

Trauma: A Deceptive Lure

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The Real shows itself in multiple ways - what better place to begin with than Freud's inaugural dream on Irma's injection? Its two parts conclude with a figuration of the Real. In the conclusion of the first part (the conversation between Irma and Freud), this is obvious: the look into Irma's throat renders the Real in the guise of the primordial flesh, the palpitation of the life substance as the Thing itself, in its disgusting dimension of a cancerous outgrowth. However, in the second part, the comic symbolic exchange/interplay of the three doctors also ends up with the Real, this time in its opposite aspect - the Real of writing, of the meaningless formula of trimethylamine. The difference hinges on the different starting point: if we end with the Imaginary (the mirror-confrontation of Freud and Irma), we get the Real in its imaginary dimension, as a horrifying primordial image that

cancels the imagery itself; if we start with the Symbolic (the exchange of arguments between the three doctors), we get the signifier itself transformed into the real of a meaningless letter/formula. Needless to add that these two figures are the two opposite aspects of the Real: the abyss of the primordial Life-Thing and the meaningless letter/formula (as in the Real of modern science). And, perhaps, one should add to them the third Real, the "Real of the illusion," the Real of a pure semblance, the mysterious *je ne sais quoi*, the unfathomable "something" that introduces a self-division into an ordinary object, so that the sublime dimension shines through it - what Lacan called *l'objet perit a*.

One should thus focus on the way the three terms of the triad Real-Imaginary-Symbolic are inherently interwoven: the entire triad is reflected in each of its three elements. There are three modalities of the Real: the "real Real" (the horrifying Thing, the primordial object, from Irma's throat to the Alien), the "symbolic Real" (the real as consistency: the signifier reduced to a senseless formula, like the quantum physics formulas which can no longer be translated back into - or related to - the everyday experience of our life-world), and the "imaginary Real" (the mysterious *je ne sais quoi*, the unfathomable "something" on account of which the sublime dimension shines through an ordinary object). The Real is thus effectively all three dimensions at the same time: the abyssal vortex that ruins every consistent structure; the mathematized consistent structure of reality; the fragile pure appearance. And, in a strictly homologous way, there are three modalities of the Symbolic: the real (the signifier reduced to a senseless formula), the imaginary (the Jungian "symbols"), and the symbolic (speech, meaningful language). There are also three modalities of the Imaginary: the real (fantasy, which is precisely an imaginary (the image as such in its fundamental function of a decoy), and the symbolic (again, the Jungian "symbols" or New Age archetypes).

The Real as the terrifying primordial abyss which swallows everything, dissolving all identities, is well known in literature in its multiple guises, from Poe's maelstrom and Kurtz's "horror" at the end of Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* to Pip in Melville's *Moby Dick* who, cast to the bottom of the ocean, experiences the demon God:

Carried down alive to wondrous depths, where strange shapes of the unwarped primal world glided to and fro before his passive eyes ... Pip saw the multitudinous, God-omnipresent, coral insects, that out of the firmament of waters heaved the colossal orbs. he saw God's foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke to it; and therefore his shipmates called him mad.

Against this notion of the Real as the ultimate traumatic unbearable Thing which we are unable to confront directly, since its direct presence is too blinding, we should ask the question: what if this very notion that the delusive everyday reality is a veil concealing the Horror of the unbearable Thing is false, what if the ultimate veil concealing the Real is the very notion of the horrible Thing behind the veil?

The logic of this reversal is ultimately the same as the passage from the special to the general theory of relativity in Einstein. While the special theory already introduces the notion of curved space, it conceives of this curvature as the effect of matter: it is the presence of matter which curves the space, i.e. empty space would be non-curved. With the passage to the general theory, the causality is reversed: far from CAUSING the curvature of space, matter is its EFFECT. In the same way, the Real - the Thing - is not so much the inert presence which "curves" the symbolic space (introducing gaps and inconsistencies in it), but, rather, the effect of these gaps and inconsistencies.

