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Under the Dictation of the Image:  
Film, Economy, and the Avant-Garde

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Art History, Theory, and Criticism

by

Michael Newell Witte

Committee in charge:

Professor William N. Bryson, Co-Chair  
Professor Mariana Razo Wardwell, Co-Chair  
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2020



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University of California San Diego

2020

## DEDICATION

For Ellie, Toni, and Homer

## EPIGRAPH

Je me trouve sous la dictée de l'image.  
C'est la vision qui exige que je dise tout ce que me donne la vision.

Pierre Klossowski

Ce sacrifice *que nous consommons* se distingue des autres, en ceci : le sacrificateur lui-même est touché par le coup qu'il frappe, il succombe et se perd avec sa victime.

Georges Bataille

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## VITA

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Under the Dictation of the Image:  
Film, Economy, and the Avant-Garde

by

Michael Newell Witte

Doctor of Philosophy in Art History, Theory, and Criticism

University of California San Diego, 2020

Professor William N. Bryson, Co-Chair  
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This dissertation explores a genealogy of late dissident/ethnographic surrealist production in avant-garde film, literature, and theory from an international perspective. Taking as its starting point the critical works of the artist Pierre Klossowski (1905–2001), understood through his (concealed) reception in film theory via the philosophers Jean-François Lyotard and Gilles Deleuze, this project weaves into this history a set of later examples through the specific cases of the Italian poet and filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini

and the Mexican artist, theater director, and filmmaker Juan José Gurrola. Both artists, I argue, are crucial for re-imagining the reception of the critical works of Klossowski, his colleague Georges Bataille, Antonin Artaud, and the larger dissident surrealist group associated with the *Collège de Sociologie* and the journal and secret society of Acéphale. In this study, I confine my approach to a set of problems posed by each of these figures: Klossowski (and Bataille) via Lyotard, Pasolini, and Gurrola. I propose an alternative film theoretical discourse in distinction to the now classical arguments of psychoanalytic film theory, as well as both realist and formalist notions of film economy. My methodology combines a close reading of cinema and theoretical texts. As well, I offer an extension of this work by means of archival research on the films of Juan José Gurrola, featuring an in-depth consideration of his landmark experimental film-action *Robarte el Arte* (1972), whose answer to the question regarding the articulation of an original film language is, I argue, crucial for our understanding of the medium, as well as for the historical periods under question and the contemporaneous debates on film semiotics.

## Introduction

“*A False Study...*” These are the words that Pierre Klossowski uses to describe his work in the infamous monograph *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux* (1969), “a book,” he warns, “that will exhibit an unusual ignorance.”<sup>1</sup> In the introduction to this remarkable study, Klossowski signals that the research he presents will not satisfy the usual academic standards due to the unconventional methods observed in the work: to investigate the literary and philosophical inventions of its subject according to a conspiracy, an analysis premised on a speculative (and, in essence, unspeakable) origin theorized beyond an examination of the immediate language of the text. Heeding this caution, I concede that the attempt to engage Klossowski’s theories, to adopt from his enigmatic and conspiratorial thinking a set of critical methods, implicitly shares in this same self-described “falseness”— a sacrifice made, as Klossowski says, for the chance “to interpret, as so many signals, the flashes of lightning that destiny continues to send our way.”<sup>2</sup>

The dissertation before you is no exception: it seeks to “interpret the lightning,” if only to re-instigate the most provocative themes of film theory. The vocabulary with which the theorist Klossowski perfects a reading of perception, simulation, and the instinctual drives will be, I argue, useful for our understanding of avant-garde and neo-avant-garde aesthetics in the respective eras in which Klossowski worked. My aim is to trace Klossowski’s influence to a variety of places in theory and visual media, in order

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Klossowski, *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1969).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

to foster a better understanding of these theories as well as to generate a more nuanced reading of the objects under investigation. This dissertation will incorporate research into an array of subjects, from the late works of the Italian filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini, to the Mexican artist, filmmaker, and theater practitioner Juan José Gurrola, to theorists Deleuze and Lyotard, and to the works of Klossowski himself, as well as that of his colleagues Georges Bataille and Antonin Artaud, his brother Balthus, and Klossowski's mentor André Gide. Exploration of these connections will require an in-depth consideration of the intellectual ecology of the 1930s/1940s dissident surrealist group, in which Klossowski and Bataille participated and were founding members; and a re-conceptualization of these theories as they cultivated international and generational waves of influence, from the appreciation for and incorporation of Klossowski and Maurice Blanchot's texts on Sade by the Italian Marxist poet and filmmaker Pasolini, to the re-emergence of certain dissident surrealist thought on fascism and eroticism incorporated and expanded upon by members of the Mexican neo-avant-garde, in the philosophical-erotic fiction of Juan García Ponce, and in the diverse visual and conceptual work of the artist and filmmaker Gurrola. Indulging the sometimes borderline incomprehensible aspects of the work, we *must* explore the baroque influences that helped generate this thought, from its debt to an alternative anti-Enlightenment canon, one that re-centers and carries through, for example, certain obscure medieval philosophies to their inheritance in Gide, Klossowski, and Bataille. Examination of the history of the so-called "French irrationalist philosophy" is therefore necessary for

mapping this longer trajectory, in terms of cataloguing the influences inaugurating some of these later neo-avant-garde strategies.

However, before getting into the theoretical stakes of the project, a brief biographical note concerning its subject is necessary. Pierre Klossowski was born in 1905 in Paris, son of the artist Baladine and the art historian Erich Klossowski, older brother to the celebrated painter Balthus. Today he is best known for his monographs on Nietzsche (*op. cit.*) and le Marquis de Sade (*Sade mon prochain*, 1947; republished with major edits, 1967). Confidant of Georges Bataille, Klossowski participated in the publication of *Documents* (1929-1930), attended the *Collège du sociologie* (1937-1939), and was a member of Bataille's journal *Acéphale* (1936-1939) and the secret society of the same name. In 1953, Klossowski wrote and published the pornographic-philosophical novel *Roberte ce soir*, the first in a series of novels involving the same themes and characters, followed with *La Révocation de l'Édit de Nantes* (1959) and *Le Souffleur ou Un théâtre de société* (1960). In 1965, Klossowski produced a work of experimental fiction entitled *Le Baphomet*, an audacious novel that garnered him the prestigious *Prix des Critiques*.<sup>3</sup> Klossowski was likewise a translator, having translated Nietzsche, Holderlin, Kafka, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Virgil into French. He was responsible for the 1936 French-language edition of "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" by

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<sup>3</sup> When the *prix des Critiques* board agreed to confer the prize, Klossowski's former colleague Roger Caillois resigned his jury seat in protest. He cited the novel's formal deficiencies, its "regrettable and persistent failings" in grammar and syntax. After his resignation, Caillois penned an editorial in *Le Monde* lambasting the decision. He argued that awarding Klossowski would leave a mark on the reputation of the prize, relativizing its value and dishonoring its tradition. Roger Caillois, "Roger Caillois dénonce 'Le Baphomet' pour cause de style," in *Le Monde*, 19 June 1965.

the philosopher Walter Benjamin, as well as for bringing into French the complete notebooks of the artist Paul Klee. Klossowski, who had written a small trove of art theoretical texts over the course of his career, abandoned writing altogether in 1972 to focus his attention on plastic compositions: lead and colored pencil drawings, and then eventually sculpture and film. His final and perhaps most influential literary work was his parodical economic treatise *La monnaie vivante* (1970), which Michel Foucault hailed as “the greatest book of our time.” The text would go on to inspire two major works of twentieth century aesthetic philosophy: Deleuze and Guattari’s *L’anti-Œdipe* (1972) and J.-F. Lyotard’s *Économie libidinale* (1974). Notable exhibitions of Klossowski’s visual work include a show at *documenta 7*, in 1982, and the retrospective exhibition of his work organized by the Centre Nationale de Arts Plastiques in Paris in 1990.

Amongst his other occupations—writer, translator, painter, philosopher, etc.—I promote Pierre Klossowski as a hitherto unexamined (or under-examined) film theorist. His theory of the “tableau vivant,” established in his fiction and embellished in numerous theoretical texts, has immediate application in film theory. I, however, would not be the first to point this out. Klossowski’s work on the tableau vivant, a cinematic theory of stasis predating the neo-avant-garde and structuralist film experiments of the 1960s onwards, was briefly transported into “film theory” by the philosopher Lyotard in his now-classic 1973 text “L’acinéma.” The connection has been addressed more recently by the theorist Eleanor Kaufman, who, after completing a monograph on Deleuze (*Deleuze and Guattari: New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy, and Culture*) quickly mused on the



importance of Klossowski's theory in a letter to Stephen Arnott in 2001 (printed in "Deleuze's Idea of Cinema," *Film-Philosophy*, Deleuze Special Issue vol. 5 no. 32, November 2001). Kaufman's point of reference for examining Klossowski is the early to mid-1970s work of the philosopher Lyotard. I discuss this heritage in the first section of chapter one, tracing Lyotard's theory of cinematic stasis to its origin in Klossowski's erotic fiction, the *tableau vivant* passages of his novel *La Révocation de l'Édit de Nantes*.

Secondly, it occurs that Klossowski himself had worked in cinema, both tangentially, via intermediaries, and directly, having worked professionally as an actor on more than one occasion. The first was a small role in Robert Bresson's *Au Hasard Balthazar* (1966), where he played the "miser" who takes in the young Marie and her donkey. That same year, 1966, Klossowski begins dreaming of film adaptations of his own literary works, and, by the end of the next decade, sees a small handful made: most notably, Pierre Zucca's 1979 adaptation of *La Révocation de l'Édit de Nantes*, entitled *Roberte*, where Klossowski himself stars as Octave, opposite his wife Denise Morin-Sinclair, who plays the titular character. Two adaptations come prior to this effort, however, with the Paris arrival of the politically-exiled Chilean filmmaker Raúl Ruiz. Ruiz had contacted Klossowski for two adaptations, *La vocation suspendue* (1978) and *L'Hypothèse du tableau volé* (1979), neither of which saw direct contributions from the author beyond his approval of the rights. The first was an adaptation of Klossowski's debut novel, produced by Ruiz for French television. The second was a more free-wheeling interpretation of the painting motif from *La Révocation de l'Édit de*

*Nantes*, with an exploration of certain ‘Klossowkian’ characters culled from different essays and literary works: a caricature of Octave from the ‘Laws of Hospitality’ trilogy, a character resembling Ogier from Klossowski’s *Le Baphomet* (1965), and another playing the goddess Diana, an allusion to Klossowski’s 1956 study *Le Bain de Diane*. There were likewise numerous documentaries made about Klossowski and incorporating his participation, including notably Alain Fleischer’s experimental biographical portraits in the 1990s. Among these works, what stands out especially is the film by Zucca, having attracted the participation and oversight of Klossowski himself. Its most notable characteristic is the somewhat amateur-feel of the acting and scenography, giving the impression (like Zucca’s own 1970 photographic plates illustrating *La monnaie vivante*) of the personal (and obsessive) nature of Klossowski’s themes, as well as reiterating, in the very fact of its casting, the strange collapse of identity involved in the assumption and denial of the roles of Octave and Roberte, a theme carried out in the novels and rehearsed, as well, in “real life,” in Denise Morin-Sinclair’s anecdotal denials of “being Roberte,” and so on, whose affect and physiognomy she clearly embodies.

However, the intent of this study is not to provide a review of Klossowski’s fiction as adapted for the screen. Doing so would require entirely different strategies and methods to what I propose. I will instead focus on the *influence* that his written work has had on a variety of other productions, from his reception into film theory via Lyotard and Gilles Deleuze, to the work of two (quite dissimilar) film authors who were both influenced by Klossowski’s thought: the Italian filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini and the

Mexican artist Juan José Gurrola.<sup>4</sup> The aim of this study is not only to provide insight into the work of these artists, but to, in large part, map this terrain for future film theory scholarship, to, in some detail, trace the intellectual history that underlies an otherwise diverse group of artists and theorists, highlighting the waves of influence that connect the intellectual concerns of the 1930s/1940s French dissident surrealist group (Klossowski, Bataille and company) to these later figures in neo-avant-garde theory and visual art.

