish history, an authoritarianism that the Solidarity movement would later challenge,<sup>225</sup> it is surprising to note that artists in Poland were granted unparalleled freedom of expression under communist rule.<sup>226</sup> The art-historian Piotr Piotrowski writes that the political thaw in the 1950s 'created a veritable explosion of Modern Art in Poland' which became something of a destination for artists from all over the eastern block.<sup>227</sup> From the 1950s onwards, Socialist Realism was slowly swept out of the public sphere, and was never enshrined as the official visual culture in the same way it was in the USSR. This apparent freedom continued throughout the '60s and '70s, during which time several artist-run galleries were funded by the regime, the most prominent of which was and still is the Foksal

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<sup>224</sup> David Ost, *Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics: Opposition and Reform in Poland Since 1968* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>226</sup> Considerable restrictions were placed on artistic expression in other Eastern European countries, where artists were prohibited from deviating too far from the party aesthetic of Socialist Realism. Aside from Poland another exception is Yugoslavia, which existed in a different political grouping to those countries directly absorbed into the USSR. For more on this see Piotr Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012).

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

gallery in Warsaw. The power the state wielded over the art-world during this period was therefore not as nakedly repressive as one might expect. Nevertheless it did come at some cost: financial as well as other mechanisms of control influenced the kind of art that was being produced and displayed. Autonomy was only granted to artists and galleries on the understanding that criticism of the regime would not be tolerated. When this tacit agreement was broken, the authorities were quick to take action, for example in 1968 when Kazimierz Dejmek's production of Adam Mickiewicz's play *Dziady* at the Polish Theatre in Warsaw was shelved for its supposed anti-socialist references. The censorship of the play prompted a student march, backed up by members of the Warsaw branch of the Writer's Union, which in turn precipitated further repression of writers, intellectuals and students, some of whom chose to emigrate as a result.<sup>228</sup>

Piotrowski describes the cultural policies adopted by the state during this period as 'pseudo liberal', insofar as they incorporated modern art into the same ideological state apparatus that once promoted Socialist Realism, only this time under the auspices of 'freedom of expression'. Needless to say the state was not genuinely committed to fostering freedom of expression, but rather co-opting potential spaces for dissent. This strategy was made even more effective due to the Modernist discourse of autonomy that reigned in the Polish art scene at the time. This meant that even if galleries such as Foksal had been allowed to exhibit critical art, they might not have done so on account of their art-theoretical allegiances.<sup>229</sup>

In the 1970s the official discourse in Poland underwent a series of mutations. The regime tried (and ultimately failed) to use consumerism to secure its legitimacy, an approach that fostered a rather uncritical embrace of consumerism by large sections of society.<sup>230</sup> This failure of the government resulted in widespread economic crisis, and fanned the flames of opposition in the form of student groups, underground magazines and newspapers, as well as trade union movements. This was once again countered with surveillance, censorship, torture and killings on the part of the state. When the independent trade union Solidarity [*Solidarność*] picked up momentum in 1981 (then amassing 9 million members from its founding in 1980), the government responded with the imposition of martial law from 1981-3. Civil liberties were eroded, food was

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<sup>228</sup> John M. Bates, 'Adam Mickiewicz', in *Censorship: A World Encyclopedia*, ed. by Derek Jones, 4 vols (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), III, pp. 1585-1587 (p. 1587).

<sup>229</sup> As Piotrowski writes, the Foksal gallery was one of a number of art spaces that 'were firmly inscribed into the discourse of autonomy developed in the 1950s. While they rejected the modernist construction of the image, its visuality and abstraction, they did not dispense with its self-contained independence vis-à-vis the external reality.' Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy* p. 88.

<sup>230</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-Garde in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), p. 352.

rationed, and political life was drastically restricted. These restrictions also extended to art institutions, and many galleries and exhibition spaces were temporarily closed.

During this period, the power of the Catholic Church in Poland increased dramatically. Whereas in the '60s and '70s the Church had pragmatically avoided confrontation with the regime in return for lighter restrictions on religious matters, in the late '70s and early '80s it took an openly oppositional stance towards the communist party, and, along with the CIA, provided funds and equipment for the Solidarity movement.<sup>231</sup> When John Paul II was elected as Pope in 1978 he drew huge crowds in his native Poland, and fully exploited his popularity to make inroads into the authority of the state. The links between the Solidarity movement and the Catholic Church are well known, and evident in the former organisation's official iconography, which includes catholic elements, such as crosses and images of the Virgin Mary.<sup>232</sup> Following the establishment of semi-free elections in Poland in 1989, and Solidarity's subsequent ascendancy to government, the links between the Church and the new state were galvanised into an axis of authority, and certain Catholic principles are to this day enshrined in the polish constitution.<sup>233</sup> The link has been further highlighted in artworks such as *Flag for The Third Republic of Poland* (2001) by Grzegorz Klaman. In this simple iconographic work, Klaman redesigned the Polish flag to incorporate a black stripe alongside the usual red and white stripes, symbolising the influence of the Catholic Church on the state. The flag was exhibited on the front the Wyspa Gallery in Gdańsk, a city home to the historic shipyards that gave birth to Solidarity two decades before.

If one agrees with Piotrowski that the cultural policies adopted by the communist regime were at best 'pseudo liberal', then a cursory glance at the cultural policies encouraged by the post-communist regime and the Catholic Church reveal a similar situation. Just as the communist regime funded galleries and exhibition spaces up until 1989, so too did the Catholic Church provide outlets for artistic expressions of dissent in the period during and shortly after Martial law. In the 1980s a series of

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<sup>231</sup> Peter Hannaford and Charles D. Hobbs, *Remembering Reagan* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 1994), pp. 70-71.

<sup>232</sup> Around this time there was also pressure for artists to incorporate religious iconography into public sculptures. In an interview Grzegorz Kowalski recalls being awarded a commission by Solidarity to make a public sculpture in the town of Gdynia in 1981. According to Kowalski, the contract was eventually terminated because he refused to incorporate a cross into the design. He recalls a similar situation in Poznan for the artists Krystyn and Anna Jarnuszkiewicz. See Żmijewski, *Trembling Bodies*, p. 170.

<sup>233</sup> To take one example of this, there is a law in Poland that enforces the respect of 'Christian values' in radio and television programmes, which effectively gives the Church the right to ban broadcasts that it does not approve of. For more examples of the links between Church and state see: Andrzej Dominiczak, 'Church and State in Post-Communist Poland', *International Humanist News* (2002) <<http://iheu.org/content/church-and-state-post-communist-poland>> [accessed 01/06/2015]

‘church exhibitions’ were staged across Poland as a means to escape the system of state funded institutions and censorship (implicit or otherwise). Although these exhibitions have not been documented to anywhere near the extent that the state-financed exhibitions were in previous decades, Dorota Jarecka writes that ‘the trend grew to such a great scale that the ‘church exhibitions’ have become almost synonymous with the art of the decade.’<sup>234</sup>

This early strategy of ideologically steering the visual culture of the emergent resistance movement has in recent years been supplanted by more explicit forms of censorship. To cite one of the most extreme cases, in 2001 Dorota Nieznalska was sentenced to 6 months community service for a fragment of her work *Passion*, which consisted of a Greek cross onto which a photograph of male genitalia had been attached. Although Nieznalska’s sentence was successfully appealed, it was on the grounds that it was not her intention to ‘offend religious sentiments’ in the first place, rather than because the right to cause such an offence should be protected by law. Another example of state censorship was the physical destruction of a sculpture by Maurizio Catalan, *The Ninth Hour* (1999) that depicts Pope John Paul II crumpled on the floor having been struck down by a meteor, which lies static on top of his legs.<sup>235</sup> In this case the curator of the National Gallery, Anda Rottenberg, was eventually forced to resign in a campaign led by the two politicians, Halina Nowina-Konopka and Witold Tomczak, who used their parliamentary immunity to physically damage the piece on the grounds that a ‘civil servant of Jewish origin should not be spending the Roman Catholic majority’s money on disgusting works of art.’<sup>236</sup> Konopka and Tomczak were eventually joined by 90 other members of parliament in signing a less openly racist letter that eventually caused Rottenberg to resign.

This brief history of the shifting power dynamics of Polish history after WWII shows that while the transition from communism brought with it many significant changes to people’s lives, there is nevertheless a significant line of continuity in the way the production and display of artworks has been controlled from the 1960s to the

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<sup>234</sup> Two examples of church exhibition are ‘The Sign of the Cross’ (1983) and ‘The Apocalypse – A Light in the Darkness’ (1984). For further details see Dorota Jarecka, ‘Janusz Bogucki, the Polish Szeemann?’, in *Rejected heritage: Polish Art of the 1980s*, ed. by Karol Sienkiewicz (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art Warsaw, 2011), pp. 8-31.

<sup>235</sup> For a full account of the incident involving Dorota Nieznalska see Piotr Piotrowski ‘Visual Art Policy in Poland: Democracy, Policy and Censorship’, in *The Populism Reader* ed. by Cristina Ricupero, Lars Bang Larsen, Nicolaus Schafhausen (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2005), pp. 187-193. For more information about the incident involving Maurizio Catalan see Piotroska, *Art and Democracy*, p. 268.

<sup>236</sup> Apollinaire Scherr, ‘A Fallen Pope Provokes a Sensation in Poland’, *The New York Times*, May 13 2001 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/13/arts/art-architecture-a-fallen-pope-provokes-a-sensation-in-poland.html>> [accessed 01/06/2015].

present day. To speak of the circulation of power more generally, the authority wielded by both the communist state and the Catholic backed government could be described as rigidly hierarchical, and when ideological state apparatus fail, they have both been quick to use more nakedly repressive means such as censorship and punitive measures. Just as similar conditions underpinned the transgressive strategies of the artists discussed in chapters 1 and 2, so too did the socio-cultural milieu of coercion and censorship contribute to an artistic culture of transgression among the critical art movement in Poland.

### The Transition to Capitalism and the Decline in Symbolic Efficiency

Whilst I have tried to show the continuity between the kind of control the state exerted on the art world before and after ‘the autumn of nations’ in 1989, there has been a less continuous shift in Polish culture that plays out in the work of Żmijewski. Here the ambition is to demonstrate that the dramatic shift that occurred in Polish society as a result of the rapid transformation from communism to market capitalism had significant effects on the Symbolic order itself, and that these effects shed light on both the transgressive and game-like character of Żmijewski's work.

In contrast to the dominant narrative of a ‘political thaw’, the transition from communism to capitalism in Poland was so fast that it can be more appropriately described as ‘political sublimation’ in the sense of ice being transformed directly into gas. As Jane Hardy elaborates in *Poland's New Capitalism*, the ‘shock therapy’ administered in 1990 comprised a raft of policies that were put in place almost overnight, as massive government cuts were levied and high interest rates were set.<sup>237</sup> In a narrative reminiscent of the economic experiments in South America, Hardy writes that ‘In 1990 neoliberal economists saw CEE [Central and Eastern Europe] as a laboratory in which they could experiment with the implantation of ‘capitalism in the raw’ through market driven policies.’<sup>238</sup> ‘History, society and politics were viewed as impediments to the design of the transformation agenda by those who knew best.’<sup>239</sup> The economic aspects of this transformation fall outside the scope of this chapter and

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<sup>237</sup> Jane Hardy, *Poland's New Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2009), p. 34.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

have been covered in detail elsewhere.<sup>240</sup> What is more significant to address is the socio-cultural effect that the transition brought about.

The art critic and curator Joanna Mytkowska has written that the economic transformation of Poland post 1989 was so rapid that ‘language failed to keep pace with [it]. The exhaustion of language, the wearing away of public discourse, is doubtless a measure of the crisis of social communication.’ Under these circumstances, according to Mytkowska ‘A gap emerged between a hastily and superficially imported liberal discourse supposed to explain the world, and native traditions struggling with memory and a description of new identity.’<sup>241</sup>

The suggestion of a gap or caesura in public discourse is significant in the context of the discussion of the decline of the Symbolic. The idea that language can be hollowed out, gradually losing its power to latch onto the Real is an idea that has found expression in a number of recent works of psychoanalytically inflected critical theory. The concept of ‘Symbolic efficiency’ proposed by Slavoj Žižek seems to possess some descriptive power here. Žižek argues that Symbolic efficiency ‘concerns the point at which, when the Other of the symbolic institution confronts me with the choice of ‘Whom do you believe, my word or your eyes?’, I choose the Other’s word without hesitation, dismissing the factual testimony of my eyes’.<sup>242</sup> Put otherwise, Symbolic efficiency amounts to what might be called *trust* in a signifier’s power to describe reality, which could be at odds with empirical facts. Here ‘institutional authority’ should be thought of in an expanded sense to account not only for institutionally sanctioned roles such as those of judge, CEO, or professor, but also any Symbolic role or function that is socially agreed and has performative effects. Recalling the work of Philip Zimbardo, it could be said that the Stanford prison experiment was precisely a test of such Symbolic efficiency, in that the roles accorded to prisoners and guards validated behaviour that would normally appear excessive. Following Lacan, Žižek claims that referential stability has been eroded in recent years: ‘The key to today’s universe of simulacra, in which the Real is less and less distinguishable from its imaginary

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<sup>240</sup> As well as Hardy, see Tadeusz Kowalik, *From Solidarity to Sell Out: The Restoration of Capitalism in Poland* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012), and Gavin Rae, *Poland's Return to Capitalism: From the Socialist Bloc to the European Union* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2008).

<sup>241</sup> Joanna Mytkowska, ‘Too True Scenarios’, in *If it Happened Only Once, it's as if it Never Happened*, ed. by Joanna Mytkowska (Ostfildern: Hatje Kantz Verlag, 2005) 12-23 (p. 12).

<sup>242</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999), p. 327. Elsewhere in the same book (p. 195), Žižek claims that the concept of Symbolic efficiency is ‘Lévi-Straussian’, presumably referring to the latter’s arguments in *Structural Anthropology*. See introduction to this thesis, footnote 36.

simulation, lies in the retreat of “symbolic efficiency”<sup>243</sup> The erosion of Symbolic trust has for Žižek given rise to a range of psycho-symbolic phenomena such as widespread cynicism and a fragmentation of the social body. For Žižek and others this comes as a direct result of the disappearance of ‘the Big Other’, which I have already described in Lacan’s terms as a pluralisation of the Name-of-the-Father in chapter one.<sup>244</sup>

Another author of popular critical theory, Franco “Bifo” Berardi, has couched the debate in different terms, but makes essentially the same point as Žižek. In *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance*, Berardi looks at the effects financial capital has had on the way language is used and conceptualised. He writes that ‘Financial parthogenesis sucks down and dries up every social and linguistic potency, dissolving the products of human activity, especially of collective semiotic activity.’<sup>245</sup> Here one might be tempted to ask why financial capitalism in particular has had this effect, rather than capitalism in general. The answer for Berardi is that with finance capital, accumulation ‘no longer passes through the production of goods, but goes straight to its monetary goal, extracting value from the pure circulation of money, from the virtualization of life and intelligence’.<sup>246</sup> Finance capital, as one aspect of what Berardi and others have called ‘semio-capitalism’ automatises language, which is now able to operate irrespective of corporeal investment.<sup>247</sup> Once again, the result of this process is a general crisis in referentiality, whereby ‘the ontological guarantee of meaning based on the referential status of the signifier has broken apart.’<sup>248</sup>

As could be expected from two authors known for polemical and at times haphazard argumentation, neither Žižek nor Berardi’s ideas can be accepted uncritically. The latter’s prescriptive argument — in short, that it is up to poetry to reinvest language with sensuous potential — throws up a range of questions, not least of all concerning the central link that Berardi sets up between dereferentialisation in

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>244</sup> As Žižek writes, ‘the “nonexistence of the big Other” is strictly correlative to the notion of belief, of Symbolic trust, of credence, of taking what others say “at face value.”’ Ibid., p. 323.

<sup>245</sup> Franco “Bifo” Berardi, *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2012) p. 19. Much of the material underpinning Bifo’s argument can be found in a more systematically elaborated form in the chapter ‘Hyperreality of floating values’ in Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (London: Sage Publications, 1993)

<sup>246</sup> Berardi, *The Uprising*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>247</sup> Elsewhere, Berardi connects this idea to the changing nature of language acquisition, claiming somewhat hyperbolically that today ‘human beings learn more vocabulary from a machine than from their mothers’. This, he claims, weakens the affective dimensions of language, and results in a situation where ‘meaning is not rooted in the depths of the body’. Franco “Bifo” Berardi, *Heroes: Mass Murder and Suicide* (London: Verso, 2015). Berardi attributes these ideas to the work of Luisa Muraro, See *L’ordine Simbolico Della Madre* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1991).

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

Symbolist poetry, and the crisis in referentiality caused by financial capitalism.<sup>249</sup> Nevertheless, the central idea of the referential stability of the Symbolic in respect to the Real being weakened in response to particular mutations in global capitalism, would seem to possess some descriptive potential in the context of Poland post 1989.

It could be said that during the communist years Symbolic efficiency was anchored by the regime. Positions of public office were institutionally sanctioned by a central authority and cultural and economic activity was closely monitored for deviation from pre-defined norms. Even when the Symbolic guarantee the regime provided seemed under threat in the 1970s and '80s, the fact that sections of the population were rebelling *against* this authority shows that they still had trust in its Symbolic efficiency. When the Solidarity movement shifted the emphasis towards building a counter-structure with the slogan 'Don't tear down the institutions, build your own', it was not long before the movement found a new guarantee for their counter-institutions in the form of Catholic Nationalism.<sup>250</sup> The church exhibitions described above could be described as a series of testbeds aimed at adding iconographic flesh to the bones of this new Symbolic regime. For many, the twilight of communism in Poland was a period when the direction of psychic investment shifted from the state to the Church, whose authority then underpinned the incoming government.<sup>251</sup> In this scenario, it would seem that a loss of Symbolic efficiency did not occur — that 'guarantees' for referentiality were provided both before and after the fall of communism. Nevertheless, the shift from one Symbolic guarantee to another exposed the contingency of both. The fact that the official discourse could change so rapidly exposed the superficiality of both the defunct Symbolic universe of authoritarian rule and the incumbent ideology of Catholic nationalism.

While many citizens were quick to pledge their allegiance to the new Symbolic authority, the group of artists of which Żmijewski was a part positioned their work precisely in the rift that had been exposed. To use Mytkowska's words, Żmijewski's work occupies the place of 'the deficiencies of our dominant ways of naming things'.<sup>252</sup> In the next section it will become clear how this applies to the three works by Żmijewski discussed in the introduction.

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<sup>249</sup> Berardi claims that symbolist poetry prefigured the dereferentialisation of finance capital. This pre-figuration seems directly at odds with the task Berardi then sets poetry.

<sup>250</sup> Tina Rosenberg, 'Revolution U', *Foreign Policy* (February 16 2011), <[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/02/16/revolution\\_u?page=full](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/02/16/revolution_u?page=full)> [accessed 01/06/2015].

<sup>251</sup> This shift is also reminiscent of the pact established between the Reagan administration and the Christian right in the U.S., and more recently the alliance between Putin and the Orthodox Church.

<sup>252</sup> Joanna Mytkowska, 'Too true scenarios', p. 12.

## Three Games

When placed against the backdrop described in the last section Żmijewski's work acquires added significance. It is worth returning to each of the three pieces discussed in the introduction before drawing conclusions.

How exactly does *The Game of Tag* occupy a gap in the functioning of public discourse? The overt target of Żmijewski's provocation seems to be a particular discursive approach to the Holocaust. This approach can be characterised by two things: solemnity and non-representation. Żmijewski's challenge to solemnity is clear, and the glee the participants show while playing the game of tag can easily be taken as a mark of disrespect. The issue of non-representation requires more explanation. A painting by Luc Tuymans, *Still Life* (2002) serves a more recent example of a 'correct' non-representational approach to tragedy. When invited to make a painting in response to the attacks of September the 11<sup>th</sup>, Tuymans responded by exhibiting a still life of some fruit and a jug of water measuring some five metres in diameter. In doing so he chose to represent the limits of representation itself, as if to ask 'how can art deal with subject matter this traumatic?' For many, the 'correct' answer to this question is that it cannot.<sup>253</sup> It is declared impossible for art to represent the enormity of tragedies such as September the 11<sup>th</sup> or the Holocaust.<sup>254</sup>

And yet when compared with other examples such as the T.V mini-series *Holocaust*, which was criticised for its trivialising fictional accounts and dramatic reconstructions of camp prisoners meeting their death, *The Game of Tag* does not appear directly representational.<sup>255</sup> The viewer only learns of the intended subject matter before they see the film (in the press, or through word of mouth) or as the credits role. Nevertheless this information recodes all that has just been seen, and the simple combination of naked bodies and a gas chamber creates a representative nexus that is

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<sup>253</sup> Such answers often draw inspiration from Theodor Adorno's frequently quoted remark that 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric'. When placed in context, Adorno's claim is not in fact an injunction against writing poetry (or creating art) in response to historical traumas such as Auschwitz, but an injunction to create in spite of the inevitable failure of the resulting creation, to persist in failing. Theodor W. Adorno, 'Cultural Criticism and Society', in *Prisms* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), pp. 17 – 34 (p. 34).

<sup>254</sup> The paragon of a 'sensitive' non-representational artwork that deals with the Holocaust is Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), a nine-hour documentary consisting largely of interviews with camp survivors, which eschewed dramatic reconstructions and stock footage.

<sup>255</sup> The Holocaust mini-series was criticised by Holocaust survivors, among others. See Elie Wiesel, 'Trivializing the Holocaust: Semi-Fact and Semi-Fiction', *The New York Times*, 16 April 1978, p. 75. For a discussion of non-representation as it relates to the mini-series as well the film *Shoah* see Jacques Rancière, 'The Ethical Turn of Aesthetics and Politics', in *Social and Critical Theory, Volume 5: Recognition, Work, Politics: New Directions in French Critical Theory*, ed. by Jean-Philippe Deranty, Danielle Petherbridge, John Rundell and Robert Sinnerbrink (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2007).

deemed offensive both because it simultaneously steps too close to the original events, and too far from them. Herein lies the difficulty of the work: it dissolves the bond between non-representation and solemnity. The paradigm of non-representation is considered appropriate *only* insofar as it anchors art to a primordial trauma, and in so doing preserves this space as one of mourning and loss. By effectively playing in a place of death, Żmijewski wants to exorcise this trauma, positioning the work as ‘therapeutic’ (an ambition that manifests itself in an entirely different way from the therapeutic intentions of the Viennese Actionists discussed in chapter 1). In doing so Żmijewski tries to deviate from the pre-established norm of what a work of art that deals with the Holocaust should do.

Returning to the issue of Symbolic efficiency, it could be argued that the very link between non-representation and solemnity is founded upon the stability of language (broadly understood). The effect of Tuyman’s painting is derived less from what it shows than from its Symbolic position in relation to the subject it deals with. Unless the viewer knows the back-story to the painting they might take it at face value, as a rather large still life painted in muted colours, and nothing more. *The Game of Tag* uses a similar technique of socio-symbolic framing by means of the text at the end of the film, but in this case one cannot even be sure if the artist is telling the truth. Even if it is conceded that the performance probably took place in the way it is claimed, the work then becomes a meta-commentary on the ‘correct’ Symbolic means of dealing with the Holocaust, rather than genuinely commemorative. This again can be attributed to a certain loosening of the effects of language, akin to questioning whether or not a funeral is in fact the most appropriate way to mark somebody’s death, rather than accepting it as an unquestionable Symbolic marker anchored by tradition.<sup>256</sup>

Of the three artworks introduced at the beginning of the chapter, *Them* is perhaps the least obviously transgressive. In a narrow sense, it could be seen as transgressing the prohibition set by Żmijewski’s former teacher Kowalski in his pedagogic activity *Common Space, Individual Space*. And yet this meaning is beyond the reach of anyone who doesn’t know the art-historical precedent to the work. Rather, the central provocation of *Them* is once again directed towards a particular discursive

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<sup>256</sup> There are a number of other Polish artworks that demonstrate a similar approach the Holocaust as a subject. See for example Zbigniew Libera’s ‘Lego concentration camp’ (mentioned above) or his ‘Positives’ (2002-3), a set of photographs that restaged historically significant works of photojournalism. For example *Positives: Residents* (2002), which shows a group of people wearing dressing gowns and prison clothing smiling behind a barbed wire fence, was based on a photograph of Auschwitz survivors liberated by the Red Army in 1945. Żmijewski’s own work *80064* (2004) also caused some controversy in its approach to the subject. In this piece he cajoles an elderly Auschwitz survivor to restore the camp number tattooed on his forearm.

construction, in this case a liberal-humanist construction founded on consensus and harmony or the democratic ideal of respectful debate. This is a challenge that Źmijewski has manifested with other works. For *The Singing Lesson II* (2002) for example, a work redolent with associations to reality TV, Źmijewski recruited a group of severely hearing impaired teenagers and trained them to sing a Bach cantata in the church in Leipzig where Bach himself is buried.<sup>257</sup> In both of these pieces, a confrontation is staged that challenges consensus. In a culture where classical music is promoted as an unquestionable good for everyone, how do those who cannot participate live up to this ideal? Źmijewski points to the irresolvable antagonisms in society, highlighting a situation in which mainstream discourses cannot rule over everyone without an irresolvable excess emerging. *Them* dramatises the violence that this excess generates.

It also bears a particular resemblance to a series of recent events in Warsaw. On November 11<sup>th</sup> 2013 a large public sculpture of a rainbow by Julita Wójcik was burnt down for the fourth time since its installation in June 2012. The rainbow, which was intended as a general symbol of tolerance, was made of artificial flowers and situated near a large catholic church in central Warsaw. Taken as a symbol of homosexuality, the sculpture was last burnt down during a march of the far right on Polish Independence Day, which itself was fragmented into 11 separate marches with different routes and agendas. A few days later around 200 people visited the square to place their own flowers among the charred remains.<sup>258</sup> This turn of events is further testament to the fragmentation of Polish political life, with symbols serving as weapons in a proxy war for the power to describe reality. The fact that the meaning of the symbol at the heart of the episode was itself the subject of disagreement, its indexical link to God in the myth of Noah seemingly forgotten by many protesters on the Christian right, is further testament to the erosion of Symbolic efficiency.<sup>259</sup>

The third work by Źmijewski discussed in this chapter, *Repetition*, seeks to challenge the hegemony of scientific knowledge. The alternative ending to the experiment highlights the contingency of the knowledge produced by the original. As Piotrowski writes, in this experiment, ‘one could say that Źmijewski not only

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<sup>257</sup> In the first installment of the project, Źmijewski enlisted hearing impaired teenagers to sing a fragment of the ‘Kyrie’ from Maklakiewicz’s *Polish Mass*, written in 1944. The irony of this choice is made manifest when among the cacophony of voices, Polish-speaking audiences are able to hear the lyrics ‘our voice rises to you and erupts as the sea roars from the deep abyss. O Christ, hear us! O Christ, listen to us!’

<sup>258</sup> L. N., ‘Burning the Rainbow’, *The Economist*, November 18 2013 <<http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2013/11/poland>> [accessed 01/06/2015].

<sup>259</sup> For more on the symbolism of the rainbow see Raymond L. Lee and Alistair B. Fraser, *The Rainbow Bridge: Rainbows in Art, Myth, and Science* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2001).

challenged Zimbardo, but also created a completely different vision of human nature.’<sup>260</sup> In this respect *Repetition* is reminiscent of an early soviet film by Vsevolod Pudovkin entitled *Mechanics of the Brain* (1926). Pudovkin’s film is ostensibly a documentary on Ivan Pavlov’s now infamous reflexology experiments using dogs. In addition to the educational content of the film, there was an overt ideological intent to its production, to such an extent that alternative endings to the film were made for Russian and American audiences. At the end of the Russian film a short section about human development shows a group of children working together to retrieve a quoit from a hook on a wall. This serves as a proclamation on the virtues of co-operation, where the American version ends some 20 minutes earlier.<sup>261</sup> Nevertheless, whereas audiences for Pudovkin’s film would only have had access to one version, probably ignorant to the fact that another version even existed, by choosing such a famous experiment, Żmijewski’s reworking exposes *both* endings as contingent. This moment of exposure between one ending and another mirrors the Symbolic deficiency that momentarily appeared when one regime was replaced by another in 1980s Poland. When read alongside pieces such as *Them*, it is clear that the ‘alternate ending’ that occurs in *Repetition* is not necessarily one that Żmiewski supports. In his own words, the target of the film is a certain ‘cognitive fundamentalism’.<sup>262</sup> The fact that the Symbolic roles accorded to the prisoners no longer held as they did in the original experiment, collapsing into an act of cooperation that resulted in a premature ending, is further suggestive of a decline of Symbolic efficiency. Ultimately this is the only conclusion that can be drawn. Once again, the work questions the ability of language, visual or otherwise, to describe reality rather than offering a theory of human nature in the manner of Zimbardo.

### Viruses, Algorithms, Programmes

The final section of this chapter will be used to connect the game-like character of the works discussed back to the issue of transgression. This connection can be discerned in Żmijewski’s programmatic essay *The Applied Social Arts*, where he sets out a series of metaphors concerning the impact art has on society at large.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy* p. 102.

<sup>261</sup> This point was made by Anke Henning: at an event at Goldsmiths College, University of London entitled “Metaphor of Violence: Revisiting Pudovkin's *The Mechanics of the Brain*”, 1st December 2011. See also Amy Sargeant, *Classic Films of the Soviet Avant-Garde* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000).

<sup>262</sup> Żmijewski, *Trembling Bodies*, p. 29.

<sup>263</sup> Żmijewski, ‘The Applied Social Arts’, pp. 25-33.

The main argument of Źmijewski's essay is that artworks should produce knowledge rather than simply ask questions, a position repeated in press conferences accompanying the Berlin Biennial in 2012, which he curated. Speaking of his own work elsewhere, Źmijewski proposes that 'an image can serve as an argument in a debate'.<sup>264</sup> At face value, this claim represents little more than a re-iteration of the historical avant-garde's position of heteronomy.<sup>265</sup> And yet when placed against the backdrop of recent Polish art history, the emphasis on application and engagement reverse the conditions by which a certain art-theoretical discourse of autonomy oiled the ideological cogs of the state. In another sense, the emphasis on arguments, debates, text and speech in Źmijewski's work can be seen as an effort to pin down meaning against a backdrop in which this has become increasingly difficult.

Developing this approach, *The Applied Social Arts* is an attempt to think through the various means by which artworks actively shape reality. Źmijewski lists some of the social consequences art has had in recent years. One of his claims is that art has contributed to a situation whereby 'Transgression has [...] become a valid political strategy'.<sup>266</sup> This point should be understood in a very specific sense. It is not Źmijewski's claim that transgression has become a valid political strategy *within* art, but rather that transgressive strategies have moved beyond the boundaries of art and found their way into mainstream politics. Perhaps confusing the matter, Źmijewski provides an example in which strategies associated with transgression effectively 'return to sender', moving back from mainstream politics into the art world. Referring to the exhibition of Maurizio Catalan's sculpture *The Ninth Hour* (discussed above), Źmijewski claims that the right-wing politicians who attempted to destroy the sculpture, Tomczak and Nowina-Konopka, 'simply responded "in kind", using the language of gestures and visual action, the language of performance.'<sup>267</sup> In the same way that Źmijewski used the 'free' space of art to his advantage in repeating Zimbardo's experiment, so too did these politicians use their parliamentary immunity to effectively break the law. Furthermore, they broke a longstanding taboo associated with gallery

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>265</sup> Here the term 'heteronomy' should not be understood in the passive sense Bourdieu gives it, to describe a condition in which art is wholly determined by outside forces. Instead I am using the term to describe a situation where artworks are both conditioned by external forces and exercise their capacity for intervention in society. See Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Field of Cultural Production', in *The Field of Cultural Production*, ed. by Randal Johnson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), pp. 29-71. For a detailed discussion of the concept of heteronomy see Gail Day, 'The Fear of Heteronomy', *Third Text*, 23: 4 (2009), 393-406.

<sup>266</sup> Źmijewski, *Trembling Bodies*, p. 26.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., p. 26. The opposition to transgressive or controversial works of art by popularist politicians is reminiscent of the part played by the Austrian Freedom Party in respect to Nitsch's work, as briefly discussed in chapter 1. In both cases the use of taxpayer money was placed at the centre of the debate.

spaces, just as artists themselves have continually sought to break this taboo in one way or another under the banner of institutional critique. For Żmijewski, the episode serves as a concrete example of art actively shaping modes of behaviour, introducing strategies and methodologies that spread beyond the boundaries of the art world.

Within the discourse surrounding critical art in Poland, it is not uncommon to find the idea that art spreads and exerts influence on other fields of cultural activity in a way analogous to a virus spreading through a body.<sup>268</sup> In *The Applied Social Arts*, Żmijewski is critical of this familiar immunological metaphor: 'Art, it claims, produces artefacts: social and cultural events that "infect" various parts of the social system just like viruses infect an organism. They "damage" or "alter" it. The infected system must change: heal or be cured.'<sup>269</sup> In opposition to this, Żmijewski proposes that a more appropriate term would be 'algorithm', writing that

Algorithms imply something operational and positive, a mode of purposeful action [...]. I am not proposing that we artificially replace one term with another, but that we change the meanings of language. One that would allow us to consider the possibility of impact, to see art as a "device that produces impact". As guiding the system from a certain initial state to a desired final state.<sup>270</sup>

The opposition here is underdeveloped, and it would seem that Żmijewski's understanding of algorithms doesn't extend much further than the Wikipedia definition he quotes.<sup>271</sup> Nevertheless, the use of the term is indicative of a certain cultural atmospherics of cybernetics already discernible in the work of Oskar Hansen and the generation of artists he trained at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. At its most basic, an algorithm is a set of instructions designed to complete a predefined task or achieve a finite outcome. While essentially this set of instructions constitutes an abstract and internally consistent whole, existing independently of the 'hardware' for which it is designed, as Andrew Goffey points out, algorithms also have a fundamentally pragmatic dimension: 'Algorithms act, but they do so as part of an ill-defined network of actions upon actions, part of a complex of power-knowledge relations, in which

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<sup>268</sup> According to Piotrowski, the critical art of the 1990s 'was supposed to function as a virus by interrupting normal functioning of society and as such was supposed to have political significance', *Art and Democracy*, p. 101.