This crucial insight also enables us to oppose all Freudian revisionists, from Jung to Deleuze. The fact that Deleuze borrowed a key term (rhizome) from Jung¹ is not a mere insignificant accident - it points towards a deeper link. In his early text on Sacher-Masoch (1961), Deleuze extensively relies on Jung in his critique of Freud.² His reapproach to Freud concerns three clearly interconnected features. First, because of his focus on the figure of the father, Freud neglects the key role of the woman (mother) in masochism: the masochist contract is a contract with the all-devouring Mother; as such, masochism stages a "regression" towards the earlier period of (individual and collective) history in which women played a crucial role in society - Sacher-Masoch cannot be properly understood without Bachofen. Second, the Freudian unconscious remains the "superficial" hysterical unconscious, the unconscious of an individual caught in the Oedipal struggle with paternal authority; Freud ignores the deeper collective (pre-individual) strata of the "maternal" unconscious, i.e., he does not "enter into the profound dimensions where the image of the Mother reigns in its own terms." Third, Freud denies symbolic autonomy to the unconscious, reducing it to a shadow theatre reflecting what goes on in non-symbolic reality, either in real social life or in the biological real of the instincts. In contrast to Freud, Jung was much more sensitive to all three to these features: he was aware of the key fundamental role of the maternal principle later repressed by the paternal one; he clearly identified the need to penetrate beneath the "superficial" hysterical-individual-Oedipal unconscious to the collective pre-Oedipal one; he elaborated the

autonomous universe of primordial symbols ("imagos") which are not to be interpreted as pointing towards another reality, but are themselves the unsurpassable horizon of meaning: "It was not left to [Freud] to grasp the role of original Images. ... The irreducible datum of the unconscious is the symbol itself, and not an ultimate symbolized." There is thus a direct lineage from Jung to *Anti-Oedipus*: the idea that, beneath the "superficial" Freudian unconscious in alliance with consciousness, there is the "true" impersonal unconscious which explodes the Oedipal triangle has Jungian origins written all over it. In this way, of course, the whole point of Freud's discovery of the unconscious is missed: it is not a simple "decentering" towards a more "fundamental" unconscious as the true center of human personality, but, on the contrary, the total desubstantialization of the unconscious - Freud's whole point is to separate his unconscious from the impersonal "primitive" unconscious of *Lebensphilosophie*. This reference to Jung also prevents Deleuze from fully deploying and properly understanding the consequences of his own elaboration of the notion of the "masochist contract," i.e., of the way this contract (with the women to whom the masochist cedes authority) undermines paternal authority:

The application of the paternal law is delivered back into the hands of the Woman or the Mother. The masochist holds out for something specific in this transference: *that the pleasure that the law forbids be given to him precisely through the means of the law*. For the pleasure that the paternal law forbids, he will taste through the law, as soon as the law in all its severity is applied to him by the woman. ... his extreme submission signifies that he is offering up the father and the paternal law to derision. ... *The same law which forbids me from realizing a desire on pain of the consequent punishment is now the law which puts the punishment first and orders me accordingly to satisfy the desire*: here we have a properly masochistic form of humour.

What Deleuze does not fully take into account is the strictly limited nature of the masochist "regression": far from simply "regressing" from the paternal to the maternal level, the masochist, WHILE REMAINING WITHIN THE DOMAIN OF THE PATERNAL (contract), reintroduces the Woman as the partner in the contract - not in order to fully enjoy the Woman, but in order to MOCKINGLY UNDERMINE PATERNAL AUTHORITY. The masochist thus stages an uncanny short-circuit, a monstrous travesty of the Law: in her very elevation to the undisputed Master whose every whim the masochist is obliged to obey, the woman is turned into a puppet effectively controlled by her slave who controls the game, writing its rules - the explicit asymmetry of the masochist contract (man's subordination to

woman) relies on an opposite asymmetry at the level of the position of enunciation. The humour of masochism is therefore not directed only at the figure of the father: it relies on the ridiculous (and, simultaneously, monstrous) incompatibility or discord between the symbolic place of symbolic power and the element that occupies it. Is therefore masochism, the masochist contract, not the ultimate proof of the fact that "Woman is one of the Names-of-the-Father"? To put it in Lacan's terms: the wager (and the deception) of the masochist is that *Woman* exists. Deleuze's "the Woman or the Mother" is here indicative: for Lacan, Woman (*LA Femme*) only exists qua Mother (*quod matrem*) - where, then, is here the place for a woman who is not mother, for the void of feminine subjectivity proper?