A further objective of this project is to combat the trend in the reception of post-structuralist film theory that (due in part to the opacity of the texts themselves) neglects the history that these theories implicitly engage. This statement ought to at least provisionally answer the question “Why Klossowski?” as our primary theoretical source. Klossowski’s theories concerning movement, language, and image, formulated in the presence of his friend and collaborator Georges Bataille, has had a significant influence on such post-structuralist thinkers as Deleuze and Lyotard, weighing heavily on those theorists’ respective conceptualizations regarding the moving image. A resuscitation of Klossowski has a number of repercussions for our thinking on poststructuralist aesthetics, as well as for psychoanalytic film theory. In the pages that follow, I highlight a number of

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<sup>4</sup> Scholarship connecting Pasolini with Deleuze is plentiful, starting with the network of references to Pasolini’s free indirect subjective in Deleuze’s two cinema books. There is likewise connection between Klossowski and Pasolini, however, less extensively examined, one of admiration from afar (as indicated in the bibliographic slide in *Salò*). The same is true of the connection between the figures of French dissident surrealism and their influence on the Mexican art and literary scene. Insightful scholarship has been conducted on this subject: Graciela Gliemmo’s article on the influence of Bataille and Artaud in Latin American literature, and the more recent study conducted by the literary historian Juan Carlos Ubilluz on the influence of French dissident surrealism on Salvador Elizondo, García Ponce, and others. Graciela Gliemmo, “La inscripción de una escritura: Georges Bataille en América Latina,” in *Revista de la Universidad de Antioquia* 62 (232), 45-57. Juan Carlos Ubilluz, *Sacred Eroticism: Georges Bataille and Pierre Klossowski in the Latin American Erotic Novel* (Bucknell University Press, 2006).

these problems with the aim of demonstrating the potential for the larger theoretical project.

The epigraph page of this dissertation reproduces a quote from Georges Bataille's *L'expérience intérieure* (1943): "Ce sacrifice *que nous consommons* se distingue des autres, en ceci : le sacrificateur lui-même est touché par le coup qu'il frappe, il succombe et se perd avec sa victime."<sup>5</sup> The section from which this quote is referenced relays an argument crucial for both Bataille and Klossowski's shared formulation of sacred sociology, what Klossowski later calls "counter-sociology," both theorists having located the concept in Nietzsche. The effort, launched by Bataille and involving Klossowski, along with others in the literary context of dissident and ethnographic surrealism, comprised several unorthodox projects that sought to reintroduce the sacred in modern society. "Sacred sociology," the very project of the College, names the conspiracy wherein the practices of art and science establish themselves as the dominant powers, on the ruins of the normative social institutions. For both Bataille and Klossowski, the conspiracy of sacrifice is existential and irreducible. The notion that the one who sacrifices is at once 'lost with the victim' is, I argue, the force motivating Lyotard's theorization of acinema, Pasolini's experimentation with the free indirect subjective, and the perfection of film's sacrificial concept in Gurrola's elaboration of the "anti-kinetic."

This dissertation is divided into four parts: part 1, "Acinema," a chapter detailing Lyotard's reception of Klossowski, laying down the groundwork necessary for

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<sup>5</sup> Georges Bataille, *L'expérience intérieure, Œuvres complètes*, t. V (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 176.

understanding Klossowski's aesthetic theory against some notable trends in psychoanalytic film theory. This research, concerned primarily with unpacking Lyotard's reference to Klossowski in the discussion of cinematic stasis, arrives to correct a tendency in the English-language scholarship on Lyotard's film theory that neglects the crucial pre-history necessary for the critique of libidinal economy. Essential for establishing 'acinema' as a particular vocabulary meant for analyzing experimental film, I argue, relies first on understanding the complexity of Lyotard's invocation of Klossowski in his appeal for representation as the requisite for abstraction.

In part 2, "The Free Indirect Subjective," I present research on the relevance of Klossowski and Bataille for Pasolini's late work, specifically the theorization of narrative economy in the film adaptation of *Les 120 Journées de Sodome*. In this chapter, I pay attention to the importance given to Klossowski's theoretical essays on Sade within Pasolini's adaptation: in particular, the relevance of Klossowski's critique of the Sadean moral stasis, a supposedly unrepresentable phenomenon that Pasolini, initially through the tortuous route of his own film theoretical adventures, feats to imagine on-screen. Whereas Pasolini's citation of Klossowski, both in the film's title cards as well as in character dialogue, is neglected within the existing scholarship on the film, I argue that Pasolini gives an important thinking through of the acinematic concept via his nuanced experimentation with film subjectivity. Although Pasolini met an untimely demise following the production of *Salò*, a look at the posthumous notes for the next film project, *Porno-Teo-Kolossal*, reveals further development on the Sadean theme. Between *Salò*

and the unrealized *Porno-Teo-Kolossal*, I chart the development in Pasolini's later thoughts on cinema to the editorial history of Klossowski's *Sade mon prochain*: specifically towards the idea of the Sadean libertine, a proxy for the filmmaker himself: from the impossibility of his project to transgress God's moral law (to produce perfect, static heterogeneities or acinemas) to the eventual integral dissolve of moral categories in absolute excess, as in the atheistic framework of Pasolini's final unrealized project.

Part 3, "The Anti-Kinetic Film," presents research on the reception of Bataille, Klossowski, and Artaud by the Mexican neo-avant-garde artist, theater practitioner, and filmmaker Juan José Gurrola, an argument leading towards Gurrola's conception of a filmic anti-economy in his 1972 film *Robarte el arte*. Although, in the previous chapter, Pasolini imagines the problematic of 'stasis' through radical departures in narrative economy, it is Gurrola who celebrates 'acinema' in its truest expression: as a critique of economy itself. In my argument, this work must be understood through the logic of libidinal investment and expenditure, conceived primarily through the exploitation of narrative stasis, or the so-called 'anti-kineticism' of the film's intertitles. Though the film itself can be read according to the historical position of its subject at documenta, it is the positioning of the film as a form of libidinal anti-economy, or as an attempt to re-invest power into the conceptual objects supposedly robbed of their libidinal investments by the sterility of the market, that the film takes on a somewhat more complex organization. I conduct this analysis through a close reading of Gurrola's film-action-text with Klossowski's own parodical 1970 critique of political economy in *La monnaie vivante*.

Lastly, in part 4, “Powers of the False,” I wade into the reception of Klossowski, Bataille, and Artaud by Deleuze and other theorists, including a discussion of Klossowski’s reading of Nietzsche and Klossowski’s important commentary on the tableau construction of the works of his brother, the celebrated painter Balthus. If the chapter on Pasolini represents a discussion of Klossowski’s evolution, from the Christian apologia of Sade to a full embrace of Bataillean heterology, the kind represented in the cryptic anti-economy of Gurrola’s film, this fourth chapter represents the wider application of acinema theory moving forward. Artaud’s writings on cinema present an interesting case study and correlation to Klossowski’s and Bataille’s theories on economy and art. If Artaud’s mad howling, in his theorization of both theatrical and cinematic cruelty, represents the irrecoverable excess of signification, so too, this excess is the meaning given to the force created by Nietzsche’s mad laughter: a preoccupation of both Bataille and Klossowski in their readings of the philosopher. However, before embracing ‘madness’ as the culmination of the theory of acinema, it would benefit us to recall the caveat on representation, that which, fundamental to the theory of acinema, keeps the project from collapsing into a simple expression of psychosis. Here, I return to Klossowski on the tableau vivant, in particular his reading of the tableau formations in the artworks of his brother Balthus. My intention in ending the dissertation here is to make clear, as Bataille had done with his own criticism of Klossowski, that the questions posed by Klossowski, the very questions that lurk behind the formulations of Lyotard’s enunciation of Acinema, still contain the relevant kernel for a radical thought of

*sovereignty* to emerge, the kind of sovereignty of thought represented in the madness of the late Nietzsche or in Artaud's theater: affirmation of the images of representation as, instead, psychological images of purely libidinal investment. With this thought of sovereignty, of images unmoored from their sterile or conventional use, one must return and re-think the conservative formula of the tableau vivant, where reciprocity, in the sense of the Sadean moral stasis, is banned, where our access to 'freedom' is guarded by obsessive figures, the demon, for instance, of Balthus's painting, or by the momentary access to 'truth' granted by the dwarf's lifting of the curtain, bathing our subject in light.

The point of this study is not to undermine the existing and contradictory forms of film theory. Rather, I simply mean to address what has existed hitherto as an eccentricity in the intellectual history of *acinema*, specifically, encapsulated in the relevance of Klossowski, a troublesome thinker, to its formation, and against the much more dominant theories, literature, and visual works produced by a greater variety of theorists and filmmakers. A decade and several years prior to Lyotard's attempt at formulating 'acinema,' the realist film philosopher André Bazin conceptualized in an influential essay the meaning of the *hors-champ*, or off-screen space, as the limit of the moving image, that which, albeit existing outside the frame, has a necessary virtual existence in the imagination of the spectator. In the dissertation ahead, in a challenge to traditional cinema realisms, I present the theories surrounding *acinema*, the free indirect subjective, and the anti-kinetic film as film theoretical imaginings of the limits of the image that exist *before our eyes*, not off-screen: the limits embedded within the image itself, the unspeakable



substructures onto which all investments are made, according to whose unknown logic instantiates our unconscious relationship with the moving image.

## Pt. 1: Acinema

In his 1973 essay “L’acinéma,” the philosopher Jean-François Lyotard theorizes cinema as the product of negation. The essay, published originally in the philosophy of arts journal *Revue d’esthétique*, was written in the wake of Lyotard’s *Discours, figure* (1971), his prolonged defense of avant-garde aesthetics. Highlighting the prominence of the image in psychoanalysis as the feature motivating Freud’s conception of primary process thinking, Lyotard’s analysis was premised on a deconstruction of psychoanalysis’s mutual implication of image-based, pre-symbolic mental processes and the realm of discourse that conforms them. “Acinema” comprises an elaboration of this project, gauging the medium’s potential for a *positive*, pre-symbolic form of “thinking.”

Film itself, for Lyotard, in its most rudimentary aspect, comprises precisely this phantasmal force, a material that yields intermediately to language, more specifically to the conventional language(s) of cinema. What remains unassimilable in this process, he explains, falls to the cutting room floor. Yet these abandoned shards of celluloid are no different than that stuff from which film in its final product is composed—discontinuous fragments of reality ushered into place (“made productive”) by the hand of the film’s editor. “No movement,” he writes, “is given to the eye/ear of the spectator for what it is.... Instead, every movement brought forward sends back to something else, is written as a plus or minus on the ledger book which is film, is valuable because it returns to something else, because it is thus potential return and profit.”<sup>6</sup> The sensuous immediacy

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<sup>6</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, “L’acinéma,” in *Des dispositifs pulsionnels* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1994), 58. Originally published in *Revue d’esthétique*, n° 2-4, 1973. “Aucun mouvement... n’est donné à

of film, its immanence as an “intensity of recorded reality,” is, in other words, negated by the actions of the director, the editor, the post-production crew, whose job it is to effectively neuter the image of its excess—to give the image over not to what it is in itself but to what it can contribute to the next article in the continuous chain of images.