<sup>269</sup> Żmijewski, *Trembling Bodies*, p. 30.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>271</sup> In fact, the very distinction between algorithms and viruses has been put into question with a great deal of work coming out of 'new cybernetics', which frequently draws tools and conceptual models from biology.

unintended consequences, like the side effects of a program's behaviour, can become critically important.<sup>272</sup> Similarly, while many of Źmijewski's performances can be distilled into a set of abstract rules of engagement that exist independently of the people that follow them, to do so fundamentally misses the pragmatic effects of their implementation. These pragmatic effects are central to the works themselves, and for this reason, together with the fact that more than one set of rules is often at play, it might be more appropriate to speak of these works as 'programmes' rather than algorithms.<sup>273</sup> While these programmes create a set of finite outcomes within the artworks themselves, (for example destruction in the case of *Them*, or a cooperative resolution in the case of *Repetition*), it becomes more difficult to determine the outcome of such artworks when they are 'released' into society at large.

If Źmijewski's work can be characterised in this way, as having a programmatic dimension above and beyond the singular, finite algorithmic function claimed above, it is interesting to consider the terrain upon which these programmes operate. In a book of dialogues with Claire Parnet, Deleuze discusses the literature of Kleist and Kafka as creating 'programmes for life'. As he explains: 'Programmes are not manifestos [...], but means of providing reference points for an experiment which exceeds our capacities to foresee.'<sup>274</sup> Can Źmijewski's work be cast in similar light, as creating 'programmes for life'?

Interpreting it in this way might be seen to sit awkwardly with the work's capacity for negation and critique. And yet the artist himself attests to the 'operational and positive' power of art, a description that presumably covers his own work as well as others'. It is my contention that the critical and programmatic aspects of his works are not in fact mutually exclusive. In its critical dimension, Źmijewski's work displays a transgressive impulse to challenge socio-cultural norms, whether this concerns the cultural hegemony of scientific discourse, or the 'correct' means of commemorating the

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<sup>272</sup> Andrew Goffey, 'Algorithm', in *Software Studies: A Lexicon*, ed. by Matthew Fuller (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), p. 19.

<sup>273</sup> The difference between the two is explained by Steve Goodman: 'Whereas a computer program is the concretization or implementation of an assemblage of algorithms, the algorithm itself can be termed an abstract machine, a diagrammatic method that is programming language independent.' Steve Goodman, 'Sonic Algorithm', in *Software Studies: A Lexicon*, ed. by Matthew Fuller (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), p. 229.

<sup>274</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 48. It would be interesting to connect the notion of 'programmes for life' to the work of Pierre Hadot, a French historian of philosophy who influenced the work of Michel Foucault among others. Hadot argued that ancient philosophy should primarily be understood as providing a number of 'spiritual exercises' that modified the lives of those that practiced them, rather than as a systematic body of knowledge. See Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold I. Davidson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

Holocaust. In its programmatic dimension, the work provides insight into the way in which 'life' is continually entrapped within Symbolic matrices that encourage it to unfold along particular pathways — pathways that frequently come into conflict with each other in his work. In short, the programmatic dimension of Źmijewski's work provides insight into the constitution of the self within conflict. In doing so, it highlights the ways in which life is always already 'programmed' by socio-cultural norms, and by placing these norms into conflict with one another the contingency of each is exposed. The three artworks described at the beginning of this chapter are at the cusp of being transgressive, representing less the dialectical challenge to an existing set of social prohibitions, than the modelling and counter-modelling of a set of relations between people.

The ultimate effect seems to be critical insofar as it aims at the destruction of automatically formulated moral and political judgments, and programmatic in so far as it incubates new socio-symbolic arrangements, first within tightly controlled microcosms, which are then injected into a wider socio-political landscape. The programmatic aspect should not be understood in the sense that it provides a manifesto or a plan of action. To borrow a phrase from Victor Goldschmitt, the aim is to form, rather than inform.<sup>275</sup> Further still, when the critical and programmatic aspects of Źmijewski's work are thought through in combination, the aim becomes to *un*form forms, and in the process clear the way for new forms to emerge.

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<sup>275</sup> Victor Goldschmitt, *Les Dialogues de Platon: Structure et Methode Dialectique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), p. 162.

**Part 2**  
**After Transgression**

## Chapter 4

### Towards an Ethics of the Sinthome

Between his excursions into knot theory and selected readings of James Joyce, the word ‘ethics’ appears nowhere in Lacan’s 23<sup>rd</sup> seminar. And yet it is precisely an ethics that Lacan seems to be elaborating over this period of his work. An ethical theory that can be derived from the ‘late’ Lacan deals less with the subject of transgression and more with the effects an artwork can have on the subjectivity of its creator. By following this path forward, I intend to show, Lacan’s work can lead us towards a new paradigm for the relationship between ethics and aesthetics, beyond transgression.

In part 1 the rise and fall of a certain ‘transgressive moment’ in visual art was described and analysed. Without passing judgment on transgression *per se* it was argued that the conditions for its critical force have passed, at least in the socio-cultural contexts discussed. It is the ambition of this chapter to develop the conceptual scaffolding for an ethico-aesthetic paradigm ‘after’ transgression. If the precondition for transgression is a strong Symbolic order, a post-transgressive paradigm for the relationship between ethics and aesthetics, by contrast, must take a weak Symbolic as its initial point of departure.

In the first section of this chapter, I will look at one of the psychic consequences of a weak Symbolic order by reflecting on the concept of ‘ordinary psychosis’. Developed by a number of clinical theorists associated with the World Association of Psychoanalysis, the concept of ordinary psychosis emerged in the 1990s, a decade after Lacan’s death. Leading into a discussion of *Seminar XXIII* with a concept that was developed almost 20 years after this seminar was delivered may seem like a strange temporal reversal. As will become clear as the chapter develops, this break with chronological sequence can be justified on the basis of the logical sequence it makes possible. The concept of ordinary psychosis, is, after all, developed using resources from Lacan’s late work, and is intimately bound up with the pluralisation of the Name-of-the-Father. Taking up this concept and using it to provide a logical backdrop to *Seminar XXIII* will cast both bodies of theory in a clearer light.

While the concept of ordinary psychosis extends the discussion of the decline of the Symbolic spread over chapters 1-3, the primary focus of this chapter is Lacan’s late concept of the sinthome. Just as Lacan’s reading of *Antigone* and his interest in

anamorphosis left their mark on the kind of ethics elaborated in *Seminar VII*, so too did his late preoccupation with Joyce result in an ethico-aesthetic theory that at times almost ventriloquises the author, rendering any straightforward interpretation difficult. Despite this difficulty, *Seminar XXIII* rewards a close reading, and represents a decisive shift in Lacanian theory along the axis of creativity. The concept of the sinthome that lies at its heart names a subjective ‘construction’ that transforms the subject, and in so far as artistic production is involved in this process, it strikes at the core of the relationship between ethics and aesthetics.

For all the relevance and theoretical novelty of *Seminar XXIII*, Lacan’s formulations in this seminar do, however, pose problems other than those associated with impenetrability. As has already been flagged up in the general introduction to this thesis, Lacan’s concept of the sinthome describes a subjective construction that remains curiously a-social. What could be called the ‘sinthomatic function’ of an artwork — its capacity to bring about a radical process of singularisation — would seem, in Lacan’s analysis, to be restricted to the artwork’s creator. For Lacan, the sinthome is beyond signification, accompanied by a *jouissance* he calls ‘opaque’. It is in the endeavor to explore this ‘beyond’ that Guattari’s work becomes useful. His wide-ranging discussions of the role of ‘a-signifying’ semiotics (partly inspired by the work of the Danish linguist Lois Hjelmslev) involve authors, artworks and audiences in processes of ‘co-creation’ (an argument partly inspired by the aesthetics of Mikhail Bakhtin). As such, they can be used to overcome the conceptual problems of Lacan’s late work. By making a ‘guattarian graft’ onto Lacan’s work in the second half of this chapter, the aim is to generate a set of resources pragmatically geared towards the discussion of artworks in chapters 5 and 6.

### Ordinary Psychosis

Formulated on the basis of Lacan’s late work, the working category of ‘ordinary psychosis’ was first developed by Jacques-Alain Miller to inaugurate a research programme, rather than establish a new nosological classification.<sup>276</sup> In order to position this concept as the logical backdrop to *Seminar XXIII*, it will first be necessary to

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<sup>276</sup> The term emerged from a series of conferences that took place in Angers, Arcachon and Antibes between 1996 and 1998. Extracts from the second event have been published as Jacques-Alain Miller and others, ‘The conversation of Arcachon (extracts)’, *Psychoanalytical Notebooks*, 26 (2013), 61-81. An extensive clinical discussion of the concept has also recently been published in Jonathan D. Redmond, *Ordinary Psychosis and the Body: A Contemporary Lacanian Approach* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

explain the classical Lacanian view on psychosis. Firstly, it should be recalled that one of the defining characteristics of psychosis, at least in Lacan's early work, is a very specific attitude towards the Name-of-the-Father. Lacan labeled this attitude 'foreclosure', which is a concept derived from Freud's German term *verwerfung*.

*Verwerfung* is used by Freud to mean a range of different things, from 'a fairly loose sense of refusal' to outright condemnation, and remains translated in the standard edition as 'repudiation'.<sup>277</sup> Among the many shades of possible meaning, Lacan zones in on just one, found in 'The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence' where Freud talks about a 'more energetic and successful form of defence' than repression.<sup>278</sup> What distinguishes foreclosure from repression is that with the latter the excluded element is buried in the unconscious, while with the former it is expelled from the psychic apparatus altogether. According to Freud, 'the ego rejects the incompatible idea together with its affect and behaves as if the idea had never occurred to the ego at all.'<sup>279</sup> With repression, on the other hand, the affect is simply displaced onto other signifiers, while the 'idea' is locked away in the unconscious, destined to return again as a symptom.

The link between foreclosure and psychosis can be illustrated with brief reference to the paradigmatic case of Schreber, whose *Memoirs of my Nervous Illness* served as a crucial reference point for Freud's theory of psychosis.<sup>280</sup> In reading Freud alongside Schreber, Lacan comes to the conclusion that the latter's psychic problems can be attributed to an early foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father. As a result, there was a hole at the centre of Schreber's Symbolic universe where the Name-of-the-Father was missing. According to Lacan, this did not cause any problems for him to begin with, and Schreber was able to find success in his profession and lead a relatively 'normal' family life.<sup>281</sup> His psychosis at this stage could therefore be characterised as 'untriggered'. It was only when Schreber was promoted to a position of authority as one of Germany's top judges that psychological problems started to occur. At this instant Schreber encounters the Name-of-the-Father insofar as there is the implicit assumption that his job requires him to act in a classically authoritarian way. For Lacan, this amounts to an 'encounter, collision, with an inadmissible signifier [which] has to be

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<sup>277</sup> Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (London: Karnac, 2006), p. 166.

<sup>278</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. by James Strachey, Vol. 3 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1962), pp. 45-61 (p. 58).

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>280</sup> Daniel Paul Schreber, *Memoirs of my Nervous Illness* (New York: NYRB, 2000).

<sup>281</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book III: The Psychoses. 1955-1956*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: Norton, 1993).

reconstituted'.<sup>282</sup> The reconstitution for Schreber involved delusions of a persecutory God, a particularly common trope in psychotic delusions.

Following on from this analysis, which is still rooted in Lacan's early work, it is necessary to ask how the Lacanian theory of psychosis responds to the decline of the Symbolic, which has as one of its characteristics a pluralisation of the Name-of-the-Father. If the power of the Name-of-the-Father to organise psychic life has been diminished, as was suggested in chapter 1, then this has effects that make themselves known in the clinic. The category of 'ordinary psychosis' can be seen, in part, as an effort to account for these effects. The result is a blurring of the boundary separating neurosis and psychosis, and a move away from a theory in which the former serves as a 'wallpaper' against which extraordinary cases of psychosis periodically emerge. To go further still, Jacques-Alain Miller has argued that one of the theoretical consequences of ordinary psychosis is a 'generalisation of psychosis', with the implication that there has been an accompanying generalisation of the mechanism of foreclosure.<sup>283</sup> This follows from Lacan's late perspective according to which 'everyone is mad'.<sup>284</sup>

Despite this turn in Lacan's work and the subsequent clinical theory it has inspired, it is important to stress that the link between the concept of ordinary psychosis and wider social change is the subject of some debate. There are some analytic theorists, such as Éric Laurent, who describe ordinary psychosis as 'what the psychotic subject is when the psychosis has not been triggered.'<sup>285</sup> For others, such as Marie-Hélène Brousse, the idea cannot be accounted for on the basis of existing concepts used to describe psychosis (such as 'triggered' or 'untriggered'). Ordinary psychosis is fundamentally different at the level of its relationship to society. It is 'both clinical and political — in the sense of the development of the dominant modalities of the social bond.'<sup>286</sup> It should be clear that my own summary foregrounds these political aspects, and in so doing positions the emergence of ordinary psychosis as a symptom of the decline of the Symbolic.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid., p. 321.

<sup>283</sup> Jacques-Alain Miller, 'Ordinary Psychosis Revisited', *Psychoanalytical Notebooks*, 26 (2013), 33-51 (p. 45).

<sup>284</sup> Lacan's position in 1978, from an article recently translated into English as Jacques Lacan, 'There are Four Discourses', *Culture / Clinic*, 1 (2013), 1-3 (p. 1). The subtleties of this proposition are addressed in a number of articles in the same journal issue, most extensively in Jacques-Alain Miller, 'Everyone is Mad', *Culture / Clinic*, 1 (2013), 17-42.

<sup>285</sup> Éric Laurent, 'Psychosis, or a Radical Belief in the Symptom', *Hurly Burly: The International Lacanian Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 8 (October 2012), 244-251 (p. 249).

<sup>286</sup> Marie-Hélène Brousse, 'Ordinary Psychosis', p. 25.

<sup>287</sup> For many readers the political dimensions of ordinary psychosis will evoke Deleuze and Guattari's reflections on the deterritorialising force of capitalism in the *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* project. In *Anti-Oedipus* for example, they claim that capitalism works through an 'axiomatic of decoded flows' (p.

The concept of ordinary psychosis also belies a shift in the underlying logic used to theorise psychosis, as Brousse makes clear: ‘As long as you are functioning in that orientation of a complete set defined by the element that is an exception to that set, psychosis is extraordinary, but when you function in another logical model, psychosis is no longer extraordinary.’<sup>288</sup>

The first logical model Brousse refers to can be derived from Cantorian set theory, according to which a set of any given elements can only be articulated on the basis of one element being excluded, which comes to serve as the boundary to the set. This is equivalent to saying that there cannot be a set of all sets — or, to use Lacan’s phrase, ‘there is no Other of the Other’ (written as  $\mathcal{A}$ ). In the theory of psychosis drawn from Lacan’s early work, the element excluded from the set is the Name-of-the-Father, and as I have said, its exclusion comes to define the category of psychosis as a whole. When the Name-of-the-Father is rendered unstable, sharply delineating ‘psychosis’ from other clinical categories immediately becomes problematic.<sup>289</sup>

As I will show in the next section, it is topology that offers Lacanian psychoanalysis a second logical model, as Brousse implies. This model underpins what Jacques-Alain Miller and others have called ‘a differential clinic of psychosis’, providing a model that is less black and white, less reliant on breaks and ruptures, and more elastic, continuous and relational.<sup>290</sup> Insofar as it makes room for the consideration of so-called ‘borderline’ cases of psychosis, the use of topology has a clear clinical

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208), and more specifically ‘decoded flows of production in the form of money-capital, and the decoded flows of labour in the form of “free worker”’ (p. 47). Just as the concept of ordinary psychosis elaborated in this chapter is linked to a wider decline of the Symbolic under capitalism, for Deleuze and Guattari the deterritorialising force of the latter has schizophrenia as its psychic corollary, which in *Anti-Oedipus* is unambiguously positioned as the ‘malady of our era’ (p. 48). Another point of correspondence between the Lacanian inflected approach used here and an approach inspired by *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* concerns the transformation of language, which under capitalism ‘no longer signifies something that must be believed, it indicates rather what is going to be done’ (p. 288). This point almost directly echoes the notion of a ‘decline of Symbolic efficiency’ elaborated in chapter 3, and the notion that language can be transformed from a medium of psychic investment that solicits belief to a command mechanism that has pragmatic effects hints at an influence of cybernetics on Deleuze and Guattari’s thought. For a justification of why *Anti-Oedipus* has not been drawn on more extensively, see footnote 39 in the introduction to this thesis.

<sup>288</sup> Brousse, ‘Ordinary Psychosis in the Light of Lacan’s Theory of Discourse’, p. 27.

<sup>289</sup> As has rightly been pointed out in criticisms of the work of Alain Badiou, logical models derived from Cantorian set theory are fundamentally blind to how different elements within the set relate to each other. See *Think Again: Alain Badiou and The Future of Philosophy*, ed. by Peter Hallward (London: Continuum, 2004). For Badiou, non-denumerable or qualitative relations are continually reduced to quantitative elements (a situation) or characterised as what a situation excludes (a void). This tends towards a model that privileges rupture, in which novelty can only come about when ‘a truth punches a hole in knowledge’ (a phrase Badiou derives from Lacan), with knowledge being figured as what can be counted. Badiou, *Ethics*, p. 70.

<sup>290</sup> Jacques-Alain Miller, ‘A Contribution of the Schizophrenic to the Psychoanalytic Clinic’, *The Symptom*, 2 (2002) <<http://www.lacan.com/contributionf.htm>> [accessed 01/06/2015]. Pierre-Gilles Guéguen, ‘Who is Mad and Who is Not?: On Differential Diagnosis in Psychoanalysis’, *Culture / Clinic*, 1 (2013), 66-85.

rationale. However, for the purposes of my own discussion it can also be used to think about wider processes of subjectivation that constitute a response to the decline of the Symbolic. In the next section I will elaborate on how topology comes into play in *Seminar XXIII*, before discussing Lacan's reading of James Joyce, and the ethical moment his work reveals.

### Borromean Knots

From the early 1950s through to the late 1970s classically hydraulic models of the psychic apparatus were gradually replaced by appeals to topology in Lacan's work. At first, figures such as the Mobius strip, the Klein bottle, the torus and the cross-cap are used to illustrate the structure of the subject in their relationship to language.<sup>291</sup> From the early '70s onwards, Lacan increasingly turns his attention to knot theory, a particular branch of topology. In both knot theory and the topology of surfaces, distance, angle, size, and area are all irrelevant, the only things that count are relationships that withstand continuous deformation.<sup>292</sup>

For Lacan, as in his discussions of the topology of surfaces, knot theory provides a resource for thinking through dynamic relationships in a non-metaphorical way. Knots do not simply demonstrate the changing structure of the subject, but rather 'monstrate' the Real of this structure, which is like a 'structure with grammar peeled off it'.<sup>293</sup> As Lacan repeatedly stresses in *Seminar XXIII*, the knot is 'forbidden to the imaginary' and in no way does it 'constitute a model'.<sup>294</sup> This is not the equivalent of saying that 'mathematics is ontology' (*pace* Badiou) because knots, just like the mathemes discussed in chapter 2, are in no way prior to the Symbolic as an ontological ground. Rather, at this stage in Lacan's work the Real can be seen as a product of the Symbolic and the Imaginary, and not a primordial sphere from which these two orders emerge. This much can be inferred from Lacan's comments in *Seminar XXII* when he

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<sup>291</sup> To take one example, just as the Torus' centre of gravity lies outside of its volume, for Lacan the subject is fundamentally decentered. The subject is nowhere to be found within the confines of a biological body, it is rather an effect of the signification process. This point is encapsulated in the neologism 'extimacy' — showing that the most intimate kernel of the subject is in fact external to its biological body.

<sup>292</sup> A commonplace illustration of this can be seen in the homeomorphism between a coffee cup and donut in topology.

<sup>293</sup> *Lacan: Topologically Speaking*, ed. by Ellie Ragland and Dragan Milovanovic (New York: Other Press, 2004), p. xix.

<sup>294</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XXIII*, p. 22, p. 34 (9 December 1975).

posits that the Borromean knot is 'a writing *that supports* a Real [...] not only can the Real be supported by a writing but that there is no other tangible idea of the Real.'<sup>295</sup>

In *Seminar XXIII*, Lacan focuses on one knot in particular, the three-ring Borromean knot (figure 9), which in mathematical terms is strictly speaking a chain.<sup>296</sup> The significant feature of the Borromean knot is that cutting one of the three rings causes the other two to come apart. No two rings are joined to each other without reference to a third. In *Seminar XX* Lacan labels the rings Imaginary, Symbolic and Real, thereby emphasising that the three orders are interdependent.

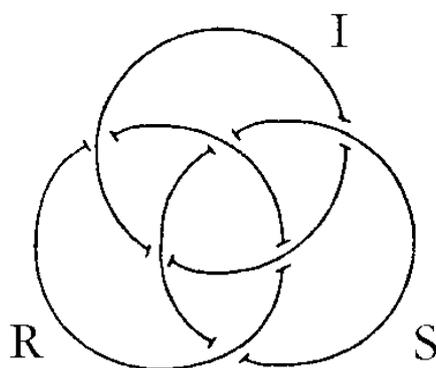


Figure 9: Three-Ring Borromean Chain

As Pierre Skriabine notes, the three-ring Borromean knot already implies a fourth term, which is the knot itself.

The common measure between the three resides in the possibility of their being knotted, knotted in a Borromean manner, and the knotting, the Borromean knot, is a fourth, new entity: it is the common measure *a minima*, in a way the perfect solution.<sup>297</sup>

The tragic dimension at play in this period of Lacan's work is that the 'perfect solution' is no longer readily available. On the path from the early to the late Lacan, from a univocal Name-of-the-Father to a plural, fragmented network of names, this 'perfect solution' could be placed squarely at the beginning, and even then it isn't so perfect. The fact that the knot no longer holds together with only three elements can be seen as a formal step away from Oedipal psychoanalysis. The progressive untying of the three

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<sup>295</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XXII: R. S. I. 1974-1975* (unpublished translation by Cormac Gallagher), p. 24 (17 December 1974).

<sup>296</sup> The Borromean knot has 3 elements. In mathematical theory a 'knot' can only have one.

<sup>297</sup> Pierre Skriabine, 'The Clinic of the Borromean Knot', in *Lacan: Topologically Speaking*, ed. by Ellie Ragland and Dragan Milovanovic (New York: Other Press, 2004) pp. 249-267., p. 253.

ring Borromean knot accounts, according to this view, for the condition of ‘ordinary psychosis’, where the inter-relations between language (the Symbolic), meaning and identity (the Imaginary) and their respective ability to latch on to the Real is rendered unstable. If a three-ring knot is no longer possible, if ordinary psychosis is to be avoided, then alternative subjective arrangements must be experimented with. For these arrangements to be post-oedipal, they must avoid reinstating the ready-made solution of the Name-of-the-Father, while nevertheless affording a certain amount of consistency.

It is for this reason that Lacan begins to introduce an explicit fourth element to the Borromean knot that acts as a repair, holding the other three rings together (figure 10). This fourth element is given several names during the course of the seminar but perhaps most consistently it is called ‘the sinthome’ (abbreviated to  $\Sigma$  - the sum of all values). In addition, when referring to Joyce, Lacan labels this fourth term simply ‘ego’ — a point that will be expanded on below.

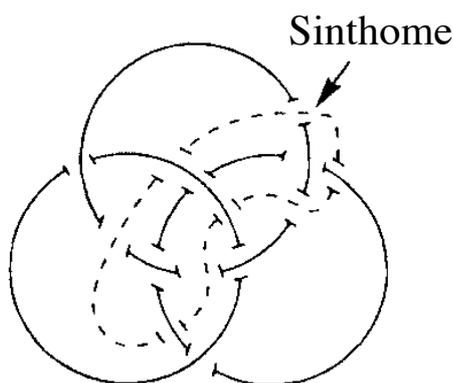


Figure 10: Sinthomatic Chain

Before embarking on a discussion of Joyce it should be noted that opinion is divided on what exactly the Borromean knot represents for Lacan. Some secondary commentaries advance the idea that the knot accounts for habitual psychic structure, and that the fourth ring is a subjective imperative for all who wish to avoid ‘triggered’ psychosis. For others, this fourth ring emerges only in cases where the traditional Name-of-the-Father failed to occur, it does not apply to those with neurotic or perverse clinical structure.

The confusion is made worse when one reads secondary texts on Lacan’s work in which two opposed interpretations are put forward in the same book, (albeit by different authors):

Let us use the Lacanian term *sinthome* in the case of psychotics who produce works of art or at least signifying structures that protect them against the devastating effects of their madness by knotting the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary, with the help of a fourth consistency, the *sinthome*, that can be a work of art.<sup>298</sup>

The *sinthome* — this symptom that knots together the real, the symbolic, and the imaginary — is the singular invention of the subject, and more especially so in psychosis, since it does not use the “standard” of the Name-of-the-Father.<sup>299</sup>

In the first quote, Kaltenbeck implies that the concept of the *sinthome* does not apply to all subjects, unless they can be considered psychotic in the classical sense he uses the word, while in the second quote, Morel claims that it is a viable solution for any subject, including the non-psychotic — albeit a less singular, or less inventive solution.

If the former position is adopted, it would amount to saying that the ideas put forward in this chapter only really apply to psychotic subjects, narrowly defined. To be clear, the fundamental wager here is that ‘ordinary psychosis’ does not simply mean that there are more subjects with psychotic structure today, triggered or untriggered. It means that the consequences of a decline of the Symbolic can be felt by every speaking being. Old existential accretions and prohibitions crumble under contemporary forms of capitalism, and this has significant psycho-social consequences. In the words of Roberto Harari, the final Lacan responds to this change in the social bond by elaborating a theory in which there is ‘an irreducible “psychotic” kernel in *every* individual, by means of which we are identified with our *sinthome*, the ever present modality of our *jouissance*.’<sup>300</sup>

According to this position, beyond the classical theory of clinical structures, there is an irreducible ‘psychotic kernel’, which serves as a logical pre-condition for *sinthomtic* formations to arise. These formations can take many forms: the traditional ‘Name-of-the-Father’ represents just one option among many (a deeply conservative option at that), and in the era of ‘generalised foreclosure’, this standard method is harder to cling on to than ever before. As a direct result of the decline in the Symbolic, subjects are increasingly required to construct their own non-oedipal solution to the problem of generalised foreclosure. This is neither a one-size-fits-all solution nor a solution that can

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<sup>298</sup> Franz Kaltenbeck, ‘Sublimation and Symptom’, in *Art: Sublimation or Symptom*, ed. by Parveen Adams (New York: Karnac, 2003), pp. 103-122., p. 117, footnote 31.

<sup>299</sup> Genevieve Morel, ‘A Young Man without an Ego: A study on James Joyce and the Mirror Stage’, in *Art: Sublimation or Symptom*, ed. by Parveen Adams (New York: Karnac, 2003), pp. 123-146. p. 141.

<sup>300</sup> Roberto Harari, *How James Joyce Made His Name: A Reading of the Final Lacan* (New York: Other Press, 2002), p. 145. [my italics]

be installed for time-immemorial. The sinthome, like the symptom before it, does not stop writing itself, to paraphrase Lacan.<sup>301</sup> That is to say, it is a processual invention that mutates as it gains consistency.

This is broadly in line with Lacan's *witz* introduced in part 1: one can 'do without the Name-of-the-Father [...] provided one makes use of it.'<sup>302</sup> 'Making use' of something is a constant activity. In some ways, this could be called the crucial 'first principle' of Lacan's ethics of the sinthome. As a pragmatic principle, it implies that one should privilege 'adoption' over 'adaptation' and replace received authority with a kind of 'know-how' or *savoir-faire*. This conceptual move will become increasingly clear in the following discussion of Joyce, whose artistic creations are precisely what enable him to 'make a name for himself' in lieu of an existing Name-of-the-Father.

### Joyce the Sinthome

Throughout *Seminar XXIII*, Lacan repeatedly asks himself 'was Joyce Mad?' (by which he means psychotic), nowhere to arrive at an answer.<sup>303</sup> This, I would suggest, is because his individual diagnostic status is less important than what his work reveals about a general psychic condition. *Seminar XXIII* is not exclusively devoted to Joyce's artistic work, and although it periodically slips in psychobiography, it is decisively *not* an 'applied' psychoanalysis. It is rather an attempt to pass through Joyce's work as a means to comment on a new modulation of the social bond. Over the next few paragraphs I will also pass through Joyce as a means to elaborate on some of Lacan's conceptual maneuvers in this seminar before extending them with the work of Félix Guattari.

Lacan suggests that Joyce suffers disturbances 'in relationship to his body. He expresses this by saying that it is like fruit skin.'<sup>304</sup> The episode is taken from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, in which Stephen Daedalus receives a beating from three of his classmates, Heron, Nash and Boland. Stephen is pinned to a barbed wire fence while the three boys beat him with a cane and a cabbage stump because he refuses to denounce the poet Byron, who the other boys think is a heretic. After the episode, Joyce writes that Stephen

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<sup>301</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XX*, p. 59 (13 February 1973).

<sup>302</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XXIII*, p. 166 (13 April 1976).

<sup>303</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XXIII*, p. 109 (10 February 1976).

<sup>304</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XXIII*, p. 180 (11 May 1976).

bore no malice now to those who had tormented him. He had not forgotten a whit of their cowardice and cruelty but the memory of it called forth no anger from him. All the descriptions of fierce love and hatred which he had met in books had seemed to him therefore unreal. Even that night as he stumbled homewards along Jones's Road he had felt that some power was divesting him as a fruit is divested of its soft ripe peel.<sup>305</sup>

As Stephen reflects on the episode, he remembers another, similar psychic disturbance that occurred some years earlier as he is walking through Clongowes school with his father, who wants to show him where he carved his name on a desk. Instead of his father's inscription, Stephen sees the word 'foetus'<sup>306</sup> roughly engraved on a desk, and this brings about a dramatic dislocation that Joyce describes as follows:

His very brain was sick and powerless. He could scarcely interpret the letters of the signboards of the shops. By his monstrous way of life he seemed to have put himself beyond the limits of reality. Nothing moved him or spoke to him from the real world unless he heard it in an echo of the infuriated cries within him. [...] He could scarcely recognise his own thoughts, and repeated slowly to himself:

- I am Stephen Dedalus. I am walking beside my father whose name is Simon Dedalus. We are in Cork, in Ireland. Cork is a city. Our room is in the Victoria Hotel. Victoria and Stephen and Simon. Simon and Stephen and Victoria. Names.<sup>307</sup>

It was worth quoting Joyce at length because these passages indicate at least three key themes that bear further exploration: Imaginary identification (and the loss thereof), the Name-of-the-Father, and naming in general. While these issues are central to Joyce's work, here it is necessary to avoid eliding the author with his literary avatar, a mistake that Lacan himself makes in *Seminar XXIII*. Important differences exist between the two, and despite the autobiographical dimensions of *The Portrait*, the reader is nevertheless dealing with a distorted (self)representation of the author.

Both of the episodes quoted above seem to bring about the same kind of disturbance, which can be broadly described as a loss of the 'I'. Bearing in mind that for

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<sup>305</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 93.

<sup>306</sup> See Luke Thurston, *James Joyce and the Problem of Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), particularly chapter 6: 'God's Real Name' for a commentary on the significance of the term 'foetus' in Joyce's work.

<sup>307</sup> Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist*, pp. 104-5. Stephen's experience of disorientation in this passage has obvious relevance to the argument made in chapter 2, and the fact that he re-orientates himself by primarily Symbolic means (a list of proper names and geographical locations), further supports the claims made in the earlier chapter for the link between a decline in the Symbolic and a rise in disorientation.

Lacan, the Imaginary is inaugurated by the mirror stage, through which the infant first receives a sense of his or her body as a totality, it could be said that the image of the body as ‘soft ripe peel’ implies the undoing of the mirror stage, the shedding of the Imaginary identification that confers identity on the body. Given Joyce’s numerous references to the literature and philosophy of the ancient world, it would be surprising if the hidden point of reference here were not Lucretius. In book IV of *The Nature of Things*, Lucretius writes that ‘images are like a skin, or a film, peeled from the body’s surface, [...] they fly this way and that across the air’.<sup>308</sup> This ‘skin’ of sensory matter radiates from objects and gives a sense of their identity, without conveying the true ‘being’ of an object *per se* — just as the mirror stage confers a psychosomatic identity on the subject for Lacan, without for that matter, encompassing the whole of their subjectivity. In both cases, this sensuous layer is a semblance, but one which nevertheless allows the subject to keep a foothold in ‘reality’. Lacan writes the problem of this loss of Imaginary consistency topologically as follows:

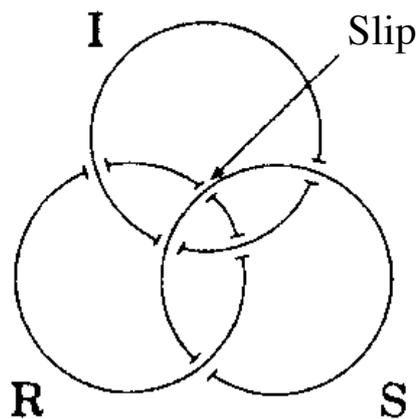


Figure 11: Unlinked Three-Ring Chain

Here the ‘slip’ causes the Imaginary ring to drift off while the Symbolic and the Real remain interlinked. In the first passage, the disturbance is accompanied by an inability to identify with descriptions of ‘love and hatred’ - a feeling that they are unreal. Stephen harbors no malice towards his attackers precisely because there is no sense of the self that would enable him to do so. The Imaginary, as locus of the ego, has drifted off, and taken love and hate with it.