What, then, is the Real? Jonathan Lear³ demonstrates how Freud's "pre-Socratic" turn to Eros and Thanatos as the two basic polar forces of the universe is a false escape, a pseudo-explanation generated by his inability to properly conceptualize the dimension of "beyond the pleasure principle" he encountered in his clinical work. After establishing the pleasure principle as the "swerve" which defines the functioning of our psychic apparatus, Freud is compelled to take note of the phenomena (primarily repetitions of traumatic experiences) which disrupt this functioning: they form an exception which cannot be accounted for in the terms of the pleasure principle. It was "at this point that Freud covers over the crucial nugget of his own insight: that the mind can disrupt its own functioning." Instead of trying to conceptualize this break (negativity), as such, in its modalities, he wants to ground it in ANOTHER, "deeper," positivity. In philosophical terms, the mistake is here the same as that of Kant according to Hegel: after Kant discovers the inner inconsistency of our experiential reality, he feels compelled to posit the existence of another, inaccessible, true reality of Things-in-themselves, instead of accepting this inconsistency:

Freud is not in the process of discovering a new life force, he is in the process of trying to cover over a trauma to psychoanalytic theory. In this way, invoking Plato and the ancients gives a false sense of legitimacy and security.

One cannot but fully agree with Lear: far from being the name of an unbearable traumatic fact unacceptable for most of us (the fact that we "strive towards death"), the introduction of Thanatos as a cosmic principle (and the retroactive elevation of libido into Eros as the other cosmic principle) is *an attempt to cover the true trauma*. The apparent "radicalization" is effectively a philosophical domestication: the break which disrupts the functioning of the universe - its as it were ontological fault - is

transformed into one of the two positive cosmic principles, thus reestablishing the pacifying harmonious vision of the universe as the battlefield of the two opposing principles. (And the theological implications here are crucial: instead of thinking to the end the subversive deadlock of monotheism, Freud regresses to pagan wisdom.) Does, however, as Lear seems to think, Lacan repeat Freud's mistake and again locate the cause of the break in some preexisting positive external entity, like the Thing, *das Ding*, the impenetrable substance of the Real? One should refer again to the general theory of relativity in which matter, far from CAUSING the curvature of the space, is its EFFECT: in the same way, the Lacanian Real - the Thing - is not so much the inert presence which "curves" the symbolic space (introducing breaks in it), but, rather, the effect of these breaks.

This notion of shift also allows us a new approach to Nietzsche who, in one and the same text (*Beyond Good and Evil*), seems to advocate two opposed epistemological stances: on the one side, the notion of truth as the unbearable Real Thing, as dangerous, lethal even, like the direct gaze into Plato's sun, so that the problem is how much of truth a man can endure without diluting or falsifying it; on the other side, the "postmodern" notion that appearance is more valuable than stupid reality, that, ultimately, there is no last Reality, just the interplay of multiple appearances, so that one should abandon the very opposition between reality and appearance - man's greatness is that he is able to give priority to brilliant aesthetic appearance over gray reality? So, in Badiou's terms, the passion of the Real versus the passion of semblance. Show are we to read TOGETHER these two opposed stances? Is Nietzsche here simply inconsistent, oscillating between two mutually exclusive views? Or is there a "third way"? That is to say, what if the two opposed options (passion of the Real / passion of the semblance) render palpable Nietzsche's struggle, his failure to articulate the "right" position whose formulation eluded him?