Lyotard’s description of the cinema, posed from the perspective of the film practitioner, has its counterpart in a competing theory which takes as its center the passive subjectivity of the spectator. The theoretical concept of “suture,” which originates in Lacan’s seminars,<sup>7</sup> was incorporated into film theory through the work of Jean-Pierre Oudart, Daniel Dayan and Stephen Heath as a concept of cinematic space serving to provide a solution to the problem of “primary identification” central to Jean-Louis Baudry’s and Christian Metz’s psychoanalytic film theories. Their argument concerning the spectator’s imaginary identification with the place of the camera would, according to the suturists, be necessarily undermined by the spectator’s awareness of the frame as such. As Kaja Silverman notes, in Lacan’s mirror stage, the joy associated with the infant’s moment of self-recognition is mediated instantly by the “lack” embedded in his image, a feeling of displeasure that becomes inextricably tied with *jouissance* thereafter.<sup>8</sup> In its relationship to suture, this displeasure is analogous to the kind of tension produced

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l’œil-oreille du spectateur pour ce qu’il est.... [A]u contraire tout mouvement proposé *renvoie* à autre chose, s’inscrit en plus ou moins sur le livre de compte qu’est le film, *vaut* parce qu’il *revient-à* autre chose, parce qu’il est donc du revenu potentiel, et du rentable.”

<sup>7</sup> “Suture,” a term appropriated by the analyst Jacques-Alain Miller, is applied for the purpose of designating the relationship of the subject to the chain of its discourse. The concept of suture was formally introduced in a lecture entitled “Suture: Elements of the Logic of the Signifier,” in *Cahiers pour l’analyse* 1, Winter 1966.

<sup>8</sup> Kaja Silverman, “Suture (excerpts)” in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 219.

by the first (potentially unresolved) shot in a film sequence, a tension held at bay by cinema's consistent "phasing-in of subject vision" in continuity editing. With the successful relay of narrative, the spectator is, of course, meant to understand the desire of the characters and their motivations for achieving these goals. The ingenuity of the suturists, however, was to ask, beyond basic character pathology, what it is that motivates the cinema itself. Recognition of the figure that sutures film's discourse, the "Absent One" in Oudart's term, is tantamount, they say, to the trauma of the mirror, a repression that haunts the entire history of cinema's narrative development. This figure is made apparent only ever in the uncanny cinematic hiccup—the fortuitous moment in a film when narrative becomes "unsutured" and hence gives way to this cinematic Other.

With a premise similar to the suturists ("film acts as the orthopedic mirror analyzed by Lacan [...] [as] the constitutive function of the imaginary subject"), Lyotard's project branches off as soon as it leaves the domain of critique in an attempt to make room for a positive conception of cinema as an alternative to the classical paradigm, a cinema of the impulses.<sup>9</sup> In suture theory, the delineation of the "absent one" never takes a positive form, but appears only ever as an excess cast in relief against the enunciation of a narrative. What is essential for this theory, therefore, is narrative production, a place where the "objects" of film can reliably unite. For the suturists, in other words, imaginary identification has always-already occurred: the body of the child is delivered to the symbolic order as soon as its spatial relations are configured, as soon

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<sup>9</sup> Lyotard, "L'acinéma," 65. "Le film agit ainsi comme le miroir orthopédique dont Lacan a analysé [...], la fonction constitutive du sujet imaginaire."

as the child's image is given unity in the gaze of an other. Even when this big Other rears its head, it can do so only negatively. Its negative existence is the ultimate reminder of the assimilating power of the symbolic order—whatever lapses these drives arise, they do so only to be (re)subordinated to the proper functioning of conscious thought.

Suture's edifice, therefore, leaves little room for a conception of cinema outside the bounds of narrative representational development. There can be no conception, within this theory, for the functioning of primary process thinking or unconscious, image-based mental processes as they relate to imaginary identification. Claiming this difference, Lyotard writes: "The real problem is to know *why* the drives spread about the polymorphous body *must have* an object where they can unite. That the imperative of unification is given as a hypothesis in a philosophy of 'consciousness' is betrayed by the very term 'consciousness,' but for a 'thought' of the unconscious [...], the question of the production of unity, even an imaginary unity, can no longer fail to rise in all its opacity."<sup>10</sup> On this line of thinking, it has been, according to Lyotard, a mistake to accredit Freud with the discovery of the movement of the drives. Freud's project was rather to describe impulsive life only in reference to what can be said of it, and hence from these descriptions he derives the terminology of his discipline—a translation of the unconscious drives into conscious speech. There is, for Lyotard, however, no discipline

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. "[L]e problème véritable... est de savoir *pourquoi il faut*, aux pulsions éparses sur le corps polymorphe, un objet où se réunir. Dans une philosophie de la conscience, ce dernier mot dit assez que cette exigence d'unification est donnée par hypothèse; elle est la tâche même d'une telle philosophie; dans une « pensée » de l'inconscient [...], la question de la production de l'unité, même imaginaire, ne peut plus manquer de se poser dans toute son opacité."

without a ‘disciplining.’ Psychoanalysis must necessarily by reference to ‘structure’ denigrate sensual experience. Cinema no doubt takes the same function: movements that derive from impulsive life are disciplined, limited to the (cinematic) norms of tolerance.

Lyotard follows instead a vocabulary set forth by the philosopher Pierre Klossowski, who, in his literature and especially in his writings on Sade and Nietzsche, produces a philosophy of the simulacrum, a ‘kinetic problematic’ conceived primarily not as representation, but rather as enigma: ‘the paradoxical product of the disorder of the drives, as a composite of decompositions.’ Within this vocabulary an alternative consideration for cinema might take form—an ‘acinema’ that exists at the antipodes of the medium, at the extremes of movement and non-movement. A digression through Klossowski’s conceptual edifice is therefore necessary before we continue with Lyotard’s analysis—in particular, his formulation of the *tableau vivant*, which, for Lyotard, exists at the limits of cinema: cinematic stasis, or the mobile rendering of a frozen two-dimensional image. Klossowski’s theorization of the tableau forms the basis of Lyotard’s reception of stasis, ergo it must be considered as paramount for his theorizing the potential of a cinematic avant-garde.<sup>11</sup> It provides, likewise, a guiding light through

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<sup>11</sup> In his historical analysis of suture in narrative cinema Stephen Heath mentions the early tableaux-orientation of silent-era, pre-cinematic film (films characterized by long immobile takes from a fixed-position camera). These, he explains, existed prior to the “modern representation of vision” brought about by the practice of continuity editing in the classical cinema. *Tableaux vivants* carry over into the early twentieth century in cinema, having to do with the fact that tableau constructions were a convention of professional photographers and that many of these photographers carried over as the first cinematographers. Yet, for Lyotard, this reference in Heath’s writing would seem to mark an elision in his analysis—if, for instance, narrative space were indeed a construction sutured around the absence of a signifier (and therefore that which exists ‘outside’ narrative can only be addressed in terms of its transgression), then what is the alternate ‘process of vision’ required by the tableau of early cinema? Against suture theory’s constant ‘phasing in of subject vision’ (‘with every positive assertion, there is necessarily a process of negation’), Lyotard thus raises the question for an ‘Acinema’—a cinema that

the quagmire of recognition as elaborated by the premises of suture theory and psychoanalytic film discourse. The difficulty of this effort, however, lies in translating the effect of Klossowski's theorization, obscured in the setting of a pornographic-philosophical fiction, into the discourse of academic philosophy—something that Lyotard deftly accomplishes in *Économie libidinale*.

### Tableau Vivant

Introduced in Klossowski's fiction in the context of his 'Laws of Hospitality' trilogy, a series of erotic-philosophical novels written between 1953 and 1960, the tableau vivant plays an important role in the description of a (fictional) set of paintings related by Klossowski's protagonist Octave, an aging, perverse theologian and art collector, thought to be a double for the author himself. The first novel in the trilogy, *La Révocation de l'Édit de Nantes* (1959),<sup>12</sup> comprises a set of diary entries written by Octave and his wife Roberte, oscillating between two narratives: the first, Octave's commentary on the works of an imaginary pompier artist named Tonnerre, the erotically-charged paintings that form Octave's personal collection and, second, the description and enactment of the bizarre custom that he and his wife share, referred to as the 'laws of hospitality.' These laws, codified by Octave and pinned to the wall of their abode, detail the rules of their

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refuses to eliminate the intensities, the 'aberrant movements,' that are the ruin of narrative economy.

<sup>12</sup> Pierre Klossowski, *La Révocation de l'Édit de Nantes* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1959). In terms of publication dates, this novel was the second release. After the completion of the trilogy, Klossowski re-defined *La Révocation de l'Édit de Nantes* as a prequel to the earlier *Roberte, ce soir* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1953).

home, that Octave, in his duties as host, must offer his wife to the pleasure of his many fortuitous house-guests. For Octave, the rationale for these laws is perversely theological, legitimized by an argument from medieval Scholastic philosophy, a line of reasoning that rests on the following premise: in order to possess the essence of Roberte, Octave must first deny her purely accidental distinctions (“society woman,” “wife,” “hostess”) to uncover her “essence” in the moment of its becoming. Over the course of the narrative, the setting of the novel becomes increasingly surreal. Its most frequently cited episode is the infamous scene in which Roberte, tied to parallel bars, has the palms of her hands licked by a hunchbacked dwarf and a giant. Such scenes have an ambiguous relationship to the laws described. Are they, in fact, offerings of Octave’s wife according to these laws? Are they imaginary? In descriptions resembling dreams, are they instead projections of the husband’s desire? The question of these visions’ origin, whether Octave’s descriptions might be trusted, or, if they are too marred by pathology to be extricated from the logic of his peculiar desires, is the question present in the other aspect of the novel, in the erotic and eroticizing descriptions of the paintings. “Is there not risk enough,” Octave wonders, “that my own descriptions, though based on the painting’s material reality, should hint at a morbid reverie?”<sup>13</sup>

Octave’s formal descriptions of his art collection, which account for the greater portion of the novel, are remarkably similar to those descriptions he gives of his wife Roberte while she undergoes various forms of sexual acts. Often neglecting explicit

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<sup>13</sup> Op cit, 145. “Ne serait ce pas déjà un risque suffisant pour ma propre description, si elle ne s’appuyait sur la réalité matérielle du tableau, qu’elle laissât transpirer une rêverie morbide?”



sexual description, Octave places primary emphasis on the hands and what they express: resistance or beckoning. There remains room enough in these passages for the descriptions to be fabricated, to be an analysis of events, or analyses of paintings that are skewed by Octave's predilections, a reading encouraged by the fact that the paintings so closely resemble the situations that Roberte herself becomes involved. This problem of origination regarding Octave's textual analyses becomes summarized in the problematic of the *tableau vivant*, which Octave writes about in length in reference to the subtleties of reading the images: "In the motifs represented in several pictures [...] you recognize a propensity for scenes where violence is due to a cunning unveiling—not to the unveiled, not to the nudity, but to the unveiling, to what is in itself the least pictorial instant." "The eye," he says, "likes to rest upon a storyless motif, and our artist seems to unsettle this repose by suggesting to the mind what the painting hides. But as he is no less a thorough expert upon the space in which the object of his emotion is situated as volume, this suggestive vision comes from his skill at suspended gesture—one is almost prepared to believe he did his paintings after 'tableaux vivants.'" "In effect, though the *tableau vivant* genre is but one manner of understanding the spectacle life offers itself, what does this spectacle show us if not life reiterating itself in an attempt to right itself in the midst of its fall, as if holding its breath in a momentary apprehension of its origins; but reiteration of life by life would be hopeless without the simulacra produced by the artist who, to produce this spectacle, manages to deliver himself from reiteration."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 14-15. "Dans les motifs que représentent les quelques tableaux [...] on reconnaît une propension pour des scènes dont la violence est due à un savant dévoilement—non au dévoilé, non à la nudité,

At the center of the tableau vivant, thus, for Octave, is the suspended gesture, the holding of breath by the actor of the enacted painting, who, attempting to maintain this ‘natural’ state, a gesture indicating the movement of its character, sways under the pressure of the forces of gravity upon him. This gesture supposedly indicates something to be interpreted, but is characterized instead by an uneasiness. This uneasiness, for Octave, exists as the effect of the intrusion of language (the intrusion of interpretation) into the flow of material reality, from which the ‘idea’ of the gesture is isolated. “To what words do these gestures relate?” Octave asks. “Probably to those the painter supposes said by his characters, no less than to those the spectator may be saying as he contemplates the scene.”<sup>15</sup> This opposition between ‘gesture’ and ‘language’ becomes evident in the opposition represented itself in the fixed state of the gesture—immobile, but supposedly representative of movement: “life giving itself as a spectacle to life; of life hanging in suspense.”<sup>16</sup> Octave explains this disjunct by reference to the phenomenon of the *solécisme*, an error in the gesture’s “syntax,” as if the ambiguous gesture proceeds from a grammatical mistake in the body’s own non-verbal language: “But if it were a

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mais à l’instant en soi le moins pictural” ; “[L]’oeil aime à se reposer sur un motif sans histoire, et notre artiste au contraire semble contrarier ce repos du regard en suggérant à l’esprit ce que la peinture dérobe. Mais comme il n’en est pas moins un connoisseur accompli de ‘espace dans lequel se situe en tant que volume l’objet de son émotion, cette vision suggestive tient à son art du geste en suspens—au point que l’on pourrait croire qu’il a peint ses toiles d’après des « tableaux vivants »” ; “En effet, si le genre du tableau vivant n’est qu’une manière de comprendre le spectacle que la vie se donne à elle-même, que nous montre ce spectacle sinon la vie se réitérant pour se ressaisir dans sa chute, comme retenant son soufflé dans une appréhension instantanée de son origine; mais la réitération de la vie par elle-même resterait désespérée sans le simulacra de l’artiste qui, à reproduire ce spectacle, arrive à se délivrer lui-même de la réitération.”