In the second passage, again the disturbance is related to the Imaginary — to an image of an unformed body, a foetus. This image is implicitly linked to the fact that Stephen’s father fails in doing what he set out to do when he entered the school, which

<sup>308</sup> Lucretius, *The Way Things Are* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), p. 120.

is precisely to find his name. Stephen pulls himself back from the brink of a psychotic episode by clinging to names: to his name, his father's name, and the name of the hotel and the city in which they are staying. Although names such as 'Stephen' or 'London' do have meanings (in this case 'crown' and 'river too wide for a ford' — amongst a series of other meanings), these rarely come into play in everyday language. In this context they serve more as signifiers-in-isolation that nominate their objects, than signifiers-in-combination that derive meaning from an entire web of signification (as in the classically Saussurian model of language).<sup>309</sup> In this way the names invoked by Stephen straddle the Symbolic and the Real, pulling signifiers away from a fluid differential sphere of language and using them as anchoring points in the psychic economy. Naming in this passage therefore has a reparative function, coming into being in the place where the father's name fails.<sup>310</sup> Once again, this evokes Lacan's call to 'do without the Name-of-the-Father [...] provided one makes use of it.'<sup>311</sup> The repair that pulls Joyce back from the brink of psychic dissolution can be represented in a Borromean way as follows:

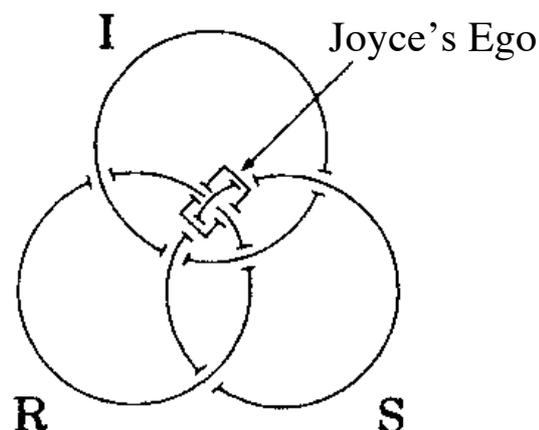


Figure 12: Unlinked Three-Ring Chain with Repair

As can be seen from this diagram, the repair comes to be where the initial slip occurred. For Lacan, who remained vehemently opposed to 'ego psychology' throughout his life,

<sup>309</sup> I have borrowed the terms 'signifier-in-isolation' and 'signifier-in-combination' from Tom Eyers, *Lacan and the Concept of the Real* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). Eyers makes the important point that 'the signifier- in-isolation and signifier-in-relation should be considered as potential 'states' for any signifier, rather than as different signifiers or fundamentally different modalities of signification.' (p. 38).

<sup>310</sup> Lacan's preoccupation with the issue of naming seems to have stemmed from his reading Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981) which is alluded to in *Seminar XXI*, p. 49 (11 December 1973), and *Seminar XXII*, p. 44 (11 March 1975) Coining the term 'ridged designators', Kripke claimed that proper names refer to their object in a direct fashion, without having recourse to description.

<sup>311</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XXIII*, p. 166 (13 April 1976).

the label ‘Joyce’s ego’ on this diagram is counter-intuitive. Is Lacan really reversing his position and siding with those who claimed that a successful analysis strengthened the subject’s ego, at whatever cost? Two points reveal that this is decisively not the case. First of all, at the semantic level, throughout Lacan’s work the German term ‘Ich’ is rendered in French as ‘moi’. By using the Latinate form ‘ego’, Lacan is therefore pointing towards something other than the psychic mediator that Freud saw as the locus of reason.<sup>312</sup> This much is clear from Joyce’s writings, which are some of the most *unreasonable* of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Secondly, at a topological level, it can be seen that Joyce’s ego does not coincide exactly with the Imaginary; it is rather a new creation with its own character.<sup>313</sup>

This highlights the other axis around which *Seminar XXIII* turns, artistic creation. Lacan describes Joyce as a ‘pure artificer [...] a man of know-how.’<sup>314</sup> He is a synthetic man, a ‘synth-homme’ with a prosthetic ego. What form of creation is Lacan advocating here? Roberto Harari argues that a distinction can be made between a ‘creationism of the signifier’ in Lacan’s early work from another form of creativity based on ‘Symbolic nomination’:

On one side there is the *fiat Lux!*, the act of naming something and founding it, making the Real emerge on the basis of the Symbolic; and on another, quite distinct side we have the invention of a name — both the proper name and the common noun — that attains its real through the abrogation of the identity authorized by the code.<sup>315</sup>

Here Harari’s claim that creative nomination can only function through ‘an abrogation of the identity authorized by a code’ once again brings to mind the concept of the ‘signifier-in-isolation’. However, while the latter involves a withdrawal of the signifier from the commonly agreed circuits of meaning, what Harari has in mind is closer to the neologisms invented by Joyce. *Finnegans Wake* in particular contains a proliferation of

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<sup>312</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘The Ego and the ID’, p. 25.

<sup>313</sup> Following on from this, it might be possible to topologically model the strengthening of the classical ego [moi] as a doubling of the Imaginary ring. Although it would be a digression to do so here, it may be possible to formalise this process with reference to the concept of ‘bing doubling’, inspired by the work of the mathematicians R. H. Bing and John Milnor. Milnor and Bing have shown that in a number of cases simply doubling the elements of a knot or chain can provide a stable link, even in cases (such as figure 11) when a link is trivial, or unlinked, in its prior state. Like the Joycean ego in figure 12, this addition would prevent the Imaginary ring from floating away and repair the fault that threatens psychic unity. However it would not do so through the creation of something new, but through a doubling, a strengthening of Imaginary defenses, petrifying the subject and possibly exacerbating their suffering. See John Milnor, ‘Link Groups’, *Annals of Mathematics*, 59:2, (1954), 177-196 (p. 184).

<sup>314</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XXIII*, p. 141 (9 March 1976).

<sup>315</sup> Harari, *How James Joyce Made His Name*, pp. 346-7.

strange idiolects containing literally thousands of new words. This act of invention has the effect of circumventing the authority that underpins recognised speech genres and renders them stable. As Harari points out, 'by foreclosing meaning that is congealed or frozen, I am able to engender new, unprecedented meanings'.<sup>316</sup> In Joyce's work as elsewhere such linguistic monsters are not immediately amenable to the understanding, leading one to assume that they work at the level of a 'modality of *jouissance*' more than a mode of communication.

It is worth exploring this idea of a modality of *jouissance* in detail, because in many ways it holds the key to understanding a different ethical mode of relating to the Symbolic that Joyce's work reveals. In Lacan's late seminars there is a proliferation of different modes of *jouissance*, which have been explored in a range of secondary texts.<sup>317</sup> Here I want to concentrate on just two: so-called 'phallic' *jouissance* and 'opaque' *jouissance*.

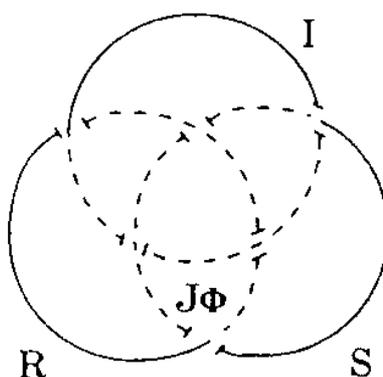


Figure 13: Three-Ring Borromean Chain with Phallic *Jouissance*

Phallic *jouissance* ( $J\Phi$ ) is the *jouissance* that is recouped by the subject from the Symbolic. Lacan accordingly places it between the Symbolic and the Real on the Borromean knot (figure 13). While the traditional role of the Name-of-the-Father is to separate a subject from the overwhelming *jouissance* of the Real, through this very act of separation it in effect creates a modality of *jouissance*. Here Freud's story of the man in the bakery quoted in chapter two once again comes to mind. In the same way that the man swaps a cake for a glass of liquor, neither of which he had paid for in the first place, if the subject is in the first place willing to give up something he doesn't have and 'accept' Symbolic castration, the dividend he receives is phallic *jouissance*. Since this

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., p. 301.

<sup>317</sup> See Jacques-Alain Miller, 'Paradigms of *Jouissance*', *Lacanian Ink*, 17 (2000), 8-47, or the final chapter of Lorenzo Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness: A Philosophical Reading of Lacan* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2007).

form of *jouissance* is obtained by means of a submission to the Symbolic, it is always collectively negotiated and ideologically conditioned.

Opaque *jouissance*, by contrast, represents an individual ‘subjectivation’ of *jouissance* that is not collectively negotiated in any usual way. Joyce’s achievement, according to Lacan, consists in creating for himself an idiosyncratic mode of *jouissance* that is not reliant on the Symbolic in general, and thus not primarily ‘phallic’ in character. Once again this implies that opaque *jouissance* is not reliant on the Name-of-the-Father. Joyce in effect ‘makes a name for himself’ and his sinthome takes on the role of the Name-of-the-Father in a new, individualised way. Furthermore, opaque *jouissance* is opaque precisely because it excludes meaning. It is associated with the sinthome, which is to be distinguished from the symptom by virtue of the fact that it is not a message to be deciphered. Although Lacan does not identify where opaque *jouissance* is to be placed on the Borromean knot, it could perhaps be placed within the area demarcated by the sinthome in figure 10.

Nevertheless, it does not seem that Lacan is claiming that ‘opaque *jouissance*’ bypasses the Other entirely. Joyce’s sinthome is ‘unsubscribed’ [*désabonné*] from the Other, implying a two-stage process: first a subscription, then an unsubscription.<sup>318</sup> The subscription is progressively withdrawn by traversing the fundamental fantasy, which as Verhaeghe and Declercq point out, progressively strips the symptom of its Symbolic properties, eventually arriving at a kernel of non-sense that resists interpretation.<sup>319</sup> After these two stages, a third stage of re-inscription can begin. As in the example of Joyce, this installs a new, particularised Master-Signifier, in contrast to the ‘off-the-shelf’ solution of the Name-of-the-Father. In *Seminar XXIV*, Lacan claims that art, as a representative of this secondary process of re-inscription, is ‘not pre-symbolic, but symbolic to the power of two’.<sup>320</sup> In other words, the ‘non-sense’ embodied in art emerges from within sense, rather than vice-versa.

The theoretical position here seems problematic in several respects. The reading proposed by Verhaeghe and Declercq makes for a rather schematic ‘three-step’ process of analysis, and the necessity of passing through the Symbolic would seem to privilege a mode of inhabiting language that is always already skewed towards neurosis, with art as

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<sup>318</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Joyce the Sinthome (I)* (unpublished translation by Aaron Benanav), p. 3. Available in French as: Jacques Lacan, ‘Joyce le Symptôme’, in *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan: Livre XXIII, Le Sinthome*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005), pp.161-169.

<sup>319</sup> Paul Verhaeghe & Frédéric Declercq, ‘Lacan’s analytical goal: “Le Sinthome” or the feminine way’, in *Re-inventing the symptom: Essays on the Final Lacan*, ed. by Luke Thurston (New York: The Other Press, 2002), pp. 59-83 (p. 67).

<sup>320</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XXIV: L’insu que sait... 1976-1977* (unpublished translation by Cormac Gallagher), p. 58 (18 January 1977).

a means to pass ‘beyond’ this neurosis. While it begs the question of psychotics, or those on the autistic spectrum, who sometimes never manage to inscribe themselves fully in the Symbolic, let alone ‘unsubscribe’ themselves afterwards, it could equally be said that these subjects have something of a head start in this process. This is the point that Phillip Dravers has made with regard to Joyce, whose probable psychosis — untriggered or otherwise — means for Dravers that there is no need for him to traverse his fantasy, but does introduce an added imperative to create for himself a particularised master signifier.<sup>321</sup>

Secondly, although it is my assertion that Lacan discusses Joyce’s work in order to think about a general social and psychic condition, his discussion revolves around a closed relationship between an artist and his artwork. According to Lacan, the *jouissance* of the Joycean text is opaque. As he put it in the opening address to the 1975 *Joyce Symposium*, ‘the symptom of Joyce is a symptom that does not concern you at all. It is the symptom insofar as there is no chance it will catch something of your unconscious.’<sup>322</sup> This posits that inter-subjective forms of expression are necessarily based on signification, and anything beyond signification ‘does not concern you’. This once again demonstrates the need to account for inter-subjective forms beyond signification, or to put it in Joyce’s words, the ‘intermisunderstanding minds of the anticollaborators’.<sup>323</sup> In the next section I will look at how Guattari’s work addresses some of these problems.

### A Guattarian Graft

As a one-time student of Lacan’s, and a member of the *École Freudienne* up until his death in 1992, Félix Guattari was a theorist, analyst and activist well versed in Lacanian theory. This is very different from saying he was a ‘Lacanian theorist’; in his single-authored works and collaborations with Deleuze, Guattari became increasingly critical

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<sup>321</sup> Phillip Dravers, ‘In the Wake of Interpretation: “The Letter! The Litter!” or “Where in the Waste is the Wisdom”’, in *Re-Inventing the Symptom: Essays on the Final Lacan*, ed. by Luke Thurston (New York: Other Press, 2002), pp. 141-146.

<sup>322</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Joyce the Sinthome I*, p. 3. The impenetrability of Joyce’s text has been noted by many commentators before Lacan, but perhaps the most relevant here is Jung, who in an unflattering review of *Ulysses* in 1932 compares Joyce to a worm: ‘If worms were gifted with literary powers they would write with the sympathetic nervous system for lack of a brain. I suspect that something of this kind has happened to Joyce, that here we have a case of visceral thinking with severe restrictions of cerebral activity and its confinement to the perceptual processes’, Carl Gustav Jung, ‘“Ulysses”: A Monologue’, in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung Volume 15: Spirit in Man, Art and Literature*, ed. by Gerhard Adler and R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 109-32 (p. 112).

<sup>323</sup> James Joyce, *The Restored Finnegans Wake* (London: Penguin Classics, 2012), p. 214.

of what he saw as the limitations of Lacanian psychoanalysis. His wide ranging critique revolved around three broad shortcomings of Lacanism: 1) the privileging of the traditional one-on-one couch setting at the expense of psychiatric institutions such as La Borde where Guattari worked; 2) the privileging of a model of the unconscious that was skewed towards neurosis, rather than psychosis<sup>324</sup> (a perspective that led Guattari to coin the term schizoanalysis in opposition to psychoanalysis); 3) the reliance on structuralist (and especially Saussurian) linguistics, which led to a ‘signifier fetishism’ among Lacanian analysts and blinded them to the importance of a-signifying forms of expression.

Perhaps as a result of these critiques it is unusual to find syntheses of Lacan and Guattari among the secondary literature on either author. Academic scholarship on Lacan usually seeks to place him on a trajectory that begins with Kant or Hegel and ends with his ‘natural inheritors’ such as Alain Badiou or Julia Kristeva, while ‘clinical’ Lacanian texts rarely make reference to any authors other than those Lacan himself cited, Guattari not being one of them. One of the few books to work through some of the complex links between Lacan and Guattari is Janell Watson’s *Guattari’s Diagrammatic Thought*. Watson exposes the submerged connections between the two thinkers, but her approach remains Guattari-centric, and some surprising claims about the increasingly structuralist character of Lacan’s work evidence a paucity of engagement with his later formulations.<sup>325</sup> While it is not my intention to give a general overview of the complex entanglements between the two thinkers, I hope that in this section it will be possible to use Guattari to solve some of the problems in Lacan’s late work, while simultaneously making a few connective syntheses that overcome the sometimes exaggerated antagonism between them.

Some of the key themes in Guattari’s oeuvre relate directly to the abiding concerns of this thesis. An expanded conception of subjectivity runs through all of his theoretical works, from an early collection of essays entitled *Psychoanalysis and Transversality* to later monographs such as *Schizoanalytic Cartographies* and *Chaosmosis* (a term that Guattari in fact borrows from Joyce). In these later works

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<sup>324</sup> Work around the concept of ‘ordinary psychosis’ on the part of Lacanian theorists could be seen as a way of addressing this criticism.

<sup>325</sup> See Watson, *Guattari’s Diagrammatic Thought*. Watson writes that ‘In 1954-55 Lacan’s sign is much more playful, open and interesting than it will later seem, once his structuralism subjects it to the matheme and algebraic topology’ (p. 35), and elsewhere of ‘Lacan’s increasingly purified structuralism’. See Janell Watson, ‘Schizoanalysis as Metamodeling’, *The Fibreculture Journal*, 12 (2008) <<http://twelve.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-077-schizoanalysis-as-metamodeling/>> [accessed 01/06/2015]. This runs counter to the widespread opinion that Lacan’s work becomes *less* structuralist as his attention turns from the Symbolic increasingly towards the Real.

much attention is given to what Guattari calls ‘ethico-aesthetics’, which is opposed to the reigning scientism (be it structuralist or logico-positivist) in psychoanalysis and culture at large. My aim in this section is firstly to give an account of Guattari’s attitude towards subjectivity, paying particular attention to the role of art in its production. This will lay the ground for a more focused look at his ‘general semiotics’, taking into account a-signifying forms as well as his critique of signifying semiotics. As I hope to demonstrate, this selective approach can be justified in Guattari’s own vocabulary as a form of ‘meta-modeling’, which is to say the construction of conceptual models drawn from different domains on the pragmatic basis of their utility in solving a problem.

### The Production of Subjectivity

Guattari never forgets that the most important outcome of psychoanalytic treatment is change. This change is not figured as a one-off cure, in the same way that a medical cure might be, but rather as a processual opening up of possibilities for the subject — a work that never stops and that does not have a pre-determined outcome. In his hands subjectivity is always treated as something that can be produced, or worked ‘in the sense that one works iron’ rather than something static.<sup>326</sup> In a turn of phrase that recalls Lacan’s description of Joyce, Guattari emphasises the ‘artificial and creative character of the production of subjectivity’ and the range of heterogeneous components that make up its composition.<sup>327</sup>

Among the many components that Guattari maps are ‘individuals, groups and institutions’, ‘technological machines of information and communication’ as well as ‘scriptural, vocal, musical or plastic discursivities’.<sup>328</sup> These components work in concert to form ‘universes of reference’ that interact with the subject in a constant and reciprocal manner.<sup>329</sup> For Guattari, schizoanalysis is about the ‘co-management’ of the production of subjectivity, which could involve making all manner of subtle changes to the subject’s material and semiotic milieu. Guattari viewed institutions of all kinds as ‘assemblages of subjectivation’ where such subtle changes could take place, for better or worse. For example, in the La Borde clinic where he worked most of his life, Guattari and his colleagues instituted ‘la Grille’ — a rotation system that required doctors, patients, and other staff to exchange tasks, thereby allowing frozen subjective positions

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<sup>326</sup> Félix Guattari, *Schizoanalytic Cartographies* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 20.

<sup>327</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, p. 8.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1, p. 4, p. 19.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

to thaw and institutionally sanctioned power to circulate more freely.

This practical example might suggest that for Guattari the subject is more or less equivalent to the ‘analysand’, ‘patient’ or ‘inmate’, depending on the setting. According to this position the task of the schizoanalyst would be to change the socio-psychic conditions under which individual humans lived. In fact, this position is quite wide of the mark of Guattari’s thought. Just as for Lacan, ‘the unconscious is the discourse of the Other’, for Guattari subjectivity was both infra- and supra-individual.<sup>330</sup> It operates at the level of institutions and groups, as well as at the ‘molecular level’ of part-objects and pathic apprehension. In what follows I will describe some of the tributaries of subjectivity that Guattari discusses.

To demonstrate the supra-individual level of subjectivity, it is enough to cite Guattari’s early opposition between ‘subject groups’ and ‘subjugated groups’, which was loosely based on Sartre’s distinction between ‘serial being’ and the ‘group in fusion’.<sup>331</sup> A subjugated group finds the principle of its unity outside of itself, with each of its elements relating to one another through this external referent, whereas a subject group interiorises its principle of unity, steering it towards its own purposes. Although references to Sartre gradually disappear from Guattari’s work, echoes of this line of thought (as well as Marx) can be heard in Guattari’s rallying call to seize the ‘means of production of subjectivity’.<sup>332</sup> Such a seizure might enable new group subjects to form along various paths of singularisation.

One of the pre-personal elements in the production of subjectivity involves ‘pathic apprehension’ that exists before, and then parallel to, the subject-object relation. In *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*, pathic categories are figured as ‘existential filters’ that organise the ‘primordial soup of the plane of immanence’.<sup>333</sup> They constitute a kind of pre-conceptual apprehension of phenomena — a form of proto-subjectivity that is unrelated to ego or identificatory formations. To make this argument, Guattari draws on the distinction made by the German physician and philosopher Viktor von Weizsäcker between pathic categories and ontic categories. As the label implies, ‘ontic’ categories relate to being, and can include such relations as ‘time, space, numbers and causality’.<sup>334</sup> Von Weizsäcker links pathic categories to such modal verbs as ‘can’, ‘will’, and ‘ought’, which embody processes that are undergone, expressing movement, desire, or

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<sup>330</sup> Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 436.

<sup>331</sup> A distinction found in Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason: Volume 1* (London: Verso, 2004).

<sup>332</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, p. 13.

<sup>333</sup> Guattari, *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*, pp. 108-109.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

obligation. Movement and response implies a minimal level of subjectivity for von Weizsäcker. This may be as simple as the reflex reaction in a Venus flytrap, or anything that changes in response to its environment. As von Weizsäcker points out, it is simply ‘the dualism of perception and movement that implies the introduction of a subject in biology.’<sup>335</sup> This level of pre-personal subjectivity should not be seen as a pre-condition to group subjectivity. A more global shift in subjective forms might feasibly change subjectivity at a pathic level. A change in the fly population as a result of human behavior might require Venus flytraps to react faster, or develop larger trigger hairs, and vice-versa.

The specific role accorded to art in the production of subjectivity lies somewhere between these two poles. In *Chaosmosis*, Guattari describes art as having a catalytic function in the production of subjectivity.<sup>336</sup> Artworks or parts of artworks are variously described as ‘vectors of subjectivation’ or ‘nuclei of differentiation’.<sup>337</sup> Understood in its widest sense as creative output, art has the capacity to launch somebody or something on a new subjective trajectory. But how, exactly, does it fulfill such a lofty function? Guattari is clear that it is ‘not through representation, but through affective contamination. They [aesthetic assemblages] start to exist in you, in spite of you.’<sup>338</sup> In the phrase ‘in you, in spite of you’ the reverberations of Lacanian theory can be felt.<sup>339</sup> Elsewhere Guattari makes this link explicit, calling for an expansion of the psychoanalytic concept of the ‘part-object’ to account for all the channels that flow into the production of subjectivity, an ambition he sees Bakhtin’s work as partially realising.<sup>340</sup> In what follows I will try to explain the significance of this move.

The idea of a ‘part-object’ was given the most decisive weight by Melanie Klein, who placed it at the heart of the object-relations theory of psychoanalysis that she would help to develop. Nevertheless, the idea is present in Freud’s work as early as 1913, when it is linked to psychosexual stages and the component drives.<sup>341</sup> For Freud,

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<sup>335</sup> Viktor von Weizsäcker, *Le Cycle de la Structure* (Paris: Desclee de Brouwer, 1958), p. 229 quoted in Watson, *Guattari’s Diagrammatic Thought*, pp. 133-4.

<sup>336</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, p. 19.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25, p. 92.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 92-3.

<sup>339</sup> In particular the last chapter of Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis. 1964* (New York: Norton, 1998), (24 June 1964) has been given the title ‘in you more than you’ by its editor Jacques-Alain Miller.

<sup>340</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, p. 14.

<sup>341</sup> In ‘The Disposition to Obsessional Neurosis’ Freud writes ‘And now we see the need for yet another stage to be inserted before the final shape is reached — a stage in which the component instincts have already come together for the choice of an object and that object is already something extraneous in contrast to the subject’s own self, but in which the primacy of the genital zones has not yet been established.’ Sigmund Freud, ‘The Disposition to Obsessional Neurosis’, in *The Standard Edition of the*

part-objects are objects that occupy a position extraneous to the infant's body, but which nevertheless play a role in his or her subjective development. The key examples are the breast (which satisfies the oral drive) and the feces (which satisfy the anal drive). These objects operate as points of alterity that give the subject libidinal pleasure. From a Kleinian point of view, the breast initially comes to serve as a stand-in for the 'whole' object of the mother, thereby acting as a bridge between the subject and his or her 'external' world, in many ways enabling this distinction to be made in the first place. Some years later Lacan would shift the emphasis away from the breast as the preeminent part-object and expand the list to incorporate the gaze and the voice. The voice is linked to the so-called 'invocatory drive' and is particularly evident in psychosis, which can involve persecutory or commanding auditory hallucinations; while the gaze is linked to the scopic drive. The gaze has been well covered in the secondary literature, but in brief it could be characterised as the phenomenological possibility of being seen, even by an object such as a painting, which gives rise to all manner of affective states, the most obvious being shame.

In this brief summary the concept of the partial-object has already started to loosen from its moorings. Whereas Freud's original usage links the part-object to an instinctual drive — to eat, to shit — Lacan's additions are more closely linked to desire, and eventually to the object of desire itself — *objet a* — the place of which can feasibly be occupied by any object. Guattari wholeheartedly approves of this expanded part-object, calling for it to be followed up even further.<sup>342</sup> The cost of not doing so would be to relegate such objects to 'normative landmarks' on a road to the generic subjective state of 'oblative genality'.<sup>343</sup> According to Guattari, whereas Kleinian and Lacanian analysts situated the partial object or transitional object at 'the junction of a subjectivity and an alterity which are themselves partial and transitional [...] they never removed it from a causalist, pulsional infrastructure: they never conferred it with the multivalent dimensions of an existential Territory or with a machinic creativity of boundless potential.'<sup>344</sup> Guattari's name for this new, expanded part-object is a 'part-enunciator' and to add theoretical scaffolding to the concept he draws on the early work

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*Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. by James Strachey, Vol. 12 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1958), pp. 317-326 (p. 321).

<sup>342</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, p. 14. Part-objects also play a decisive role in *Anti-Oedipus*, where they are conceived of as interruptions in the flows of libido. These interruptions are not overcome on the route to towards sexual maturity, as Klein's work implies, but constitute the machinic components of the unconscious that can be engineered and modulated through schizoanalysis.

<sup>343</sup> Guattari, *Schizoanalytic Cartographies* p. 31. 'Oblative genality' was for Freud the 'normal' outcome of passing through all the stages of psycho-sexual development.

<sup>344</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis* p. 94.

of Mikhail Bakhtin.

In Bakhtin's early work the distinction between a material artifact and an aesthetic object is an important issue. This is no more the case than in the essay *The Problem of Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art*.<sup>345</sup> Here Bakhtin positions himself against the Formalism that dominated Russian art theory in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which sought to establish the primacy of the material in the interpretation and analysis of works of art, taking in such considerations as scale, texture, or shape. In contrast, Bakhtin insists that an aesthetic object is irreducible to its material composition:

The aesthetic component [...] is neither a concept, nor a word, nor a visual representation, but a distinctive aesthetic formation which is realized in poetry with the help of the word, and in the visual arts — with the help of visually apprehended material, but which does not coincide anywhere with any material combination.<sup>346</sup>

On this basis, Bakhtin asks himself how aesthetic form, while necessarily dependent on material combinations, manages to spill over its material container to become 'the form of content'.<sup>347</sup> A straightforward psychologistic answer to this question might try to account for the aesthetic component of a work of art as a subjective projection of the human mind. For Bakhtin this is only partially what is going on. While in this essay, and in much of his work, he grants the spectator a decisively active role in the 'co-creation' of a work of art, for Bakhtin an artwork's significance cannot simply be put down to an aesthetic projection:

In form I *find myself*, find my own productive, axiologically form-giving, activity, *I feel intensely my own movement that is creating the object*, and I do so not only in primary creation, not only during my own performance, but also during the contemplation of a work of art. *I must to some extent experience myself as the creator of form, in order to actualize the artistically valid form as such.*<sup>348</sup>

This passage describes a process of aesthetic contemplation that gives the spectator a feeling of his or her own subjectivity joining with an object in a moment of 'co-creation', which, in turn, reveals the aesthetic form that made this creative moment

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<sup>345</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, 'The Problem of Content, Material and Form'.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid., p. 300.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid., p. 304.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

possible. Modes of contemplation that do not pass through this circuit of creative contemplation are described as ‘cognitive’, rather than aesthetic thinking. Only through entering into the form as a co-creator, and by consciously experiencing this process, does aesthetic contemplation become possible.

Before any of this can happen Bakhtin asserts that the work first of all needs to be detached from ‘the unity of nature and the unity of the ethical event of being’.<sup>349</sup> This is not a typical autonomist argument, whereby *only* the artwork itself should be taken into consideration in the study or contemplation of art, because as Bakhtin makes clear, passing from a cognitive to an aesthetic mode of contemplation does not wipe the slate clean. Contextual information, biographical details of the artist, or knowledge about the object’s production may all be retained by the viewer, and may even comprise part of the newly detached aesthetic object itself. Isolation of the aesthetic form is what finally cleaves it from its material substrate, opening it to subjective input: ‘Isolation is [...] the negative condition of the personal, subjective (not psychologically subjective) character of form; it allows the author creator to become a constitutive moment in form’<sup>350</sup>

Bakhtin’s account of the extra-material dimensions of aesthetic objects chimes with the extra-material significance placed on part-objects in psychoanalysis. From a Kleinian perspective, a breast is not simply a body part or a potential source of nourishment; it plays an active role in the production of subjectivity. For Freud too, the excremental assemblage bound up with the anal drive gives the infant a sense of the boundaries of their own body, a sense that is in no way ‘given’ if they are looked at in isolation. Bakhtin’s achievement was not only to extend the notion of the part-object, but also to discuss it outside of any normative model of psychogenetic development or the circuits of the ‘component drives’. When passages from Bakhtin that speak of the artwork as ‘a segment of the unitary open event of being’ are considered, the potential for a Lacanian inflected interpretation becomes clear. Guattari makes this connection vivid and immediate, writing that aesthetic perception and artistic creation ‘detach and deterritorialise a segment of the real’<sup>351</sup> effectuating a ‘complex ontological crystallization’<sup>352</sup> in the spectator or the artist.

To hazard a point of comparison between Bakhtin and the late Lacan, it is worth recalling the idea of ‘unsubscribing’ from the Other that the latter sees in Joyce, which is precisely a mode of isolating an aesthetic object from the general ‘cognitive’ circuits

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<sup>349</sup> Ibid., p. 306.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., p. 308.

<sup>351</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, p. 131.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

of meaning (i.e. the Symbolic) and giving this object an existential weight in the subject's psychic life. In the case of Joyce this process of unsubscription was seen to inaugurate a counter movement of Symbolic *re*inscription by means of a particularised master signifier or *sinthome*. An important difference however can be seen in the fact that the *sinthome* as Lacan theorises it cannot be inter-subjective, whereas for Bakhtin and Guattari the aesthetic object or 'part-enunciator' sends subjective ripples through the author, the viewer and potentially their respective socio-symbolic milieus. This is one of the key points that warrants a turn to Guattari in this chapter.

### Cracking the A-Signifying Kernel

As previously mentioned, a second crucial shortcoming of Lacan's seminar on Joyce, and perhaps Lacanian psychoanalysis in general, is its insistence on 'the primacy of the signifier'. *Seminar XXIII* is less dogmatic than earlier seminars in this respect, with its manifold diagrams and discussions of nomination and phonetics serving to pluralise the semiotic forms on offer.<sup>353</sup> Nevertheless, among Lacanian theorists and in the majority of seminars this is clearly not the case. Guattari saw this shortcoming early on, and many of his collaborative or single-authored works contain wide-ranging critiques of 'signifier fetishism.' This critique is bolstered by some serious and sustained attempts to think through an alternative semiotic model. It is in an essay entitled 'The Role of The Signifier in The Institution' that a compressed account of the 'general semiotics' that Guattari advocated in place of structuralist semiotics can be found.<sup>354</sup> Before expanding on this, it will first be necessary to sketch the main points of Guattari's critique of the linguistic underpinnings of Lacanian psychoanalysis.

