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The Abyss of Mind and Matter: Sexuality on Edge

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Freud brought mother, father and society into play as the forces shaping the erotic constitution of the child. The usual, simplistic explanation of how parents and society affect the child's sexuality (Oedipus and the waning of Oedipus), however, are outdated; our civilization is now post-Oedipal, and neo-Freudians who still lay every sexual problem at the foot of the mother must be rejected. To be a parent is not only a matter of forming a child who will readily do society's bidding (while secretly rebelling against it—the Oedipal child). The parent needs to understand how the child first conceptualizes what is closest to it: how the infant builds its mental universe around a vacant space, a void inserted between itself and what is beside it—and then imaginarily colonizes that space. Only then can we realize how a changing social context connects to the process.

The Making of the Erotic Body

Jacques Lacan claimed that language profoundly impacts the infantile psyche (*infans*: without speech). He distilled Freud's insights on the construction of the child's erotic body this way: »Language—the word implies it—carves up [the] body.«¹ The *word* expels natural *jouissance*, creating a bodily void. The mutilated body that results is no longer animal in character, but is shaped by a non-organic logic: a body without organs. What is carved away by language—*jouissance*—does not stay

¹ Jacques Lacan: *Télévision*. Paris 1974, p. 16 [English, p. 6]. »L'homme [...] pense de qu'une structure, celle du langage – le mot le comporte – de qu'une structure découpe son corps, et qui n'a rien à faire avec l'anatomie.« *Blade* is the root sense of *la langue*.

lost; it returns in phantom form to the body as a fantasy fulfillment that far exceeds the natural satisfactions relinquished. If every positive speech inserts a void in the body, that hollow is also a signpost to another *place—ein anderer Schauplatz*—the other scene of the unconscious, where this emptied space is filled in fantasies of absolute *jouissance*.

Lacan's approach to the infant seems a far cry from Freud's. Yet if we look back to the early *Project*,² we find Freud too tracing the growth of the infant's mind as its body is altered by conceptual (metaphoric) thought.

In the *Project* Freud depicts neuron systems that set off mental development by responding to (and repelling) the comparatively vast energy fields surrounding the embryonic organism. Overwhelmed by the sheer volume of external energy that threatens to submerge it and smash its integrity, the organism erects barriers against this energy, securing itself from what would engulf it. Although shielded against it, the organism must nevertheless permit a certain amount of energy to enter its domain of sequestration: selective openings in the shield are necessary to keep the organism nourished and to discharge its waste.

Freud thus traces the evolution of mind from matter as primarily a spatial operation: side-channels to the main nervous system direct energy flows in and out, exercising a primitive judgment on what to keep and what to eject. Selection requires that raw physical energy's *quantity* be transformed (conceptualized/metaphorized) into mental *quality*. Physical energy is converted into both qualitative nervous mental energy (*conceptual thought*) and hyper-energized unconscious thought (*drive*) via these sets of neurons, permitting energy to flow in, to be stored up or discharged, and another set that *blocks* portions of the conceptualized energy from exiting the organism at all.

This means that once the mental apparatus is set up, the organism contends with a new overflow of energy, not of natural energy (»external stimuli«) but of mental energy, hyper-energy cumulated within (as ongoing »stimulation«). An *internal* limit becomes necessary to prevent a flood of qualitative, purely *mental* energy from overwhelming the organism from inside. The internal bars or limits placed on the *mental* energy that over-stimulates the organism are an inaugural *repression*, the original unconscious. »Barred« mental energy

2 Sigmund Freud: *The Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895). In: *The Standard Edition of the Works of Sigmund Freud*, I. London 1956, pp. 283–399.

is not expelled but pooled, cumulated as unconscious *drives* (ongoing stimulations), demanding impossible satisfactions.

For Freud, the origin of infantile conception (mentation) is the provisional absence of external, nourishing energy and it is linked to the drive. The drive is first spurred, according to Freud, by the fact that the newborn's actual satisfaction of its hunger is periodically unavailable (the emptied breast is withdrawn). Of what use is the drive? Freud writes, »The concept of instinct [drive] is [...] one of those lying on the frontier between the mental and the physical [...] and is] a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work.«³ It pressures the infant to fulfill not only real but mental hungers, thereby urging the child to higher levels of mentation. Mental life grows in the child as it devises ways to satisfy itself with images of a remembered satisfaction—images then elaborated into hallucinated scenes of enjoyment.⁴

The mind becomes a motive force in itself: fueled by fantasies of fulfillment, the body responds to *them*, and not only to material stimuli. Fantasized pleasure begins to remodel the very physical structure of the body, as the infantile mind locates heightened, imaginary satisfactions in the body's orifices (mouth and anus, but also eyelids, nostrils and even ears). The unconscious drives, or rather partial drives, settle (usually) into the child's body at its natural openings.⁵ These become eroticized, shaped by an entirely non-material energy⁶ that constitutes them as sites of absolute pleasure.