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 12. “Quant à la parole? Sans doute à celle que le peintre suppose dite par ses personnages, non moins qu’à celle du spectateur en train de contempler la scène.”

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 16. “[L]a vie se donnant en spectacle à elle-même; de la vie demeurant en suspens....”

matter of solecism,” he says, “if it were something contrary which the figures utter through this or that gesture, they must say something in order that this opposition be palpable; but painted they are silent; would the spectator speak on their behalf, in such a way as to sense the opposite of the gesture he sees them performing? It remains to be seen whether, having painted such gestures, the artist wanted to avoid solecism; or whether, from painting the kind of scenes he chose, he was, to the contrary, trying to demonstrate the positiveness of the solecism which could be expressed only through means of an image.”<sup>17</sup>

What is at stake between Octave’s reading of the tableau and his fantasy, involving himself as voyeur to the exploitation of Roberte, the philosopher Deleuze summarizes in his essay from the appendix of *Logique du sens*: “He [Octave] attempts to multiply Roberte’s essence,” he writes, “to create as many simulacra and reflections of Roberte as there are persons in relation to her, and to inspire Roberte to emulate somehow her own doubles, thanks to which Octave, the voyeur, possesses and is able to know her better than if he had kept her, quite simply, for himself.”<sup>18</sup> The problem for Octave’s analysis of the tableau is precisely that it breaks with the singularity of the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 12. “Mais s’il y a solécisme, si c’est quelque chose de contraire que les figures font entendre par un geste quelconque, il faut qu’elles dissent quelque chose pour que ce contraire soit sensible; mais peintes, elles se taisent; le spectateur parlerait-il donc pour elles, de façon à sentir la contraire du geste qu’il les voit faire? Reste toujours à savoir si, pour avoir peint pareils gestes, l’artiste voulait éviter le solécisme; ou si, à peindre le genre de scènes choisies, il cherchait en revanche à démontrer la positivité du solécisme qui ne s’exprimerait que par l’image.”

<sup>18</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Logique du sens* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1969), 328. “Il s’agit pour lui de multiplier l’essence de Roberte, de créer autant de simulacres et de reflets de Roberte, qu’il y a de personnes entrant en rapport avec elle, et d’inspirer à Roberte une sorte d’émulation avec ses propres doubles, grâce auxquels Octave-voyeur la possède et la connaît mieux que s’il la gardait, toute simplifiée, pour lui-même.”

subject and implies, in the solecism, the conditions for recognizing the *insignificance* of the object. “One possesses thoroughly only what is expropriated, placed outside of itself, split in two, reflected in the gaze, and multiplied by possessive minds.”<sup>19</sup> Hence, if vision takes the form of possession, consisting in a doubling, a dividing and a multiplying of the image, the voyeur, in witnessing what occurs, has a more intense participation than if he were immediately involved. Envisioning the object, in other words, in its *insignificance* means to ‘possess’ what exceeds personal experience, what is multiple in the object: “To possess is thus to give over to possession and to see the given multiplied in the gift.”<sup>20</sup>

To Lyotard’s critique of the drives in Freud’s project, it suffices to say that ‘reality’ “is only ever a sector of the imaginary field which we have agreed to renounce, from which we have accepted to withdraw our phantasms of desire.”<sup>21</sup> The image, the phantasmatic object, is given first; it correlates to the vision of the subject; the solecism is negated, and hence the image is understood as grammatical. “Representation,” writes Lyotard, “is therefore essential to this phantasmatic; it is essential that the spectator be offered instances of identification, recognizable forms, matter for the memory, because it is at the price of going beyond this and disfiguring the order of propagation that the intense emotion is felt.”<sup>22</sup> This price paid (‘disfiguring the order of propagation’) is the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid. “On ne possède bien que ce qui est exproprié, mis hors de soi, dédoublé, reflété sous le regard, multiplié par les esprits possessifs.”

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. “Posséder, c’est donc donner à posséder, et *voir* ce donné, le voir se multiplier dans le don.”

<sup>21</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *Discours, figure* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971), 284. “La réalité n’est jamais qu’un secteur du champ imaginaire auquel nous avons accepté de renoncer, duquel nous avons accepté de désinvestir nos fantasmes de désir.”

<sup>22</sup> Lyotard, “L’acinéma,” 67. “Il est donc essentiel à cette fantasmaticque d’être représentative, c’est-à-dire d’offrir au spectateur des instances d’identification, des formes reconnaissables, et pour tout dire matière à mémoire car c’est au prix, répétons-le, d’outrepasser celle-ci et de défigurer l’ordre de la

dissolution of the subject, of the productive self, and the sudden emergence of a ‘new’ “unproductive” subject, which Octave aspires for his wife Roberte: “This image of self, mirrored in the gaze of others upon her, only comes to her when inside her there wells up the irresistible urge to live, which she thinks she is obliged to curb, an urge to be free of her dignity, of this dignity that seems to be engraved in the regularity of her features.”<sup>23</sup>

The price of dissipation, and its resultant creation of a new subject, “is the same price” writes Lyotard, “that the cinema should pay if it goes to the first of its extremes, immobilization: because this latter [...] means that it would be necessary to endlessly undo the conventional synthesis that normally all cinematographic movements proliferate.”<sup>24</sup> In the context of Lyotard’s early writings, acinema presents a theory tied to this larger project of libidinal economy: a project to render, against the ravages of institutional signification, an alternative political economy for the preservation of impulsive life. If classical cinema produces through its conventions of framing and editing a ‘glorious body’ in the form of a cinematic language, acinema retrieves its libido in the form of cinematic disruption. These disruptions (in reference to the critique of suture theory) would not have a ‘negative existence’ against the positive constructions of cinematic form. Disjunctions between soundtrack and image, between images

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propagation que se fera sentir l’émotion intense.”

<sup>23</sup> Klossowski. *La Révocation de l’Édit de Nantes*, 56-57. “Encore cette image de soi, reflétée par le regard d’autrui, ne lui vient-elle que dans l’irrésistible montée du besoin de vivre qu’elle pense se devoir de refréner, besoin de se libérer de sa dignité, de cette dignité comme inscrite dans la régularité de ses traits.”

<sup>24</sup> Lyotard, “L’acinéma,” 67. “C’est le prix même que devrait payer le cinéma s’il allait au premier de ses extrêmes, l’immobilisation : car celle-ci (qui n’est pas l’immobilité) signifierait qu’il lui faut sans cesse défaire la synthèse convenue que tout mouvement cinématographique répand.”

themselves, contain the only essential form of cinema. The notion that a medium's structure prefigures narrative content is undermined, from the seat of the spectator, by the fact that content is, again and again, eternally present. The difference for Lyotard is that the first shot (understood as the "phantasm") eternally recurs, figuratively speaking. Its aesthetic is not simply that of a visual practice alternative to the classical paradigm; its aesthetic is that of vision itself, of Octave's vision, a vision that doubles and re-doubles and never in fact possesses what it seeks. Beyond the tragic dissolution of an ideal spectator, what emerges for Lyotard is the place of a creator (an editor, a director), who sees the image freed from conventional burdens. Narrative is thus known as that which offers the image (and the impulses) fictitious goals and meanings.

This revelation, however, is not the end of fictions once and for all, a total de-mystification. "If we demystify," says Klossowski, "it is only to mystify more thoroughly."<sup>25</sup> What becomes revealed, after conventional narratives are unsettled, is a choice: either to produce simulacra in conformity to the constraints of communication or to produce them via the obsessional constraints of perversion. This choice, for Lyotard, marks the place of the artist—the place of Octave whose desires faithfully shape and distort his readings. The exchange of images according to this latter model represents a 'fraudulent exchange,' a rupturist form marked by the intensities of the voyeur-artist, who, in his brooding over the unified, immobile image, denounces his own inadequacy to reproduce it in thought.

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<sup>25</sup> Klossowski. *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux*. 194. "[O]n ne démystifie que pour mieux mystifier."

## Negation

Before moving forward, we ought to acknowledge the sense in which Lyotard addresses the question of “negation,” necessary for our understanding of his characterization of the “positive” nature of the libidinal cinema.

In the work preceding “L’acinéma,” Lyotard’s 1971 dissertation *Discours, figure*, Lyotard catalogues three separate forms of “negation,” analyzed in a section of the work entitled “The ‘No’ and the Position of the Object.” He casts these definitions in recognition of the terminological ambiguity that has bothered interpretations of Freud since the publication of his 1925 essay “Die Verneinung.” ‘Verneinung’ is meant to signify ‘negation’ in the grammatical sense, while also meaning ‘denial’ (to deny, refuse, disavow) in the psychological sense. In his writing, Freud exhausts the economic and psychological aspects of the word. According to Lyotard, Freud’s definition of the term falls according to three distinctions: 1) ‘negation’ as one of the possibilities offered by the closed system of syntax, that which comes across in negative statements; 2) ‘negation’ as the transcendental mark of reference, as the fundamental property of language produced in the subject, marked by the distance that separates the phenomenal “I” from the object of discourse; and, 3) ‘negation’ in the sense of the negativity of desire. The difficulty for translating this essay confirms for Lyotard the complicated coordination of these distinctions for Freud’s conception of desire, the different registers through which desire operates, and the negative recognition of desire as a disturbance in discourse.

In the essay on negation, Freud gives the example of the analysand who insists

that the figure represented in his dream is “not [his] mother,” to which the analyst responds, the figure in the dream therefore “*is* his mother.” This would be the logical scandal whereby the analyst, according to Freud, “takes the liberty of disregarding the negation and seiz[es] on the pure content of the thought.”<sup>26</sup> “By considering [the analysand’s denial] only as a segment taken from a closed system—that of language—the statement ‘it is not my mother’ presents negation as one of the possibilities offered by the system’s syntax, as one of the ways to articulate experience: for the logician it represents a determination of judgment according to the category of quality.”<sup>27</sup> However, Lyotard, quoting the linguist Benveniste, contends that the linguistic factor (the syntactical ‘No’) is not the decisive factor in this process. The discourse of the subject “can produce a preponderance of denials, but it cannot abolish the fundamental property of language, which is to imply that something corresponds to what is uttered, something and not ‘nothing.’”<sup>28</sup> The analyst’s interpretation therefore signifies entry into a different order (re: Lyotard’s second distinction), according to the logic by which negation is conceived as the distance that separates the subject’s speech from its object. “If, however, the analyst believes himself entitled to interpret No as a Yes, this is because he leaves behind the order of formal signification, of the closed system, in order to open under this No the

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<sup>26</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Negation,” in *The Penguin Freud Reader*, ed. A. Phillips (NY: Penguin, 2006), 96.