The first of Guattari's criticisms involves the infamous 'Saussurian bar' between the signified and signifier. For Lacan this bar acts as a one-way street, with the signifier

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<sup>353</sup> In fact it might be possible to trace a path away from signifying semiotics in Lacan's late work. In *Seminar XXI* for example, Lacan uncharacteristically describes his elaboration of the link between two signifiers in his early Saussurian inflected essay 'The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis' as 'an error'. See Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XXI: Les Non Dupes Errent* (Unpublished translation by Cormac Gallagher), p. 50 (11 December 1973). An example of Lacan focusing on a-signifying forms in *Seminar XXIII* (11 May 1976) can be seen in his appropriation of the argument of Clive Hart's *Structure and Motif in Finnegans Wake* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1962), which posits that Joyce's last book is underpinned by two interlocking forms — the sphere and the cross — which determine the form of the entire book without passing into signification. As one might expect, Lacan is quick to see in this form another way of writing the Borromean knot, in which the cross, when its points are extended to infinity, essentially serves the same function as two interlocking circles would, in effect containing the third circle by locking it into position.

<sup>354</sup> Félix Guattari, 'The Role of the Signifier in the Institution', in *Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics* (London: Penguin, 1984), pp. 73-81.

perpetually acting on the signified in a non-reciprocal manner according to which ‘the word kills the thing’. For Guattari, this has the effect of petrifying the possibilities inherent in signified matter on one side of the bar, and establishing a veritable ‘signifying ghetto’ on the other.

Related to this critique is the claim that Lacan gave very little account of how signifiers come into being in the first place.<sup>355</sup> The Lacanian signifier ‘lacks ontological heterogenesis’.<sup>356</sup> As if to add grist to Guattari’s mill, Lacan was fond of quoting William Burroughs to the effect that ‘language is a virus from outer space’ — perhaps with the addendum that it destroys the possibility of finding out which galaxy it came from.<sup>357</sup> For Guattari it is important to think about processes of *semiotisation* rather than any autonomous semiotic sphere: ‘the question is neither to abstract out from signified content, nor to confer on it a separate and autonomous ontological status, but to determine its conversions’.<sup>358</sup>

A third rejoinder to Lacan concerns the relationship of signifying semiotics with capitalism, a line of analysis that has been taken up and developed by theorists such as Franco "Bifo" Berardi and Maurizio Lazzarato under the banner of 'Semiocapitalism'.<sup>359</sup> In fact, while certain passages from Guattari's work might suggest that capitalism derives a huge amount of power from 'despotic signifying machines', another prominent current in his thought (both individually and with Deleuze) emphasises the manifold ways in which capitalism uses a-signifying semiotics — perhaps most obviously in the financial sphere, where technical apparatus, trading algorithms, financial ratings etc. act directly on flows of material and the organisation of commodity chains without necessarily passing into signification.<sup>360</sup> Whilst on the one hand Guattari makes a quasi-economic claim that capitalism positions the signifier ‘profit’ as the general equivalent against which everything else is measured (a ‘transcendent enunciator’) his sensitivity to the increasingly sophisticated a-signifying apparatus of capitalism shows that

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<sup>355</sup> This is not entirely true. As Watson points out in *Guattari's Diagrammatic thought*, Lacan’s very early seminars give a cursory account of ‘sign-particles’ that serve as pre-signifying semiotic units.

<sup>356</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, p.39. For many Lacanians this absence of the ontological genesis of the signifier would be seen as a consequence of there being ‘no meta-language’, it is a matter of ‘coming to terms with this lack’ rather than filling it in.

<sup>357</sup> William Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), p. 112.

<sup>358</sup> Guattari, *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*, p. 163.

<sup>359</sup> See for example Franco “Bifo” Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2009), p. 21, and Maurizio Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014). This last book contains extended readings of Guattari's work and seeks to highlight its heightened relevance under contemporary forms of capitalism.

<sup>360</sup> As Guattari writes in *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*: ‘what is the reductionist bent of the signifier [...] supported by? To my mind it is inseparable from the much more general curvature of capitalistic Universes in the direction of the entropy of the equivalence of significations.’ Guattari, *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*, p. 214.

something else is always going on beneath the surface.<sup>361</sup> At best it could be said that capitalism is an economic system that operates in various semiotic domains at the same time, but that its operations on the terrain of signification are more easily apprehended than its a-signifying operations, and this has the effect of devaluing semiotic forms outside signification, a devaluation that Lacanian psychoanalysis was thought to compound.

For Guattari psychotics are particularly disadvantaged by the devaluation of extra-linguistic forms of expression.<sup>362</sup> To develop a criticism made earlier, the structuralist emphasis on signifying forms is ill adapted to the analysis of those who make sense of the world in different ways. As such it requires some drastic modifications if it is to be used in what Guattari first called 'institutional analysis', and later schizoanalysis. It is in this context that the essay 'The Role of The Signifier in the Institution' should be placed; with its primary aim to pluralise the modes of semiotisation that psychoanalysis takes into account so as to render them operative in institutional settings with a high proportion of psychotic patients.

In formulating part of his alternative 'general semiotics', in this essay Guattari replaces the usual references to Saussure and Jakobson with terms drawn from the Danish linguist and semiotician Louis Hjelmslev.<sup>363</sup> This is perhaps a surprising move, given the highly structuralist character of the latter's work.<sup>364</sup> From the 1930s onwards, Hjelmslev and his colleagues in the Copenhagen school sought to identify the algebraic structures and basic units common to all language, both actual and potential — an endeavor they called 'glossmatics'.<sup>365</sup> Despite his place in the history of structuralism, there are several reasons to make a 'detour through Hjelmslev' (as Guattari puts it in *The Machinic Unconscious*). These reasons will become clearer once some of Hjelmslev's terms have been explained.

The table which appears at the beginning of 'The Role of the Signifier in the Institution' (figure 14) uses several terms taken directly from Hjelmslev — matter, substance, form, expression, and content — which form a lattice overlaid by a series of

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<sup>361</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, p. 104.

<sup>362</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, p. 72.

<sup>363</sup> For a detailed discussion of Guattari's work on semiotics see Gary Genosko, 'Guattari's Schizoanalytic Semiotics: Mixing Hjelmslev and Peirce', in *Deleuze and Guattari: New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy, and Culture*, ed. by Eleanor Kaufman and Kevin Jon Heller (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 175-190.

<sup>364</sup> Guattari was not the first cultural or critical theorist to turn to Hjelmslev. See for example Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1957).

<sup>365</sup> Hjelmslev called the basic units of language 'glossimes', taken from the Greek 'glossa' meaning tongue or language.

arrows to designate various kinds of semiotic manifestation.<sup>366</sup> By examining this table in detail it will be easier to grasp the import of Hjelmslev's work for Guattari.

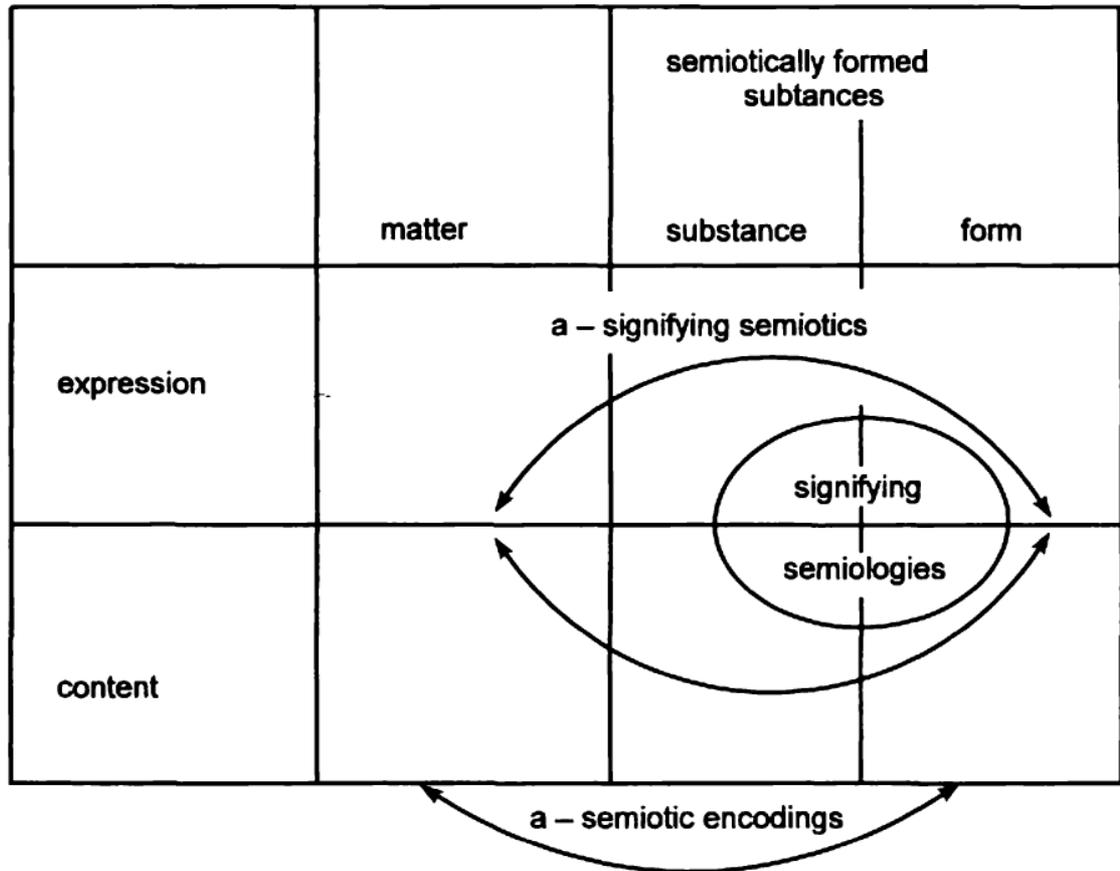


Figure 14: The Role of the Signifier in the Institution.

Perhaps the most fundamental distinction for Hjelmslev is that between ‘expression’ and ‘content’, which Guattari plots onto the left hand side of his table. Some linguists have chosen to neatly map these categories onto Saussure’s distinction between signifier and signified, an association that is not without justification in Hjelmslev’s own work.<sup>367</sup> As one might expect, Guattari (this time with Deleuze) is quick to disagree with such interpretations, writing of the expression/content planes in *A Thousand Plateaus* that

There is never conformity between the two, or from one to the other. There is always real independence and a real distinction; even to fit the forms together, and to determine the relations between them, requires a specific variable assemblage. None of these

<sup>366</sup> Both Gary Genesko and Janell Watson have made previous readings of this table that influence my own. See Gary Genesko, *Félix Guattari: An Aberrant Introduction* (London: Continuum, 2012); Watson, *Guattari’s Diagrammatic Thought*.

<sup>367</sup> See for example: Miriam Taverniers, ‘Hjelmslev’s semiotic model of language: An exegesis’, *Semiotica*, 171 (2008), 367–394.

characteristics applies to the signifier-signified relation.<sup>368</sup>

The idea of a ‘variable assemblage’ between content and expression highlights the fact that the boundary between them is not simply associative, but functional, working as an interface of conversion.

The relationship between content and expression is figured as independent and yet structurally *isomorphic*. In other words, the planes have no correspondence with one another and yet the way in which they are organised is similar. Furthermore, while formally independent they in fact mutually presuppose one another: there is no such thing as an expression without content or an expressionless content. In Hjelmslev’s words: ‘They are defined only by their mutual solidarity, and neither of them can be identified otherwise. They are each defined only oppositively and relatively, as mutually opposed functives of one and the same function.’<sup>369</sup> The fact that neither plane takes primacy over the other sets them apart from Saussure’s signifier/signified relation, and allows Hjelmslev to claim that it should be possible to find a way of analysing expression starting with content — a distinctly immanentist position that appeals to Deleuze and Guattari.<sup>370</sup>

As well as the two planes of expression and content, Hjelmslev elaborated three further categories: matter (or purport), substance, and form. Hjelmslev described the first category as an ‘amorphous mass [...] which is defined only by its external functions’, and in the *Prolegomena* purport is likened to sand that can be put into different molds.<sup>371</sup> Just as the same sand can be molded differently and yet the underlying matter remains the same, so too can the same purport be structured differently in different languages without the purport itself changing.<sup>372</sup> As shown in figure 14, purport can exist on both the content and the expression planes. Content-purport is akin to Kant’s noumenal reality, an unformed and undifferentiated realm of things-in-themselves, whereas expression-purport is figured as an amorphous sequence of sounds in verbal language (or potentially any material of expression before it is formally expressive). This description of purport as something amorphous and passive like sand again seems uncannily close to Saussure’s signified, which is perhaps why

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<sup>368</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 74. In the endnote given on this page, Deleuze and Guattari write categorically that ‘We consider Hjelmslev, despite his own reservations and vacillations, to be the only linguist to have actually broken with the signifier and the signified.’ *Ibid.*, p. 574.

<sup>369</sup> Louis Hjelmslev, *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963), p. 60.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>371</sup> Hjelmslev, *Prolegomena*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

Guattari felt the need to make the difference explicit. In *The Machinic Unconscious*, he writes that ‘sense is by no means an “amorphous mass” [...] waiting upon an external formalism that would come to animate it. [...] [It] is manifested across a spatial, temporal, substantial, multidimensional, and deictic rhizome in the midst of which it operates every possible transmigration, every transmutation.’<sup>373</sup> Even if this is not true for Hjelmslev, for Guattari matter is a fundamentally active and intensive realm of unrealised possibility. Of all the categories in the table it is perhaps the closest to the Lacanian Real, a realm of imminent causality that is outside of representation.

Purport conjoins with form in order to make substance. Hjelmslev famously describes this relationship as follows:

By virtue of the content-form and the expression-form, and only by virtue of them, exist respectively the content-substance and the expression-substance, which appear by the form’s being projected on to the purport, just as an open net casts its shadow down on an undivided surface.<sup>374</sup>

As this quote implies, forms are like the strings of a net, held in place by each other in an expansive web of language. The net example reveals the set-mathematical foundations of glossmatics, according to which an undefined multiplicity is grouped into the semiological ‘set’ of a specific language or conceptual system. This is true on the content plane as well as the expression plane, and one could feasibly speak of a ‘zoological set’ of animals (such as marsupials) as it pertains to content, as well as a ‘signifying set’ of semaphore signals as they pertain to expression. In fact, forms cannot really be said to exist independently of this grouping function. Their existence fundamentally depends on being put into action, making and unmaking words and things out of unformed purport.

The final category of substance is a little subtler, as implied by it being equated with the shadow of a net. It represents the bridge between form and purport necessary for meaning to arise. To take a concrete example, on the expression plane substance could be equated with phonetics. Phonetics is the very physical aspect of sound, as produced by a particular person or group of people — in short it is words as the ear hears them. Expression-form on the other hand could be equated with phonology. It is

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<sup>373</sup> Félix Guattari, *The Machinic Unconscious: Essays in Schizoanalysis* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011), pp. 218- 219. The usual translation of purport is *matière* or *sens* in French. As a result in the Adkins translation of *The Machinic Unconscious* it has been rendered into English as ‘sense’, when it should perhaps have been left as matter.

<sup>374</sup> Hjelmslev, *Prolegomena*, p. 57.

the aspect of sound as systematised and ordered by language. One phoneme is opposed to another phoneme in an abstract structure of differentiation.<sup>375</sup> Phonology is words as the brain hears them. Just as it is impossible to have phonology without phonetics, form without substance would result in empty and meaningless forms, and the converse is also true for substance. As Hjelmslev succinctly puts it: ‘purport provides the substance for a form’.<sup>376</sup>

Now that the basic terms that Guattari borrows from Hjelmslev have been defined, it is possible to further unpack the meaning of the different semiotic and a-semiotic manifestations that traverse the six squares of the table. The arrows on the table exist as passages of transformation, and the fact that some of them are double-ended show that this is possible in both directions. Matter can be formalised into relatively stable structures, and forms can be rendered as inoperative as a broken sand-bucket.

For Guattari the small oval shaded grey represents the ‘signifying ghetto’ of the Lacanian Symbolic. Its centre of gravity is at the dividing line between the two axes of form-substance and expression-content, and it involves the formalisation of various types of substance, from linguistic expression to Morse code. Signifying semiologies can be further divided into ‘symbolic semiologies’ and ‘semiologies of signification’. The former employ such substances as gesture, mime, tattoos, insignia etc., while the latter are ‘centred upon a single signifying substance’ — linguistic expression.<sup>377</sup> All the semiotic forms in this sphere are ‘structured like a language’ and ‘other poly-centered semiotic substances become dependent upon a single specific stratum of the signifier.’<sup>378</sup> A recent artwork by Lawrence Abu Hamdan entitled *Conflicted Phonemes* (2012) provides a concrete example of this reduction at work. The piece highlights immigration authorities’ use of accent and language tests, which attempt to determine the validity of an asylum claim solely on the basis of whether the claimant’s accent matches the place they say they have come from. Once their claim has been rejected, the asylum seeker is unable to dispute the ruling. Made as an outcome of collaborative workshops with rejected claimants in Holland, one of the resulting diagrams (figure 15) shows just how plural and complex a person’s linguistic profile often is, resulting from all manner of personal encounters and material influences. This is intended to directly

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<sup>375</sup> To recall the terms of an earlier argument, it could be said that expression form is therefore like Eyer’s concept of the signifier-in-combination, insofar as it describes meaning generated ‘negatively’ through difference.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>377</sup> Félix Guattari, ‘The Role of the Signifier’, p. 75.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*

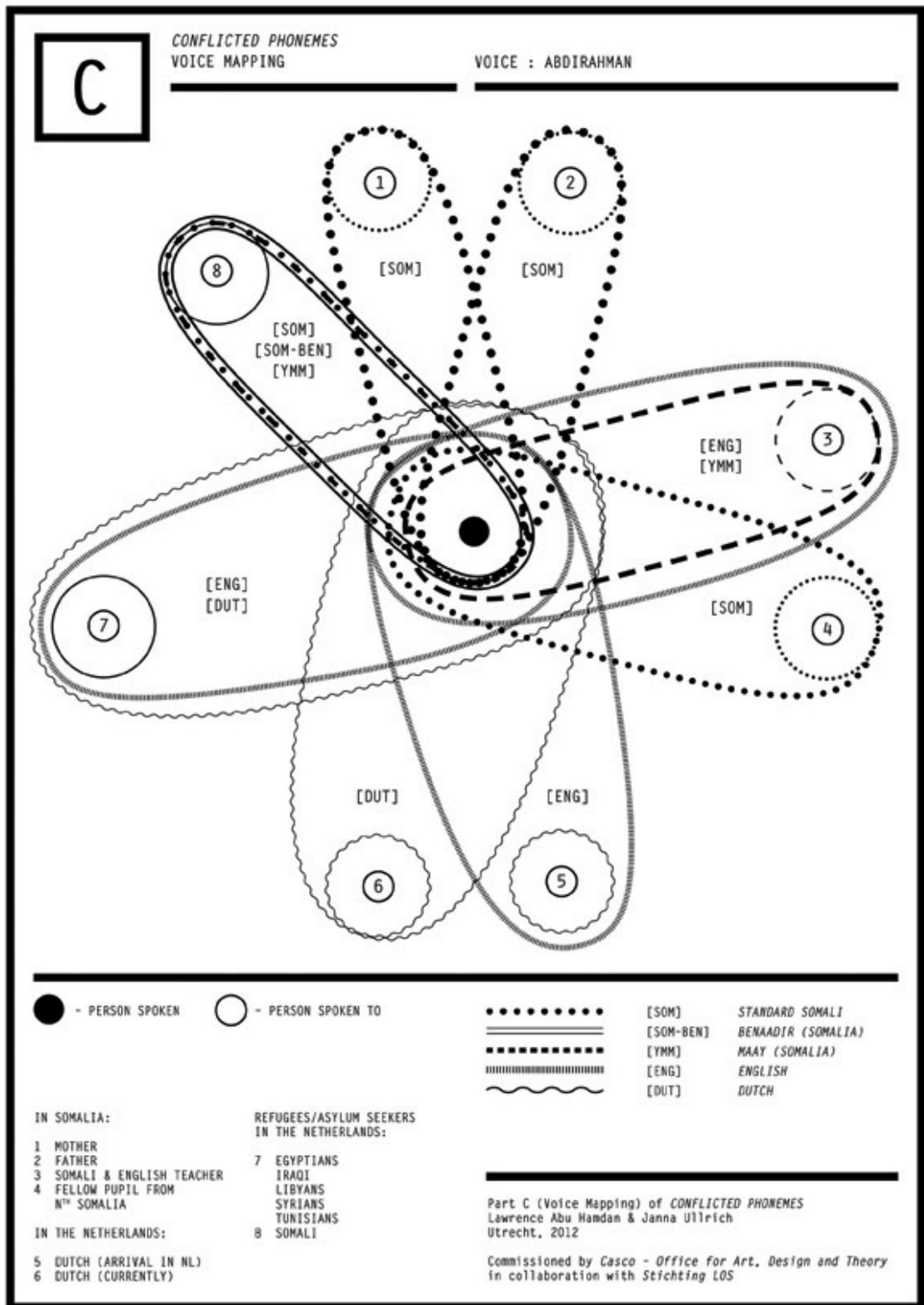


Figure 15: Lawrence Abu Hamden, *Conflicted Phonemes* (2013) digital print. © The artist

contrast with the categorical link between accent and territory that the state seeks to establish, which has the effect of converting a-signifying forms (accent, intonation) into the all-important signifier of origin (e.g. Somalia). The *raison d'être* of Hamden's maps is to offer the rejected/silenced asylum seeker an alternative and non-vocal mode of

contestation, thereby bringing about an ever so slight deterritorialisation of semiologies of signification to incorporate symbolic semiologies.<sup>379</sup>

Interpreters of Guattari's work have observed that because signifying semiologies are placed outside of the 'matter' (purport) column of this table, it follows that semiologies of this kind are cut off from the Real.<sup>380</sup> In fact I would argue that while figure 14 does lend support to this interpretation, it strikes me as paradoxical that there could be any semiology that did not in some way involve purport. Perhaps therefore it would be more accurate to say that signifying semiologies are only *consciously* cut off from purport, while unconsciously their nets still cast long shadows onto the underlying realm of active and intensive material. As Guattari himself argues, signification '*seems to make all semiotics originate from the signifier.*'<sup>381</sup>

At the other extreme are a-semiotic encodings, which operate independently of substance, connecting purport with form directly. The most obvious example of this is DNA, but one could also speak of chemical compounds more generally, hormones, enzymes, psycho-active substances etc. Strictly speaking, such formalisations of material intensities are untranslatable, and yet Guattari does highlight the example of pharmacological substances being made to serve signifying semiologies, as well as the dictates of profit more generally. This becomes immediately clear when consideration is given to such endeavors as the 'Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders' (DSM) produced regularly by the American Psychiatric Association, which sets out diagnostic criteria in neat arboreal arrangements that determine the eventual prescription of pharmaceutical drugs. Despite its adaptive function, there is nothing intrinsically repressive about Prozac (to take an arbitrary example) and there is nothing intrinsically semiotic about the way in which it connects with the human brain. As Guattari points out, 'psycho-pharmacology could just as easily be directed to the constitution of a non-signifying semiotic'.<sup>382</sup> An additional feature of semiotic encodings is that they operate independently of the division between expression and content. To paraphrase Marshal McLuhan, it could be said that in such cases the *matter* is the message. DNA triggers all manner of complex sequences of cause and effect, but

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<sup>379</sup> Lawrence Abu Hamden, 'Conflicted Phonemes' [exhibition hand-out] (London: Tate, 2013) As the exhibition literature points out, asylum seekers from Somalia are particularly vulnerable to the vicissitudes of this test, which often conveniently places their accents as originating from safe pockets of northern Somalia. For a country that has been in relative turmoil for the past 40 years, giving rise to numerous migration flows and population upheavals, putting such faith in the connection between voice and territory would seem like a strategic choice on the part of the authorities.

<sup>380</sup> See Watson, *Guattari's Diagrammatic Thought*, p. 48.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, my emphasis.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

it does so independently of representation. For this reason a-semiotic forms are by definition untranslatable into signifying semiotics. Their instrumentalisation at the hands of the latter, which under capitalism ultimately results in their subjection to the dictates of profit (as the pharmaceutical example readily attests), constitutes more of an overcoding than a translation.

Over and above such a-semiotic encodings, Guattari holds out the most hope for the third and final form of semiotic manifestation: ‘a-signifying semiotics’. Examples of these include musical notation, mathematics, and computer code. In each of these examples, signs and things have the capacity to connect directly, without recourse to representational paradigms. As Bruno Bosteels has put it, these forms are ‘flush with the real.’<sup>383</sup> And yet just as a-semiotic encodings have the potential to be operated by signifying semiologies, so too can a-signifying semiotics influence signification. In a phrase that recalls Lacan’s description of art as ‘symbolic to the power of two’, Guattari describes this semiotic form as ‘post-signifying’.<sup>384</sup> A-signifying semiotics ‘remain based on signifying semiotics, but no longer use them as anything but a tool, an instrument of semiotic de-territorialization’.<sup>385</sup> In other words, a-signifying semiotics have the capacity to creatively retool signifying semiotics independently of subjective control. To borrow a term from Bakhtin, a-signifying semiotics ‘polophonise’ signifying semiotics, steering them away from any general equivalent and onto singular, and singularising paths. This is as true in visual art as it is in literature. A huge variety of a-signifying forms traverse the works of Joyce, large tracts of *Ulysees* were influenced by musical techniques and notation, and as mentioned above, for Clive Hart the entirety of *Finnegans Wake* is underpinned by the geometrical figure of an interlocking sphere and cross.<sup>386</sup>

Elsewhere, Guattari calls a-semiotic forms ‘diagrammatic’. To grasp this point it is important to distance Guattari’s sense of the ‘diagram’ from its quotidian meaning. A graphic table such as figure 14 could serve a diagrammatic function or it could not. This is equally true of algorithms, or algebraic equations. What is important is not its visual ‘diagrammatic’ appearance, but its generative properties. The purpose of diagrams is ‘not to denote or to image the morphemes of an already constituted referent, but to

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<sup>383</sup> Bruno Bosteels, ‘From Text to Territory: Félix Guattari’s Cartographies’, in *Deleuze and Guattari: New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy, and Culture*, ed. by Eleanor Kaufman and Kevin Jon Heller (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 145-174 (p. 162).

<sup>384</sup> Guattari, ‘The Role of the Signifier’, p. 75.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.

<sup>386</sup> Zack Brown, *Bloom's Old Sweet Song: Essays on Joyce and Music* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995); Clive Hart, *Structure and Motif in Finnegans Wake*.

produce them.’<sup>387</sup> They do this by forging a reciprocal bridge between form and matter, short-circuiting representation, and in the process providing vectors for subjectivity. This expanded sense of the diagram also finds expression in Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, where he described the Panopticon as ‘the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form.’<sup>388</sup> In Foucault’s work, diagrams are socio-political technologies that regardless of their specific use actively shape ‘bodies in space’, for better or worse. With this in mind, is it possible to view Lacan’s topological figures in the first half of this chapter as ‘diagrams’ in Guattari’s sense? I would assert that *Seminar XXIII* contains a proliferation of diagrammatic components that point the way towards new subjective arrangements of RSI. If this seminar is read against the grain of some contemporary Lacanians, and the temptation to position the mathematical elements as the ontological ground upon which other theoretical elaborations rest is resisted, it is easier to see that topology, and the Borromean knot in particular, serves a highly creative and diagrammatic function in the production of subjectivity.

### Sidestepping the Steamroller

While this chapter has engaged with fields as diverse as topology, literary studies, and semiotics, the resulting construction remains focused on problems relating to ethics and aesthetics. Looking back over the points elaborated above, it is now possible to see where Guattari and Lacan’s late work converge as well as their mutual relevance in theorising a new ethico-aesthetic paradigm of art. This is a paradigm that pushes beyond the boundary play of transgression and prohibition and into a domain more overtly concerned with creativity and its ethico-aesthetic effects.

To recapitulate, in the first half of this chapter I demonstrated that the ethical theory of the late Lacan has many characteristics: it is *non-oedipal*, because it does away with the Name-of-the-Father as an off-the-shelf solution to the problem of psychosis; *pragmatic*, because it involves a kind of ‘know-how’ attentive to social change; *singular*, because the processes of ‘unsubscription’ and ‘reinscription’ associated with the sinthome amount to a process of singularisation that circumvents the

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<sup>387</sup> Guattari, *Machinic Unconscious*, p. 216.

<sup>388</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 205. The concept of the diagram is pinpointed as a crucial dynamic in Foucault’s work in Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (London: Continuum, 1999). Another point of reference for Guattari’s concept of the diagrammatic is Charles Sanders Peirce, who pioneered the use of ‘existential graphs’ in, among other places, Charles Sanders Peirce, ‘Existential Graphs’, in *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, 8 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958-1966), IV (1960), 293-470

ideologically conditioned Symbolic sphere, and *inventive*, because the sinthome and its existential outgrowths are nowhere given or ready made.<sup>389</sup> This last point is what makes Lacan's late work an aesthetic-ethics, not simply because it is elaborated by means of an engagement with the aesthetic productions of James Joyce, but because it foregrounds creativity and invention in the production of subjectivity, lending further meaning to the formulation that Lacan quotes on the first page of his *Écrits*: 'style is the man himself'.<sup>390</sup>

Despite the often-exaggerated antagonism between the two theorists, Guattari shares many of these characteristics of Lacan's late work. It goes without saying that the former had a deeply held commitment to non-oedipal thought. This extends to all of Guattari's work, not least his reflections on the subject of ethics. Secondly, in Guattari's concept of metamodelling one finds a thoroughly pragmatic principle in which the task of the schizoanalytically inclined theorist or analyst is to produce cartographies of existing modeling systems (be they religious, artistic, or psychoanalytic) that show how they work. Without establishing general equivalents or over-coding existing models, the aim of meta-modeling is to preserve heterogeneity and simultaneously develop possible openings onto new subjective experiences in a pragmatic fashion. Such tools and techniques of the schizoanalyst are what safeguard the emergence of singularity (with invention as its handmaiden), which makes much of Guattari's work an ethico-aesthetic enterprise, as he himself made clear. For both Lacan and Guattari ethico-aesthetics represents a departure from the scientific paradigms mired in regimes of linear causality.

In summary, it could be said that both thinkers essentially elaborate an ethics of self-relation, if not an ethics of self-cultivation, where the 'self' is something that is not given once and for all, but requires construction — the particularities of which I have sought to elaborate in this chapter. In this respect they sit in a trajectory of ethical thought that stretches back to Epicurus and the Stoics in the Hellenistic tradition, through to Spinoza and Nietzsche in the modern period, and on to such 20<sup>th</sup> century thinkers as Bakhtin and Foucault. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to trace the various lines of influence in this grand historical lineage, but suffice it to say that all of

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<sup>389</sup> Jacques-Alain Miller has repeatedly emphasised the pragmatic dimensions of Lacan's late work, writing that during this period 'the end of analysis is stripped of the pathos of the beyond, of transcendence, of the passage, and the accent is put on the changes in the regimes of jouissance that can be found in the cure'. Jacques-Alain Miller, 'Milanese Intuitions [1]', *Mental Online*, 11 (2002), 9-16 <<http://www.lacancircle.net/MentalOnline11.pdf>> [accessed 01/06/2015] (p. 15).

<sup>390</sup> *Le style est l'homme meme*. The quote is attributed to Comte Georges Louis Leclerc de Buffon. See Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 3.

these thinkers each in their own way consider ethics to constitute more than just a science of decision-making or apparatus of judgment. Ethics here is fundamentally concerned with self-transformation. As was established in the introduction, in this tradition the question 'how do I act?' is merely a subset of the broader question 'how might I live?', and this second question is answered not only with words and propositions, but with life itself, in all its creative and imaginative possibility.

This brings the argument to a final characteristic of the ethics I have sought to develop in this chapter. As well as being an aesthetic ethics, it is also fundamentally an ethics of resistance, which is to say, a political ethics. Guattari's work on the production of subjectivity should be opposed to what he sees as the 'steam roller' subjectivity of capitalism that both destroys old subjective arrangements and establishes new, homogenous arrangements in their place. His theorisation of art as the realm of 'part-enunciators' and the uniquely inventive attempts to formulate a mixed semiotics are themselves attempts to provide ways of thinking about subjectivity outside of the tyranny of adaptation. This political dimension is implicit in Lacan's late work on Joyce (if not all his work), and when viewed against the problem of a decline in the Symbolic it takes the form of an injunction to avoid the ready-made solutions capitalism has to offer. And yet it is Guattari who places most emphasis on the political stakes involved in the production of subjectivity. His preoccupation with transformations that occur on infra and supra-individual levels facilitate an escape from the terrain of bourgeois individuality, dovetailing with a political project of encouraging subjective differentiation.

As a final point, it might be objected that if the ethics derived from Lacan and Guattari do indeed both share the broad characteristics listed above then it is not necessary to use both. I have already justified the 'Guattarian graft' as helpful for overcoming what might be called the 'anti-social' limits of Lacan's late work. While for Lacan the *sinthome* produces a singularity that is one step removed from the *socius*, singularity for Guattari is thoroughly contagious, using all manner of a-signifying forms. The task that now remains is to justify the effort exerted reconstructing Lacan's difficult and often fragmentary last theoretical enterprise. Lacan's work is useful in several crucial respects. As well as providing something of a case study for the kind of ethico-aesthetic transformation at stake with his reading of Joyce, Lacan's late focus on topology, and in particular the topology of knots, is a unique attempt to diagram specific transformations in subjectivity. Topology is a mathematics of transformation, and the journey into the final work of Lacan demonstrated its utility in mapping ethical

transformations in the psychic economy of the subject. Following his work forward to the mid '70s also shows how much of his ethical theory has changed by this stage, revealing a movement away from the theme of transgression articulated in the late '50s and early '60s, which in turn facilitates reflection on the social changes that precipitate this shift. Finally, as I hope to show in the next two chapters, filtering Guattari's ethico-aesthetic paradigm through a topology of R.S.I allows the latter's ethical injunction to continuously invent new subjective forms to be nuanced. Put otherwise, the subjective mutations that Guattari calls for are those that deterritorialise the present and throw out lines of flight towards a different future. By considering these lines in their Real, Symbolic and Imaginary aspects — and crucially how the three interrelate — it will be possible to avoid unqualified endorsements of novelty and consider how 'the new' remains entangled in different ways with that which it seeks to overcome.