Where the child's needs were first satisfied and then remodeled as sites of pleasure means, Freud says, that they were sexualized:

3 Sigmund Freud: *Three Essays on Sexuality* (1905). In: *The Standard Edition of the Works of Sigmund Freud*, VII. London 1956, pp. 125–245, pt. II: *Infantile Sexuality*, p. 168.

4 Freud says, mentation first arises from an anamorphic spatial turn, when the baby turns aside from its frontal view of the breast – the fount of satisfaction – to see it only in profile. A mental image of the now absent breast is then evoked to »satisfy« it, but only imaginarily. (Freud 1895 [as note 2], p. 329. See also: Sigmund Freud: *Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning* [1911]. In: *The Standard Edition of the Works of Sigmund Freud*, XII. London 1956, pp. 218–26).

5 Freud 1905 (as note 3). In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the entire surface of the skin is erogenized for perverts and hysterics, not zoned.

6 Freud 1895 (as note 2), Section 10, »The Paths of Conduction«, p. 317. Here he speaks of an unlimited accumulation of $Q\eta$ energy alongside Q and N (p. 295).

To begin with, sexual activity attaches itself to functions serving the purpose of self-preservation and does not become independent of them until later. No one who has seen a baby sinking back satiated from the breast and falling asleep with flushed cheeks and a blissful smile can escape the reflection that this picture persists as the prototype of sexual satisfaction later in life. The need for repeating the sexual satisfaction now becomes detached from the need for taking nourishment—a separation which becomes inevitable when the teeth appear and food is no longer taken in only by sucking but is also chewed up. The child does not make use of an extraneous body for his sucking, but prefers a part of his own skin because it is more convenient, because it makes him independent of the external world, which he is not yet able to control, and because in that way he provides himself as it were with a second erotogenic zone, though one of an inferior kind. [...] At a later date he seeks the corresponding part—the lips—of another person.⁷

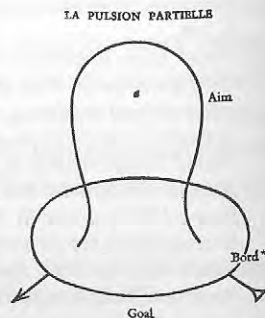
Such⁸ are the erogenous zones.

Under Oedipus, the partial drives are eventually supposed to come under the primacy of the genitals, ensuring reproduction. But this is by no means the whole story; each partial drive, Freud says, is retained as a component of the overall sex drive of any individual, one's will to pleasure. (And our sexual pleasure surely depends on such forbidden zones participating in our erotic life.)

How can we possibly relate this to Lacan's conviction that language is *the* fundamental factor shaping the infantile (erotic) body? Nothing Lacan wrote was without its model in Freud. I argue that it is because Lacan adopted Saussure's theses on language—that meaning is entirely determined by a negative interval, a silence or an empty space, between positive linguistic elements—that he could link language to Freud's theory of how consciousness and the unconscious are inaugurated. Both originate in the spacing, the cuts made in energy flows, just as articulate speech arises from breaks in sonic flow.⁸

⁷ Freud 1905 (as note 3), p. 182.

⁸ Lacan's is a Freudian approach to the child's erotic body; see his teachings on «Little Hans» in *Seminar IV*, pointing to Freud's focus on spatiality (Jacques Lacan: *La relation d'objet* (1956–1957), *Séminaire IV*. Paris 1996). Lacan's schematizes the partial drive, inserting the part-real, part-fantasy erotic object (*a*) into the body at its opening (rim; *bord*) precisely around a void. (Jacques Lacan: *Les Quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*. *Séminaire XI*. Paris 1973, p. 163).



Most followers of Lacan, of course, take his use of language reductively, as a strict, regulatory symbolic ordering super-imposed over the natural, animal body. They forget that Lacan used language not as an abstract system of rules for order (grammar), but as a system of signs that cannot be detached from their context: Saussurean linguistics is »the science of signs *in society*.«⁹ Society produces language and shapes the child's body—and vice versa. Lacan's pithy pronouncement on language's elemental shaping of the body, then, only summarizes Freud, and lacks the incredibly rich texture of Freud's voyage through the human erotic trajectory.