<sup>27</sup> Lyotard, *Discours, figure*, 118. “A ne le considérer que comme segment pris dans un système clos, celui de la langue, l’énoncé « ce n’est pas ma mère » présente la négation comme l’une des possibilités offertes par la syntaxe du système, comme l’une des manières d’articuler l’expérience : pour le logicien, elle est une détermination du jugement selon la catégorie de la qualité....”

<sup>28</sup> Qtd. in Lyotard, *Discours, figure*, 118. “Son discours [du sujet] peut prodiguer les dénégations, mais non abolir la propriété fondamentale du langage qui est d’impliquer que quelque chose correspond à ce qui est énoncé, quelque chose et non pas rien.”



traversal, vertical dimension of designation.”<sup>29</sup> Knowledge of the unconscious, Lyotard explains, is afforded by the breach opened in discourse through the recognition of the object (for instance, the analysand’s “mother”) as lost, which is to say, the negative recognition of an object positioned ‘outside’ the coordinates of discourse (“the dream is not about the analysand’s mother—it is about *not being about* the analysand’s mother,” a distinction that constitutes the relationship of the speaking subject to the lost or barred Other of the subject’s discourse).

What allows the content of the analysand’s dream to be speakable then is a negative articulation. Distance occurs in the analysand’s denial and in the simultaneous registration of the negative content preserved in the form of disapproval. “The analysand’s negation,” explains Lyotard, “repeats the negation that makes discourse possible, just as it expresses that which is the condition of the system of language.”<sup>30</sup> Freud elaborates that the result “is a kind of intellectual recognition of the repressed while the essential element [the repression] remains in place.”<sup>31</sup> Though conservative in function, the formal negation, as “object” of the analysand’s thought, points to the primordial affirmative act of symbolization that logically precedes the possibility of negation in general (what Freud refers to as *Bejahung*). As Lyotard writes, “the negation that distinguishes itself formally in the utterance allows a view of the supporting structure

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<sup>29</sup> Lyotard, *Discours, figure*, 118. “Si pourtant l’analyste se sait fondé à interpréter Non également comme Oui, c’est qu’il sort de l’ordre de la signification formelle, du système clos, pour ouvrir, sous ce Non, la dimension transversale, verticale, de la désignation.”

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 123. “Sa négation répète la négation qui est la possibilité du discours comme elle exprime celle qui est la condition du système de la langue.”

<sup>31</sup> Freud, “Negation,” 97.

of discourse, suggesting a hole punched through its floor through which we fleetingly catch sight of the persistent distancing that protects the order of language from that of the objects of which it speaks, and that allows it to cut them up, in total freedom, according to its logic.”<sup>32</sup> In other words: the ramifications of a wholly positive (symbolic) concept of negativity functioning in the grammar of the analyst.

In an essay entitled “Explication continuée” (*Tel Quel*, no. 8, 1962), written almost a decade after the publication of the first novel of the Roberte trilogy, Klossowski re-imagines the strange experience he has returning from the grips of his monomaniacal obsession with the unique sign of ‘Roberte’ (enacted in his writing studio) to the garrulous, transactional world of *le code quotidien*, the everyday code of signs. “[A]s soon as I left the stage of this mental comedy,” writes Klossowski, “my memory was immediately invaded by sensations, ghosts, specters of apprehension. I find it difficult to support this abrupt return to the sollicitations of life, of its problems that want to be solved without the unique sign....”<sup>33</sup> According to Klossowski, the ordinary sign exhausts its meaning before having been spoken, conferred in a language that disappears as soon as it is no longer needed. “The result brings silence,” Klossowski remarks, “dissatisfaction

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<sup>32</sup> Lyotard, *Discours, figure*, 120-121. “Pareillement la négation qui se marque formellement dans l’énoncé offre une vue sur les soutènements du discours, elle suggère une trouée dans son plancher par où nous apercevons distanciation persistante qui maintient l’ordre du langage à l’abri de celui des objets dont il parle et qui lui permet de les découper en toute indépendance conformément à sa logique propre....”

<sup>33</sup> Pierre Klossowski, “Explication continuée,” in *Tableaux vivants: essais critiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 98. “De la sorte, dès que je quittais la scène de cette comédie mentale, aussitôt m’envahissait la mémoire avec autant de sensations que de fantômes de corps, de spectres que d’appréhensions. J’ai du mal à soutenir ce brusque retour des sollicitations de la vie, de ses problèmes qui se veulent résoudre sans le signe unique....”

breaks it. On the other hand, in the world of the sign, dissatisfaction reigns where the world of commercial affairs considers the result obtained.”<sup>34</sup> According to Lyotard, the explanation for the dissatisfaction with ordinary language is what occupies the most enigmatic passage in Freud’s text, the passage located at the heart of the *Verneinung* essay, on the subject of exteriority and interiority. “To negate something in judgment is basically to say: ‘This is something I’d rather repress.’”<sup>35</sup> This repression, says Freud, is a judgment made according to the life of the drives, their function to decipher what is ‘good’ and ‘bad’ in perception, and whether those objects actually exist. What is imperative here “is no longer to valorize, but to understand if the object itself is *outside* [of the subject] or merely *inside* [as phantasy], and therefore if [the object] has been rejected (and lost) or on the contrary incorporated, whether it has been the object of destruction or the subject of pleasure.”<sup>36</sup> Following Freud, syntactic negation is tied to the destructive drive, “the impulse to reject, to place outside, to repress, or rather to foreclose” the undesirable object.<sup>37</sup> This alignment of negation/destruction represents a “fundamentally ambiguous relation, since [negation] is at once the emblem of [the negated content’s] presence and the means of its disappearance.”<sup>38</sup> This ambiguous

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. “Le résultat obtenu ramène le silence, l’insatisfaction le rompt. En revanche dans le monde du signe, l’insatisfaction règne là où le monde des affaires considère le résultat obtenu.”

<sup>35</sup> Freud, “Negation,” 97.

<sup>36</sup> Lyotard, *Discours, figure*, 124. “Seulement il ne s’agit plus ici de valoriser, il s’agit de reconnaître si l’objet lui même est dehors ou seulement dedans, si par conséquent il a été rejeté (et perdu) ou au contraire incorporé, s’il a été objet de destruction ou sujet de plaisir.”

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 123. “[E]ntretient avec l’impulsion destructrice, l’impulsion à rejeter à mettre à l’extérieur, à refouler ou plutôt à forclore....”

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. “[U]n rapport foncièrement équivoque, puisqu’elle est à la fois l’emblème de présence et le moyen de sa disparition.”

relation is, moreover, in the spirit of Klossowski's complaint—embedded in the logic of the unique sign (the short circuit of internal/external distinction in phantasy, which knows no repression), judgment is turned on its head when this logic is collapsed in ordinary affairs.

As we recall from Deleuze's analysis, the unique sign of Roberte is that which is revealed at the crossroads of the 'glorious body' of language and the perversity of the body's pantomime—the suspension of gesture in the tableau vivant as that which, in Octave's attempt at description, introduces hesitation into language. Only through an explosion of syntax, through an endless careening of interpretation, can Octave attempt to mimic in language the expression of the body-in-flux, an object whose simultaneity is, for Octave, indescribable. Failure of expression is a result of the weakness of designation, he laments. "As soon as we 'name' or 'designate' something, we 'denounce' it as well."<sup>39</sup> Therein lies the indicative value of negation for Freud: the symbol of negation as a way of designating what is repressed. The image of Octave's phantasy seeks to render positive what language would otherwise denounce ("the rapes of Roberte punctuate reasons and alternatives"). We might understand denunciation as the condition for the system of language itself. "[A]n obscure law," writes Klossowski, "forbade me to see [Roberte] in order to be able to describe [her]—such a preoccupation remained untenable without the substitution of signs...."<sup>40</sup> For Freud's example of the mother as 'lost object', the

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<sup>39</sup> Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, 330. Translation modified. "Des qu'on « nomme », dès qu'on « désigne quelque chose ou quelqu'un, à condition de le faire avec la précision et surtout le style nécessaires, on le « dénonce » aussi...."

<sup>40</sup> Klossowski, "Explication continuée," 96. [U]ne loi obscure m'interdisait de jamais les voir pour

recovery of the mother in the analysand's language is through the very matrix of absence-presence represented in the *fort-da* game—the recovery of an object through its replacement by an elementary signifier. This elision (fort/da, absence/presence) is what allows language to, as Lyotard writes, “account for the reverse side of things.”<sup>41</sup>

“Desire thus begins,” explains Lyotard, “as long as it is preceded, heralded, and marked by its procession of representatives, because the negativity of the object-sign begins and because the distance and tension—which forever separate the ‘interior’ and the object—spread out. The representation of the drive, which is what constitutes desire, requires the possibility of the negative being established: such is the referential function of language.”<sup>42</sup> For the position of Roberte in Octave's phantasy (recall the caveat in the previous section not to take these descriptions as ‘objective’ in the traditional sense), Octave's language is capable of flattening the various contradictory ‘attributes’ that comprise the phantasy, or the attributes that exhaust Roberte's seemingly unlimited erotic potential. Like the response of the analyst to the negated content produced in the discourse of the analysand, Octave's descriptions accede the negated content, the negative potential that overflows the image of Roberte, rendering into language the object of Octave's phantasy. “Admitting that this conspiracy forms the very axis on which the rotation of Roberte's body takes place— even if this conspiracy exists otherwise than

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seulement arriver à les décrire, —cependant, une telle préoccupation demeurerait insoutenable sans une substitution des signes....”

<sup>41</sup> Lyotard, *Discours, figure*, 126. “[C]ette éliision qui fait l'envers des choses...”

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. “Le désir commence alors pour autant qu'il est précédé, annoncé et marqué par son cortège de représentants, parce que commence la négativité de l'objet-signe, parce que s'étend la distance, la tension qui séparent à jamais « l'intérieur » et l'objet. La représentation de la pulsion, qui constitue le désir, exige que le négatif puisse être posé: telle est la fonction référentielle du langage.”

how I write this conspiracy is woven under the skin of Roberte as much as in my syntax.... She refuses me the right to speak about it.”<sup>43</sup>

What Klossowski (through Octave) describes is the need, according to Lyotard, to articulate in language a body without limits, or a language adequate for representing the intensity of the body’s affect. “This body,” explains Lyotard, “knows no limits. It does not stop at a surface or frontier (the skin) that would disclose an interior and an exterior. The body is extended easily beyond that so-called frontier because words, books, food, images, glances, pieces of body, animals, sounds and gestures can be invested in it. Therefore they can function as charged regions and as outflow canals in the same way as an ‘organ,’ such as the liver or stomach in psychosomatic emotions or illnesses.”<sup>44</sup>

As discussed in Lyotard’s essay on acinema, narrative is what binds or represses intensity, what bars the affective dimension of the event in order to control or exploit its intensity for a specific narrative theatricality. For Octave’s description, there is no escape from the administrative form of representation nor its assignation to a place within a constitutional system (for example, even in Octave’s description, Roberte is identified as fulfilling a number of roles: wife, hostess, society woman, Huguenot, member of the

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<sup>43</sup> Klossowski, “Explication continuée,” 98. “En admettant que cette conspiration forme l’axe même sur lequel s’effectue la rotation du corps de Roberte cette conspiration se trame sous l’épiderme de Roberte autant que dans ma syntaxe.... Elle lui refuse le droit d’en parler.”

<sup>44</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, “Petite économie libidinale d’un dispositif narratif: le régie Renault raconte le meurtre de Pierre Overney” in *Des dispositifs pulsionnels* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1994), 157-158. “Ce corps n’a pas de limites, il ne s’arrête pas à une surface ou frontière (la peau) qui dissocierait un extérieur et un intérieur, il se prolonge aussi bien par-delà cette prétendue frontière parce que des mots, des livres, nourritures, images, regards, morceaux de corps, outils et machines, animaux, sons, gestes, peuvent être investis, donc fonctionner comme des régions chargées et comme des canaux d’écoulement, au même titre qu’un « organe » comme le foie ou l’estomac dans les émotions ou les maladies psychosomatiques.”