A reference to Levi-Strauss's exemplary analysis, from his *Structural Anthropology*, of the spatial disposition of buildings in the Winnebago, one of the Great Lakes tribes, might be of some help here.⁴ The tribe is divided into two sub-groups ("moieties"), "those who are from above" and "those who are from below"; when we ask an individual to draw on a piece of paper, or on sand, the ground-plan of his/her village (the spatial disposition of cottages), we obtain two quite different answers, depending on his/her belonging to one or the other sub-group. Both perceive the village as a circle; but for one sub-group, there is within this circle another circle of central houses, so that we have two concentric circles, while for the other sub-group, the circle is split into two by a clear dividing line. In other words,

a member of the first sub-group (let us call it “conservative-corporatist”) perceives the ground-plan of the village as a ring of houses more or less symmetrically disposed around the central temple, whereas a member of the second (“revolutionary-antagonistic”) sub-group perceives his/her village as two distinct heaps of houses separated by an invisible frontier... The point Levi-Strauss wants to make is that this example should in no way entice us into cultural relativism, according to which the perception of social space depends on the observer’s group-belonging: the very splitting into the two “relative” perceptions implies a hidden reference to a constant - not the objective, “actual” disposition of buildings but a traumatic kernel, a fundamental antagonism the inhabitants of the village were unable to symbolize, to account for, to “internalize,” to come to terms with, an imbalance in social relations that prevented the community from stabilizing itself into a harmonious whole. The two perceptions of the ground-plan are simply two mutually exclusive endeavors to cope with this traumatic antagonism, to heal its wound via the imposition of a balanced symbolic structure. It is here that one can see in what precise sense the Real intervenes through anamorphosis. We have first the “actual,” “objective,” arrangement of the houses, and then its two different symbolizations which both distort, in an anamorphic way, the actual arrangement. However, the “real” is here not the actual arrangement, but the traumatic core of the social antagonism which distorts the tribe members’ view of the actual antagonism. The Real is thus the disavowed X on account of which our vision of reality is anamorphically distorted. (And, incidentally, this three-levels “dispositif” is strictly homologous to Freud’s three-levels “dispositif” of the interpretation of dreams: the real kernel of the dream is not the dream’s latent thought which is displaced/translated into the explicit texture of the dream, but the unconscious desire which inscribes itself through the very distortion of the latent thought into the explicit texture.)

Back to Nietzsche, it should now be clear what his dilemma means: everything is not just the interplay of appearances, there is a Real - however, this Real is not the inaccessible Thing, but the Gap which prevents our access to it, the “rock” of the antagonism which distorts our view of the perceived object through a partial perspective. And, again, the “truth” is not the “real” state of things, i.e. the “direct” view of the object without perspectival distortion, but the very Real of the antagonism which causes perspectival distortion. The site of truth is not the way “things really are in themselves,” beyond their perspectival distortions, but the very gap, passage, which separates one from another perspective, the gap (in this case: social antagonism) which makes the two perspectives radically

incommensurable. The “Real as impossible” is the cause of the impossibility of ever attaining the “neutral” non-perspectival view of the object. There IS a truth, everything is not relative - but this truth is the truth of the perspectival distortion AS SUCH, not the truth distorted by the partial view from a one-sided perspective.

This brings us to the key dilemma concerning Nietzsche’s notions of Overman and Eternal Recurrence of the Same. Konrad Lorenz made the ambiguous remark that we ourselves (“actually existing” humanity) are the sought-after “missing link” between animal and man - how are we to read that? Of course, the first association that forces itself upon us here is the notion that “actually existing” humanity still dwells in what Marx designated as “pre-history,” and that true human history will begin with the advent of Communist society; or, in Nietzsche’s terms, that man is just a bridge, a passage between animal and overman. (Not to mention the New Age version: we are entering a new era in which humanity will transform itself into a Global mind, leaving behind petty individualism.) What Lorenz “meant” was undoubtedly situated along these lines, although with a more humanistic twist: humanity is still immature and barbarian, it has not yet reached full wisdom. However, an opposite reading also forces itself upon us: this intermediate status of man IS his greatness, since the human being IS in its very essence a “passage,” the finite openness into an abyss.