Let us now return to Freud to trace that journey, in which he never regards the emerging erotic body of the child in isolation from its human context: family, society, civilization and ultimately language, for no society has ever existed without language and no language has ever existed in the absence of society.

In »Infantile Sexuality« (1905)¹⁰ Freud says that education and socialization bring the infant's pre-genital eroticized zones gradually under the sway of the genitals to fulfill society's mandate to produce offspring. Submission is not total, for at least one among these zones will attain the status of a *fixation* that determines the unique shape of a child's subsequent erotic life. Freud's example is from *The Confessions*¹¹ where Rousseau finds the fixation of his adult erotic life originating in the painful pleasure he felt as a child when Mlle. Lambercier spanked him on his bottom.

Jacques Lacan: »Fixation is not an instinctual stage, but a historical scar.«¹² »Scar« because the libido is fixed or pinned to those areas of the body where pleasure was most intensely experienced but also most severely cut off (»carved« away). The lost pleasure reattaches to the body fantasmatically writing itself as what Lacan calls the body's love letters: unconscious enjoyment read like the traces hollowed out in the wax of Freud's mystic writing pad. »Historical« because

⁹ Ferdinand de Saussure: *Course in General Linguistics*. Ed. by Charles Bally/Albert Sechehaye. New York/London/Toronto 1966, p. 16.

¹⁰ Freud 1905 (as note 3).

¹¹ Jean Jacques Rousseau: *Les Confessions*, v. I, *Les Oeuvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*. Paris 1959, Book I, p. 15. Later on, Rousseau notes that an unfortunate fall caused Mlle. Lambercier to expose her own bottom to the King of Sardinia passing by (*ibid.* p. 22) – a literal Freudian slip?

¹² Jacques Lacan: *The Function and Field of Speech in Psychoanalysis* (1953). In: *Écrits: a selection*. Tr. A. Sheridan. New York 1996, pp. 30–113, here: p. 52.

each eroticization is shaped first by original infantile fantasies of an unattainable satisfaction and then secondarily by cultural forces of repression brought to bear on the child. The erotic body is tied to the social and familial context that surrounds the child.

For Freud, the original process of mentation had been set off by the infant's responding to the presence, within its purview, of something nearby: he calls it the *Nebenmensch* (Nature, Other, Mother—the Thing). Its borders are undecided for the infant: it seems infinitely beyond but infinitely close, the source of all the enveloping, nourishing energy but also its greatest danger. To safeguard its own integrity the infant puts up a defense that mirrors imaginarily the original neuronic shielding of the embryonic mind: it invents a spatial distance between itself and the *Thing*, keeping it apart while remaining partly open to it. The Maternal Thing's seemingly awesome power is mitigated by mental barriers raised against it, by virtue of the space the infant imagines between them.¹³ The infant projects mental images onto the imaginary space it has devised to distance itself from the *Nebenmensch* (parents, family, culture, language). The *Aufbau* of the mind starts here: with the insertion, *between* the perception and the reality of the Thing, of an *illusion*, a void in which the infant stages its handling of the force that consumes it—or that it would consume.

The capital element in constructing a human, rather than an animal body, is thus the way it opens to or closes itself off from the *Nebenmensch*, who is neither outside nor inside: near or far off, in front of, yet strangely beyond.

The pressures the *Nebenmensch* exerts are conscious (i. e., education and restriction) and unconscious. The infant responds to what its parents and society consciously desire for it, and also to what they unconsciously demand. Parents, society and restrictions on speech require certain zones of pleasure be censored. Bans on a free enjoyment that even the parents long for and that civilized sexual morality cuts off become secondary forces contributing to unconscious drives.

Lacan's dictum that language has an absolute effect on the body is not a final word, then, but a way to renew Freud's original insights on the infantile imagination that makes its body an erotic one. Language

¹³ In *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (Seminar VII [1959–60]. Tr. D. Porter. New York and London 1992), Lacan suggests equating Melanie Klein's idea of the Mother with *Das Ding/Nebenmensch* in Freud's *Project*.

creates the social, symbolic human space into which the infant is born. The wonder is that Freud was able to reach his invaluable insights into an infant's consciousness—and its unconscious—without the benefit of articulate speech. Lacan's linguistic turn is key to unlocking Freud's speculation on the very origin of language in the dawning organism.