French board of censors). To locate 'Roberte' as the 'libidinal thing'—as a surface of "undecidable connections"—is to give a name for that which is 'lost' in Roberte's theatrical presentation. Each assignation (wife, host, censor) dissimulates the sign, makes relative the network of signs that constitutes her place, and therefore also the relative position from which these assignments were cast—as well as a cataloguing of the distinct regions of her body that might supply the phantasy. Lyotard describes Octave's evocation of the proper name "Roberte" against the backdrop of the particular case (Roberte qua X) as "like a disjunctive bar turning at high speed around some point or other—the gaze, the vulvar slit, the gloved thumb, an intonation, and displacing itself in an aleatory fashion on the segment which forms the bar."<sup>45</sup> "Roberte" is what Lyotard refers to as a "tensor sign," a 'rigid designator' marking the overdetermination of opposed forces that constitute the various, contradictory aspects of her potential being. "If Roberte is a tensor, it is not because she is both a slut and a thinker, but because she exceeds both these assignations in the vertigo of an intensity."<sup>46</sup> He continues: "Roberte is not someone's name (a predicate of existence), even if this were to be double, it is the name of this unnameable, the name of Yes and No, and of both the first and the second, and if the proper name is a good example of the tensorial sign, it is not because its singular designation creates difficulties when one thinks in concepts, but because it covers a

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<sup>45</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *Économie libidinale* (Paris: Minuit, 1974), 71. "[L]e nom *Roberte* est comme une barre de disjonction tournant à toute vitesse autour d'un point quelconque, le regard, la fente vulvaire, le pouce ganté, une intonation, et se déplaçant lui-même aléatoirement sur le segment que forme cette barre."

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. "Si Roberte est un tenseur, ce n'est pas parce qu'elle femme publique et femme de tête, mais parce qu'elle excède jenseits l'une et l'autre de ces assignations dans le vertige d'une intensité...."

region of libidinal space open to the undefinability of energetic influxes....”<sup>47</sup>

For Freud, the ‘absent mother’ is ‘objectivity’ reified; for the analysand, the ideational content of what is repressed reaches consciousness. “Yet the loss of the mother is not sufficient in itself for her to be objectified. The mother is ambiguous (good-bad) well before objectification is possible.”<sup>48</sup> The tensor designates this ambiguity, which is “pre-object” and “pre-objective.” What the tensor describes then is the residue of the breakup of “an originary situation” (identification) given over to language—the split conceptualized in the recognition of the mother as an originary site of pleasure (tension/release), canceled/repressed in the child’s future development.

“This is why the first retraction, that of the breast, far from tracing the fault line between ego and reality, only establishes auto-erotism, the coiling of the corporeal surface upon itself, and the reconstitution of the pleasure-ego’s self-sufficiency, and thereby grounds childhood polymorphic perversion, which relies on such a denial of reality.”<sup>49</sup> Here, the expelled-missing object is retained from experience by means of the economic principle of cathexis. It is the mechanism through which desire works its way through language, understood in the form of the disturbance in the unbinding of libidinal

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 71-72. “Roberte n’est pas le nom de quelqu’un (prédicat d’existence), serait-il même double, c’est le nom de cet innommable, le nom du Oui et Non, et du ni Oui ni Non, et du et le premier et le second, et si le nom propre est un bon exemple de signe tensoriel, ce n’est pas parce que sa désignation singulière fait difficulté quand on pense par concept, mais c’est parce qu’il couvre une région de l’espace libidinal livrée à l’indécidabilité des influx d’énergie, une région en feu.”

<sup>48</sup> Lyotard, *Discours, figure*, 125. “La « mère » est ambivalente (bonne-mauvaise) bien avant que l’objectification soit possible.”

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 125-126. “C’est pourquoi le premier dédit, le retrait du sein, bien loin de tracer la ligne de clivage entre Moi et réalité ne fait qu’instituer l’auto-erotisme, l’enroulement de la surface corporelle sur elle-même, la reconstitution de la suffisance du Moi-plaisir, et que fonder la perversion polymorphe de l’enfance, qui repose sur un tel déni de la réalité.”



energy from its institutional signification.

The analyst, in the example of the analysand's "it is not my mother," goes beyond the simple, logical negation to address the system of oppositions that forms the foundation of language. The analyst's method to render desire 'speakable' is adopted by Octave—the naming of the tensor opens the possibility for an affirmative conception of desire, the potential for signifying the intensity of the event as a dissimulation that short-circuits representation by means of the refusal to exhaust the capacity of the unique sign. As we shall see, this 'affirmative conception of desire' requires a unique staging.

### Mise-en-scène

"Mise-en-scène is not an artistic activity," says Lyotard: "it is a general process connecting all fields of activity, a profoundly unconscious process of separation, exclusion, and effacement."<sup>50</sup> Elsewhere he describes it as the activity of transmitting "signifiers from a 'primary' space to another space" according to certain rules: "imposing here *and* there, in 'reality' just as in the real, the *same norms*, the same ordering of all drives, excluding obliterating, effacing them *no less off* the screen than on."<sup>51</sup>

In reference to the mirror stage, we recall Lyotard's comment that "film acts as the orthopedic mirror analyzed by Lacan in 1949 as constitutive of the imaginary subject

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<sup>50</sup> Lyotard, "L'acmé," 63. "La mise en scène n'est pas une activité « artistique », elle est un processus général atteignant tous les champs d'activité, processus profondément inconscient de départages, d'exclusions et d'effacements."

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 64. "... qui impose *ici et là*, dans la « réalité » comme dans le réel, *les mêmes normes* qui instancie pareillement toutes les impulsions, et qui par conséquent n'exclut et n'efface *pas moins hors scène* qu'en scène."

of the *objet a*.” For Lyotard, following Lacan, this imaginary subject, formulated in the context of the mirror stage, *is* the absent cause of desire (the *objet a*). An image that situates the body in *Gestalt*, that allows the subject to locate him or herself as an object articulated within the unified plane of the mirror, is relevant for the formation of the ego as a product of the Other’s mediation, the desire of the subject mediated by the desire of the Other. “That the imperative of unification is given as hypothesis in a philosophy of ‘consciousness’ is betrayed by the very term ‘consciousness,’ but for a ‘thought’ of the unconscious (of which the form related most to pyrotechnics would be the economy sketched here and there in Freud’s writings), the question of the production of unity, even an imaginary unity, can no longer fail to rise in all its opacity.”<sup>52</sup> Lyotard’s comment refers to the model of psychical energy that tethers Freud’s theory of the ego and the principle of constancy, antithesis to the pyrotechnics that forms this ‘real’ economy over which the ego is defined like figure to ground. Just as for the infant before the mirror, the spectator is given a ‘good image’ conforming to some unified, imaginary configuration of reality: “*good* form, *good* lighting, *good* editing, *good* sound mixing are not good because they conform to perceptual or social reality,” Lyotard warns: “but rather because they are a priori scenographic *operators* which on the contrary determine the objects to be recorded on the screen *and in ‘reality.’*”<sup>53</sup> What is reproduced in good form, in other

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 65. “Dans une philosophie de la conscience, ce dernier mot dit assez que cette exigence d’unification est donnée par hypothèse; elle est la tâche même d’une telle philosophie; dans une « pensée » de l’inconscient, dont l’une des formes la plus apparentées à la pyrotechnie serait l’économique ici ou là esquissée par Freud, la question de la production de l’unité, même imaginaire, ne peut plus manquer de se poser dans toute son opacité.”

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 63. “... la *bonne* lumière, le *bon* montage, le *bon* mixage ne sont pas bons parce qu’ils sont conformes à la réalité perceptive ou sociale, mais parce qu’ils sont les *opérateurs* scénographiques *a*

words, is the imaginary configuration of reality in conformity with the vision of the Other. As such, the film is, as Lyotard describes, the orthopedic mirror grounding recognition, an image of bound (rather than unbound) intensity, energy that is “at rest, quiescent, provisionally conserved, inscribed” in the image of the film, in its composition, in the promise of meaningful return.

According to Lyotard, *mise-en-scène* first artificially separates reality from the stage, and, maintaining the separation, redoubles the rules of the first onto the second. “[B]eyond this representational disjunction, in a ‘pre-theatrical’ economic order, [direction] eliminates *all impulsional movement, real or unreal, which will not lend itself to reduplication*, all movement which would escape identification, recognition, and the mnesic fixation.”<sup>54</sup> What Lyotard describes is the conservative conspiracy of the first order and its theatrical redoubling—emphasized not as a phenomenon exclusive to the rarefied field of “production design” but for the phenomenon of signification in general.

“[T]he real problem, missed by Lacan due to his Hegelianism, is to know why the drives spread about the polymorphous body *must have* an object where they can unite.... We will no longer have to ask ourselves how and why the *specular wall* in general, and thus the cinema screen in particular, can become a privileged site for the libidinal cathexis.”<sup>55</sup> Here Lyotard casts Lacan’s reading of the formation of the ego in the mirror

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*priori* qui déterminent au contraire les objets à enregistrer sur l’écran *et dans la « réalité ».*”

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 64. “... par-delà cette disjonction représentative, dans un ordre « pré-théâtrique », économique, *tout mouvement impulsional, qu’il soit de déréel ou de réalité, qui ne se praterait pas à redoublement, qui échapperait à l’identification, à la reconnaissance et à la fixation mnésiques.*”

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 65. “Mais le problème véritable, que Lacan élude en raison de son hégélianisme, est de savoir *pourquoi il faut*, aux pulsions éparses sur le corps polymorphe, un objet où se réunir.... [O]n aura à se demander comment et pourquoi la *paroi spéculaire* en général, et donc l’écran cinématographique en

stage as a convenient backwards look. According to Lyotard, Lacan's account relies too heavily on the theory of the ego to give an accurate interpretation of this process: "A libidinal economy of the cinema," he explains, "should theoretically construct the operators which exclude aberration from the social and organic bodies and channel the drives into this set-up. It is not clear that narcissism or masochism are the proper operators: they carry a tone of subjectivity (of the theory of the ego) that is probably still much too strong."<sup>56</sup> As theorist Julie Gaillard points out, "To Lyotard, Lacan can only account for the moment of the articulation of the primordial form of the subject because he presupposes it, 'pretend[s] to understand' it. But this model only accounts for the channeling of the life drives towards their propagation, thereby operating the foreclosure of all the death drives."<sup>57</sup> What the commentary on Lacan amounts to, for Lyotard, is a critique of this all-pervasive conspiracy of *mise-en-scène*, conceived in the wider sense: "Independent of all 'content,' as violent as it might seem, *mise-en-scène*, considered from the angle of this primordial function of an exclusion spreading to the exterior as well as to the interior of the cinematographic medium, always acts as a *libidinal normalization*."<sup>58</sup> Lyotard's gripe with Lacan therefore is this teleological rendering of the mirror stage as

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particulier, peut devenir un lieu privilégié d'investissement libidinal..."

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. "Une économie libidinale du cinéma devrait littéralement construire les opérateurs qui sur le corps social et organique excluent les aberrances et canalisent les impulsions dans ce dispositif. Il n'est pas certain que le narcissisme ou le masochisme soient les opérateurs convenables; ils comportent une teneur en subjectivité (en théorie du Moi) sans doute encore beaucoup trop élevée."

<sup>57</sup> Julie Gaillard, "Imaginary Constructs? A Libidinal Economy of the Cinematographic Medium" in eds. Graham Jones and Ashley Woodward, *Acinemas: Lyotard's Philosophy of Film* (Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 79.