It is precisely historical traumas like the holocaust which seem to posit a limit to such a Nietzschean vision. For Nietzsche, if we do not radicalize the Will to Power into the Eternal Recurrence of the Same, the assertion of our Will remains incomplete, we forever remain constrained by the inertia of the past which we did not choose or will, and which, as such, limits the scope of our free self-assertion: only the Eternal Recurrence of the Same changes every “it was” into “it will be,” apropos of which I can then say “I willed it thus.” There is an inherent link between the notions of trauma and repetition, signaled in Freud’s well-known motto that what one is not able to remember, one is condemned to repeat: a trauma is by definition something one is not able to remember, i.e. to recollect by way of making it part of one’s symbolic narrative; as such, it repeats itself indefinitely, returning to haunt the subject. More, precisely, what repeats itself is the very failure, impossibility even, to repeat/recollect the trauma properly. Nietzsche’s Eternal Recurrence of the Same, of course, aims precisely at such a full recollection: the Eternal Recurrence of the Same ultimately means that there is no longer any traumatic kernel resisting its recollection, that the subject can fully assume his/her past, projecting it into the future as willing its recurrence. Is it, however, effectively possible to assume a

subjective stance of actively WILLING the traumatic event to repeat itself indefinitely? It is here that we confront the holocaust as an ethical problem: is it possible to sustain the Eternal Recurrence even apropos of the holocaust, i.e. to adopt also towards it the stance of "I willed it thus"?

Are therefore Nietzsche's *amor fati* and eternal return of the same not homologous to Pascal's version of the unity of right and might? "Equality of possessions is no doubt right, but, as men could not make might obey right, they have made right obey might. As they could not fortify justice they have justified force, so that right and might live together and peace reigns, the sovereign good."⁵ Since, in this unique life of mine, I am constrained by the burden of the past weighing on me, the assertion of my unconditional will to power is always thwarted by that which, in the finitude of being thrown into a particular situation, I was forced to assume as given. Consequently, the only way to effectively assert my will to power is to transpose myself into a state in which I am able to freely will, assert as the outcome of my will, what I otherwise experience as imposed on me by external fate; and the only way to accomplish this is to imagine that, in the FUTURE "returns of the same," repetitions of my present predicament, I am fully ready to assume it freely. However, does this reasoning not also conceal the same formalism as that of Pascal? Is its hidden premise not "if I cannot freely chose my reality and thus overcome the necessity which determines me, I should formally elevate this necessity itself into something freely assumed by me"? Is therefore Nietzsche not at the extreme opposite of the Jewish-Levinasian-Derridean-Adornian hope of the final Redemption, of the idea that this world of ours cannot be "all there is," the last and ultimate Truth, that we should stick to the promise of some Messianic Otherness?

What, however, is effectively Nietzsche's eternal return of the same? Is it the factual repetition, repetition of the past which should be willed as it was, or is it a Benjaminian repetition, a redemptive return-reactualization of that which was lost in the past occurrence, of its virtual excess, of its redemptive potential? Does the notion of the eternal return as repetition of the reality of the past not rely on an all-too-primitive notion of the past, on the reduction of the past to the one-dimensional reality of "what really happened," erasing the virtual dimension of the past? If we read the thought of eternal return in this way, as the redemptive repetition of the past virtuality, then Agamben's evocation of the holocaust as the conclusive argument against the eternal return loses its weight: on the contrary, one should will the repetition of the potential which was lost through the reality of the holocaust.