Infantile Sexuality

For Freud, *sexual* means *the desire for gain in pleasure*.¹⁴ It is not to be confused with any rationalization, regulation or legislation of that pleasure. As the child matures, disrupting its sexual impulse to pleasure is hardly so crucial as it was in its infantile mental stages when it meant life or death: the child had to be waked from his pleasurable dreams to find real food. But why, after the child has attained consciousness, must its will to pleasure be further constrained? After all, pleasure was the founding principle of mental conception, of all mental life.

Freud says a pleasure once experienced compels us to wish to repeat it. The *pleasure* of satisfying a physical need becomes detached from its physical portion and is intensified, refashioned into an urgent desire just where it is impossible to obtain. The infant who contents itself with imaginary satisfaction risks death, should fantasy enjoyments take precedence over fulfilling vital needs: pleasure principle as literal death drive, contravened by the reality principle. It must obtain actual sustenance, not live off of its mere memory. Mental satisfactions forsaken in favor of reality also become unconscious drives. What the primitive organism sifted out of afferent incoming energy made a fantasy place for itself in return (reappearing in the mind). So do the secondary social/familial repressions of pleasure fuel new unconscious drives, propelling the child into fresh existential dilemmas.

Animal instinct is distinct from what Freud calls *drive*:

By a [drive] is provisionally to be understood the *psychical representative* of an endosomatic, continuously flowing source of stimulation, as contrasted with a ›stimulus,‹ which is set up by *single* excitations coming from *without*.¹⁵

¹⁴ Sigmund Freud: ›Civilized‹ Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness (1908). In: The Standard Edition of the Works of Sigmund Freud, IX. London 1956, pp. 181–204, here: p. 188.

¹⁵ Freud 1905 (as note 3), p. 168.

He ties the drives to the erotogenic zones where they arose:

What distinguishes the instincts from one another and endows them with specific qualities is their relation to their somatic sources and their aims. The source of an instinct is a process of excitation occurring in an organ and the immediate aim of the instinct lies in the removal of this organic stimulus.¹⁶

In other words, the aim of removing »organic stimulus« (satisfying a hunger) does not remain organic for long. The infant's various bodily zones of physical satisfaction become models for a non-organic »continuously flowing« stimulation that must in turn urgently be responded to. Drive is a »demand made on the mind for work,« Freud continues—a demand for *work* of a new kind. Not the work needed for the infant to obtain food, not the original real limit on fantasy satisfaction, but a new, a secondary demand to curtail the free enjoyment in and of infantile sexuality. The child must meet civilization's demand for its sexual feelings to be put strictly in the service of reproduction: auto-erotism is »unserviceable for the reproductive function.«¹⁷ The stronger the child's sexual drive, the greater the proscription on its free expression.

Infantile sexual impulses thus come to be ruled by the genital organs, harnessed for reproduction: »[C]onstrutions [of genital primacy] which are so important for the growth of a civilized and normal individual [...] emerge at the cost of the infantile sexual impulses.«¹⁸ As the serial repression of each so-called instinctual phase (the site of the partial drives, oral, anal, etc.) expands, the child's body is reshaped to enable genital primacy and obey the command to reproduce. If pleasure was the original impetus to thought, to mentation, now it must be constrained. (Indeed, art alone is granted license to turn pleasure into thought.)

The reality principle had been necessary to countervail the pleasure principle and save the dreaming infant from death; the command to reproduce is not to save the individual child from death, but to oblige it to save the life of its *species*. The child becomes, Freud says, simply »a link in a chain, which he serves against his will, or at least

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Freud 1905 (as note 3), p. 188.

¹⁸ Freud 1905 (as note 3), p. 178.

involuntarily.«¹⁹ This trajectory characterizes human sexuality and reproduction since primeval times.

But Freud soon found a sinister side to the contemporary cultural imperative to reproduction.

›Civilized Sexual Morality‹

Freud characterizes three stages of civilization paralleling the hierarchical structuring of the infant's erotic body: 1) a stage where sexual instinct is freely exercised without regard to the aims of reproduction (infantile auto-erotism); 2) a stage in which all sexual instincts are repressed, except those with reproductive aims (object-love); 3) a stage wherein only *legitimate* reproduction is admitted as a sexual aim.²⁰

Freud describes the sexual mores of his Vienna in a 1908 essay, »›Civilized‹ Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness.«²¹ Men, he writes, are expected to defer sexual gratification until they can provide for the family that must result from the union of man and woman. But they enjoy free release of their sexual feelings before marriage—in secret: with prostitutes, other men or masturbation. Women are kept in almost total sexual ignorance until they are safely married (deemed incapable of controlling their sexual instinct/desire for pleasure and of sublimating like men).