## Chapter 5

### Ethico-Aesthetic Repairs

In *Seminar XXIII* Lacan refers to the sinthome as a ‘way of repairing’ that does not return the knot to its original state.<sup>391</sup> Although the notion of repair plays an admittedly minor role *Seminar XXIII* (the word itself appearing just once), in this chapter I will attempt to isolate the concept and give it a set of new inflections. Insofar as the sinthome, on a topological level, does not simply designate a return to that which preceded the cutting of a knot, by extension it could be said that processes of repair do not seek to return an object to its former state of existence. As I hope to show in this chapter, this is fundamentally what distinguishes an act of reparation from an act of *restoration*. In the sense I use it here, ‘repair’ designates a creative response or additive process of recomposition, rather than a return to a previous state of condition.

Despite the minor role it plays in Lacan’s late work, taking up and developing the concept of repair is not without justification when placed in the larger context of this thesis. If the ambition of part 2 is to trace the contours of an ethico-aesthetic paradigm that responds to the decline of the Symbolic, then this decline could be figured as a kind of breakage, and the response it triggers an act of repair. In the previous chapter the effects of this macro-historical change were isolated at the level of subjectivity, and the concept of ‘ordinary psychosis’ was discussed as directly resulting from a decline of the Symbolic. This clinical category could also be viewed as a form of breakage that calls for a reparative response. When viewed in this way, the concept of repair can be used to gather up a number of different strands of the argument made thus far, in the process providing an axis along which a post-transgressive ethico-aesthetic paradigm might be developed.

In advancing the idea of a repair I am following the artist Kader Attia, who has progressively elaborated the concept in a number of recent exhibitions.<sup>392</sup> Attia himself has defined repair as ‘reconstruction in an extended sense, and thus as a kind of tool

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<sup>391</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XXIII*, p. 117 (17 February 1976).

<sup>392</sup> Among the exhibitions that have included references to the concept of repair are ‘*Nature, another Culture repaired*’, Middelheim Museum, Antwerp, Belgium (25 October 2014 – 29 March 2015); ‘*Show Your Injuries*’, Lehmann Maupin Gallery, New York, USA (8 November – 13 December 2014); ‘*Continuum of Repair: The Light of Jacob’s Ladder*’, Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK (26 November 2013 – 23 November 2014); ‘*Reparatur 5 Akte*’, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, Germany (26 May 2013 – 25 August 2013); ‘*Documenta (13)*’, Fridericianum Museum, Kassel, Germany (9 June 2012 – 16 September 2012)

which can be applied to political, cultural and scientific topics to examine their various interactions'.<sup>393</sup> This claim highlights the potentially broad scope of the concept, which extends beyond the range of practices that are usually described as reparative. It is the ambition of this chapter to further demonstrate this scope, pushing the concept of repair beyond Attia's work and demonstrating its relevance to ethico-aesthetics.

After the theoretical focus of the last chapter, the turn towards Attia's work in this chapter may feel like a diversion from the main thrust of the argument. The aim however is to creatively extend the arguments made in chapter 4. Rather than providing a 'case study' that theory can be applied to, here the ambition is to pass through Attia's work in much the same way Lacan passed through Joyce's — inhabiting this work in order to expose the wider significance of the concept of repair. While the immediate terrain of this concept is primarily artistic in nature, I aim to show that it has wider cultural and theoretical significance. The argument will proceed from a close reading of a handful of Attia's works before moving into more theoretical terrain, ultimately making a return journey to the abiding concern of part 2: the development of an ethico-aesthetic paradigm focused on the production of subjectivity.

### Introduction to the Work of Kader Attia

In 2006 Attia covered a beach on the island of Fuerteventura with mirrored tombstones reflecting the sea.<sup>394</sup> As the closest of the Canary Islands to Africa, just 100km from the Moroccan border, Fuerteventura is a popular place of transit for refugees seeking to gain access to the EU. On a regular basis boatloads of migrants jump or swim ashore from modified fishing vessels and pick their way through tourist-lined beaches. In the year that *Holy Land* was installed on the island, it is claimed that Fuerteventura received 2,000 migrants through illegal entry points.<sup>395</sup> From time to time a body washes up on the shore, eventually finding its way into an unmarked grave in the local cemetery. The primary subject of Attia's artwork is neither those who survive the journey nor those

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<sup>393</sup> Kader Attia cited in Ellen Blumenstein, 'Kader Attia: Repair. 5 Acts. Four questions of the curator to the artist,' in the leaflet for the exhibition at KW Institute for Contemporary Art (Berlin, 2013).

<sup>394</sup> The work has been installed in several locations since the 1<sup>st</sup> Canary Island Biennial. In 2007, in Saint-Tropez on the French Côte d'Azur as part of *Dialogues Méditerranéens*; in 2010 at the Galleria Continua, San Gimignano, Italy; in 2011 at the Galleria Continua, Le Moulin, France as part of the exhibition *'Sphères 2011'*, and in 2013 in Amsterdam, as part of the ARTZUID sculpture biennial. My discussion of the work refers only to its original citing in Fuerteventura.

<sup>395</sup> The exact figure is 2,269. Dirk Godenau, 'Irregular Maritime Immigration in the Canary Islands: Externalization and Communitarisation in the Social Construction of Borders', *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 12:2, (2014) 123-142 (p. 134)

who wash up on the beaches, but the thousands of missing dead, those swallowed by the sea without a trace.



Figure 16: Kader Attia, *Holy Land* (2007), 45 mirrors. © The artist.

The contrast between the island's reputation for beach tourism and its notoriety as a destination for people smugglers is reflected in the shape of the mirrored forms that comprise *Holy Land*. As well as tombstones, the sculptures could equally evoke the form of surfboards half-buried in the sand — an image readily available on post-cards in one of the island's shops. Further associations are set off when the form is considered in an architectural light. An entire history of cultural intermingling could be written about the pointed arch. The architectural historian K. A. C. Creswell went further than anyone in writing this history, and in the multivolume *Early Muslim Architecture*, he claims that the pointed arch, an iconic gothic form, in fact has its origins in the Holy Land to which Attia's title refers.<sup>396</sup> Looked at in this way, Fuerteventura's position as a point of blockage for the migrants that wash up on its shores is marked with a symbol of another epoch when the borders between Europe and Africa were more porous.

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<sup>396</sup> The pointed or gothic arch is said to originate from Syria in particular. K. A. C. Creswell, *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture* (London: Penguin Books, 1958). Another of the many historians to have made this claim is W. R. Lethaby, who in *Medieval Art* (London: Duckworth and Co., 1904), p. 8, writes that 'It is not generally realised in how large a degree the Persian, Egypto-Saracenic and Moorish forms are members of one common art with Gothic.'

A tension between blockage and exchange can also be read into the mirrored surface itself. As a communicational tool, mirrors played an important role in armed conflict throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and a device known as the heliograph formalised an ancient practice of sending signals by reflecting the sun's rays.<sup>397</sup> In this role the mirror serves a means to bridge distances with communication, facilitating exchange between two continents. But in the documentation photographs of *Holy Land* the mirrors instead stand like sentinels guarding the island, blocking the view of what they stand in front of. When dealing with mirrors the critical reflex might be to evoke Lacan's concept of the mirror stage. Whereas the latter is associated with the inauguration of an (Imaginary) identity, consolidating the subject, the use of mirrors in *Holy Land* instead fragments. This is true both visually and in terms of the above meanings the work sets in motion. Positioned at different angles the mirrors splinter the sky into fragments and scatter the gaze along with it. The viewer who stands facing them is confronted with an image of themselves in pieces. This double fragmentation, of both vision and meaning, is an essential prerequisite to the work of repair.

*Holy Land* also builds on a number of the themes present in Robert Smithson's *Incidents of Mirror Travel in the Yucatan*, an essay-cum-travelogue that documents the artist's sculptural interventions on the Mexican peninsula. At specific junctures in his travels Smithson stopped to place small square mirrors into the ground, or onto a trees. These mirrors were angled upwards, disclosing 'an altitude so remote that bits of "place" were cast into the remote sky'.<sup>398</sup> As the title of his essay suggests, the works are inextricably linked to various forms of travel, both spatial and temporal. While the sculptures may seem like stopping points on the journey, the use of mirrors in effect prevents these points from becoming stationary. Here 'mirror travel' does not simply describe a travel between mirrors, but a travel with the aid of mirrors, a travel *through* mirrors. This is also the case for *Holy Land*. While the mirrored arches mark a destination of sorts, symbolically punctuating a journey, this punctuation is an ellipses rather than a full stop, extending the migrant journey and causing it to double back on itself. Smithson titled his works on the Yucatan peninsula 'mirror displacements', asking rhetorically 'when does a displacement become a misplacement?'.<sup>399</sup> One of the effects of *Holy Land* is to politicise this question, relating it to the lives and deaths of displaced people, who arrive

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<sup>397</sup> David L. Woods, 'Heliograph and Mirrors', in *Military Communications: From Ancient Times to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. by Christopher Sterling (Oxford: Acu-Clio, 2008), pp. 208-211. Aside from their military use, heliographs have also been employed by everybody from forestry services and surveyors, and Woods writes that 'in 1835 'a Royal navy captain at Gibraltar used a mirror from a common looking glass to converse with friends across the straight to Tangier' (p. 209).

<sup>398</sup> Robert Smithson, 'Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan', in *Robert Smithson: Collected Writings*, ed. by Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 119-133, (p. 130).

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

in new lands only to find that for many they are in fact *misplaced* people — the prefix carrying the force of a judgment as to the 'correct' people to occupy a particular place.

Another work by Attia deals not with the traffic of people between continents but with the traffic of meaning. *The Repair From Occident to Extra Occidental Cultures* (figure 17) is a large installation comprising a series of second-hand anthropology books, wooden and marble sculptures, 'metiso objects' (extra-occidental objects that incorporate occidental elements) and trench art (objects made by soldiers during WW1 from bullet cartridges and artillery shells). On a large wall a two-screen slide projection shuffles through a series of headshots of injured soldiers and a collection of African masks. The faces that appear are badly maimed. Often the same face is shown before and after surgical reconstruction. Misshapen noses, lips pulled askew; the black and white photographs capture the damage in a clinical, documentary fashion. As the initial shock of these images wears off attention shifts to the images adjacent, to the African masks. The two halves of the slide show slowly synchronise and it becomes clear that the masks too have undergone repairs — in exactly the same places as the faces.



Figure 17: Kader Attia, *The Repair From Occident to Extra-Occidental Cultures* (2012), mixed media, installation view at Documenta 13, Fridericianum Museum, Kassel, Germany (9 June 2012 – 16 September 2012). © The artist.

Between *Holy land* and *The Repair* there is a break, a shift in register. While the former bears witness to the unnamed, innumerable dead off the coast of Africa, the latter showcases survivors who would then go on to be documented and studied. On the one hand there is absence and loss, on the other there is a symbolic trace that serves as the basis for social reintegration and repair.

And yet in many ways the first work is no less concerned with repair than the second. As Freud pointed out of his *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, monuments are more than simply blocks of stone, or emblems of power — they also serve as ‘mnemonic symbols’.<sup>400</sup> These mnemonic symbols are often erected in response to crises, catastrophes and otherwise traumatic events that hitherto lacked Symbolic inscription. By symbolising an aspect of this experience, monuments allow for a group of people to both distance themselves from the trauma that affected them, and maintain a proximity to the events that generated it.<sup>401</sup> In its dual role as a barrier to trauma and a proxy that allows for some form of contact with the past, the monument remains a curiously static form of repair that has little to do with the kinds of sinthomatic response discussed in the last chapter. In many ways *Holy Land* makes of the monument a dynamic form, reflecting life and its limitations back at a viewer rather than anchoring it in the past. This dynamism is pushed further in *The Repair From Occident to Extra Occidental Cultures*, which sets up a series of complex relationships between the various elements it contains.

A further example that dramatises the difference between a static and dynamic approach to repair can be found in Attia’s country of birth, Algeria. The *Monument to the Dead of the First World War* (figure 18) in Algiers was commissioned by the French authorities in 1922. In response to a change of regime it was encased in concrete 50 years later in such a way that left a gap between the original and its newly cast exterior.<sup>402</sup> The original monument was created by Paul Landowski and carried overt symbols of friendship and alliance between France and Algeria.<sup>403</sup> In the period immediately following independence such friendship seemed undesirable, if not

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<sup>400</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘Five Lectures on Psycho-analysis’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. by James Strachey, Vol. 11 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), pp. 9-56 (p. 16).

<sup>401</sup> For an extended treatment of the place of monuments in Freud’s work See Peter Homans, *The Ability to Mourn: Disillusionment and the Social Origins of Psychoanalysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), and chapter 10 in particular, ‘Framing the Argument with Freud’s “Little Discourse” on Mourning and Monuments’.

<sup>402</sup> Work on the monument began in 1922 and finished in 1928.

<sup>403</sup> Paul Landowski (1875-1971) is perhaps best known for his *Christ the Redeemer* statue in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

impossible, and the mayor of Algiers asked the modernist painter M'hamed Issiakhem to 'do something' about the monument. Issiakhem's solution was neither to destroy Landowski's work, nor simply replace it, but to preserve it within the interior of his own sculpture and give the end product a new title: the *Monument to the Martyrs*. Recently a crack appeared in the front of Issiakhem's sculpture and its contents have threatened to emerge once again. The decision as to whether to remove the concrete casing altogether or smooth over the cracks has prompted a public discussion that centres on the past and its representation in a post-colonial context.



Figure 18: Paul Landowski, *Monument to the Dead of the First World War* (1928), stone and reinforced concrete. © Association des Amis du Musée Landowski.



Figure 19: M'hamed Issiakhem, *Monument to the Martyrs* (1962), Reinforced concrete applied to existing monument.

The curious history of this monument highlights several features of the concept of repair that I would like to foreground in this chapter. The repairs carried out between objects and people can reveal a great deal about history's lines of force. Landowski's monument was in the first place intended to repair the emotional damage inflicted by World War I, but 50 years later this repair was seen to mask the true nature of colonial relations between the two countries, and became a source of embarrassment for the nascent Algerian state. Issiakhem's response could be seen as a gesture that cleared the ground for another act of repair, leaving future generations the option to remove his sculpture, erase the original, or arrive at a hybrid mixture between the two — a

proposition the artist Amina Menia has recently put forward.<sup>404</sup> In each case symbolic and material practices are subtly intertwined, but it is only the third solution that could be considered a repair in a more dynamic sense. This solution would orientate the sculpture to the future by means of an addition, rather than turn it towards the past by means of a renovation or restoration. The distinction between these three terms will be discussed in greater detail below.

### Space, Time, and the Repair



Figure 20: Kader Attia, *The Repair From Occident to Extra-Occidental Cultures* (2012), film still. © The artist.

First it is necessary to return to Attia's work to further substantiate the claim that a repair can be dynamic and future facing. One of the first words that viewers might grope for when asked to describe the relationship between the two elements of the slide show in Attia's installation would be 'juxtaposition'. Theoretically, one might juxtapose any two items; all it requires is that they be positioned [*poser*] near or beside [*iuxta*] one another. A juxtaposition is a linear relationship in space. By contrast, the two collections of slides in Attia's installation constitute *packets* of relations that connect with each other in time *and* space.

What are the temporal resonances of the work? The anthropology books are vintage, dating back to the early half of the last century — the sort of books that Picasso might have used as source materials during his 'African period' from 1906-1909. As if in direct reference to the Western appropriation of African art during this period, Attia has bolted some of the books to the shelves, either closed or open at a specific page.

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<sup>404</sup> A work by the artist Amina Menia, *Enclosed* (2012), uses this history of the monument as its point of departure, and includes a series of sketches of possible designs based on a range of suggestions that incorporate elements from both monuments. I am indebted to Menia for bringing the monument and its history to my attention.

This suggestive move could be interpreted as an over-zealous attempt to prevent the books (or their contents) from being pillaged. Such a defensive gesture would be at odds with the hybrid forms the exhibition plays with. While a great deal of Western art was ‘anthropophagic’, to borrow a term from Oswald de Andrade, the cultural cannibalisation of other cultures is not seen as something to be restricted in Attia’s work. It is rather a fundamental dynamic that inheres in all relationships. As de Andrade would have it, ‘Cannibalism unites us. Socially. Economically. Philosophically. The world’s single law.’<sup>405</sup> The gesture of bolting the books closed is more likely a critique of such limits, implying a process of ‘fixing’ mobile cultural motifs into a specific place, or disavowing them altogether.

Another example of this kind of disavowal is given in an essay by Serge Gruzinski on the exhibition hand out. He draws the reader’s attention to an Olmec mask ‘repaired’ by the renaissance goldsmith, sculptor, draughtsman and musician Benvenuto Cellini, currently housed in the Palazzo Pitti in Florence. Olmec civilisation pre-dates renaissance art considerably, and yet as Gruzinski points out, the pre-history of the mask is all but erased. Its hybridity is hidden from sight and the mask is often considered to be a gloriously pure example of the renaissance arts. In both cases the temporal and spatial ‘origin’ of the artwork is relocated back to Europe, and the complex network of influences on the objects is violently erased.

It is significant that both the anthropology books and the ‘trench art’ date back to a time period largely concurrent with the birth of modernity. The Great War was the first war in which technology played a pivotal role, and the broken faces [*gueules cassées*] are testament to this in two ways. In the first place, the injuries are the result of the great force of impact between men and machines. In this war injuries caused by shrapnel, grenades and high explosive shells predominated. In the second place, the rudimentary cosmetic surgery is evidence of new technology entering the domain of the medical sciences. Not only could wounds be sewn up, but metal plates could be inserted, glass eyes could be fitted, and synthetic elements could be introduced into the human body. The aim of these repairs, as much as possible, was to return the broken face to its original state, to a time before the war. At irregular intervals in the slide show the images give way to written messages such as ‘The modernist myth of perfection’, which partially connect back to the immaculate white marble busts on the shelves adjacent. All of this reminds a viewer that the birth of modernity is often figured as a

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<sup>405</sup> Oswald de Andrade, ‘Cannibalist Manifesto’, in *Latin American Literary Review*, 19:38 (1991), 38-47. In his celebrated manifesto Andrade uses cannibalism (anthropophagia) as a metaphor for the Brazilian assimilation of Western art.

great historical rupture, almost an atemporal event, without precedent in the art and culture that came before. As the Russian constructivists Rodchenko and Stepanova proclaimed at the start of the century: ‘The Future is our only Goal!’<sup>406</sup>

These influences not only reintroduce time into an purportedly ‘atemporal’ moment in 20<sup>th</sup> century Western culture, they also reintroduce place and territory, and in particular the territories that get ignored. In all the emphasis placed on the ‘Western Front’ it is easy to forget that the Great War was also the first *World War*. France drew heavily on its colonies in South America, Asia, and especially Africa for manpower, and the South African Brigade, among many other forces, played a crucial role for the British armed forces. While European soldiers were the subject of extensive photographic and moving image documentation, which served as the material base for other less obviously material practices such as patriotism, charity and heroism, there are very few symbolic traces of the war dead from former colonies.<sup>407</sup> Connecting the broken faces to the broken masks, it is almost as if the latter serve as a stand in for the former. The masks come to speak in the place of the absent photographic documentation of the injured and maimed colonial Soldiers during World War I, demanding equal symbolic inscription, and ultimately serving the ‘monumental’ function discussed above.

This demand opens out onto the issue of the museum and the object’s place within it. *The Repair* prompts the viewer to consider the disparity between objects that are given pride of place and other objects that are buried deep in the archives (if they are archived at all). The Repaired masks and the ‘metise’ objects on display in Attia’s exhibition are examples of excluded items, comprising what Gregory Sholette calls ‘dark matter’, which he characterises as a ‘shadow archive’ or ‘an unseen accretion of creativity’.<sup>408</sup> The repaired masks are deemed impure by virtue of their visible temporal layering, the hybrid objects by virtue their territorial indeterminacy. By contrast, in museums all over the world it is common to see *unrepaired* stone statues — battered Greek marbles with missing limbs that are positioned as ‘pure’.<sup>409</sup> Attia’s installation

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<sup>406</sup> Rodchenko quoted in Aleksandr M. Rodchanko, *Varia F. Stepanova: The Future is Our only Goal*, ed. by Peter Noever, (Munich: Prestel, 1991), p. 7.

<sup>407</sup> A similar situation with African American Troops is described in Arthur E. Barbeau, *The Unknown Soldiers* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1996).

<sup>408</sup> Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (London, Pluto, 2011), p. 45. See also Simon Sheikh, ‘Notes on Institutional Critique’, in *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice* 31, ed. by Gerald Raunig & Gene Ray (London: Mayfly, 2009), pp. 29-32. In a similar vein to Sholette, Sheikh writes that there are ‘expulsions at the very center of certain institutions’, p. 31.

<sup>409</sup> It has not always been considered best practice to leave ancient statues unrepaired. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century it was common for missing parts to be replaced. When attitudes changed in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century a number of ancient statues were in effect ‘de-restored’ and later additions, however sensitive to the original, were

exposes the line of exclusion that separates these two classes of objects and relegates such hybrid or repaired objects to obscurity. In doing so he places monological cultural attitudes in dialogue with their outside, an outside which is co-constitutive of monological forms in the first place, insofar as the latter exist solely on the basis of a series of exclusions.

Glancing back at the anthropology books, it becomes clear that they are all spatially indexed; if the titles don't relate to specific nation states then they are linked to cultural groupings linked to territory. They cling to a notion of culture as something that can be cleanly categorised according to specific criteria. They are literally and figuratively bolted in place, while the *metise* objects are mobile, testament to an intercultural encounter, a bridge between two different spatio-temporal regimes.

While this section began by isolating the temporal resonances of Attia's installation, it should now be clear that these resonances are inextricably linked to spatial resonances, so that the term 'spatio-temporal' should be understood to denote an unbreakable bond between the two. The *temporal* rupture of modernity is often also *spatially* located in the West, and as post-colonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha have shown, this spatial positioning is in part what allows for the temporal narrative of rupture to be asserted in the first place.<sup>410</sup> The past is always 'over there', while the future is ushered in by modernist innovations cultivated in the occident. In a smaller way, the various objects in Attia's installation also express distinctive space-time relations. As an installation *The Repair* has a messy temporal and territorial make-up. Objects are shuttled back and forth between different times and places. Early anthropology books sit next to recently made wooden sculptures from Dhakar based on the photographs of soldiers wounded during World War one. The polished marble busts are also new but their aesthetic pre-dates the facial injuries whose repair they inspired. The traffic between these temporal and spatial co-ordinates runs in a number of different directions at the same time, and this traffic in itself amounts to a distinctive space-time relation, whereby disingenuous macro-historical claims are overrun with

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removed. A curious by-product of this change can be found in the Ny Carlsberg Museum in Copenhagen, which holds a collection of replacement noses (or 'nasothek') that have one-by-one been removed from the statues in their collection. There are some contemporary examples such as 'The Hope Hygieia' (a marble sculpture discovered in 1797 at Ostia, Italy, currently held at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in which the process of 'de-restoration' has itself been reversed. See *History of Restoration of Ancient Stone Sculptures*, ed. by Janet Burnett Grossman, Jerry Podany, and Marion True (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2003).

<sup>410</sup> Bhabha joins many others in critiquing the enlightenment myth of progress by pointing to its foundations in colonial oppression, but he also specifically addresses the subject of modernity, writing that 'Without the post-colonial time-lag the discourse of modernity cannot, I believe, be written' Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 361.

smaller spatio-temporal relations. ‘Here’ and ‘there’, the future, the present and the past are linked in a way that allows for mutual contamination.

As well as attempting its own admittedly partial ‘repair’ on the rift at the foundations of modernity, the installation attempts to infect a Western aesthetic ideal of ‘perfection’ with a more hybrid sensibility. In both the metise objects and the repaired masks, the additions are not disavowed but celebrated. The bound fragments of pottery, patched up holes, and stapled hairline cracks embody a radically different aesthetic imperative to that of the Western ‘myth of modernity’, affirming the impure over the pure. The more one begins to consider the items on display the more one comes to recognise examples elsewhere. In Japanese ceramics for example, the practice of ‘kintsugi’ [literally ‘golden join’], entailed the repair of broken pottery with a mixture of lacquer and powdered gold, celebrating the repair rather than disavowing it. Rooted in a tradition associated with *wabi-sabi* that elevated impermanence or decay to an aesthetic ideal, kintsugi ceramics were most often employed during the tea ceremony, and the celebrated practitioner Furuta Oribe was said to deliberately damage objects which he considered ‘too perfect’ purely so that they could then be repaired using this method.<sup>411</sup> In European art history, an association can be made to Duchamp’s *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, which the artist worked on laboriously for almost 8 years, declaring it ‘definitively incomplete’ in 1923.<sup>412</sup> At the most basic level of interpretation *The Large Glass* is an artwork about frustrated desire, depicting a machine with parts that neither fully connect nor appear to follow the same operating rules. When it was accidentally broken in transit in 1926 Duchamp’s response to the breakage was not to replace the broken panel but to sandwich the shards between two additional sheets of glass, thus further fragmenting the iconography that he had invented. In both examples breakage represents the integration of a contingent event into life history of the work. Even in the case of Oribe’s supposedly deliberate breakages there is an element of contingency at stake in the particular form the breakage takes. Here, as in Attia’s installation, an aesthetic of repair simultaneously embodies an ethic of repair. In the following sections, I want to bring this ethico-aesthetics into sharper relief, before connecting it back to some of the theoretical claims made in the last chapter, expanding them in the process.

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<sup>411</sup> Charly Iten, ‘Ceramics Mended with Lacquer – Fundamental Aesthetic Principles, Techniques and Artistic Concepts’, in *Flickwerk: The Aesthetics of Mended Japanese Ceramics* (Münster: Museum für Lackkunst, 2008), pp. 18-23.

<sup>412</sup> Jerrold E. Seigel, *The Private Worlds of Marcel Duchamp: Desire, Liberation, and the Self in Modern Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 106.



Figure 21: 15th century Japanese bowl with 18th century porcelain *yobitsugi* [borrowed patch].

### Defining Repair

A consideration of Attia's work has already touched on the concept of repair. It is now necessary to sharpen the meaning of this word and demonstrate its conceptual range. Cleaving the word from its semantic relations is the first step in this task.

As I claimed in the opening paragraph, repair should be distinguished from restoration, but it should also be differentiated from renovation. The main difference lies in the material traces the repair leaves behind. Both renovations and restorations attempt to subtract themselves from an object and return it to its original state. They gravitate towards an ideal object located in the past, and consequently both restoration and renovation can be seen as mimetic practices. By contrast, practices of repair leave room for difference to emerge between an object's prior state and its recomposition. This difference is always tempered by a necessary continuity with the prior object. The precise nature of this balance between difference and continuity will be addressed later in this section.

The distinction between repair on the one hand, and renovation and restoration on the other can be seen in a recent example. In 2012 an elderly Spanish woman called Cecilia Gimenez attempted to restore a 19<sup>th</sup> century fresco of Jesus painted by Elias Garcia Martinez. As images of the restoration spread over the internet, BBC correspondent Christian Fraser memorably described 'the once-dignified portrait' as now resembling 'a crayon sketch of a very hairy monkey in an ill-fitting tunic.'<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> Christian Fraser, 'Spanish fresco restoration botched by amateur' (23 August 2012) <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-19349921>> [accessed 01/06/2015].

Gimenez was attempting to return the painting to its former glory, which is the aim of restoration or renovation. Her effort was deemed unsuccessful precisely because the renovation remained visible; it did not subtract itself from the object. Instead of a mimetic return to an ideal same, what Gimenez produced was difference. Is it therefore possible to call it a repair?

Here another semantic relation of the repair comes into play: the replacement. While a repair may bring forth a new, hybrid object, if it strays too far from the original it becomes a replacement. As Serge Gruzinski writes on the handout accompanying Attia's installation at Documenta 13, repairing is the 'will to keep all or part of the thing, thus ensuring a semblance of continuity.'<sup>414</sup> A replacement is a substitution for what can no longer be repaired. Unlike the repair, the replacement and the substitution entail the destruction or withdrawal of the old object. The motto for replacement is thus 'out with the old, in with the new'. Replacement should however not be confused with the kinds of change discussed in the last chapter at the level of subjective transformation. The replacement is perfectly at home in a consumer culture that idolises the new and elevates creativity to a market-driven imperative. Built-in obsolescence and bi-monthly upgrades constantly 'move things forward', but the trajectory of this movement is always already pre-established by the dictates of profit. Only the concept of repair moves in the direction of change, as opposed to the endless reproduction of novelty. As Gruzinski points out 'DIY or reparation create an object never before seen, leading to new practices, manners, and beliefs'.<sup>415</sup>

This throws up a seemingly contradictory aspect of the repair. It seems to encapsulate both change on the one hand, and continuity on the other. How is a balance between these two poles possible? There seem to be three options.

Firstly, it might be possible to separate the object's function from its outward appearance, subjecting one to change and leaving the other to continuity. For example, it could be said that 'kintsugi' pots retain their basic function as receptacles while changing in appearance. They therefore strike a balance between change and continuity. And yet if the notion of function is expanded to incorporate semiotic function, it could equally be said that with the example of the kintsugi pot, *both* the object's function *and* its outward appearance have changed. As a result of the repair, a pot might carry a different symbolic function in a tea ceremony — a particular ritual space where the

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<sup>414</sup> Serge Gruzinski, 'From Holy Land to Open Your Eyes' [exhibition handout] (Paris: Black Jack éditions, 2012)

<sup>415</sup> Ibid.

symbolic function of objects is heightened.<sup>416</sup> It may be used more or less often; it may be put on display as a curiosity item, or reserved for particular ceremonial functions. All this goes to show that ‘function’ and ‘appearance’ cannot be so neatly separated.

It is therefore necessary to look for another way of balancing change and continuity as they relate to repair. A second option would be to innovate as regards the method of repair while maintaining aesthetic continuity. According to this model the object itself serves as a kind of proving stone for innovative methods of repair. Here art conservation or restoration could be cited as examples. These fields have increasingly begun to rely on innovative techniques in imaging software, laser technology and even the application of live bacteria to the surface of paintings in order to maintain aesthetic continuity.<sup>417</sup> A repair of this order would not require the object’s function to be delineated from its appearance; both might be restored. Again, here a balance seems to have been struck, but on closer inspection this method of balancing change and continuity collapses back into a dynamic of renovation, for the aim is always to return the object to its ideal past condition.<sup>418</sup>

Thirdly, it is possible to think about the repair as a *process* that involves both continuity and change. This seems to be the latent force of Attia’s installation. Each of the objects on display existed before the exhibition, and by bringing them together nothing has outwardly changed, and yet something is different. On the one hand the anthropology books, the sculptures, the metise objects, the trench art and the slide show are the same as they always were, and yet on the other hand bringing them together has caused them to change. In the last section it was claimed that this cumulative effect creates a new spatio-temporal arrangement that is irreducible to the range of individual spatial and temporal references belonging to the objects that constitute the work. Perhaps now it is possible to see that the larger spatio-temporal regime the work creates is characterised by a particular combination of change and continuity. This is not simply to say that the objects are physically the same while symbolically different (if such a

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<sup>416</sup> Charly Iten, ‘Ceramics Mended with Lacquer’.

<sup>417</sup> Sam Bagwell, ‘The Beauty of Science: New Technologies in Art Restoration’, *Illumin: a Review of Engineering in Everyday Life*, 15:3 (2004) <<http://illuminate.usc.edu/34/the-beauty-of-science-new-technologies-in-art-restoration/>> [accessed 01/06/2015].

<sup>418</sup> Here it is interesting to note that current best practice in the field of art-conservation dictates that careful records be kept of the exact materials used to make changes to the work. This is so that any attempt at restoration has the possibility of being reversed with the right material or equipment. Even the very attempts to restore the object should themselves be amenable to restoration, always with the ultimate aim of returning the object to its past state of being. Here time is ultimately reversible. See Barbara Appelbaum, ‘Criteria For Treatment: Reversibility’, *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation*, 26:2 (1987), 65-73.

dichotomy can be made in the first place). Fundamentally they are the same *and* different. How is this possible?