There is, however, another problem with the eternal return of the same. What would the digital virtualization of our lives, the shift of our identity from hardware to software, our change from finite mortals to “undead” virtual entities able to persist indefinitely, migrating from one to another material support – in short, the passage from human to posthuman – mean in Nietzschean terms? Is this posthumanity a version of the eternal return? Is this posthumanity a version of the eternal return? Is the digital posthuman subject a version (a historical actualization) of the Nietzschean “overman”? Or is this digital version of posthumanity a version of what Nietzsche called the Last Man? What if it is, rather, the point of indistinction of the two, and, as such, a signal of the limitation of Nietzsche’s thought?

In other words, is the eternal return rooted in human finitude (since the gap between virtuality and actuality only persists from the horizon of finitude), or does it stand for our uncoupling from finitude? When today’s subjectivity is celebrated as rootless, migratory, nomadic, hybrid, etc., does not digitalization provide the ultimate horizon of this migration, that of the fateful shift of hardware into software, i.e., of cutting the link that attaches a mind to its fixed material embodiment (a single individual’s brain), and of downloading the entire content of a mind into a computer with the possibility of the mind turning into a software program that can indefinitely migrate from one to another material embodiment and thus acquiring a kind of undeadness? Metempsychosis, the migration of souls, thus becomes a question of technology. The idea is that we are entering a regime as radically different from our human past as we humans are from the lower animals: by uploading yourself into a computer, you become “anything you like. You can be big or small; you can be lighter than air; you can walk through walls.”⁶ In good old Freudian terms, we thus get rid of the minimum of resistance that defines (our experience of) reality, and enter the domain in which the pleasure principle reigns unconstrained, with no concessions to the reality principle, or, as David Pearce put it in his quite appropriately titled book *The Hedonistic Imperative*: “nanotechnology and genetic engineering will eliminate aversive experience from the living world. Over the next thousand years or so, the biological substrates of suffering will be eradicated completely,” since we shall achieve “the neuro-chemical precision engineering of happiness for every sentient organism on the planet.”⁷ (Note the Buddhist overtones of this passage!) And, of course, since one of the definitions of being-human is that disposing of shit is a problem, part of this new posthumanity will also be that dirt and shit will disappear: “a superman must be cleaner than a man. In the future, our plumbing (of the thawed as well as the newborn) will be more hygienic and

seemly. Those who choose to will consume only zero-residue foods, with excess water all evaporating via the pores. Alternatively, modified organs may occasionally expel small, dry compact residues.”⁸

We also have the confused functions of our orifices: is the “multi-purpose mouth” not “awkward and primitive”? – “An alien would find it most remarkable that we had an organ combining the requirements of breathing, ingesting, tasting, chewing, biting, and on occasion fighting, helping to thread, needles, yelling, whistling, lecturing, and grimacing” - not to mention kissing, licking and sucking, all the erotic confusion. Is the ultimate target here not penis itself, with its embarrassing overlapping of the highest (insemination) with the lowest (urination)?

Today, with the prospect of the biogenetic manipulation of human physical and psychic features, the notion of “danger” inscribed into modern technology, elaborated by Heidegger, turned into a common currency. Heidegger emphasizes how the true danger is not the physical self-destruction of humanity, the threat that something will go terribly wrong with biogenetic interventions, but, precisely, that NOTHING will go wrong, that genetic manipulations will function smoothly – at this point, the circle will in a way be closed and the specific openness that characterizes being-human abolished. And the same point is made in more common terms by cultural critics from Fukuyama to Habermas worried about how the latest techno-scientific developments (which potentially made the human species able to redesign and redefine itself) will affect our being-human – the call we hear is best encapsulated by the title of Bill McKibben’s book: “enough.”⁹ Humanity as a collective subject has to establish a limit and freely renounce further “progress” in this direction. McKibben endeavors to empirically specify this limit: somatic genetic therapy is still this side of the enough point, one can practice it without leaving behind the world as we’ve known it, since we only intervene in a body formed in the old “natural” way; germline manipulations lie on the other side, in the world beyond meaning. When we manipulate psychic and bodily properties of individuals before they are even conceived, we pass the threshold into full-fledged planning, turning individuals into products, preventing them from experiencing themselves as responsible agents who have to educate/form themselves by the effort of focusing their will, thus obtaining the satisfaction of achievement - such individuals no longer relate to themselves as responsible agents.