<sup>58</sup> Lyotard, "L'acinéma," 64. "Indépendamment de tout « contenu », aussi « violent » puisse-t-il paraître, la mise en scène considérée l'angle de cette fonction primordiale d'exclusion, étendue aussi bien à l'« extérieur » qu'à l'intérieur de l'aire cinématographique, agit donc toujours comme un facteur de *normalisation libidinale*."

the functioning of the conspiracy of the ego *avant la lettre*, therefore excluding consideration of whatever aberrations are sublated in the process. “All of these so-called objects are the result of the imposition and hope for an accomplished totality. They are supposed to realize the reasonable goal *par excellence*, the subordination of all partial drives, all sterile and divergent movements to the unity of an organic body.”<sup>59</sup>

In an essay entitled “The Unconscious as *Mise-en-scène*” (1977), Lyotard experiments with the concept of *mise-en-scène sans metteur-en-scène*, image creation conceived in a radically different sense than in the earlier cinema formulation. In this later essay, Lyotard weighs the unconscious as the originator of phantasy images, produced without a “regulating brain,” whose operator, conceivably, is the work of desire itself (opposed to the subjective operators of narcissism and/or “good form”). One of the principle objects of analysis for such a conception of “the unconscious as *mise-en-scène*” would be what Freud called “screen memories,” a distortion of memory formed as the compromise between repressed content and the subject’s defense. In the image produced, psychic significance is transferred onto otherwise extraneous but associated details, and this mechanism is, according to Freud, the work of the unconscious. In Lacan’s estimate (which is guided by the axiom that the ‘unconscious is structured like a language’), the screen memory “take[s] the function of a substitute for what is not seen” (“... prendre la fonction de substitut de ce qui n’est pas vu”): “With phantasy we find ourselves in front

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid. “Ses objets, qui n’en sont pas, résultent tous de l’imposition et de l’espérance d’une totalité effectuée, ils sont censés réaliser la tâche raisonnable par excellence, qui est la subordination de tous les mouvements pulsionnels partiels, divergents et stériles à l’unité du corps organique.”

of something of the same order, which fixes the course of memory, reduced to the instantaneous state, by stopping it at this point which is called the screen memory.”<sup>60</sup>

Lacan explains this moment as the subject’s encounter with the impossible *objet a*, the moment when the chain of memory (that is, the symbolic chain) stops. Lacan recounts the famous example of the origins of the foot fetish, where the child’s vision remains on the mother’s ankle, the last recognized shape, before traveling up the skirt to reveal the mother’s phallus, which remains ‘never seen’. “This is a symbolic reduction that has progressively eliminated the whole subjective structure of the situation, leaving only an entirely unsubstantiated and ultimately enigmatic residue,” he writes.<sup>61</sup> It is in this sense that the memory displacement, like the screen in the mirror stage, serves an orthopedic function, allowing the ego to maintain its integrity in the midst of potentially destabilizing content. For Lyotard, this account of the screen memory mischaracterizes the image as *merely* the effect of symbolic compromise, thus discouraging further examination of the phantasy as it relates to its unconscious production. Following Freud, Lacan acknowledges that analysis can go no further than the kernel of the dream; the object cause of desire, he explains, remains untranslatable. However, according to the libidinal economics resurrected by Lyotard, Freud’s conception of the productive aspect of the unconscious intimates new avenues for speculation.

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<sup>60</sup> Jacques Lacan, “*On bat un enfant et la jeune homosexuelle*” in *Le Séminaire, livre IV: La relation d’objet, 1956-1957* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1994). “Avec le fantasme nous nous trouvons devant quelque chose du même ordre, qui fixe, réduit à l’état d’instantané, le cours de la mémoire en l’arrêtant en ce point qui s’appelle le souvenir-écran.”

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 119. “Il y a là comme une réduction symbolique qui a progressivement éliminé toute la structure subjective de la situation pour n’en laisser subsister qu’un résidu entièrement désubjectivé, et en fin de compte énigmatique.”

In *Discours, figure*, Lyotard comments that the “thing-presentations” (“phantasmatic images”) nurtured by phantasy “hardly represent ‘things,’ that is to say, objects recognizably pertaining to the external world.”<sup>62</sup> These ‘things’, like the innocuous object of the screen memory, appear as images superimposed onto one another, “as if multiple scenes... were [by analogy] superimposed onto the same film.”<sup>63</sup> What the multiplicity of the phantasy scene points to, Lyotard argues, is the atemporality or omnitemporality of the primary process. Due to phantasy’s omnitemporal complex, the ‘word-presentations’ associated with phantasy (descriptions of the phantasy scene) run counter to the ordinary rules of syntax. Lyotard analyzes Freud’s classic essay “A Child Is Being Beaten” (1919) to elaborate this claim. In this essay, the female masturbation phantasy “A Child Is Being Beaten” is taken apart according to multiple, contradictory phases, elaborated not according to the model of desire as concealed wish but of desire as libidinal force, a network of drives that superimposes its objects onto the scene without respect to a meaningful/(narrative/representable) chronology.

In this example, the patient reports her phantasy that a “child (somewhere) is being beaten (by someone),” against which Freud is able to verbalize three distinctive, simultaneous stages that account for this imaginary scene: 1. the sadistic (“[my] father is beating the other child [that I hate]”); 2. the masochistic (“[my] father is beating me”);

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<sup>62</sup> Lyotard, *Discours, figure*, 327. “Les « représentations de chose » (les images fantasmatiques) qu’il nourrit ne représentent guère des « choses », c’est-à-dire des objets relevant du monde extérieur et reconnaissables comme tels.”

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 327-328. Translation modified. “... comme faites de la surimpression, sur une même pellicule... de plusieurs scènes qui n’auraient en commun que certains segments.”

and 3. the sado-masochistic (“a child is being beaten”). “With the help of the patient’s recollection, Freud ‘discovers’ that this first description [‘a child is being beaten’] hides another one [‘[my] father is beating the child’]”; “Between the first and the last phase,” he continues, “it is necessary to postulate an intermediate phase [‘[my] father is beating me’].”<sup>64</sup> The superimposition of multiple contradictory phases is necessary to explain the patient’s various investments in the scene—the genital gratification that accompanies the phantasy, the love/jealousy for the child, the hatred/admiration for the father, and the sense of shame that inhibits the phantasy’s avowal. What characterizes these multiple, concealed investments is their exclusivity and their simultaneity without respect to causality or contiguity. “What makes [the phantasy] impossible to represent,” explains Lyotard, “is that it stands for the atemporality of the primary process.... The formation may be submerged by a new libidinal surge, the investment overcompensated for by a counter-investment, but there is no going back to the blank page.”<sup>65</sup>

The tableau of “A Child Is Being Beaten” is cross-hatched with these impossible investments. “A drive-siege,” writes Lyotard, “never lets up. The opposite

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<sup>64</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, “The Unconscious as Mise-en-scène,” trans. Joseph Maier, in *Performance in Postmodern Culture*, eds. Michel Benamou and Charles Caramello (Madison, WI: Coda Press, 1977), 91. Lyotard’s original text, which was submitted in English to Michel Benamou prior to its publication in 1977, was misplaced following the death of its English language translator, Joseph Maier. The text provided in footnotes is a reconstruction of Lyotard’s original essay produced by Lyotard’s former student and translator Roger McKeon, given to the author as an unpublished manuscript. “A l’aide des souvenirs de ses patients, Freud “découvre” que cette scène en dissimule une autre, qu’il résume par la phrase”; “Entre la première et la dernière phase, dit Freud, il faut postuler une phase intermédiaire qu’il appelle : « mon père me bat ».”

<sup>65</sup> Lyotard, *Discours, figure*, 337. “Ce qui nous rend impossible toute représentation, c’est qu’il est le répondant, dans l’étendue, de l’atemporalité ou de l’omnitemporalité du processus primaire.... La formation pourra être recouverte par une nouvelle poussée libidinale; l’investissement surcompensé par un contre-investissement; on ne revient jamais à la page blanche.”



or inverse investment which accompanies it does not suppress the first, does not even conceal it, but sets itself up next to it. All investments are, in this way, contemporaneous with each other: one loves and hates the same object at the same time and in the same respect, which is contrary to the rules of intelligibility.”<sup>66</sup> However, Freud describes these investments as bearing upon particular operations of the unconscious, interpreted in a way that runs up against or contorts the classical understanding of *mise-en-scène*.

“For instance, from ‘the father is beating the child’ to ‘my father is beating me,’ it is necessary that the patient, who was a spectator, become an actress, that the love of the father be turned into hatred, that the hatred for the other child be turned into the hatred the girl feels for herself... that the sex of the victim be changed (from male to female), along with the position of the spectator in relation to the stage.”<sup>67</sup> But what is the point of Freud’s detailing these transformations, other than to say that the drives, relevant to the phantasy scene, undergo genuine metamorphoses? These metamorphoses are given over by the drives’ representatives, in the words, images, and affects that constitute these scenes. “Since these operations are, according to Freud, characteristic of the unconscious, it is indeed the unconscious that stages the discourse of the girl’s desire, and this

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<sup>66</sup> Lyotard, “Unconscious as *Mise-en-scène*,” 94. “Un siège pulsionnel ne lâche jamais prise ; l’investissement inverse ou opposé qui l’accompagne ne supprime pas le premier, ne le dissimule même pas, mais s’installe à ses côtés. Tous les investissements sont ainsi contemporains les uns des autres : on aime et on déteste le même objet dans le même temps et pour la même raison, ce qui est contraire aux règles d’intelligibilité.”

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 92. Translation modified. “Par exemple, de « le père bat l’enfant que je hais » à « mon père me bat », il faut que la patiente, qui était spectatrice, devienne actrice, que l’amour du père se transforme en haine, que la haine pour l’autre enfant se transforme en haine que la petite fille ressent envers elle-même, que la jalousie initiale, qui n’est peut-être même pas sexualisée, soit remplacée par une pulsion à forte composante anale, que le sexe de la victime soit changé (de mâle à femelle) au même titre que la position de la patiente par rapport à la scène.”

mise-en-scène, far from being a translation, would be the transcription of a pictorial text of virtual bodies, with effect on the real body of the spectator.”<sup>68</sup> Lyotard writes, “[i]f such are the space, time, and logic of the drives, then the desire of the woman who fantasizes the beaten child is not a clear message.”<sup>69</sup> This reading undermines the Freudian/Lacanian conception of desire as the originator of ‘primary messages’ that are then disguised/distorted by their unconscious staging. “We must at least say that desire is not a legible text,” says Lyotard, “and that it need not be given a disguise by mise-en-scène in order to be represented, since it alludes interpretation on its own.”<sup>70</sup> In this note, Lyotard harkens his earlier pronouncement that “the [tableau] in general, if it holds a certain libidinal potential, does so because it brings the theatrical and economic orders into communication.”<sup>71</sup> Using Freud ‘against himself’, Lyotard performs a reading of mise-en-scène antithetical to the ordinary modes of staging, a reading that anticipates the libidinal economy, the notion of desire as force, and a conception of phantasy not wholly reducible to the “linguistic operator,” but participating in language as it does with the visual and with psychological affect.

Hence, we conceive these maneuvers as an adjustment of the earlier theory. Between the later text and the earlier ‘acinema’ formulation, Lyotard is pulled between a

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid. “Ces opérations étant, selon Freud, caractéristiques de l’inconscient, c’est bien l’inconscient qui met en scène le discours du désir de la jeune fille et cette mise en scène, loin d’être une traduction, serait la transcription d’un texte pictural de corps virtuels, avec effet sur le corps réel du spectateur.”

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 94. “Si tels sont l’espace, le temps et la logique des pulsions, alors le désir de la femme qui fantasme sur l’enfant battu n’est pas un message clair.”

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. “Nous devons au moins dire que le désir n’est pas un texte lisible, et qu’il n’a pas besoin d’être déguisé par une mise en scène pour être représenté, puisqu’il échappe de lui-même à l’interprétation.”