It is my contention that the concept of repair as elaborated in Attia's installation embodies a change, but a change that is in continuity with a prior state of existence. This method of balancing change and continuity would seem to imply some sort of essence according to which a thing might develop. For example, a broken pot might still embody the essence of what it means to be a pot, despite having been repaired in such a way that renders it unusable. This way of balancing change and continuity suggests a mode of individuation, where the individual thing or person in question changes along a line of continuity. In fact it is not a conception of essence that most would recognise, for the change comes about not through the externalisation of an innate quality (a genetic model), but through a process of continual self-production in dialogue with the world in which this production takes place. A repair, I would argue, entails precisely this kind of balance between change and continuity, where the repair itself changes the object in question, while nevertheless remaining within the limits that define it. A repair enables an object to produce itself anew each time, without for that matter entirely abandoning its prior state of existence. If this conception of repair hinges upon a notion of an object's essence, preventing, as I have claimed, the repair from becoming a replacement, then it is worth looking at the concept of essence in more detail, particularly as it relates to the two models mentioned above.<sup>419</sup>

The genetic model could be allied with Aristotle's concept of entelechy, which in Joe Sachs' translation of the *Physics* is rendered as 'being-at-work-staying-itself'.<sup>420</sup> As the translation suggests, entelechy involves an element of endurance, whereby the particular thing that endures is pre-established from the outset. What occurs over the lifespan of the thing's existence is not so much a series of changes in dialogue with its surroundings, but rather the fulfilment of a purpose — just as the purpose of an acorn is assumed to be its development into an oak tree. From this perspective, each successive stage in the tree's development can be considered a repair on its previous state of existence, progressively moving towards a pre-established end. In his essay *Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel* Bakhtin criticises the influence of the concept of entelechy on ancient forms of biography, claiming that it results in a narrative where

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<sup>419</sup> For a full and thorough treatment of the concept of essence as it relates to various philosophies of life see Eugene Thacker, *After Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

<sup>420</sup> Joe Sachs, *Aristotle's Physics: A Guided Study* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), p. 31.

‘Character itself does not grow, does not change, it is merely filled in.’<sup>421</sup> Likewise, it could be said that whereas the concept of entelechy does offer a balance between change and continuity to a theorisation of repair, it does so at the cost of reducing transformation to the fulfillment of an essence within a narrow set of parameters established at the outset.

There is a similar idea at play in Spinoza’s *Ethics*, where things are conceived as nothing more than endurances over time. They are singular modes of individuation that strive to continue to exist. This idea of striving to continue to exist is encapsulated in the term ‘conatus’.<sup>422</sup> Again this provides a principle that balances change and continuity. While for Aristotle entelechy implies the actualisation or endurance of a pre-established essence, for Genevieve Lloyd, Spinoza shows that ‘a thing’s endeavor to persist in being *becomes* its very essence’; the two cannot be separated.<sup>423</sup> This would seem to imply that it is not so much that an object endures by actualising (or externalising) an essence that is pre-established from the outset, but rather that this essence is the very same thing as the act of striving to continue to exist. In part III of the *Ethics* it is Spinoza’s claim that the essence of a thing *is* its conatus: ‘The striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing’.<sup>424</sup> Without the striving of an object to exist there can be no essence. Spinoza’s conception of conatus could be stretched to say that it is only through activity that a thing perseveres in its being, even if this activity involves little more than self-maintenance (the activity of resisting external causes that would otherwise destroy a thing).<sup>425</sup> A final point that distances this account from the teleological character of Aristotle’s concept of entelechy, whereby a thing moves towards the fulfillment of its original purpose, is that for Spinoza one of the characteristics of God or Nature is the radical absence of purpose, for within his work ‘Nature has no end set before it, and that all final causes are nothing but human fictions’.<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>421</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, ‘Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Towards a Historical Poetics’, in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. By Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 84-258 (p. 141).

<sup>422</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, p.75: ‘Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being’.

<sup>423</sup> Genevieve Lloyd, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Spinoza and the Ethics* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 9 [my emphasis].

<sup>424</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, p. 75.

<sup>425</sup> This is more or less how Bakhtin glosses Aristotle’s concept of ‘energia’, where ‘the full existence, the essence of a man is realized not by his condition, but by his activity, his active force (“energy”). This “energy” manifests itself as the unfolding of his character in deeds and statements.’ Bakhtin, ‘Forms of Time’, p. 140.

<sup>426</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, p. 27.

To summarise, drawing on the Spinozian theory of conatus, it is finally possible to arrive at a definition of repair that seems adequate to Attia's exhibition.<sup>427</sup> It is distinct from the renovation or the restoration on the grounds that it does not aim to recapture an ideal; different from the replacement in that it keeps all or part of the thing in question, and transformative in the sense that it actualises the essence of an individual object — where essence does not imply a fixed and final 'purpose', but rather a principle of striving to exist.

### Sinthomatic Repairs

Drawing on Spinoza allows the concept of repair to be connected to what might be called an ethics of self-cultivation, where conatus applies not simply to 'things' in the narrow sense of the word (i.e. objects), but to subjects as well. This focus in turn allows a bridge to be constructed between the concept of repair and the theoretical elaborations in the last chapter concerning the sinthome. As I claimed in the introduction, in some ways the bridge between these two concepts is provided by Lacan himself, when in *Seminar XXIII* he refers to the sinthome as a 'way of repairing'.<sup>428</sup> Following on from this, it is worth asking how exactly a sinthomatic repair functions in relationship to the various kinds of essence discussed above. As well as a glance back at *Seminar XXIII*, it is Guattari's work that will facilitate an answer to this last question.

For a repair to truly be a repair it must occur in response to a collapse, breakage, or crisis. In Lacan's seminar on the sinthome he returns several times to points of crisis in the domain of subjectivity, finding examples in the work of Joyce where psychic coherence threatens to break down. As demonstrated in the last chapter, this collapse is figured topologically as a cut in one of the rings of the Borromean knot, which causes the other two rings to drift off. In both registers — the literary and the topological — the breakage or crisis in question does not unfold in a gradual or incremental way, but amounts to a sudden slip or triggering. Similarly, strictly speaking in the topology of knots a knot is either tied or untied, there is no middle point between the two.<sup>429</sup> The

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<sup>427</sup> Here it might be objected that the term conatus only really refers to humans, and cannot be appropriated for the analysis of an exhibition. In fact Spinoza says that every *mode* strives to exist, not just those modes that go by the name of humans. Spinoza, *Ethics*, p. 75.

<sup>428</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XXIII*, p. 117 (17 February 1976).

<sup>429</sup> It could be said that this constitutes an unproductive limitation to the topology of knots that mathematicians and philosophers such as Roberto Casati have sought to overcome. Casati makes a distinction between 'topological knots' and 'ecological knots', claiming that only the latter 'are the result of transformations that take you from a situation in which there is no knot, to a situation in which there is a knot. You do not tie topological knots, because you cannot.' The same could be said for transformations

idea of a sudden triggering is outlined very early on in Lacan's work on psychosis using a revealing metaphor: that of a three-legged stool. As Lacan points out, not all stools have four legs, some function perfectly well with just three. Of this second category however there are stools that are designed to only have three legs, with each spaced evenly like the legs of a tripod, and those that are designed to have four legs, only that one of them is missing. This last type of stool can be perfectly stable so long as one sits on it in a particular way. But as soon as weight is shifted onto the place where the fourth leg is missing then its fault becomes apparent. This, again, reveals the site of an original breakage or absence (the missing leg) in need of repair. For Lacan, the fourth leg is a metaphor for the Name-of-the-Father, which in the case of psychosis is foreclosed. Just as a three-legged stool will stand up until the point at which weight is distributed in the wrong way, in many cases of psychosis the subject can function perfectly well without an operative Name-of-the-Father. It is only when at 'a certain crossroads of his biographical history, [he] is confronted by this lack that has always existed' that a psychotic break or crises occurs.<sup>430</sup> Such cases are what necessitate the elaboration of a repair: a makeshift fourth leg (or fourth ring of the Borromean knot), which operates as a creative addition that allows for a certain kind of stability. Just as there are various ways one might respond to the physical breakage of an object — through restoration, renovation, or replacement — so too there are various ways in which one might respond to such crises at the level of subjectivity.

The general umbrella term that Lacan uses to describe processes of psychotic stabilisation or repair in *Seminar XXIII* is 'suppletion' [*suppléance*].<sup>431</sup> In the range of clinical texts that draw on the concept, suppletion is sometimes used to describe phenomena that prevent psychotic triggerings from occurring in the first place, and sometimes processes of stabilisation that occur afterwards. In a number of cases it has even been elevated to the status of analytic goal for clinical work with psychotics.<sup>432</sup>

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associated with untying. Roberto Casati 'Knowledge of Knots: Shapes in Action', in *Shapes 2.0: The Shapes of Things / Universal Logic*, ed. by Mehul Bhatt, Stefano Borgo, Oliver Kutz, Paulo Santos (Rio de Janeiro: World Congress and School on Universal Logic, 2013), pp. 3-20 (p. 5).

<sup>430</sup> Lacan, *Seminar III*, p. 203 (18 April 1956).

<sup>431</sup> As well as having a specific meaning in Lacanian theory, the term 'suppletion' also carries significance in the field of linguistics. Here suppletion describes a process associated with irregular lexical items, where a word with a phonologically unrelated stem is somehow imported to fill a gap in the existing paradigm. The verb sequence 'go-went' is an example of just such a suppletion, where the stem of go is from west-germanic, and the suppletion 'went' is from proto-germanic. Instead of sweeping this meaning of suppletion to one side, it is worth retaining it, since it designates a process of repair at the micro-level of language, and again preserves the imprint of an intercultural counter.

<sup>432</sup> See for example Marie-Hélène Brousse, 'Question de suppléance', *Ornicar?*, 47 (1988), 65-73.

Given such a broad range, the concept of suppletion comes to describe a number of very different psychic ‘solutions’ to the problem of foreclosure. As Dany Nobus puts it,

suppletions can be imaginary (in the form of identifications leading to the formation of a new ego), symbolic (through writing and fine art) or real (via so-called psychosomatic phenomena). In general they serve as limitations of the psychotic’s overwhelming intrusive enjoyment, enabling him to lead a relatively decent social life, whether before the psychosis has become manifest or after the actual outbreak.<sup>433</sup>

Given this conceptual range, it would seem that the concept of the sinthome is but one modality of suppletion among many, which may also include processes of stabilisation that occur in the orders of the Imaginary and the Real. This is broadly in line with the theorisation of the sinthome offered in the last chapter. However, care should be taken not to follow Nobus too closely in his distinctions between different kinds of suppletion. Real suppletion would seem to represent a contradiction in terms, since for Lacan the Real is the order of instability, impasses, and logical paradoxes. At a purely conceptual level, it is therefore difficult to see how anything that remains within the order of the Real could offer a principle of stabilisation. A second problem arises when one considers that not all processes of stabilisation that occur ‘through writing and fine art’ are Symbolic, and if one follows Lacan’s work closely at this stage, it is clear that the concept of the sinthome is precisely an attempt to escape such reductive localisations. The topology of knots is marshaled by Lacan precisely to work out the relationships *between* the three orders, rather than offering up ways of bolstering one or other of them through analytic work. Fundamentally, the sinthome, as one kind of possible suppletion, consists in adding something new to the other three orders.<sup>434</sup> In fact, it could be said that it is not even adequate to call sinthomatic suppletion a form of stabilisation, as the majority of Lacanian authors do, if this stabilisation is put in place as a preventative measure before any anticipated psychotic break.<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>433</sup> Dany Nobus, *Jacques Lacan and the Freudian Practice of Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 2000) p. 88.

<sup>434</sup> Here, once again, I find myself in agreement with Harari in his reading of *Seminar XXIII*, when he claims that ‘*suppletion does not consist of a replacement, but the addition of something new*. For instance, when I am attempting to sew, to repair a trefoil knot at a crossing-point where a “slip” has occurred, I cannot avoid doing so by adding to it, so I invent, I use artifice (or rather “I artifice,” understood as a transitive verb. This, to be sure, is quite different than supporting the Name-of-the-Father through a love that is unconditional, eternal, and in this sense paralyzing in its closing-down of horizons’. Harari, *How James Joyce Made His Name*, p. 305.

<sup>435</sup> See for example Jonathan D. Redmond, ‘Contemporary perspectives on Lacanian theories of psychosis’, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 4 (2013) <<http://journal.frontiersin.org/Journal/10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00350/full>> [accessed 01/06/2015].

One of the major arguments in this thesis is that just such points of collapse, breakage, or crises at the level of the subject occur at a larger social level in the form of the decline of the Symbolic, and, moreover, that there is a relationship of reciprocal causality between the two. As well as individual cases it has been argued that a generalised foreclosure has brought about a more widespread socio-psychic change associated with the decline of the Symbolic. One major difference between these scales of operation, however, is the way in which such crises occur. While a psychotic break or crisis may occur quickly and dramatically for an individual psychotic subject, at the level of the social such crises are not so quick to take place. The decline of the Symbolic describes a set of phenomena that slowly corrode psycho-symbolic territories, rather than destroy them overnight. If the term suppletion is used here to describe preventative measures, then this automatically disqualifies its use in the social sphere, insofar as the breakages that occur at this level are incremental, and it would be impossible to isolate a single trigger point that one could somehow stave off. It is only by articulating the concept as a dynamic *response* to a crises or breakage that it can be positioned as multi-scaler — that is, operative at the level of both individual subjects and social groupings.

As I have said not all suppletions are *sinthomatic*. In the discussion of Attia's work it was likewise claimed that not all responses to a breakage or crisis constitute repairs. Over the last two sections a series of terms relating to these two groups have been elaborated. Lacanian clinical theory has offered up three types of suppletion: 1) Imaginary, 2) Symbolic and 3) *sinthomatic*, while a discussion of Attia's work generated three different kinds of response to a crisis or breakage: 1) restoration/renovation 2) replacement and 3) repair. In the final paragraphs of this section I aim to show that the various forms of suppletion traced out in Lacan's late work can be roughly translated into the terms drawn from Attia's work. An attempt to reconcile these different concepts will both extend the concept of the *sinthome* elaborated in the last chapter, and demonstrate that it can be used to discuss wider ethico-aesthetic mechanisms of subjectivation.

Given that the Imaginary is the domain of wholeness and consistency for Lacan, then a restoration or a renovation amounts to an Imaginary suppletion. Renovations disavow faults and breakages, covering them over or pretending they do not exist. In the terms of the last chapter, this amounts to an attempt to resurrect the traditional Name-of-the-Father on the basis that it once allowed things to hang together. In this way renovations and restorations cling to an ideal, often temporally located in the past. This

might involve totalising delusions at the level of individual psychotic subjects based on their personal history, or myths associated with perfection and racial purity at a more general social level. Today, in indirect response to the decline of the Symbolic, it is possible to see Imaginary suppletions in the form of nationalist political agendas that cling to myths of pure nationhood rooted in the past. These agendas in effect seek to renovate or restore a social body to an ideal and imagined former state, which in many cases never existed in the first place.

A second tendency can be seen in the figure of the replacement, which can be aligned with Symbolic suppletion insofar as it involves a kind of metaphoric substitution of one thing for another. At the level of individual subjects, Symbolic suppletions are not only associated with 'writing and fine art', as Nobus suggests, but with signification in general. Replacement is equal to Symbolic suppletion *only* insofar as this suppletion entails the destruction and overcoding of the Symbolic sphere that pre-exists it. Such attempts at Symbolic overcoding could be equated with 'the modernist myth of perfection' referred to the slide show component of Attia's installation. As will further be demonstrated in the next chapter, myths can have a stabilising function in respect to social forms. Attia makes a conjunction between the myth of perfection and modernity, which placed faith in the establishment of new Symbolic forms at the expense of those that it sought to replace. As I have already argued, this myth is both spatially and temporally indexed, and often the past that these new Symbolic forms overcode is located in non-western cultures. The replacements that Symbolic suppletions represent have a stabilising effect insofar as they project an image into the future. This can be seen in more general political terms, according to which an anticipated future event (be it a revolutionary break or a triumph of technological innovation) can have a stabilising effect on the present. The event in question is often pinned to the master signifier of progress, and this has the secondary effect of overcoding the messy and maligned elements of the Symbolic that offer embarrassing contradictions.

If Imaginary suppletions can be equated with renovations insofar as they cling to an idealised past, and Symbolic suppletions related to replacements on the basis that they project faith into the future, then how might sinthomatic suppletions be linked to the concept of repair? One possible way of answering this question is to pick up some of the conceptual resources of the last chapter and consider their mutual attitude towards semiotic heterogeneity. Sinthomatic suppletions are not restricted to the Symbolic; they traverse all manner of signifying and a-signifying forms. As I will argue in greater

detail in the next section, this act of traversal is what allows a sinthomatic suppletion to persevere in its own being, rather than change into something else. This self-maintaining activity has a stabilising effect, yet unlike the two other forms of suppletion discussed above, it is not static; it welcomes difference. In a way that recalls Spinoza's theory of conatus, it is the activity of traversing numerous semiotic strata that allows a thing to persevere in the preservation of its own essence. For this reason a sinthomatic suppletion could be placed between the Symbolic (as the domain of sense), the Real (as a domain of non-sense), and even the Imaginary (as the domain of consistency), while being irreducible to any one of them. By turning once again to the work of Guattari, it will be possible to see how this process has an effect on the production of subjectivity.

### The Existential Pragmatics of Repair

This chapter began with a discussion of a particular work of art, which led the concept of repair to be brought into sharper relief. Over the sections that followed this discussion, the concept has been progressively brought into the domain of subjectivity. In this final section, it is the ambition to push the analysis one step further and isolate the dynamics by which a repair (as sinthomatic suppletion) has existential effects, that is, effects on the production of subjectivity.

As Maurizio Lazzarato has recently shown, the use of the term 'existential' in Guattari's later work is a way of figuring something beyond discourse, which nevertheless is somehow partly produced through discourse.<sup>436</sup> In this way it coincides with a sinthomatic process that makes use of the Symbolic (recalling the schema of subscription-unsubscription-resinscription discussed in the last chapter) without being entirely reducible to it. This existential dynamic is pragmatic insofar as it involves activity and process. In Guattari's existential pragmatics, this activity is the activity of enunciation in the widest sense, which has effects far beyond those associated with 'performativity' as it has been theorised in the work of Judith Butler, to take the most

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<sup>436</sup> Lazzarato makes this point by showing the line of influence between Bakhtin and Guattari, ultimately demonstrating how the latter surpasses the former with his concept of the 'existential': 'while Bakhtin disillusions us with regard to the performative thanks to a conception of enunciation that eludes every kind of structural or combinatory formalization of language, Guattari radicalizes the break with linguistics and pragmatics by examining what Bakhtin failed to examine in sufficient depth, namely, the relationship between the linguistic and extralinguistic. Very late in his work, Guattari called this extra linguistic dimension existential.' Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines*, p. 203. While this may be so, it could be said that in using the term 'existential' Guattari is also returning to his earlier interest in Sartre. For more on Guattari's interest in Sartre see Watson, *Guattari's Diagrammatic Thought*, particularly the section of chapter 1 entitled 'Sartre meets Freud in the psych ward'.

prominent example.<sup>437</sup> As Lazzarato puts it, quoting Guattari, ‘unlike discursive pragmatics, existential pragmatics has to do with the production of the self, with the “ontological singularities of the self-appropriation of the self, the singularities of self-consciousness”’.<sup>438</sup>

The idea of a ‘self-appropriation of the self’ represents a curious conceptual figure that is at first difficult to grasp. Guattari’s existential pragmatics involves a process of auto-affection that is not dissimilar to the operation of conatus in Spinoza’s *Ethics*. If for Spinoza it is fundamentally *activity* that enables an object to endure over time, and this endurance or striving itself constitutes the object’s essence, for Guattari it is the activity of enunciation that continually returns back to the subject, giving consistency to an existential singularity in the process. This singularity is ‘incorporeal’ insofar as it cannot be reduced to the biological or cognitive existence of the subject. As Guattari puts it in a late seminar, existence ‘produces itself within its own movement’.<sup>439</sup> Again, this is radically opposed to ontological formulations that take existence as something fixed from the outset that progressively unfolds and manifests itself in the world. Here existence is constituted by the very act of unfolding, just as essence is constituted by the very act of striving for Spinoza.

Keeping in mind the discussion of Guattari’s ‘mixed semiotics’ in the last chapter, it should be recalled that ‘the activity of enunciation’ does not simply refer to the activity of speech and signification. As Lazzarato puts it, ‘the relation to the self represents an incorporeal existential focal point [...] whose consistency, durability, and development depends, secondarily, on the multiplicity of actualized elements that it traverses and reconfigures (*the discursive, the cognitive, but also institutions, the social, the economic sphere, etc.*).’<sup>440</sup> Enunciation takes place across a range of strata, encompassing everything from utterances, gestures, glances, transactions, or indeed anything that constitutes an action in the world. Guattari’s existential pragmatics involves all of these signifying and a-signifying forms, but crucially it also goes beyond them, accounting for the very act of traversal itself. Here a formulation could be put

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<sup>437</sup> The first of Butler’s works to draw on the theory of performativity was Judith Butler: *Gender Trouble, Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990). It has since been developed in Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge, 1993), and Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>438</sup> Félix Guattari, ‘Singularité et complexité’. <[http://www.revue-chimeres.fr/drupal\\_chimeres/files/850122.pdf](http://www.revue-chimeres.fr/drupal_chimeres/files/850122.pdf)> [accessed 01/06/2015], transcript of a seminar given on the 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1985, quoted in Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines*, p. 205. Much of Guattari’s work that Lazzarato draws upon in the chapter of *Signs and Machines* dedicated to existential pragmatics has not yet been translated into English, and for this reason I remain indebted to his particular reading of this primary material.

<sup>439</sup> Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines*, p. 207.

<sup>440</sup> Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines*, p. 206. [my italics]

forward in order to bring about a synthesis of the terms in this chapter: that enunciation entails a process of traversal, and that taken together they are what make repairs possible.

The first two terms in this sentence sit side by side in Guattari's work, and for this reason require less explanation than the third. Both traversal and enunciation designate activities, and moreover they designate activities that are existentially productive. Without the activities these terms imply, one finds oneself doomed to passively occupy the infrastructures that condition subjectivity, condemned to shuffle pre-existing semiotic counters from one place to another according to pre-established patterns. Each in their own way, traversal and enunciation describe the creation of new patterns and new semiotic counters. They designate ways of occupying linguistic and non-linguistic territories that somehow reconfigures them. It is in this sense that it is possible to use these terms in the same breath as repair, for there is a related process of reconfiguration that gives consistency to heterogeneous elements through action. To quote Lazzarato one last time,

Speech thus has a dual function: to signify, communicate, and declare 'politically,' but also and especially 'to produce assemblages of enunciation able to capture, territorialise, and deploy the singularities of a focal point of existential subjectivation and give consistency and durability to them.'<sup>441</sup>

Beyond speech, signification or communication, this act of giving existential consistency and durability to subjects and objects can be called an act of repair. Furthermore, it is my assertion that this second, existential aspect to enunciation is precisely what Lacan was trying to account for in his theorisation of the *sinthome*. In Lacan's final theoretical elaborations, the work of Joyce is exemplary precisely because it traverses an incredible range of semiotic forms, passing beyond them in order to produce wide-reaching existential effects on its author and its readers.

### I Repair, You Repair, We Repair

In this chapter I have attempted to creatively reaccentuate Lacan's concept of the *sinthome* and bring it into dialogue with the operations of a work of art. The marriage between the two has chiefly been brokered by the concept of repair. Reconciling this

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<sup>441</sup> Guattari quoted in Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines*, p. 204. Reference missing in the original.

concept as it appears in Attia's work has had a number of secondary effects on the notion of the *sinthome*. Firstly, it has enabled the latter to be discussed in the content of semiotic material 'beyond' signification — an encounter in many ways prepared in the last chapter by means of a discussion of Hjelmslev. Secondly, it has demonstrated the fundamentally inter-subjective dimensions of the *sinthome*, beyond the closed relationship between an author and his or her creative production. In this respect I would argue that Attia's work provides an example of an installation effectuating a kind of repair into which subjects other than the author might enter. These subjects come to walk the bridge between the world and the work, and this has the capacity to bring about a subtle change in subjectivity in accordance with their *connatus*. An artwork sometimes, very rarely, has the ability to effect change in a viewer in the way it has been discussed in this chapter. In a final twist, this means that it is not simply the artwork that serves as the repair for its creator, in the mode of Lacan's *Joyce*. What Attia's installation effectively brings about is a repair of a larger magnitude whereby the creator, the artwork and the audience too might momentarily constitute a packet of relations that mutually repair one another.

The way in which the argument has been constructed in this chapter could be seen as part and parcel of this process. Like Lacan's concept of the *sinthome*, over the course of the discussion the concept of repair has been progressively freed from its moorings and allowed to drift into unfamiliar territory. Aesthetic in origin, the discussion has brought the concept to bear on the production of subjectivity, and therefore into the terrain of ethics. Insofar as the concept of repair combines the two, it is a thoroughly ethico-aesthetic concept, able to support a more general ethico-aesthetic paradigm 'after' transgression.

## Chapter 6

### Experiments with Truth

Lying has proven to be a surprisingly popular activity among artists in recent years. Over the last few decades projects have included advertisements for non-existent events, invented historical personae, forms of tactical media, imitation newspapers and websites, and a variety of pseudonyms adopted for various purposes.<sup>442</sup> While this glut of deceptive artworks is relatively recent, it could be seen to build on a longer history that stretches back as far as early forms of camouflage and trompe-l'oeil. Arguably what distinguishes recent artistic experiments in this domain from their antecedents is a focus on process, with an eye to managing not only the deception itself, but also the moment when it unravels.

The artist Walid Raad writes that 'facts have to be treated as processes', highlighting the way they are produced, put to work, made affective, or otherwise challenged and disputed.<sup>443</sup> The same could be said for lies. In both cases there is a process that unfolds over time — lies hatch, grow, survive unnoticed or shed their skin of truth. To account for the processual nature of artistic experiments with deception, the art historian Carrie Lambert-Beatty has coined the term 'parafiction', using it to describe artworks that actively deceive viewers, often before self-consciously shepherding them back to the 'truth'.<sup>444</sup> The question at the heart of this chapter is 'what remains of the artistic lie once this 'truth' has been restored?' Once its object is revealed

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<sup>442</sup> To cite a handful of these works, in 2013 the artist Ryan Gander commissioned the advertising agency Kirke and Hodgson to produce a PR campaign for a fictional government initiative to promote imagination (*Imagineering* (2013)). For the 9<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Biennial in 2005, the artist Michael Blum chose to pay tribute to a little known historical figure called Safiye Behar by mounting a display of letters, books, documents and photographs in her former apartment in the Beyoglu district of the city. In the weeks and months that followed the exhibition it emerged that no such character existed. In 2008 The Yes Men created a 'special edition' of The New York Times bearing the headline 'IRAQ WAR ENDS'. They have also made websites that deliberately imitate those of the World Economic Forum, Apple, Halliburton and others. See The Yes Men, 'Museum of Fake Websites' <<http://yeslab.org/museum>> [accessed 01/06/2015] for a full archive. Countless artists have used pseudonyms for various reasons. In 2009 the Czech artist David Černý invented 27 artists who were supposed to have collaborated on the *Entropa* sculpture unveiled at the headquarters of the council of the European Union. In 1997 Cornelia Sollfrank submitted no fewer than 200 entries to the Hamburg Art Museum's first .Net art open competition 'Extension' under the guise of different female pseudonyms. Despite this number comprising over two thirds of the total entries received, all three of the winners were male, a fact that Sollfrank's work, entitled *Female Extension* (1997), both anticipated and critiqued.

<sup>443</sup> Walid Raad/ The Atlas Group, 'Untitled Artist's Statement', in *Documentary Now! Contemporary Strategies in Photography, Film and the Visual Arts*, ed. by Frits Gierstberg et al (Rotterdam: NAI, 2005), pp. 121-2 (p. 121).

<sup>444</sup> Carrie Lambert-Beatty, 'Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility', *October*, 129 (2009), 51-84. Lambert-Beatty's article provides a good descriptive account of the kinds of artworks discussed in this chapter.

to be false, a lie does not simply evaporate; it leaves behind it a residue long after its truth-claims have been dropped. For better or worse, art works that experiment with deception have the capacity to generate real effects. This chapter will focus on two broad classes of effects: those that are somehow critical, that turn one's attention back on the truth-framing devices that allowed for deception in the first place, and those that are creative, that inscribe the image of a possible world onto the mind of the viewer or participant.

Although the critical effects of deception should not be undervalued, it is the effects that could be considered creative that have a greater ethical part to play in the production of subjectivity. In this sense, it could be said that deception has a *sinthomatic* function that doesn't simply embellish the Imaginary, or reconfigure the Symbolic, but is involved in the construction of a new subjective arrangement that helps produce the Real. It will be argued that deception has the capacity to create new universes of reference, providing vectors of subjectivation in the process.

Considering these effects on a broader scale will entail a look at the relationship between acts of deception and the wider socio-symbolic context in which they take place. Building on the premise of a 'decline of the Symbolic' outlined in previous chapters, do artworks that reveal the plasticity of truth further accelerate this decline? Do experiments with truth ultimately risk undermining one's capacity to distinguish between the Symbolic poles of truth and falsehood, or do they provide a set of crucial reading strategies for understanding how these poles are constructed in the first place?<sup>445</sup> This chapter will attempt to address all of these questions, in the process linking the subject of deception back to the abiding concern with the relationship between ethics and aesthetics.

In the process, and without necessarily scaling back any of the claims made above, it is important to consider to what extent deception can be creative but nevertheless quite regressive. Here it is instructive to consider a statement attributed to a senior advisor to the Bush administration, Karl Rove, made in 2002, just prior to the

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<sup>445</sup> This last question is addressed by D. Graham Burnett, who writes that 'if, increasingly, actual politics operated operatically (privileging everywhere image, performance, and spectacle), then wielding a little schizophrenic irony – indeed, mastering the veritable arts of collective deception – might well be the twenty-first century equivalent of registering to vote'. D. Graham Burnett, 'In Lies Begin Responsibilities' in *More Real: Art in the Age of Truthiness* ed. by Elizabeth Armstrong (Santa Fe: SITE, 2012) pp. 190-209 (p. 195). Despite the hyperbolic tone of this quote, 'registering to vote' does not exactly represent the pinnacle of political agency, and by positioning 'the arts of collective deception' as its equivalent Burnett is perhaps not making a tall enough order.

invasion of Iraq: 'We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality.'<sup>446</sup> In the context of the lies that were propagated in the run up to the war, is this not also an expression of the power of deception to produce new universes of reference? It is possible to find numerous other examples that illustrate this point, such as the formal similarity between The Museum of Jurassic Technology, a playfully deceptive museum of fictional natural history in Los Angeles, and the right wing 'creationist' museums that actively promote a view of the world created in six days.<sup>447</sup> The difference between these two cases obviously turns on the hinge of faith, but the comparison nevertheless highlights the need to avoid blanket endorsements of deceptive practices and make careful distinctions based on a complex range of factors.

Here the ambition is not to subject such experiments to a moral calculation in order to determine whether they are the product of good intentions — an important yardstick in the philosophy of deception, as I aim to demonstrate. Rather, this chapter will consider the ethical import of such practices as they are played out in the sphere of art. Just as the concept of 'repair' in the last chapter was filtered through the sinthomatic ethics elaborated in chapter 4, towards the end of this chapter I will attempt to nuance the discussion of deception on the same basis, considering its potential to contribute to an ethico-aesthetic paradigm 'after' transgression.

### From Intention to Effect

When it comes to pinpointing a precise definition of lying, the issue of intention quickly comes to the fore. It was St. Augustine who first outlined a systematic theory of lying that rested on the intentions of the liar. In his *De Mendacio*, he writes that 'not every one who says a false thing lies, if he believes or opines that to be true which he says',

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<sup>446</sup> Ron Suskind, 'Faith, Certainty and the Presidency of George W. Bush', *New York Times Magazine*, October 17 2004 <[http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/17/magazine/17BUSH.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/17/magazine/17BUSH.html?_r=0)> [accessed 01/06/2015]. The quote was later attributed to Karl Rove, in Mark Danner, 'Words in a Time of War: On Rhetoric, Truth and Power', in *What Orwell Didn't Know: Propaganda and the New Face of American Politics*, ed. by András Szántó (New York: Public Affairs, 2007), pp. 16-36 (p. 17).

<sup>447</sup> For a guide to the Museum of Jurassic Technology see Lawrence Weschler, *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder: Pronged Ants, Horned Humans, Mice on Toast, and Other Marvels of Jurassic Technology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996). One of the biggest creationist museums is located in Kentucky, and features among other things an interactive display presenting a monkey 'from a biblical standpoint', a widescreen visual presentation of the six days of creation, and a dinosaur den which promises to show why 'Biblical history is the key to understanding dinosaurs.' Creation Museum, 'Exhibits' <<http://creationmuseum.org/whats-here/exhibits/>> [accessed 01/06/2015].

thereby arguing that it is not so much the relation between the utterance and reality that characterises a lie, but rather the intention to deceive.<sup>448</sup>

To illustrate this point it is enough to cite an anecdote found in Freud's *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, which involves a dialogue between two Polish Jews who meet on a train. "Where are you going?" one asks. "I'm going to Cracow," the other replies. To which the first answers, "You say you are going to Cracow, because you want me to think you are going to Lemberg. But I know you are going to Cracow. So why are you lying to me?"<sup>449</sup> In this example, the second character takes the first to be lying to him, even though he supposes that what he says corresponds exactly to the truth. Here it is possible to make a distinction between truth/ falsity (which concerns the epistemological accuracy of a statement) and truthfulness/ deception (which is based on intention).<sup>450</sup> The first character's utterance is perfectly true, but if, as the second character believes, it were founded on an intention to deceive, according to the Augustinian model it would be classed as a lie.