The insufficiency of this reasoning is twofold. First, as Heidegger might have put it, the survival of the being-human of humans cannot depend on an ontic decision of humans. Even if we try to define the limit of the

permissible in this way, the true catastrophe has already happened: we already experience ourselves as in principle manipulable; we just freely renounce fully deploying these potentials. But the crucial point is that not only will our universe of meaning disappear with biogenetic planning, i.e. not only are the utopian descriptions of the digital paradise wrong, since they imply that meaning will persist; the opposite, negative, descriptions of the "meaningless" universe of technological self-manipulation are also victims of a perspective fallacy; they also measure the future by inadequate present standards. That is to say, the future of technological self-manipulation only appears as "deprived of meaning" if measured by (or, rather, from within the horizon of) the traditional notion of what a meaningful universe is. Who knows what this "posthuman" universe will reveal itself to be "in itself"? What if there is no singular and simple answer, what if the contemporary trends (digitalization, biogenetic self-manipulation) open themselves up to a multitude of possible symbolizations? What if the utopia - the perverse dream of the passage from hardware to software of a subjectivity freely floating between different embodiments - and the dystopia - the nightmare of humans voluntarily transforming themselves into programmed beings - are just the positive and the negative of the same ideological fantasy? What if it is only and precisely this technological prospect that fully confronts us with the most radical dimension of our finitude?

As Lacan points out in *Seminar XX: Encore*, *jouissance* involves a logic strictly homologous to that of the ontological proof of the existence of God. In the classic version of this proof, my awareness of myself as a finite, limited being immediately gives birth to the notion of an infinite, perfect being, and since this being is perfect, its very notion contains its existence; in the same way, our experience of *jouissance* accessible to us as finite, located, partial and "castrated," immediately gives birth to the notion of a full, achieved, unlimited *jouissance* whose existence is necessarily presupposed by the subject who imputes it to another subject - his/her "subject supposed to enjoy."

This utopian point of absolute *jouissance* is the point at which what Lacan calls *jouissance de l'Autre* would be suspended. What is this *jouissance de l'Autre*? Imagine (a real clinical case, though) two love partners who excite each other by verbalizing, telling to each other their innermost sexual fantasies to such a degree that they reach full orgasm without touching, as the effect of "mere talking." The result of such excess of intimacy is not difficult to guess: after such a radical mutual exposure, they will no longer be able to maintain their amorous link - too much was

being said, or, rather, the spoken word, the big Other, was too directly flooded by *jouissance*, so the two are embarrassed by each other's presence. THIS, not some full perverse orgy, is the true excess: in not realising your innermost fantasies instead of just talking about them," but, precisely, TALKING about them, allowing them to invade the medium of the big Other to such an extent that one can literally "fuck with words" it is here the elementary constitutive barrier between language and *jouissance* breaks down. Measured by this standard, the most extreme "real orgy" is a poor substitute.

Recall the famous scene in Bergman's *Persona* of Bibi Anderson telling about a beach orgy and passionate lovemaking in which she participated: we see no flashback pictures, and nonetheless the scene is one of the most erotic in the entire history of cinema - the excitement is in how she tells it, and this excitement, which resides in speech itself, is *feminine jouissance*. And it is this dimension of the *jouissance* of the Other that is today threatened. Let us imagine the situation in which pain (or pleasure) will no longer be generated in a subject through sensory perceptions, but through direct excitation of the appropriate neuronal centers (by means of drugs or electrical impulses) - what the subject will experience in this case will be "pure" pain, pain "as such," the REAL of pain, or, to put it in precise Kantian terms, the non-schematized pain, pain which is not yet rooted in the experience of reality constituted by transcendental categories.