An unprepared young bride is thus subjected to an older man accustomed to sexual brutality or »invert« sexual practices and thus apparently highly unlikely to provide her with a tender initiation into sex. Inside the marriage, contraception is judged illegitimate (by religion) or is so mechanically clumsy that each sexual act brings on the fear of a child, leading the couple to indulge only rarely. Freud notes, »It must above all be borne in mind that our cultural sexual morality restricts sexual intercourse even in marriage itself, since it imposes on them the necessity of contenting themselves, as a rule, with very few procreative acts.«²² A »dammed up libido« results.

¹⁹ »The individual does actually carry on a twofold existence. One, to serve his own purposes and the other as a link in a chain, which he serves against his will, or at least involuntarily.« (Sigmund Freud: On Narcissism [1914]. In: The Standard Edition of the Works of Sigmund Freud, XIV. London 1957, pp. 77–78).

²⁰ Freud 1908 (as note 14), p. 189.

²¹ Freud 1908 (as note 14).

²² Ibid., p. 194.

The ironic inversion at the heart of the command to procreate becomes clear: if only legitimate procreation inside a legal marriage is permitted, restrictions on sexual pleasure are utterly counterproductive. The rationale of preserving the species becomes ludicrous, as few if any children ever result:

To the uninitiated it is hardly credible how seldom normal potency is to be found in a husband and how often a wife is frigid among married couples who live under the dominance of our civilized sexual morality; what a degree of renunciation often on both sides, is entailed by marriage, and to what narrow limits married life—the happiness that is so ardently desired—is narrowed down to.²³

The *legitimately* married couple's sheer sexual dissatisfaction »continues to exercise its influence on the few children, or the only child, born of it.«²⁴

This twisted imperative informs and shapes the transmission of sexuality (and sexual morality) to the child. Recall that Lacan called each erotic fixation a historical scar that is the »result of an interlocution.«²⁵ With whom? With *the mother*, who traditionally transmits civilization's commandment to reproduce. She is to channel her infant's sexual feelings so it will later dutifully reproduce. Yet how can she in reality do so for a mandate to which she herself is not at all reconciled?

We have long assumed that the Oedipus and the superego that supplants it assert the will of civilization over the longings of the infant. But can we really be so certain? Before the infant reaches either stage, the force field that is its mother's own unconscious also comes into play, exerting its own power over the infant's sexuality.²⁶ A mother who has been shaped by the laws of a »civilized« sexual morality that forbids her pleasure (and if she is rendered neurotic by them) becomes unwittingly harmful to her child. If it falls into nervous illness, Freud writes,

²³ Ibid., p. 201.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 202.

²⁵ Jacques Lacan: *Écrits*. Paris 1966, p. 50.

²⁶ I have pointed out Melanie Klein's uniqueness in placing Oedipus pre-verbally in the nursing at the breast. Juliet Flower MacCannell: *Mothers of Necessity: Psychoanalysis For Feminism*. In: *American Literary History*, 3:3, 1991, pp. 623–47.

[I]t seems like a transmission by inheritance, but [...] it is really a question of the effect of powerful infantile impressions. A neurotic wife who is unsatisfied by her husband is, as a mother, over-tender and over-anxious towards her child, on to whom she transfers her need for love; *and she awakens it to sexual precocity*. The bad relations between its parents, moreover, excite its emotional life and cause it to feel love and hatred to an intense degree while it is still at a very tender age. Its strict upbringing, which tolerates no activity of the sexual life that has been aroused so early, lends support to the suppressing force and this conflict at such an age contains everything necessary for bringing about lifelong nervous illness.²⁷

The moral context in which the mother is forced to play an extraordinary role in the libidinal shaping—and crippling—of her infant's sexual body demonstrates not a fatal flaw endemic to motherhood (as Freudians once concluded) but a horrendous flaw in the moral order itself—in its deepest logic. In 1908, Freud was witnessing the expanding dominion of a sadistic superego over individual and collective life, issuing its conflicting commands to enjoy while forbidding enjoyment. This is no longer a simple malaise in civilization but augurs its very ruination: a return of death drive at the very level of the species. The contradictions in civilized sexual morality generate neuroses not because of what is popularly today called *heteronormativity* or *Oedipus*: it is because what it bans is *pleasurable sex*.

The mother of an infant is not a simple container, dispensing satisfaction from her infinite store of nourishing energy. She is herself an erotic being who has suffered her own restrictions on pleasure. If inhibitions have turned her into a mere container, it is one under enormous pressure. The excessive foreclosure of her own sexual drives—a foreclosure civilized morality has demanded—mars her openness toward her child, making her loom far too large in her infant's mental field, affecting its mind and its sexual body in absolute terms.