If this provisional definition of the lie is accepted, one is obliged to consider the inter-subjective dimension of lying. To borrow a term from Mikhail Bakhtin, it could be said that lying is a fundamentally *dialogic* practice rooted in the concrete situation in which a particular utterance is produced and how this situation involves others. Bakhtin counters a view of language as something abstract and self-contained by focusing on the social life of language. In doing so he also helps bring the temporal aspect of dialogue into clearer focus:

Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word. Such is the situation in any dialogue.<sup>451</sup>

This is also true of dialogue that contains deceptive utterances. A Bakhtinian view of language allows one to step beyond the narrow definition of the lie based solely on epistemological accuracy and see it as a temporally extended discursive object. Furthermore, if one accepts Bakhtin's view of language as a chaotic sphere of

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<sup>448</sup> St. Augustine, 'On Lying', in *Seventeen Short Treatises of St. Augustine* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1847), pp. 382-425 (p. 383).

<sup>449</sup> Freud, 'Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious', p. 115.

<sup>450</sup> The distinction between objective truth and truthfulness is made in Immanuel Kant, 'On a supposed right to lie from philanthropy', in *Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 611-615 (p. 611).

<sup>451</sup> Mikhail M. Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. by Michael Holquist (Austin TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 259-422 (p.280).

utterances freighted with points of view and value judgments about the world, then any simple process of epistemological adequation is immediately rendered specific to the language in which the process takes place.<sup>452</sup>

Taking on board Bakhtin's insights therefore allows two things to be done: 1) to dethrone the category of truth as epistemological accuracy, which is seen as the product of an 'ennobled discourse' that claims to capture its object in an unmediated fashion, and 2) to see truthfulness and deception as thoroughly dialogic concepts conditioned by anticipated or actual responses. As the example from Freud's joke book shows, truthfulness and deception are founded on a social relation and a series of assumptions and predictions pertaining to the behavior of others.

Nevertheless, with the category of truthfulness the emphasis is still narrowly placed on the intentions of the liar. A focus on intentions inevitably leads to their schematisation according to a pre-established moral code, giving rise to such categories as 'white lies', 'noble lies' or 'malicious lies', which can be distinguished from one another only when their intended outcome is taken into account. Augustine himself makes a distinction between eight classes, arranged in ascending order of how forgivable they are in the eyes of God, for it is only God who has the ability to traverse the boundary between the soul and the world in order to see the truth.<sup>453</sup> This belief can be seen in the early modern practice of adding an unvoiced disclaimer to a deliberately voiced lie — a practice nonetheless risky in that it presupposes a God that can't tell the difference between speaking and thinking.

The moral ordering of lies based on intention could be used to think about artworks such as *Dow Does the Right Thing* (2004) by The Yes Men. In what is probably the most famous intervention by the group, and a defining example of what has been called 'tactical media', one of the group's members, Andy Bichlbaum, posed as a representative of Dow Chemical for an interview on BBC World T.V.<sup>454</sup> The interview took place on the twentieth anniversary of the 1984 Union Carbide chemical spill at Bhopal, in India, which killed around twenty thousand people and damaged the

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<sup>452</sup> As Bakhtin writes, 'No living word relates to its object in a *singular* way: between the word and its object, between the word and the speaking subject, there exists an elastic environment of other, alien words about the same object, the same theme, and this is an environment that it is often difficult to penetrate.' *Ibid.*, 276.

<sup>453</sup> These classes range from 'lies told in teaching religion' as the least forgivable to 'lies which hurt nobody and protect a person from physical defilement' as the most. Augustine, 'On Lying'.

<sup>454</sup> The term 'tactical media' was coined at the 'Next Five Minutes' (N5N) conference in Amsterdam in 1993, and subsequently defined by the organisers as referring to 'a critical usage and theorization of media practices that draw on all forms of old and new, both lucid and sophisticated media, for achieving a variety of specific noncommercial goals and pushing all kinds of potentially subversive political issues'. Critical Art Ensemble, *Digital Resistance: Explorations in Tactical Media* (New York: Autonomedia, 2001), p. 5.

health of countless others. As the parent company of Union Carbide since 2001, Dow have continually refused to take responsibility for the environmental after-effects of the spill and have offered no compensation to those still suffering from related illnesses.<sup>455</sup> It was therefore a surprise to many viewers when on live T.V. a representative of Dow pledged \$12 billion to make reparations to the victims and clean up the spill site. It took the BBC just two hours to reveal the spokesperson as an imposter, by which time shares in Dow had already dipped on stock markets around the world.<sup>456</sup>

According to a theory of lying based on intentions this artwork could perhaps be considered to embody an altruistic lie. But what does characterising it as such really achieve? Fundamentally, any schematisation of lies founded on intention simply applies pre-existing moral categories of good and evil to a person or group's presumed motives. Not only is such an approach out of step with the general focus of this thesis, which has sought to advance a vision of ethics as something creative, rather than normative; it also goes against each of the thinkers that have inspired this perspective on the subject. Bakhtin, like Lacan and Guattari, was notoriously suspicious of such a mechanical approach to ethics.<sup>457</sup>

Specific cases of deception rarely yield reliable knowledge of the intentions of the deceiver. With *The Yes Men* one may be on relatively firm ground in assuming that their intentions were to help victims of the spill, but in the great majority of cases artists' intentions are a lot more opaque. Furthermore, by devoting attention to a moral calculation based on intention the thoroughly *ethical* stakes involved in artworks that experiment with deception are overlooked. The Yes Men justified their intervention with a phrase associated with the anti-globalization movement at the time: 'We were trying to show that another world is possible.'<sup>458</sup> An approach geared towards unpacking the ethical stakes of the work would focus less on the intention 'We were trying...' and more on the production of alternative universes of reference: 'another world is possible'. Such an analysis would look at the range of novel effects on the production of subjectivity that an artwork such as the *Dow Does the Right Thing* sets in motion.

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<sup>455</sup> According to the Bhopal Medical Appeal, some victims received between \$300 and \$500 from Union Carbide in 1989, worth about five years of medical care. The Bhopal Medical Appeal, 'Union Carbide's Disaster' <<http://www.bhopal.org/what-happened/>> [accessed 01/06/2015].

<sup>456</sup> The Yes Men claim on their website that Dow made a loss of 2 billion dollars on the German stock exchange. The Yes Men, 'Dow Does Right Thing' <<http://theyesmen.org/hijinks/bbcbhopal>> [accessed 01/06/2015].

<sup>457</sup> On this see Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Towards a Philosophy of the Act* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993).

<sup>458</sup> The Yes Men 'Dow Does Right Thing'.

To the two broad approaches to the subject of lying already discussed (truth as epistemological accuracy, and truthfulness as the product of an imputed intention to be truthful) a third could be added: that of a truth *effect*. In the field of psychology the term ‘illusory truth effect’ was first used by Hasher, Goldstein, and Toppino to describe the increased likelihood of false facts being intuited as true after they had been repeated several times.<sup>459</sup> Here the term could be used in a different sense, inspired by the work of Barbara Cassin.<sup>460</sup> In *Sophistical Practice* Cassin focuses on the lines of mutual influence between philosophy and sophistry, claiming that the latter’s privileging of rhetorical forms over an above any ontological claims amounts to a privileging of effect over intention:

Philosophy never relinquishes its claim to unmask sophistic by banking on the concept of intention; sophistic never ceases to distinguish itself from philosophy by emphasising the accounting of effects. The consideration of effects can match that of intention because the effect is no longer at the mercy of a dichotomy: faced with the polarised duplicity of intention, there is or there is not an effect, *de facto*, precisely.<sup>461</sup>

Any understanding of intentions is reliant on how they are communicated, and for this reason they are at the mercy of a dichotomy between genuine and disingenuous speech. Effects, on the other hand, are signs of themselves, and cannot be falsified. Faced with the inscrutable nature of intentions this chapter wagers that a focus on the *effects* of artistic practices of deception will be more fruitful. This is not to argue that a definition of lying should be re-founded on the basis of the effect it has, but rather that it is more productive to consider the aspects of the lie which become public, participatory, and dialogic. The effects of deceptive utterances are rarely as clear-cut as the example drawn from Freud. Their edges bleed into the fabric of social life, addressing multiple audiences at the same time, bringing about all manner of secondary and tertiary effects — some intended, others not. In the reverse direction, a widespread ‘culture of lying’ might also render the task of isolating an individual lie as difficult as abstracting a subject from the discursive community to which he or she belongs.

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<sup>459</sup> Lynn Hasher, David Goldstein, and Thomas Toppino, ‘Frequency and the Conference of Referential Validity’, *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior*, 16:1 (1977), 107-112.

<sup>460</sup> Barbara Cassin, *Sophistical Practice: Towards a Consistent Relativism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

A passage from Jean-Michel Rabaté's *The Ethics of the Lie* illustrates this point. In the context of a chapter on the 'state lies' propagated in Bush era America, Rabaté writes that:

the political lie on a grand scale, the true state lie, a lie so widespread that personal culpability and the sputtering of the state machine are indistinguishable, end almost always by creating its own reality. There is no longer a historical error, when history itself is an error. The isolated lie no longer exists when the politics of an entire country derives from the official lie.<sup>462</sup>

This quote both highlights the relative impossibility of separating a subject from the socio-cultural milieu in which they exist, and points towards a tradition of equating lying with history in general, a tradition most readily associated with Nietzsche.

Nietzsche grants the concept of lying a range that covers entire systems of morality and religion. In *The Anti-Christ* Christianity is referred to as a 'holy lie'<sup>463</sup>, fabricated by priests and philosophers, and in *Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense*, Nietzsche pre-empts the structuralist doctrine of the arbitrariness of the sign by characterizing truth as 'A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms, [...] a sum of human relations which have been subjected to poetic and rhetorical intensification, translation, and decoration'.<sup>464</sup> In this context, the interdiction against lying is simply the reverse side of an 'obligation to use the customary metaphors, or, to put it in moral terms, the obligation to lie in accordance with firmly established convention, to lie *en masse* and in a style that is binding for all.'<sup>465</sup> For Nietzsche, any social relation founded on language would therefore have to be considered a lie, a position that comes to be expressed more systematically in the '60s and '70s with semiotics, so that in 1968 Umberto Eco can argue that 'the definition of a "theory of the lie" should be taken as a pretty comprehensive program for a general semiotics.'<sup>466</sup>

The 'dit-mension' of language that semiotics circumscribes can be equated with a theory of the lie insofar as individual words fail to fully convey the noumenal object

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<sup>462</sup> Jean Michel Rabaté, *The Ethics of the Lie* (New York: Other Press, 2008), p. 82.

<sup>463</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight*, p. 41, and in several other places in the book.

<sup>464</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense', in *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Essays*, ed. by Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 141-153 (p. 146).

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>466</sup> Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), p. 7.

to which they are assigned.<sup>467</sup> Here language is viewed as a social tissue of lies that claims to describe an objective truth outside of itself. This view is valuable insofar as it de-individualises the lie and further weakens the definitional criteria of intention. Nevertheless if such a position is considered in light of the semiotic theories of Hjelmslev elaborated in chapter 4, which allows for the traversal of different semiotic strata rather than their neat separation, it immediately begins to seem reductive. As I hope to show towards the end of this chapter, if one takes a sinthomatic approach whereby the Symbolic can have a part to play in the production of the Real, then the cleavage between the Real and the deceptive (as the Symbolic per se) no longer appears so absolute. Before doing so it is important to show that within the dit-mension of the Symbolic there exist different practices, different effects, and different uses associated with deception. Even though these distinctions could themselves be seen as arbitrary in relation to the objects they describe, they nevertheless have social, historical and cultural effects. A look at a specific artwork that deals with deception will be useful in this respect.

### Lying to Liars

In her work *The Trainee* (2008) the artist Pilvi Takala spent an entire month working as a student trainee in the marketing department of Deloitte, all the while filming her actions on hidden cameras. The first 'lie' that Takala tells is to change her first name from Pilvi to Johanna, presumably to prevent her new colleagues from finding out that she is an artist and not an aspiring marketing executive. For the entire month she then proceeds to play a modern day Bartleby by doing as little as possible in and around the building. Colleagues look on as she spends a day at the library of the Tax and Legal department of the firm, neither consulting documents nor working on a computer but staring dreamily into space. On another day in the consulting department Takala sits redundantly in the middle of a busy open-plan office, justifying herself to bemused colleagues by saying that she is 'doing brain work' and mumbling vague thoughts about her 'thesis'. The situation reaches a comic climax when on February the 28<sup>th</sup> Takala spends an entire day shuttling between floors in the building's lift. A secret camera documents the forced smiles of colleagues hiding their disbelief when Takala explains

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<sup>467</sup> The word 'dit-mention' is a pun borrowed from Lacan, which equivocates around the meanings 'spoken dimension', 'spoken mansion' (a play on Heidegger's famous assertion that 'language is the house of being') and crucially, 'spoken lie', with the implication that this extends to an entire dimension. Lacan, *Seminar XX*, p. 21 (December 19 1972).

that she finds the lift conducive to thinking — ‘like being on a train.’ This concern grows over the course of the month as a series of glances, e-mails and conversations are exchanged about Takala’s disruptive presence. When the project was exhibited in the Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art in Helsinki in 2008, it included a power-point presentation showing some of these e-mails (figure 22).

From: X Sent: 28. helmikuuta 2008 11:46 To: Z Subject: marketing trainee	From: X Sent: February 28 2008 11:46 To: Z Subject: marketing trainee
Moi	Hi
Nyt se trainee on majoittautunut ruokalaa lähimpänä olevaan hissiin. Seisoo takanurkassa ja ajelehtii kerroksesta toiseen muiden käyttäjien mukana. Tolkuton määrä aikaa menee siihen, kun porukka spekuloi asialla. Emmekö me nyt voisi hoitaa häntä pois täältä, selvästi joku henkinen ongelma.	Now the trainee has placed herself in the elevator closest to the cantine. She's standing in the back corner drifting from floor to floor with the other users. People have spent a senseless amount of time speculating on this issue. Couldn't we now get her out of here? Obviously she has some kind of mental problem.
Y:lle laitoin myös viestiä.	I also informed Y about this.
X	X

Figure 22: Pilvi Takala, *The Trainee* (2008), film still. © Galerie Diana Stigter and Carlos/ Ishikawa

The ‘senseless amount of time’ employees at Deloitte apparently spent speculating on Takala’s presence is testament to the disruptive effect her performance had. Elsewhere the artist has described the intervention as a ‘threat to order’ — ‘sitting in front of an empty desk with your hands on your lap, thinking, threatens the peace of the community and breaks the colleagues’ [sic] concentration.’<sup>468</sup>

If *The Trainee* can be considered to have a disruptive effect, this effect is discharged by means of a set of deceptive strategies. Takala’s presence in Deloitte is initially accepted on the basis of a verbal lie pertaining to her reasons for being there, backed up by company management, who secured her a job for which she was not sufficiently qualified, and supplemented by a number of other choices involving everything from her mode of addressing other employees to office attire. But Takala’s work hints at another raft of lies, and she herself has described the way employees at

<sup>468</sup> Pilvi Takala, ‘The Trainee’ <<http://www.pilvitakala.com/thetrainee01.html>> [accessed 01/06/2015].

Deloitte and elsewhere hide laziness and time wasting under a mask of false-productivity.<sup>469</sup> A furrowed brow and a concentrated stare are sometimes all that is needed to hide hours spent browsing the Internet or scrolling through social media. If anything, open plan office environments encourage such duplicitous behavior, and the e-mail chain shared among concerned employees in *The Trainee* is testament to the way in which they encourage a regime of collective self-policing.<sup>470</sup> The lie at the heart of Takala's piece is therefore directed critically at another set of lies, and perhaps ultimately at the managerial practices and spatial systems that make such lies necessary.

This coupling of one lie with another is also fundamentally what is at stake in a literary device Bakhtin labels 'gay deception', described as 'a *lie* justified because it is precisely directed at liars'.<sup>471</sup> The 'lie' to which Bakhtin opposes 'gay deception' is 'the lie of pathos', which characterises what he calls novels of 'the first stylistic line'. A few points require explanation here. First of all, as Morson and Emerson point out, the Russian *pafo*s, although from the same Greek root as the English word, does not carry the same connotations of sadness, and could even be translated as 'enthusiasm', 'inspiration' and 'animation'.<sup>472</sup> This meaning becomes clearer when Bakhtin speaks of the various discourses of pathos in the novel, which as well as 'sentimentalising pathos' also include 'high-heroising pathos' — a construction that would normally seem oxymoronic in English. Secondly, when Bakhtin speaks of 'novels of the first stylistic line' he is drawing on an aspect of his own typology of prosaic forms to talk about novels that try to wash their hands of the patchwork of different discourses and tongues 'still warm' from their usage in everyday speech. In a word, novels of the first line are polemically directed against *heteroglossia*. They make use of a 'respectable' or 'ennobled' discourse that tries ultimately in vein to rid itself of contextual

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<sup>469</sup> Ibid.

<sup>470</sup> For a discussion of Takala's piece that focuses more on the relationship between contemporary performance practice and such post-taylorist management regimes see Sami Siegelbaum, 'Business Casual: Flexibility in Contemporary Performance Art', *Art Journal*, 72: 3 (2013), 48-63.

<sup>471</sup> Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', p. 401. Although the concept of 'gay deception' is embedded in Bakhtin's discussion of the novel, it is my contention that it can be separated from this discussion on account of its close links to what Morson and Emerson have called 'global concepts' in Bakhtin's work, specifically the concept of dialogue. Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990). Debora Hayes provides further justification for putting Bakhtin's work to use in the study of visual art, justifying it on the basis of his concept of 're-accentuation'. Debora Hayes, *Bakhtin and the Visual Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 15. Bakhtin expresses the concept as follows: 'Every age re-accentuates in its own way the works of its most immediate past, [thus] their semantic content literally continues to grow, to further create out of itself', Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', p. 421. Although Bakhtin's work advocates a close 'reading' of the context in which words and concepts are used, I would follow Hayes in arguing that his work also contains the imperative to put concepts to creative use and to "re-accentuate" them in novel ways.

<sup>472</sup> Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, p. 355.

contamination. As such, novels of the first stylistic line have pretensions to neutrality and universality.<sup>473</sup>

It is now possible to see how Bakhtin opposes ‘gay deception’ to the lie of pathos, which is ‘accumulated in the language of all recognized and structured professions, social groups and classes [...] the language of priests and monks, kings and seigneurs, knights and wealthy urban types, scholars and jurists [...] the languages of all who hold power and who are well set up in life.’<sup>474</sup> For Bakhtin, it is not that these particular professions and social groups are prone to lying more than anyone else, but that they have forgotten the arbitrariness of their discourse. They have forgotten that language itself lies, and in doing so, they participate in a literary discourse which attempts ‘to faithfully reflect reality, to manage reality, and to transpose it’.<sup>475</sup> In other words, for Bakhtin these professions often appear in the novel as overly confident of their ability to minimise the distorting effects of language and describe reality as it is.

It could be argued that such is the underlying dynamic of *The Trainee*. In a spirit of gay deception Takala effectively tests the limits of the office culture within Deloitte, where a particular way of speaking and acting assumes a dominant position. The ennobled discourse of the business world is often hostile to other discourses that would force it recognise the contingency of its own position. In her act of withdrawal from the company discourse Takala holds heteroglossia in potential, not committing to any one discourse, and therefore not identifying with the group or profession to which she supposedly belongs. This has the effect of directing attention towards the authorised language and an office culture of self-important assiduity. Moreover this critical attention is accompanied by a parodic, if not openly mocking stance.

In his discussion of literary characters such as the clown, the fool and the merry rogue, Bakhtin claims that they allow languages to be perceived ‘physically as

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<sup>473</sup> Bakhtin also elaborates a rival to the tradition of the first stylistic line, the second stylistic line, which he casts in a more positive light. The second stylistic line ‘incorporates heteroglossia into a novel’s composition, exploiting it to orchestrate its own meaning and frequently resisting altogether any unmediated and pure authorial discourse.’ Bakhtin, ‘Discourse in the Novel’, p. 375. Novels of this class embody the clamour of interactions between different languages, dialects and worldviews, ultimately exposing the relative contingency of each. While the novels of the first stylistic line have heteroglossia as their disavowed background, it is only novels of the second stylistic line that fully draw on heteroglossia as a resource full of potential.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid., p. 401.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid., p. 412. In relation to this point Barbara Cassin makes a useful distinction between the descriptive or demonstrative mode ‘speaking of’, which she claims is the major register of philosophy, and the persuasive, effectual mode of ‘speaking to’, which is of the domain of rhetoric. Cassin, *Sophistical Practice*, p. 194. When the lie of pathos forgets that it cannot fully ‘speak of’ a particular object, ‘gay deception’ is never far away to remind it that it is also ‘speaking to’.

objects'.<sup>476</sup> Similarly, in isolating the office culture as an object of attention, *The Trainee* brings the contours of the discourse and the managerial structures that make it possible into clearer focus. Although this effect is initially achieved by means of deception, Takala's lie is purposely not so good that it goes unnoticed. Rather it is the points of difference that allow the office discourse in Deloitte to emerge as an object — sitting at a desk *without* a computer, riding the lift *without* a set destination, thinking *without* writing materials. It is these moments of slippage that culminate over the course of the month and ultimately cause the lie to unravel, a process that generates critical effects.

It could be said that these effects are generated at two points in the life of the artwork, each corresponding to a different audience group. Those who experience the work in a gallery constitute an audience to whom the deceptive structure of the work is never directed. From the outset they are in on the joke. The employees who directly experienced the intervention at Deloitte constitute a second group, as much an audience as a group of participants. Some three months after the internship had formally ended this group were told that they had been part of an artwork and the deceptive content was fully dismantled.<sup>477</sup> This is perhaps the moment when the critical affect of the work was fully discharged to this audience. As Takala herself writes:

After I left, the conversation about acceptable working methods continued at the workplace. Whether accepting my behavior or not, I forced my co-workers to

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<sup>476</sup> Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel,' p. 404. In Bakhtin's work the figure of the merry rogue re-accentuates the discourse of pathos, whether it is heroic or sentimental, in order to "'distance it from the mouth" [...] by means of a smile or a deception, mock its falsity and thus turn what was a lie into gay deception.' Ibid., p. 402. In charting the history of the merry rogue from dawn of the novel's history, Bakhtin argues that in modern times it is 'cut loose' and ceases to be a 'symbolically static image', thus opening the door to viewing the character as a wider cultural trope. Ibid., p. 405. Modern and contemporary art is no stranger to the figure of the trickster, with artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Maurizio Catalani and more recently Ryan Gander playing the role with differing degrees of verve and subtlety. Jean Fisher lucidly explores the post-colonial dimensions of the trickster as a trans-cultural trope, claiming that it has been 'remobilised in literature and art as a symbolic vector of anti-colonial resistance and cultural resurgence from the 1970s on.' Jean Fisher, 'Tricksters, Troubadours — and Bartleby: On Art from a State of Emergency', *InPrint*, 2:1 (2013), 13-28 (p. 21). Fisher's placing of the trickster in a post-colonial frame is not without precedent, and could be connected to other tropic figures such as 'the mimic man' in the work of Homi Bhabha, who exploits the identificatory slippage produced by mimicry in order to produce a certain ironic dislocation. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>477</sup> Three months after the internship ended employees who were directly filmed were asked their permission for the footage to be used. Employees who did not feature directly were informed a month after this. E-mail conversation with the artist.

reconsider their expectations of shared rules and I think the same happens to people who see the documentation as my art piece.<sup>478</sup>

It is perhaps slightly surprising to learn then, that Takala's intervention at Deloitte was carried out in the full knowledge of the CEO and manager of the marketing department, who gave his permission to carry out the action and in fact directly contributed to the work by supplying company e-mails.<sup>479</sup> A question that is often overlooked in discussions of this piece concerns what the manager thought the benefits of inviting Takala into his office would be. Is he simply a benevolent lover of contemporary performance art, or did he see the advantages of an artwork that denaturalised a stuffy office culture in the anticipation of new, more efficient forms of collective behavior? Perhaps at this level practices of 'gay deception' are not incompatible with an office culture that embraces bonding exercises, weekend retreats, and 'dress down' Fridays. This idea is perhaps the ultimate critical effect of Takala's intervention, highlighting the perversity of a system that welcomes critique with open arms. If Bakhtin's concept of gay deception offers a model of lying that reprocesses discourses and exposes a kind of truth *through* deception, this is not simply the truth of contingency and heteroglossia, but also of the effects of interactions between different languages and discourses and the power play that allows one to absorb another.

### Intimate Percussion

In 2005 a strange rumour spread through the Spanish city of León. Groups of young people were increasingly turning their back on conventional music in preference for the sound of their own heartbeat, which was said to have addictive properties. Personal music devices were being modified to amplify the heartbeat of the user, and prolonged exposure had the capacity to induce a trance-like state. Signs of this nascent trend seemed to be materialising all over the city: graffiti and posters appeared in public places carrying slogans such as 'intimate percussion', special events were held at a local venue, and the story seemed to be gaining traction in the local media as well, with an interview broadcast on radio León and scattered articles in the local press. When the record label 'Musique Camus' gathered together several bands in order to record an

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<sup>478</sup> Jacquelyn Gleisner, 'New Kids on the Block: "Brain Work" with Pilvi Takala,' <<http://blog.art21.org/2012/12/10/new-kids-on-the-block-brain-work-with-pilvi-takala/#.VINFPVesVuA>> [accessed 01/06/2015].

<sup>479</sup> E-mail conversation with the artist.

album of music entirely inspired by the heartbeat — later reviewed by the music critic Carlos del Riego — it seemed that the private practice had suddenly developed into a full blown subculture, further bolstered by the website heartbeaters.net, which functioned as an online portal for the growing community.

Although outwardly extreme, the rumour was lent some credibility by a number of existing media narratives. Studies into the effects of repetitive audio on the listener's heartbeat were quoted and circulated as factoids that fed into the rumour. The practice of 'heartbeating' also resonated with a number of technologically alarmist voices that had previously lamented the decline of face-to-face interaction. Furthermore, this decline was linked to familiar narratives of a generational disconnect between a self-obsessed youth culture and an older generation that looked on in dismay. To the latter it might have been understandable for music itself to give rise to a new subculture, but the onanistic nature of a youth culture that preferred to get high on their own heartbeats seemed to symptomise a greater range of underlying social ills.

For many, the revelation that the rumour was in fact a work of art by Dora Garcia, who made the announcement on the occasion of her exhibition opening at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León (MUSAC), did not come as much of a surprise.<sup>480</sup> This is because many of the participants were enlisted as collaborators some three months before Garcia revealed the work's fictional content. A second group of disbelievers may have had doubts after seeing Garcia's name on the heartbeaters.net website. There, a previous work by the artist on the same theme — *Heartbeat* (1999), first exhibited at the Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo in Andalucía — was posited as an originary fiction, which precipitated the real life spread of the practice to urban centres across Spain and beyond.<sup>481</sup> For a surprising number of others, the fiction had become a reality, and many of those who contributed material to the website heartbeaters.net did so of their own volition, presumably in the belief that just such a subcultural form was in fact emerging.

The project's success lay not only in its ability to play on existing social anxieties, but also make use of particular circuits of distribution. Garcia was quick to involve professionals in the fields of music, radio, and TV, who made use of both official channels of communication in the broadcast and print media, and propagated the fiction by means of word-of-mouth or 'word-of-web'. Like all rumours, the source of the heartbeater stories in León were obscure, and at the beginning lacking in empirical

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<sup>480</sup> The announcement was made on September 10 2005.

<sup>481</sup> The original manifestation of the work comprised of a hyperlinked text narrative, posters, videos, and pseudo-scientific reports.

validation. In this way the rumour existed as an artifact of unofficial speech that once released into the wild began to mutate and have real effects. Here the proximity of *Heartbeaters* to commercially driven campaigns of a similar character is significant — both seek to insert stories into pre-existing social networks as if they had occurred spontaneously, ultimately with the aim of greater market/audience penetration. Obvious brand authorship notwithstanding, what distinguishes *Heartbeaters* from such PR practices is that the anonymous, distributed deception was ultimately reigned in and assigned to a specific author with a specific motive. Like Takala's revelatory message to the employees at Deloitte, the lie was in effect terminated; only in Garcia's case at this very moment it assumed the status of a fiction.

Here it is interesting to consider the difference between lies and fiction. While the former claims to describe reality, the latter suspends all claims to this effect, either implicitly or explicitly.<sup>482</sup> The suspension of these claims frees the work of fiction from any social obligation to be truthful. Just as lies need to take the listener into account, the fictional status of an object is worked out in a dialog between an author, an artwork and its audience according to a shifting set of conventions that change over time.<sup>483</sup> *Heartbeaters* played with such conventions, suspending them at a temporal juncture that caused the project to exist at one stage as a lie and at another a fiction. As a term that covers both practices at the same time, here the word 'fabulation' could be used to describe the project as a whole.<sup>484</sup> The theoretical significance of this term will be elaborated in the final section.

In order to consider the effects *Heartbeaters* generated it will be useful to look at the sequential nature of the piece in greater detail. For many participant-viewers the temporal makeup of *Heartbeaters* involved three stages.

In the first stage elements of the story were allotted a space within a material network of signs and relayed via circuits of distribution. Here the object of fabulation had the capacity to be registered as factual, and bleed into other epistemological inscriptions and change their experiential qualities, for example bolstering moral panic.

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<sup>482</sup> This follows from John Searle's definition of fiction as something 'made possible by the existence of a set of conventions which suspend the normal operation of the rules relating illocutionary acts and the world'. John R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 67.

<sup>483</sup> It is worth noting that such conventions do periodically change, as in the case of Thomas More's *Utopia*, which when first published in 1516 was taken so seriously by some members of the Church that the possibility of sending missionaries to convert the population of the imaginary island was apparently discussed. Isaac D'Israeli, *Curiosities of Literature*, 2 vols (London: Murray, 1971- 73), II (1973), p. 23.

<sup>484</sup> The OED defines the verb fabulate as 'to relate as a fable or myth' and 'to invent, concoct, fabricate.' *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn, 20 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), V (1989), p. 640.

During this stage the antecedent myth of a previous artwork aimed to reinforce the veracity of the piece.

During the second stage some aspect of the lie was revealed to be factually inaccurate or false. This was set in motion by an element of the artwork itself, and here it could be argued that Garcia's termination of the fictional content can be considered part of the overall choreography. The initial deception subsequently started to unravel, and the experiential quality of the object of deception changed.



Figure 23: Dora Garcia, *Heartbeaters* (2005), Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León, Spain (10 September 2005 - 6 December 2005). © The artist

The final stage would seem to have involved two different processes, which are not mutually exclusive. One allowed the viewer to critically revisit the site of the original deception, in the process reflecting on the range of truth-framing devices that made it possible for the work to be perceived as truth in the first place. The final manifestation of Garcia's project consisted of various didactic elements chronicling events in the life of the artwork (figure 23), thereby facilitating a critical return to these very devices. In this way *Heartbeaters* created a discourse on deception, as well as deception itself. This aspect closes the work back on itself, but it also encourages a critical literacy that may be transferred to other objects, giving the unsuspecting participant a crash course in the arts of rhetoric. Nevertheless, and this is the other process involved at this stage, some

residue of the original lie may still remain. Even though the lie has been unraveled, it may have slightly changed the objects of knowledge it came into contact with during the first stage.

During the final stage the lie can irreversibly attach itself to a range of heterogeneous elements in the mind of the viewer (for example having the capacity to forge a subliminal link between the practice of wearing headphones and the presence of a heartbeater), and circulated in the exchanges between people, objects and discourses, altering these ever so slightly in the process.

### Talking Back

The idea that Garcia's work not only has the capacity to sharpen a viewer's critical faculties, but also, somehow, leave a 'residue' of its false content even after truth-claims have been dropped, points towards a possible effect on the production of subjectivity.

In an essay about Jean Genet, Guattari describes a similar process, whereby Genet brings a 'dreamer function' to bear on the plight of the Black Panthers and the Palestinians in his last novel *Prisoner of Love*.<sup>485</sup> Guattari argues that Genet's 'dreamer function' does not work towards the 'derealization of these movements', but 'is perhaps even a means of conferring on them a more intense subjective consistency.'<sup>486</sup> Genet passes from being a practitioner of 'derealizing fabulation' to the constructor of 'fabulous images' that produce the real'.<sup>487</sup> Although Guattari does not deal directly with deception as it has been discussed thus far, his argument is significant because it leads in a different direction from the claims made for the 'truth' of fictive or deceptive art. I have argued that Bakhtin's figure of the merry rogue can be aligned to such claims, whereby the truth effect of gay deception consists in exposing the ultimate contingency and contextual colouration of discourse, removing its mask and dialogising its content. In other words, by means of untruth, gay deception exposes the ultimate truth of heteroglossia. Such a conceptual figure could be said to highlight the *corrosive* potential of artworks that deal with untruth. By contrast, here Guattari positions art as capable of augmenting reality and granting it a greater 'subjective consistency'. This is linked to the formation of a collective subjectivity in the groups Genet worked with.

Guattari is not the first writer to use the term 'fabulation' in a philosophical context. The term hails from Henri Bergson, who in *The Two Sources of Morality and*

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<sup>485</sup> Jean Genet, *Prisoner of Love* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2003).

<sup>486</sup> Guattari, *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*, p. 221.