And is such a short-circuit not the basic and most disturbing feature of consuming drugs to generate experiences of enjoyment? What drugs promise is a purely autistic *jouissance*, a *jouissance* accessible, without the detour through the Other (of the symbolic order) - *jouissance* generated not by fantasmatic representations, but by directly attacking our neuronal pleasure-centers? It is in this precise sense that drugs involve the suspension of symbolic castration, whose most elementary meaning is precisely that *jouissance* is only accessible through the medium of (as mediated by) symbolic representation. This brutal Real of *jouissance* is the obverse of the infinite plasticity of imagining, no longer constrained by the rules of reality. Significantly, the experience of drugs encompasses both these extremes: on the one hand, the Real or noumenal (non-schematized) *jouissance* which by-passes representations; on the other hand, the wild proliferation of fantasizing (recall the proverbial reports on how, after taking a drug, you imagine scenes you never thought you were able to access - new dimensions of shapes, colors, smells).

In 2003, at the Center for Neuroengineering at Duke University, monkeys with brain implants were trained to move a robotic arm with their

thoughts: a series of electrodes containing tiny wires were implanted about a millimeter deep into the brains of two monkeys; a computer then recorded signals produced by the monkeys' brains as they manipulated a joystick controlling the robotic arm in exchange for a reward – sips of juice. The joystick was later unplugged and the arm, which was in a separate room, was controlled directly by the brain signals coming from the implants. The monkeys eventually stopped using the joystick, as if they knew their brains were controlling the robotic arm. The Duke researchers have now moved onto researching similar implants in humans: in the summer of 2004, it was reported that they had succeeded at temporarily implanting electrodes into the brains of volunteers; the volunteers then played videogames while the electrodes recorded the brain signals - the scientists trained a computer to recognize the brain activity corresponding to the different movements of the joystick. This procedure of "eavesdropping" on the brain's digital crackle with electrodes (where computers use zeros and ones, neurons encode our thoughts in all-or-nothing electrical impulses) and transmitting the signals to a computer that can read the brain's code and then use the signals to control it mechanically already has an official name: brain-machine interface. Further prospects include not only more complex tasks (say, implanting the electrodes into the language centers of the brain and thus wirelessly transmitting a person's inner voice to a machine, so that one can speak "directly," bypassing voice or writing), but also sending the brain signals to a machine thousands of miles away and thus directing it from far away. And what about sending the signals to somebody standing nearby with electrodes implanted in his hearing centers, so that he can "telepathically" listen to my inner voice? The Orwellian notion of "thought control" will thus acquire a much more literal meaning.

Even Stephen Hawking's little finger - the minimal link between his mind and outside reality, the only part of his paralysed body that Hawking can move – will thus no longer be necessary: with my mind, I can DIRECTLY cause objects to move, i.e., it is the brain itself which will directly serve as the remote control machine. In the terms of German Idealism, this means that what Kant called "intellectual intuition" – the closing of the gap between mind and reality, a mind-process which, in a causal way, directly influences reality, this capacity that Kant attributed only to the infinite mind of God - is now potentially available to all of us, i.e. that we are potentially deprived of one of the basic features of our finitude. And since, as we learned from Kant as well as from Freud, this gap of finitude is at the same time the resource of our creativity (the distance between "mere

thought” and causal intervention into external reality enables us to test the hypotheses in our mind and, as Karl Popper put it, let them die instead of ourselves), the direct short-circuit between mind and reality implies the prospect of a radical closure. Is, then, this prospect of a world in which no trauma or “stress” could occur not the ultimate trauma?

WORKS CITED

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4. Claude Levi-Strauss, "Do Dual Organizations Exist?" in *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), p. 131-163; the drawings are on pages 133-134.
5. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, Harmondsworth; Penguin Books, 1965, p. 51.
6. Storrs Happ, quoted in *Enough*, p. 102.
7. Quoted in *Enough*, p. 102-103.
8. Robert Ettinger, quoted in *Enough*, p. 110.
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