Freud situates the infant in relation to an overwhelming being, such a (Maternal) Thing not by virtue of its physical proximity but of its mental one. The exposure of the tiny infant to the mother's unconscious drives forces the infant to shield itself against them. The neurotogenic consequence is that excess maternal energy floods the child, and must be disposed of or pooled with the child's own excess energy at its libidinal sites.

²⁷ Freud 1908 (as note 14), p. 202; my emphasis.

Freud's phenomenology is compelling. The Victorian mother's repressed sexual feelings write her unconscious wishes upon the very body of her child, scarring it. But, surely, the loosening of sexual moral codes and the overthrow of Victorian prudery improved the situation of mother and child? We have the technology and the social will to detach sex (pleasure) from reproduction. An absolute distance seems to separate us from them. Yet, if we look closely at the moral imperatives of contemporary civilization, we are forced to ask if they do not have similar deleterious psychological effects as those of the moral order of Freud's day. Freud brought out the irrational inversion at the heart of his own moral order; we must do the same for our »liberated« era.

Indeed, Freud shows that in his day, nerve specialists believed that people have too much freedom of feeling, and they attributed increasing nervous illness to too much available pleasure. Freud quotes W. Erb's idea of its root causes:

[T]he individual's demand for the enjoyments of life have increased in all classes [...]; unprecedented luxury has spread to all strata of the population who were formerly quite untouched by it. [...] The immense extension of communications which has been brought about by the network of telegraphs and telephones that encircle the world has completely altered the conditions of trade and commerce [...] encroach[ing] upon the hours for recreation [...] The exhausted nerves seek recuperation in increased stimulation and highly-spiced pleasures [...].²⁸

Erb also cites the »spread of political excitement, trade unionism,« and a »modern literature [...] that stirs the passions.«²⁹ Ludwig Binswanger attributes modern nervous illness to »advances in the field of technology that render illusory every obstacle, whether temporal or spatial, to our means of communication.«³⁰ Freud suggests, however, that his colleagues have not produced a *clinical* insight at all, but merely reproduced the fallback moralism of those impotent to articulate an unnamable truth. Their hyperbolic accent on *immoderate* pleasures and *over-communication* only indicate, Freud saw, a censoring of their own dim intuition that their patients were experiencing *too little* enjoyment,

²⁸ W. Erb, 1893 (cited in Freud 1908, as note 14, p. 183). [Freud provides no bibliographical references in his notes for either Erb or Binswanger.]

²⁹ Cited in Freud 1908 (as note 14), p. 184.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

too little freedom of intercourse. Hence their analytic failure to conceive of a better cultural landscape for the infantile bodies born into it.

To recognize a problem by misrecognizing it, articulating it as its opposite, is what Freud called *Verneinung* or *denegation*: the distorted expression of a truth in the mode of its denial. Do we suffer the same?

Lacan showed (in *Seminar XVII*)³¹ that while capitalist culture claims to have returned us to full enjoyment, we are still regularly served up unpleasure and as many or more restrictions on sexual pleasure than ever before. There is far less »good fat enjoyment, simple enjoyment«³² these days—or nowhere near as much as our culture appears to promise. He attributes our particular constraints to contemporary capitalism, which he notes begins by getting rid of sex.³³ And, »in spite of all our theoretical progress, we [psychoanalysts] haven't even been able to create a single new perversion.«³⁴ Instead, capitalism produces abundant *jouissance en toc*; counterfeit enjoyments that effectively disguise the accelerating restrictions placed on pleasure today. The superego lifts restrictions on the enjoyments the child's parents forbid, but the superego is ultimately an ally of the id's death drive, the Oedipal ego is their mutual object of aggression. (Freud explains why in his late essay, »The Ego and the Id«, 1923.³⁵ There he traces the child's path from autoerotism to object love, forcing into the unconscious its original aggression toward the external object. Then the superego mobilizes the aggression in the id and turns it not against the beloved object, but against the ego.)³⁶ As the Oedipal symbolic is displaced by a sadistic superego issuing the impossible command to »Enjoy!« when it is physically and psychologically impossible to do so, we see another turn of the screw, a total double bind in terms of a pleasure that claims to be everywhere and is yet nowhere.

³¹ Jacques Lacan: *Le Séminaire XVII, L'envers de la psychanalyse* (1969–70). Paris 1991.