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid.*

*Religion* accords fiction the power to ‘prevent or modify action’.<sup>488</sup> This power is for Bergson a function of what he calls ‘closed societies’.<sup>489</sup> Myths, gods and ‘semi-personal powers’ play an essentially regulatory function, helping to bind societies together in rigid or static ways. When the concept is discussed by Guattari, both in his solo writing and with Deleuze, the term is largely emptied of these negative connotations. In *What is Philosophy?* the authors give the term a decidedly creative meaning, associating it with artists and novelists who go beyond the ‘perceptual states and affective transitions of the lived.’<sup>490</sup> If for Bergson fabulation is a function that has real effects on society, then for Deleuze these effects are no longer linked to static regimes of behaviour, rituals, or structural constants. Rather, the fabulatory function has the capacity to ‘invent a people to come’, providing an image of a collectivity in such a way that is processual, collaborative and open.<sup>491</sup> Both in his essay on Genet and his collaborative writing with Deleuze, Guattari explicitly links fabulation to his abiding concern with the production of subjectivity. For Guattari the fabulous image effectively ‘produces the real’<sup>492</sup> — at a certain point exceeding the dominant co-ordinates of language to become ‘self-sufficient, self-referent, self-processual’, and in doing so it becomes an image that can speak back to an audience.<sup>493</sup> In *What is Philosophy?* Guattari and Deleuze associate such a detachment with the construction of monuments or giants.<sup>494</sup> Only once these larger than life forms have been created and isolated can the fabulatory image take on a life of its own.

Early on in Guattari’s essay on Genet he zones in on a key visual metaphor from *Prisoner of Love*. The metaphor involves the vapour from a boiler, which ‘steams up a window, then gradually disappears, leaving the window clear, the landscape suddenly visible and the room extended perhaps to infinity’.<sup>495</sup> This image would seem to hint at the power of something less monumental having a fabulatory function: the ephemeral

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<sup>488</sup> Henri Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1935), p. 89.

<sup>489</sup> The French ‘fabulation’ is rendered as ‘myth-making’ by Bergson’s English translators.

<sup>490</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 171. The concept of ‘fabulation’ also appears in a number of Deleuze’s solo writings, but is never developed at any length. See Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 3-4 and Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp. 150-4, where it is translated as ‘story-telling’, as it also is in Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism* (New York: Zone, 1991), p. 108. For a detailed discussion of the concept in the context of literature see Ronald Bogue, *Deleuzian Fabulation and the Scars of History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010). Perhaps because of its late publication in English, Bogue’s account of fabulation does not reference Guattari’s use of the term in *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*.

<sup>491</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 150.

<sup>492</sup> Guattari, *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*, p. 221.

<sup>493</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>494</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 168, 172.

<sup>495</sup> Genet, *Prisoner of Love*, p. 367.

drift of vapour, or the unofficial spread of a rumour. The sequential nature of the image resonates with the progressive unfolding of Garcia's artwork. If it is possible to align *Heartbeaters* with this image, the question that follows is 'what remains when the steam (or deceptive content) of the work has evaporated?' Just as the fabulatory image has the capacity to augment the power of a group, or even 'invent a people' for Deleuze, perhaps the ultimate constructive effect of Garcia's work is its role in forging the image of a collectivity.<sup>496</sup> However fragile and temporary, the original fiction set in motion a process that produced links between people bound together by the a-signifying rhythms of a heartbeat. As I have said, the 'revelation' that disbanded this collectivity is effectively what terminates its deceptive content. However it also had the effect of isolating the work as an object of aesthetic experience, allowing it to speak back to an audience in a different voice.

This notion of aesthetic isolation recalls Bakhtin's early aesthetic theory discussed in chapter 4. As previously discussed, it is by way of a reading of Bakhtin that Guattari expands the psychoanalytical concept of the part-object so that it becomes a 'part-enunciator'. Although this concept is never connected explicitly to the notion of fabulation, it would appear that similar processes are at stake. In both cases an object is charged with a power that then feeds back into the production of subjectivity. In Bakhtin's account the necessary pre-condition for this is the object's detachment from the given co-ordinates of reality. To repeat a quotation from chapter 4, 'Isolation is [...] the negative condition of the personal, subjective (not psychologically subjective) character of form; it allows the author creator to become a constitutive moment in form'.<sup>497</sup> In Guattari's hands this process works in both directions, so that the form also becomes a constitutive moment in the subject who creatively apprehends it. This moment of isolation in Bakhtin's aesthetic theory sheds light on Guattari's claim that the fabulatory image needs to gain a certain 'consistency' in order to play a part in the production of subjectivity.

Here a problem arises concerning artworks that deceive. If *Heartbeaters* did in fact succeed in soliciting belief, it did so insofar as it mimicked existing narratives and occupied existing circuits of distribution. Practices of mimicry are often what allow lies to go unnoticed because they enable the object of deception to blend into a background of expected behaviors, appearances and events. But if mimicry is *too* successful then the object of deception has less chance of detaching itself from the cognitive circuits of

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<sup>496</sup> Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, p. 150.

<sup>497</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, 'The Problem of Content, Material and Form', p. 308.

meaning and ‘talking back’ to an audience from another place. Put otherwise, here successful mimicry leads to a lower consistency of the fabulatory image in question, and higher consistency leads to less successful mimicry. This is not to say that the name ‘art’ need appear in neon letters above such works in order for consistency to be gained (and deception unraveled) but it does mean that a certain mode of aesthetic (rather than cognitive) perception needs to be mobilised for an object to act as a ‘fabulous image’. Labeling something art can sometimes serve as a short cut to such a mode of perception.

The problem of consistency’s inversely proportional relationship to mimesis can perhaps be overcome by artworks such as *Heartbeaters* that effectively *stage* an act of deception. This performative dimension of the project is arguably what allows an audience the space to reflect on both its critical function in respect to the structures it mimics, and for it to gain consistency as an aesthetic object. In passing from deception to fiction, *Heartbeaters* arrives at a position whereby it has a greater power. Deception serves as a prefatory stage in the deployment of the fabulatory image and fiction is charged with a power from deception, so that the admixture between the two has a greater capacity, for better or worse, to have real effects.

### Lying and tying

Beyond the subject of Genet’s work, and beyond the realm of contemporary art production, what are the different modalities by which deception and fiction can bring forth the Real? Do all fictions that have a ‘constructive’ effect produce ‘fabulous images’ in the sense Guattari uses the term? And what are the broader socio-political stakes in their doing so? To answer these questions it will be useful to return to the terms of chapter 4 and consider deception and fiction in their Symbolic, Imaginary and Real aspects.

In the introduction a senior advisor to the Bush administration, Karl Rove, was quoted as saying of the United States ‘We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality.’<sup>498</sup> Rove is quoted as making a distinction between the ‘reality-based community’ with people who ‘believe that solutions emerge from [...] judicious study of discernible reality’ and another community of ‘history actors’ who create reality.<sup>499</sup> The fact that such a reality was created on the basis of lies in the run up to the

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<sup>498</sup> Suskind, ‘Faith, Certainty and the Presidency of George W. Bush’.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid.

war in Iraq serves as a cautionary tale that warns against uncritically endorsing the power of deception and fiction to shape reality.

A year after Rove testified to the creative power of untruth Naomi Klein labeled 2003 as the year of the fake: ‘fake rationales for war, a fake President dressed as a fake soldier declaring a fake end to combat and then holding up a fake turkey.’<sup>500</sup> The incident to which Klein is referring is Bush’s notorious 2003 ‘mission accomplished’ speech made on the deck of the aircraft Carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, where he emerged from a jet plane in full military regalia to prematurely proclaim victory in Iraq. By the time Bush had made this speech, the false pretext for the original invasion had almost become a reality. The Iraq war has transformed the country into a magnet for terrorists from across the region and helped Ba’athist and religious fundamentalists to forge an unstable alliance against allied forces. The irony is that such factors were part of the raft of lies that allowed for the invasion of Iraq in the first place — before they were true — yet it was only the war itself that brought them into existence. This example illustrates the power of lies to actively shape reality. It could also be allied to the fabulatory function in the work of Bergson, insofar as it involves the creation of a myth (the ‘axis of evil’) that works in the services of a ‘closed society’ (where ‘closed’ should not so much be understood as an adjective describing America as a whole, but a horizon of possibility, a process of *closing* society).

Such lies become reality by means of a series of carefully calibrated semiotic devices that operate performatively on the Symbolic. For Austin, performativity involves a highly codified speech act, which depends on the rules of a given social scenario in order to accomplish an action through language. The extent to which a performative is ‘happy’ (successful) or ‘unhappy’ (unsuccessful) for Austin depends on the context and the authority of the actor in question.<sup>501</sup> Performativity has become a significant leitmotif in much post-structuralist theory, and thinkers such as Derrida and Butler have both questioned the absolute distinction between successful and non-successful speech acts, and expanded the category to account for a range of socio-semiotic effects.<sup>502</sup> In the various speeches, interviews and appearances Bush made during his two terms in office, all manner of semiotic codes were performatively

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<sup>500</sup> Naomi Klein, ‘The Year of The Fake: Don’t Think and Drive’, *The Nation*, 26 January 2004 <<http://www.thenation.com/article/year-fake>> [accessed 01/06/2015].

<sup>501</sup> J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 28.

<sup>502</sup> Butler’s texts that deal with the issue of performativity are referenced in the last chapter (footnote 437). For Derrida’s contribution to the conversation on performatives see Jacques Derrida, ‘Signature, Event, Context’, in *Limited, Inc* (Evanston IL: Northwestern university Press, 1988), pp. 1-23.

manipulated as a means to lend credence to the official lie being propagated. For this reason it is possible to claim that the ‘reality’ the Bush government created through lying was first of all a *Symbolic* reality. Bush and his government together constructed a matrix of semiotic untruths, first nestled within a larger socio-symbolic network of ‘social lies’, but then disseminated via massive circuits of media distribution, quickly saturating Symbolic universes of reference and distorting everyday ‘socially agreed’ reality. The lies of the Bush administration were primarily Symbolic not only because they involved manipulations of semiotic material, but because their performativity, like all performativity, depended on a set of pre-existing conventions in order to be effective. Herein lies one of the problems of endorsing the performative power of deception to construct reality: as well as creating new universes of reference, performative speech acts also bolster the Symbolic structures they rely on. With every declaration of marriage conferred on a couple by a priest, to cite Austin’s example, the power of the priest and the institution from which they derive their authority are strengthened.<sup>503</sup> Likewise, creative deception that operates purely at the level of the Symbolic can only ever operate as a prophylactic against the emergence of new, potentially disruptive information, because according to this model the only sensory data that is accepted as true is that which can be accommodated to existing belief systems and structures of knowledge. In this way they create by means of calcification, layer upon layer until the joints of possibility seize up. In the terms of chapter 4, this amounts to a form of adaptation.

To the category of Symbolic lies and fictions it is possible to add those that are primarily Imaginary. Imaginary lies can be discerned in an extreme form in the pathological category of mythomania.<sup>504</sup> Rabaté describes the mythomaniac as ‘an interested victim of the omnipotence of his desires’, someone who ‘cannot sustain himself in reality and prefers an ideal fiction to a communal reality marked by lack, inadequacy, frustration’.<sup>505</sup> Although Rabaté uses the term fiction, mythomania is usually considered to be a form of pathological lying. It invariably involves the piling of lie upon lie over a considerable period of time as a means to stave off the effects of the Real. This is not to say that mythomaniacs are unaware of a ‘reality’ beyond their lies,

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<sup>503</sup> Austin, *How To Do Things*, p. 5.

<sup>504</sup> The psychologist Ernest Dupré (1862-1921) is credited with inventing the category of ‘mythomania’, a ‘confabulatory delusional state which derives from a “disequilibrium in the imaginative faculty”’. Ernest Dupré and Jean Logre, ‘Confabulatory delusional states’, in *The Clinical Roots of the Schizophrenia Concept: Translations of Seminal European Contributions on Schizophrenia*, ed. by John Cutting and Michael Shepherd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 157-167 (p. 162).

<sup>505</sup> Rabaté, *Ethics of the Lie*, p. 126.

for often the subtlety of their methods requires them to have a firm foothold in the Symbolic and an accurate sense of what is believable. In this sense the mythomaniac is often highly adept at manipulating truth-framing devices, but unlike the kinds of lies and fictions that have primarily Symbolic effects, mythomania involves the construction of the self and reality according to an Imaginary fantasy of totality. The lies that the mythomaniac uses are creative insofar as they progressively fill out the gaps in an underlying fantasy that remains curiously static. Ernest Dupré, the French psychologist who coined the term mythomania writes of the process as follows:

As each invented idea is produced, it is then registered as if it were an incontrovertible fact, inscribed, as it were, on a 'mythomaniac dossier'. After a while, secondary interpretations and the guiding influence of emotional preoccupations then consolidate a complex system which constitutes the more or less permanent phase of a confabulatory delusional state.<sup>506</sup>

The elaboration of a mythomaniacal delusion could therefore be considered 'processual' — to recall a key adjective deployed by Guattari to describe fabulation — but the way mythomaniacal lies progressively build do not create new vectors of subjectivation. The underlying ideal that yokes them together remains fixed, with each new lie only serving to increase the power of an underlying fantasy. When the Real finally does come to pop the mendacious bubble it can have a devastating effect, as illustrated by Rabaté with the case of Jean-Claude Romand, a French family man who at the risk of having his lies unmasked, killed his parents, wife and two children before attempting to commit suicide. Romand had spun a web of deception stretching back 18 years, involving made up qualifications, friends and a job at the World Health Organization. When his narcissistic fantasy finally looked like it would be found out, Romand made a *passage à l'acte* as means to ensure the survival not of himself, but of the Imaginary fantasy he had built brick by brick.<sup>507</sup> As Romand himself admitted: 'When I don't know how to surmount an obstacle, I destroy it.'<sup>508</sup> Such an extreme example highlights the essentially narcissistic character of deception and fiction if they remain in the Imaginary, which although still 'constructive', also, invariably end with the destructive emergence of the Real.

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<sup>506</sup> Dupré and Logre, 'Confabulatory', p. 165.

<sup>507</sup> A number of films deal with the case: *Time Out* (2001) by Lauren Cantet, *The Adversary* (2002) by Nicole Garcia and *La Vida de Nadie* (2003) by Eduard Cortes, as well as a book: Emmanuel Carrere, *The Adversary: A True Story of Monstrous Deception* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2002).

<sup>508</sup> Jean-Claude Romand quoted in Rabaté, *Ethics of the Lie*, p. 125.

The third category of constructive deception or fiction involves the Real, but it cannot be inscribed within this domain entirely. This is because from a Lacanian perspective the Real is considered ontologically anterior to codifications of truth and falsehood. It is however possible to speak of a ‘sinthomatic’ form of deception or fiction that binds the three orders together in a novel way. To recapitulate some of the points made in chapter 4, the concept of the sinthome constitutes a way of allowing a psychic construction to hang together in a way that avoids static laws of psychic coherence (such as those embodied in the Oedipus complex) in favour of a process of existential unfolding. Here one is reminded of Lacan’s description of James Joyce as a ‘pure artificer [...] a man of know-how’<sup>509</sup> who managed to make for himself a new, particularized master signifier. If performativity has as its ultimate outcome a bolstering of the Symbolic ring of the Borromean knot, and mythomania an expansion of the Imaginary, then a sinthomatic effect of untruth has the capacity to incorporate elements of all three registers as a means to create genuinely novel subjective effects.

From a sinthomatic perspective, deception and fiction could be seen as processes of untying and retying respectively. For its part, deception has the capacity to undermine the legality of signification, to distort and disrupt established norms and conventions, and shrug off the obligation to manipulate language in the socially sanctioned manner. In this way deception pulls at the Symbolic chord that both helps produce subjects, and knots them together through language. Yet in so doing it pulls in the same direction as capitalism, further exacerbating the decline of the Symbolic. In both cases the Symbolic’s general condition of malleability is revealed.

And yet from this condition of malleability new ‘fabulous’ images can emerge. If deception unties, then fiction reties, and as with any common knot, the retying makes use of the untying. The corrosive effects of deception and the constructive effects of fiction join each other in a double movement of untying and retying, a movement that echoes the relation between breakage and repair. At the same time deception undermines the Symbolic, something comes to be re-inscribed at the point of collapse. This point of collapse itself becomes a new particularised point of identification, crystallising attention on the ‘fabulous image’ that comes to be in its place. It draws heterogeneous semiotic materials into its orbit, and slowly these give it a consistency that grows and changes with each new addition. Once a certain threshold of consistency is achieved the fiction has the power to ‘speak back’ as a partial enunciator, and by ‘making use of it’ an open, processual, and collective dimension emerges. It is only at

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<sup>509</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XXIII*, p. 141 (9 March 1976).

this stage that the fiction achieves the status of an ethico-aesthetic object: ethical insofar as it feeds back into the production of subjectivity, and aesthetic insofar as this can only occur on the basis of an aesthetic approach to the object in question. Artworks that experiment with truth in this way can contribute to the emergence of a wider ethico-aesthetic paradigm 'after transgression'.

## Conclusion

Like the topological figures that loop their way through Lacan's final seminars, in this thesis ethics and aesthetics have been treated as concepts that undergo semi-continuous transformation. Neither can be taken as concepts that 'belong' to a presupposed subject, because they help reformulate the terrain on which this subject is itself constructed. Complex and variable in their historical interrelations, ethics and aesthetics nevertheless converge on processes and practices of subjectivation.

Since its inception over a century ago, psychoanalysis has remained focused on questions of subjectivity. It has been one of the ambitions of this thesis to demonstrate that psychoanalysis, and its radicalisation in the form of schizoanalysis, offers a rich set of resources for thinking through how the subject changes in reciprocal dialogue with the social, and moreover, that art has a part to play in this process. The second half of this conclusion will be devoted to looking at the particular relationship between art and psychoanalysis in more detail. Before this can be done, it is worth recapitulating on some of the main propositions that have been put forward thus far.

Firstly, despite their variability, I have tried to show that the relationship between ethics and aesthetics historically stabilises into conceptually coherent paradigms. The first half of this thesis was devoted to demonstrating that one such paradigm can be articulated around the concept of 'transgression'. A longer study would no doubt be able to isolate other ethico-aesthetic paradigms, perhaps tracing the roots of transgression back to a time when the ethical function of art centred on its presumed edifying effects.<sup>510</sup>

Within the paradigm of transgression it was my ambition to show that there are numerous typological variations. Chapters 1-3 were an attempt to isolate some of the different 'logics' of transgression in the work of a number of European and American post-war artists. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 sought to elaborate a number of concepts that embodied ethico-aesthetic relationships *beyond* transgression. In this latter half it was

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<sup>510</sup> In the UK, perhaps the preeminent figure associated with such an edifying paradigm was John Ruskin. In his wildly successful *Modern Painters* Ruskin claimed that the artist had 'the responsibility of a preacher' in the delivery of moral truths. See John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, 6 vols (London: George Allen, 1898-1903), I (1898), p. xlvii. The idea that art (visual or otherwise) can be of use in morally educating members of its audience finds a contemporary supporter in the philosopher Noël Carroll, who writes that 'Like the use of heuristic devices, such as diagrams, in the education of medical students, the fact that literary examples are generally less messy than real-life cases aids the refinement of our practice of moral judgment.' Noël Carroll, 'Art and Ethical Criticism: An Overview of Recent Directions of Research', *Ethics*, 110:2 (2000), 350-387 (p. 368).

not my intention to show that these concepts already constitute a distinct ethico-aesthetic paradigm, but rather to deploy vectors along which a new paradigm might develop, inspired by a series of more recent works of art. It would be disingenuous to claim that these vectors emerge from artworks like water from a spring, bubbling up through the cultural bedrock in pure form. While in each chapter it has been my ambition to allow artworks to lead me toward new concepts, conclusions, and ideas, these ideas have obviously not passed into the argument in an unmediated fashion. At every step of the way the significance of particular artworks has been articulated in dialogue with particular theoretical standpoints. The work of Lacan, Guattari and to a lesser extent Bakhtin have all helped to bring the various relationships between ethics and aesthetics that artworks embody into sharper focus. Perhaps with the exception of Guattari, some of the resources these thinkers offer have been underused in the theorisation of contemporary art. Secondary texts on Lacan abound, but few of them discuss his late work in conjunction with contemporary art. One of the original contributions of this thesis is to demonstrate that the work of these thinkers provides a rich reservoir of concepts that have utility in exposing aspects of artworks that would otherwise remain concealed. While it is important to remember that many of these concepts are rooted in particular contexts and debates, as much as possible it has been the ambition to follow Bakhtin's example and creatively 'reaccentuate' concepts and motifs rather than fix them into particular disciplinary arrangements.

This process of reaccentuation does not entail amplifying theory so that it speaks at a volume above that of artworks. Theory, in this sense, has not been used in a meta-textual way, able to explain the hidden message of artworks while placing itself beyond question. It is my claim that Lacan's work in particular should be treated as a historically situated praxis that changes in dialogue with wider social transformations. In this way, artworks are given an equal voice to the theoretical resources under discussion, and the conversation between the two makes it possible to better discern the changes to the social that have been grouped under the concept of the decline of the Symbolic. Insofar as the relationship between art and theory is, in this thesis, primarily a relationship between art and psychoanalytic theory, the relationship between the two bears a little more consideration. Before arriving at my own conclusions as to how this relationship might be mediated, it is worth briefly going over some of the problems that have historically beset psychoanalytically inflected studies on art.

## Sublimation and its Discontents

As Parveen Adams points out, the attitude of psychoanalysis towards art is often characterised by a certain false modesty, ‘expressed in the formula “art has much to teach psychoanalysis, psychoanalysis has very little to say to art”’.<sup>511</sup> This has traditionally resulted in a rather one-sided relationship. If psychoanalytical writings deal with specific artworks at all, they often do so in such a way that illustrates a particular psychoanalytical concept or theory. In his discussion of works such as Holbein’s *Ambassadors* and Piola’s *Anamorphosis of Rubens* discussed in chapter 1, it could be said that Lacan himself is guilty of using art in such an instrumental fashion. In *Seminar VII* precious little attention is paid to the specificity of these artworks beyond their significance as examples of anamorphosis. As well as attempting to steer clear of such tendencies by attending to specific works of art and the conditions under which they were produced, this thesis has also avoided the concept most often used to mediate the relationship between art and psychoanalysis: sublimation.

One of the reasons for avoiding the concept of sublimation is that it places considerable emphasis on the role of the artist in creative production. In so far as it considers artworks as diversions of the individual’s libidinal energy away from sexual aims, sublimation treats the artist as an analysand, and their libidinal investments come under close scrutiny. This sometimes results in a psychobiographic approach, in which an artist’s personal history is transformed into a master key that unlocks the doors of understanding to particular artworks.

Another drawback of using the concept of sublimation to mediate between art and psychoanalysis is that it hinges upon the dubious notion of a ‘higher cultural aim’ for libido. Freed from its erotic origins, libido becomes desexualised in Freud’s theory, finding its place among the venerated objects of ‘civilised’ culture. It is therefore fundamentally ill-suited to accounting for transgressive artworks that frequently take their aim at such culture.<sup>512</sup> It is true that the concept of sublimation undergoes

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<sup>511</sup> Adams, *Art: Sublimation or Symptom*, p. xiii.

<sup>512</sup> For an extended application of Freud’s theory of sublimation see Sigmund Freud, ‘Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. by James Strachey, Vol. 11 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), pp. 63-137. The problems with the notion of ‘higher cultural aims’ go beyond the difficulty in squaring sublimation with works of transgressive art. From the beginning, the theorists of the Frankfurt School looked upon the social esteem accorded to objects of sublimation in Freud’s theory as way to smuggle bourgeois cultural values into psychoanalysis. In *Minima Moralia*, Adorno wrote unequivocally that ‘Artists do not sublimate. That they neither satisfy nor repress their desires, but transform them into socially desirable achievements, their works, is a psycho-analytical illusion; incidentally legitimate works of art are today

something of an overhaul in Lacan's seminar on ethics, where it becomes associated with transgression through its indexical link to the Real.<sup>513</sup> By the time of *Seminar XXIII* this link takes on a different character, and the sinthome becomes a name for an artistic process that directly participates in the Real, rather than lingering in its proximity. Without a feat of theoretical gymnastics then, it would be difficult to use *both* the concept of sublimation *and* the sinthome to bridge the gap between art and psychoanalysis, insofar as the two appear to be mutually exclusive in Lacan's work.

### From Diagnosis...

If not through recourse to the concept of sublimation, then what precisely has brokered the union between art and psychoanalysis in this thesis? In the first place, psychoanalysis has levied a certain diagnostic power. This power has not so much been directed towards artists, but rather towards artworks and social forms. More precisely, artworks have been treated as *symptoms* of particular social forms. In this way it was possible to diagnose the decline of the Symbolic as an underlying factor in the shift away from an ethico-aesthetic paradigm of transgression. This proposition — that changes to capitalism have had far-reaching effects on the Symbolic structures that anchor meaning and prohibition — sits at the centre of the argument, and is formulated on the basis that artworks constitute symptoms of social change.

While a symptom necessarily points towards an underlying cause, it does not necessarily do so in a direct or unmediated fashion. A symptomatic relationship is not a wholly deterministic relationship. In Lacan's early work one finds a repudiation of the notion of a symptom as a direct route back to a cause, which is what distinguishes it from a medical symptom.<sup>514</sup> The symptom cannot be found at the end of a piece of string that one follows back through the maze of history to an original source. In Lacan's work there is no universally valid meaning of any given symptom. The relationship between a symptom and its cause is one that is refracted through the networks of the Symbolic, at every step picking up semiotic baggage that changes its character. This is what Lacan calls the 'formal envelope' of the symptom, but it could be said that it is an envelope that paradoxically changes the character of the message it contains. It is not simply that causes generate symptoms and symptoms realise causes,

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without exception socially undesired.' Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 212-13.

<sup>513</sup> Lacan, *Seminar VII*.

<sup>514</sup> Lacan, *Seminar II*, p. 320 (29 June 1955).

but rather that symptoms have a part to play in the co-construction of the cause itself.

One way of bridging the gap between art and psychoanalysis can, therefore, be found in their respective symptomologies. In a short interview entitled 'Mysticism and Masochism', Deleuze speaks of symptomology as a method that has as much to do with art as it does medicine: 'symptomology appeals to a kind of neutral point, a limit that is premedical or sub-medical [...]: it's all about drawing a "portrait". The work of art exhibits symptoms, as do the body or the soul'.<sup>515</sup> Treating artworks as symptoms of underlying social forms places their author in the position of analyst, rather than analysand. No longer the focus of speculation on their presumed psychic dysfunctions or personal history, the artist becomes the creator of 'portraits' — a process that involves grouping and regrouping signs in new ways. Just as James Parkinson was able to re-order signs in such a way to isolate Parkinson's disease at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so too can artists and writers like Sacher-Masoch bring together signs that reveal socio-cultural formations in completely new ways.<sup>516</sup>

In chapter 1 of this thesis the work of the Viennese Actionists was seen to operate in a similar diagnostic mode. While their names did not come to label the socio-cultural forms they isolated in the same way as Masoch, their work nevertheless created a symptomology of an Austrian social sphere that had not been fully de-nazified. Thinking alongside such artworks entails adding another layer to the artists' symptomologies, so that the mode with which the Actionists diagnosed underlying social ills in Austria *itself* becomes symptomatic. The way in which they created a portrait of Austrian social life by bringing together particular symptoms was underpinned by specific 'logics' of transgression. Treating these logics *themselves* as symptoms, and following them forward in time, makes it possible to discern the ways in which the Symbolic changes. In different ways, the first three chapters of this thesis could all be said to operate in a predominantly diagnostic mode. Artworks have been selected and grouped together in specific ways that point towards a set of underlying causes.

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<sup>515</sup> Gilles Deleuze, 'Mysticism and Masochism', in *Desert Islands and Other Texts*, ed. by David Lapoujade (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), pp. 131-134 (p. 132). Elsewhere Deleuze credits Nietzsche with inventing a symptomological method. See Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. xi. The contours of this method are sketched in Friedrich Nietzsche, 'The Philosopher as Cultural Physician', in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the early 1870's*, ed. by Daniel Breazeale (London: Humanities International Press, 1979), pp. 69-76.

<sup>516</sup> For an extended treatment of Masochism see Gilles Deleuze, 'Coldness and Cruelty', in *Masochism* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), pp. 9-138.

### ...To Production

If the engagement between art and psychoanalysis in this thesis is mediated through the common method of symptomology, something changes when the concept of the symptom is progressively reworked and becomes the *sinthome*. The focus is no longer simply diagnostic, but also productive. When viewed in a sinthomatic way, artworks not only have the capacity to reveal something about the changing patterns of social life, but to actively intervene in this life, producing vectors of change. This makes the bridge between art and psychoanalysis into something more pragmatic, where the goal is not only to use psychoanalysis to ‘read’ works of art and reveal their underlying causal dynamics, but to bring psychoanalysis and art together into variable composites that can construct new objects, ideas, and practices. In this way the bond between psychoanalysis and art is forged in the crucible of a pragmatism that aims to supply new resources for processes of subjectivation. This, I would argue, is a thoroughly ethico-aesthetic enterprise.

The shift from a symptomology to a sinthomology, from diagnostics to production, is a shift that finds its progressive expression in a movement from the beginning to the end of this thesis. If the arguments in chapters 1-3 operated in a predominantly diagnostic mode, then this was gradually supplemented with a set of concepts that operate in a more productive way. This shift to production is however flanked by two dangers. These have already been touched on in chapters 4-6, but here it is worth briefly drawing the loose ends of these arguments together and outlining them in a more schematic form.

On the one hand production can result in the ossification of the existing structures that condition subjectivity. As was shown in chapters 5 and 6, production can easily lead to stultifying renovations and stronger egos as it can experimental repairs and ‘fabulous’ images. These productive forces are marked by a sclerotic reaction to the decline of the Symbolic — reactions that knot the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary in ways that duplicate one or other of the elements already present.

The discussion of ordinary psychosis in chapter 4 signaled a second danger that potentially accompanies production: the loss of subjectivity. A note of caution accompanies both Lacan and Guattari’s calls for practices of subjective experimentation. In different ways, they show us that production can unleash flows of desire, or regimes of *jouissance*, that overwhelm the subject to such an extent that it

becomes difficult to speak of a subject at all. As demonstrated in part 1, this was the fate that befell Antigone: eager to escape Creon's over-codified social sphere, she plunges headlong towards subjective annihilation. In a similar vein Guattari, together with Deleuze, warns of the dangers of falling into a subjective 'black hole', which they relate to a 'precocious' deterritorialisation that occurs too quickly, too violently.<sup>517</sup>

Treading a path between these two dangers requires some diagnostic focus to be retained, if only to show where the dangers lie. It also requires attention to be paid to the specific ways in which the production of subjectivity is supported. The concept of the *sinthome* is just such a principle of support that treads a fine line between the subjective black hole of psychosis on the one hand, and sclerotic production on the other. The imperative, then, is not only to symptomise, nor simply to unleash desire in uncontrollable ways, but to scaffold, modulate, and use artworks as supports for subjective mutations. This is one of the crucial propositions that can be drawn from part 2. The supports artworks can provide in processes of subjectivation have the capacity to facilitate unique orientations for a subject that is 're-inscribed' in the Other, rather than irrevocably withdrawn. In respect to the main argument of this thesis, my suggestion is that this position has the capacity to bind ethics and aesthetics in a new paradigmatic relationship beyond transgression.

Despite the theoretical through-lines, micro-arguments, and numerous asides, the main focus of this thesis is indeed the relationship between ethics and aesthetics in contemporary art. The very fact that it has been possible to point towards more than one paradigm for the relationship at stake shows that ethics and aesthetics do not relate to one another in a fixed way. It has not been my ambition to exhaustively catalogue all the possible permutations between the two. Rather, I have tried to show that ethics and aesthetics periodically stabilise into specific 'ethico-aesthetic paradigms' within contemporary art, and that these paradigms form and deform in response to wider socio-cultural changes.

Before drawing the conclusion to a close, it is worth recapitulating the three overarching ambitions outlined in the introduction: 1) to account for the patterns of historical emergence of the ethico-aesthetic paradigm of transgression; 2) to account for the historical decline of this paradigm; and 3) to trace the contours of an ethico-aesthetic paradigm 'after' transgression. The first of these ambitions was realised through a close look at a number of artworks and the socio-cultural conditions from which they emerged. An argument was built over the course of these three chapters that

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<sup>517</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 334.

transgressive artworks require a ‘strong’ Symbolic order to react against. The second ambition was realised over the same three chapters by means of the proposition that the Symbolic was in decline in the contexts discussed, leading to the decline of transgression itself. The third and final ambition was geared less towards convincingly diagnosing an existing state of affairs than actively producing a range of possibilities. This approach, characterised more by production than diagnosis, emphasises the modal component of the question ‘how *might* one live?’, opening up a space of possibilities, rather than enumerating a set of obligations.

In the introduction it was also argued that a movement away from the ethico-aesthetic paradigm of transgression represents a transition from a reactive to a progressively active mode. In fact, all of the artworks discussed in this thesis have a certain *active* role in co-constructing their cause, insofar as they are symptomatic in the way outlined above. Nevertheless, the extent to which this co-construction takes place is not distributed evenly. The shift from transgressive to sinthomatic artworks is consistent with an increase in the magnitude by which something has the capacity to *self-cause*. In the Spinoist tradition, knowledge of causes becomes a central tenet of ethics. From a psychoanalytic perspective, an understanding of the way a subject is acted upon supplies them with an opportunity to change the nature of this causal relationship. The transitions from a symptomology to a sinthomology — from a diagnostics to a production — all push in this same direction, augmenting the capacity for a subject to become their own cause. My suggestion is that in transgression’s relationship to the Name-of-the-Father (or the superego, or the state) there persists a relationship of external causality. Transgressive artworks remain trapped by the targets of their critique. The challenge to transform external causality into self-causality (where this ‘self’ can belong as much to a group as to an individual) is congruent with a shift towards the post-transgressive ethico-aesthetic paradigm this thesis has attempted to theorise and advance.

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