³² »[...] à l'exclusion du bon gros jouir, le jouir simple, le jouir qui se réalise dans la copulation toute nue« (Lacan, 1969–70 [as note 31], pp. 111–12).

³³ »Autant donc pour le sexe, puisqu'en effet le capitalisme, c'est de là qu'il est parti, de le mettre au rancart« (Lacan 1974 [as note 1], p. 51).

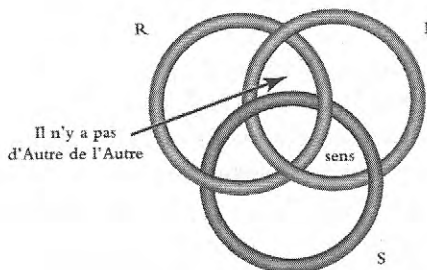
³⁴ Lacan 1959–60 (as note 13), p. 15.

³⁵ Sigmund Freud: *The Ego and the Id* (1923). In: *The Standard Edition of the Works of Sigmund Freud*, XIX. London 1956, pp. 12–66.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

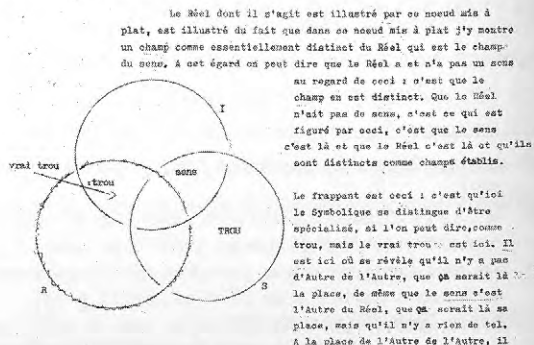
If language, symbolic order, the social link no longer seem capable of making what Lacan calls »un vrai trou,« a real hole, a void or empty space made in the overwhelming imaginary,³⁷ and if today's cultural capitalism offers us images of unbridled enjoyment that enclose us in its bubble, it is because we have yet to find a way to shatter its illusions. *Images* cannot satisfy us in reality and they no longer really satisfy us in fantasy, as long as sex-as-pleasure is driven out of the equation. What new level of reality principle could release us from the death drive of overabundant imaginary pleasures that no longer even satisfy? For Lacan, only the imagination itself can be deployed at this point. In his *Seminar XXIII*³⁸ he found that something inherent in the image can be used against itself, reinserting the void (»un vrai trou«) into its imaginary plenitude.

37 Jacques Lacan: *Le Séminaire XXIII, Le sinthome* (1975–976). Paris 2005, p. 134:



Le vrai trou est ici

The illustration in the book is not as clear with regard to the location of the »real hole« as it is in the Lacan manuscripts of his teaching (p. 172):



38 Lacan 1975–76 (as note 37).

Even in the Imaginary a structural gap appears, and [...] functions in the constitution of the subject as a potential for creative resistance to death drive. What does the *vrai trou* accomplish on the side of the Imaginary? It fractures the image's received meaning; it inserts [...] a bit of non-meaning into what appears as a perfect whole without seams or gaps [...] the *vrai trou* marks a place where the Imaginary meets up with Real, and *makes a hole in it*.³⁹

Conclusion

Simplistic models of »in and out« (even a continuum or fold turning exteriority into interiority) that do not take account of the dialectic of *barrier and gap*, the insertion of a void necessary to differentiate *outside* and *inside* can never generate the delicate balance required for meeting the challenge of the encounter (or missed encounter) with the *Nebenmensch*. What comes *between* perception and reality becomes the essential. This means that there is no categorical distinction of mind versus matter: there are only ways of *conceiving* (imagining, hallucinating, fantasizing) the link or break between them. *Outside and Inside* exist only because of a certain way of dreaming that they do.

Attention to the spatial unconscious reveals forgotten links between expressive social forms and the unconscious, which is both their cause and effect. The *other scene* of the unconscious can be read on the expressive surface: faint warps in spatial forms index unconscious distortions at work, just as Freudian slips do in speech. These distortions are often at cross purposes to their makers' conscious intentions: signs of wishes hidden in plain sight and legible, like Poe's purloined letter.

Lacan once said, »[P]rimitive architecture can be defined as something organized around an emptiness [...] the true meaning of all architecture.«⁴⁰ Appreciating the void at its heart, its original empty space, must supplement any analysis of positive cultural, social and political representations. We must reach their root form, their ultimate source: the human body, its eroticized apertures, and its unconscious.

³⁹ Juliet Flower MacCannell: The Dialectic of the Political Imaginary: The Subject of the Freudian Left. In: *The Freudian Left Reconsidered* (a), VIII: 2, 2011–12, pp. 15–36, here: p. 31.

⁴⁰ Lacan 1959–60 (as note 13), p. 135.

Great artists and architects turn the energy of the unconscious away from fantasy and towards creating new openings. They produce voids, spaces open to imaginary colonization, new channels for erotic flow. They thus remind us that what really counts is how we figure the edges of these openings.

One architect who has created voids filled with possibility is contemporary Chinese architect Wang Shu. Note the highly original treatment of apertures in his buildings, which reference traditional Chinese architecture but put the relation of inside to outside in a different perspective. His windows and door frames ignite for us a sense of the supreme importance of treating the opening with careful attention to how we might use them to open out onto somewhere else or something new.

Three illustrations follow:⁴¹

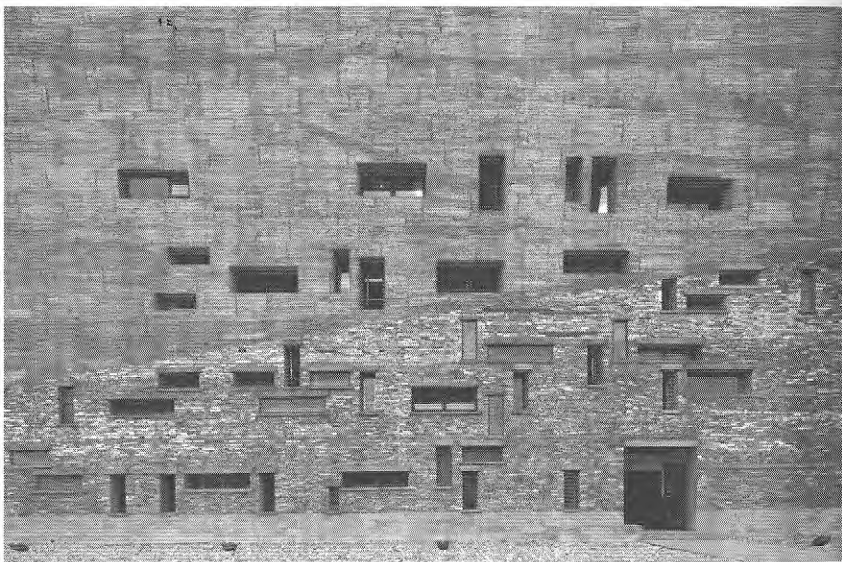


Fig. 1 Ningbo History Museum, Ningbo, China, 2003–2008. Photo by Lv Hengzhong.

⁴¹ http://www.pritzkerprize.com/media/2012_media/images-download accessed 1/25/13 »2012 Images for Download: The following high resolution images may be used for printing or broadcast in relation to the announcement of Wang Shu being named the 2012 Pritzker Architecture Prize Laureate. These are photographs of the architecture of Wang Shu, and his firm, Amateur Architecture Studio, based in Hangzhou, The People's Republic of China. The photographer/photo libraries/artists must be credited if noted.«



Fig. 2 Ningbo Tengtou Pavilion, Shanghai Expo, 2010, Shanghai, China. Photo by Fu Xing.

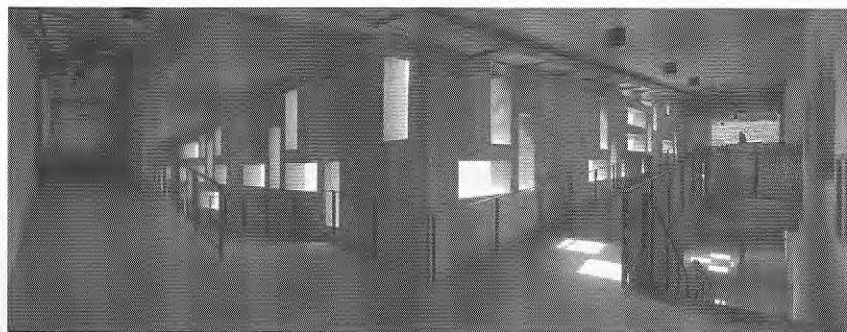


Fig. 3 Xiangshan Campus, China Academy of Art, Phase II, 2004–2007, Hangzhou, China. Photo by Lv Hengzhong.

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Erogene Gefahrenzonen

Aktuelle Produktionen des (infantilen) Sexuellen

Mit Beiträgen von

Steven Angelides, Sabine Broeck, Olaf Knellessen, Juliet Flower
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