<sup>71</sup> Lyotard, “L’acinéma,” 66. “[L]e tableau vivant en général, s’il détient un potentiel libidinal certain, c’est parce qu’il en met en communication l’ordre théâtrique et l’ordre économique.”

structuralist and a phenomenological theory of experience. Accepting that one cannot recuperate the excess of lived experience outside its token representation in language, Lyotard wages this stalemate as a critique against our understanding of Freud. Conceiving *mise-en-scène* as the dispositive of libidinal normalization is testament to this theoretical failure. The fanciful construction of the “unconscious as *mise-en-scène*” meanwhile—signaling a return to the earlier, “visual” Freud against the Lacanian interpretation—privileges visual organization as that milieu that might harbor flashes of the unconscious. Between cinema, Lyotard’s theory of negation, and his notes on *mise-en-scène*, Lyotard supplies a useful grammar moving forward, a vehicle with which to discuss libidinal economy. Understanding cinema as “forgery,” the conspiratorial cover up of the phantasm’s libidinal staging, is itself an interesting thing to ponder in relation to Lyotard’s and our shared project of theorization, its complicity in the so-called conspiratorial arc of representation. This tension is evident in Klossowski’s thought, at the core of his vast text. In the next chapter, we will discuss how precisely this tension plays out within another of Klossowski’s main theoretical case studies, the Marquis de Sade, interpreted, once again, via an intermediary: the filmmaker Pasolini, who, reader of Klossowski, sought to re-imagine Klossowski’s theorization of the moral quandaries of representation via the cinematic adaptation of Sade’s *Les 120 Journées de Sodome*.

## Pt. 2: The Free Indirect Subjective

If the import of Klossowski into film theory weren't clear from its inauguration by Lyotard, perhaps a more practical example would suffice—one that concerns not only the theorization of Klossowski, but the entire intellectual ecology (the dissident Surrealists) from which he derives. This would involve the notorious last film of Pasolini.

In *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (dir: Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1975), while in the company of his fellow libertines, the duc de Blangis, played by the actor Paolo Bonacelli, remarks on a scene composed for him in an anterior hallway of the Château de Silling, the theater of debauchery as adapted by Pasolini from Sade's text. In this scene, two hostages are splayed out by the libertines' henchmen, Guido and Vaccari. The figures and the space they occupy form a diagrammatic tableau, a symmetrical hallway, furnished with three sets of doors, four mirrors, two chandeliers, matching light fixtures, and two windows (Fig. 2.1, 2.2). Breaking the symmetry are the patterns on the carpet and the figure of the libertines, seated opposite the demonstration at the far end of the hallway. In this sequence, two tableaus emerge in shot/reverse: first, the libertines, and, across from them in full, what they observe: Guido and Vaccari straddling and molesting their two victims. Out of this geometrical arrangement, viewed from a distance, the duc begins to speak. "You notice," he says, "that while we approach our activities with enthusiasm and passion, Guido and the mistress Vaccari could hardly be more indifferent as they caress those inert bodies. This observation leads me to reflect on certain interesting conclusions.... Their obscene gestures are like that of a deaf-mute's sign-language, a

secret code inviolable by us no matter how great our power. Nothing can be done about it. Our only recourse lies in selection. To consummate pleasure we have to restrict our impulses to one single gesture.” In an almost extra-diegetic glance towards the camera, the bishop, played by Giorgio Cataldi, clarifies his libertine brother’s source material: “Klossowski,” he says.<sup>72</sup> This “in-text citation” is given in conjunction with a bibliographic slide furnished at the opening credits of the film, referencing Pierre Klossowski’s collection of essays in *Sade mon prochain* (1947/1967) (Fig. 2.3).

Although complicated in its application, the connection between this sequence (and the film in general) and Klossowski’s magisterial reading of Sade has its merit, considered especially in light of Pasolini’s (somewhat opaque) theories concerning film and written language. In polemics with the psychoanalytic film theorist and semiologist Christian Metz, Pasolini argues that film, while having no *langue*, nevertheless pertains to a system of double articulation. According to Pasolini, the shot functions beyond the basic unity that Metz defines as the *énoncé*—the simple utterance, “here is x”—to deliver a content which is instead intrinsic to the image—the infinite virtual connections that underlie the contents of the frame, what Pasolini calls the “insensitive chaos of objects.” This understanding of the image and its articulation (in “the Sadean dissertation”) is what is at stake in the duc’s musing, as, he admits, the (dis-)articulation of the physical body

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<sup>72</sup> Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* in *Per Il Cinema*, ed. Walter Siti (Milano: Mondadori, 2001), 2041-2042: “Osservare, come stiamo qui facendo con passione non minore dell’apatia, Guido e la Vaccari che masturbano quei due corpi che ci appartengono, mi spinge ad un certo ordine di interessanti riflessioni... Tuttavia guardi lì, la gesticolazione oscena è come un linguaggio dei sordomuti, col suo codice che nessuno di noi, malgrado il suo illimitato arbitrio, può trasgredire. Non c’è niente da fare. La nostra scelta è categorica: noi dobbiamo subordinare il stro godimento a un gesto unico.”

contains a “secret,” “inviolable” code. If the scene, in other words, were reducible to description, then the stories related by Vaccari in the theater of debauchery would suffice for her libertine audience. Instead, what is given in the theater is given in reverse: mimesis yields praxis, as storytelling turns into physical acts of debauchery. It is this glorious body of language that engenders the second, corporeal text—the passion of the libertine, frustrated in his attempt to achieve what remains yet unrealized in the language of the storyteller. This is, in Klossowski’s observation, the arresting feature of Sade’s text: the frustration over that object which remains “absent” in desire.

Pasolini articulates this frustration twice in the first interior sequence of the *Château*—first, for the duc’s criticism against Vaccari’s superficial description, and second, moments later, over the lost virility of the bishop, whose failure to master the body of his squirming victim only emphasizes his inevitable exasperation before this object—leaving in his mouth the compensatory taste of bitterness that Klossowski associates with “accursed virility.” This curse is the motor that drives the full exercise of Sadean cruelty—from the partial, pathological processes of rape and humiliation associated with the demands of the provincial fascist torturer to the pure process of apathetic, eternally reiterated acts of destruction, associated with the activity of Sade’s integral monster (which I will elaborate below).

In an essay of critical importance for Pasolini’s interpretation of Sade (via Klossowski, and, in general, for the problem of “simulacra,” taken up again in his later, unrealized film *Porno-Teo-Kolossal*—to be discussed in chapter 4, “The Powers of the

False”), the philosopher Gilles Deleuze summarizes the “parallelism” that motivates Klossowski’s oeuvre between seeing and speaking: the relation between the disjunctive articulation of the physical body (that which is seen) and the “glorious body” (that which is perfected in speech).<sup>73</sup> This disjunction is, furthermore, carried by Deleuze into his reading of Pasolini’s film theoretical work, into Pasolini’s argument for film’s double articulation: “Pasolini has expressed this dual requirement very clearly,” writes Deleuze: “On the one hand, the cinematographic whole would be one single analytic sequence shot, by rights unlimited, theoretically continuous; on the other, the parts of the film would in fact be discontinuous, dispersed, disseminated shots, without any assignable link.”<sup>74</sup> “The language of cinema,” argues Pasolini, “forms a ‘visual continuum’... it is linear as is every language... a succession of perception.”<sup>75</sup> This succession will be composed of individual shots—each one representing the discontinuous dispersal of individual perceptions, strung together and “perfected” via the conventions of cinematic language. A disjunction emerges between the particularities of an image (whose limit is the frame), and that ‘whole’ segment of film into which this image is edited, made uniform, and therefore “objectified”—that is, when it is made to serve the specific

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<sup>73</sup> Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, 325.

<sup>74</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma 1: L’image-mouvement* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1983), 44; Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 27 (English). “Pasolini a exprimé cette double exigence d’une manière très claire. D’une part, le tout cinématographique serait un seul et même plan-séquence analytique, en droite illimité, théoriquement continu ; d’autre part les parties du film seraient en fait des plans discontinus, dispersés, disséminés, sans liaison assignable.”

<sup>75</sup> Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Empirismo eretico* (Roma: Aldo Garzanti Editore, 1972), 207; Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, trans. Ben Lawton and Louise K. Barnett (Indiana University Press, 1988), 202 (English). “La lingua del cinema forma un « continuo visivo » o « catena d’immagini »: è, cioè, lineare, come ogni lingua, il che implica una successività... una successione di percezione.”

narrative ends of the sequence.

An oft cited example comes from Pasolini's short essay "Observations on the Sequence Shot," where Pasolini compares the limited and meaningless "subjectivity" of the infamous Zapruder film with the meaningful "objectivity" of classical narrative cinema. In a maneuver that separates his from the realist ontology of André Bazin (who saw the long take as the objective image par excellence), Pasolini argues the reverse—that only via the intervention of montage can the image transcend the frail limit of perspective and enter into objective, hence historical, relations. If a shot is produced in the irreducible "present," as that present tense through which the camera records indexically the "image of reality" (the 60 second take of Kennedy's assassination), only through the authorial introduction of the cut and the editorial coordination of multiple "presents" into a legible sequence can this present tense be sublated for a proper historical narrative conception, "a past," Pasolini writes, "that, for reasons immanent to the cinematographic medium, and not because of an aesthetic choice, always has the quality of the present."<sup>76</sup> Filmed by the hand of Zapruder, a nonspecialist, the Kennedy assassination footage has, for Pasolini, all the marks of a relative, imprecise, and ambiguous 'take' on the situation—an ambiguity symmetrical with the pathological and historical limitations of the camera's operator (Fig. 2.4).

If Sade's libertine is, by analogy, unable to 'flatten' this distinction (between pathology and his objective, historical exercise of cruelty), nowhere is this seen with

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 236 (244). "un passato che, per ragioni immanenti al mezzo cinematografico, e non per scelta estetica, ha sempre i modi del presente (*è cioè un presente storico*)."



greater effect than in the sequence marking the denouement (“The Circle of Blood”) of *Salò*: a sequence seen through the eyes of three libertines, overlooking the brutal execution of several victims, as they alternate binoculars in a single take (Fig. 2.5, 2.6). If the “loss” associated with Zapruder’s perspective remains obscure to Pasolini’s reader, then surely this particular sequence will yield, in devastating form, the full consequence of the long take. The achievement is Pasolini’s alignment of the camera’s gaze with the pure pathology of the libertine, all the while given without the mercy of a cut. In this sequence, Pasolini parodies what Klossowski calls the “two fold experimentation” of Sade’s literature: the “relationship between the actualization of the sensuous in an act through writing and the performing of the act independently of its description.”<sup>77</sup> This type of writing, says Klossowski, can never be simply “objective.” It is writing continually caught up in the interpretive delirium that emerges between the libertine’s speech and his objective actions. Each—the representation of the sensuous in an act and the described representation—scandalizes the other. In the irreducible singularity of the libertine’s point-of-view, related via the conventional language of cinema (the customary binocular lens point-of-view shot), an apparent realization of Sade’s experiment is achieved. The libertine’s phantasm (the product of his gaze) and the writing of Sade (the descriptive representation of the act) are refracted (again) by cinema’s double articulation: the subjective gaze of Pasolini’s character is all at once engulfed by the

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<sup>77</sup> Klossowski, *Sade mon prochain* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), 22. Orig. publication: Klossowski, *Sade mon prochain* (Paris: Seuil, 1947), cited later; new ed. with substantial revisions, preceded by *Le Philosophe scélérat* (Paris: Seuil, 1967). “D’où le rapport de l’actualisation, par l’écriture, du sensible dans un acte, avec l’exécution de l’acte, indépendamment de sa description.”

‘writing’ of Pasolini’s camera. At this same moment, it renders that writing “useless.” In the context of the film, the introduction of a Zapruder-esque point-of-view sequence (the image of atrocity viewed from the confines of the libertine’s binocular vision) universalizes, in this way, the givens of the film’s subjective bias (Fig. 2.5, 2.6).

Here we might address the critique of Roland Barthes. In a June 1976 review of the film given in *Le Monde*, Barthes writes that the problem of *Salò* is due to the unfortunate predicament of this bind, the collapse of the double articulation of cinema and the perverse, dual experiment of Sade. “The Sadeans (those who delight in Sade’s text,” he writes, “will never recognize Sade in Pasolini’s film. The reason for this is general: Sade can in no way be represented,” and, secondly, “[from] a political point of view... the system [of fascism, in the film’s setting] requires a precise analysis,” one which, lifted into the allegory of the Sadean text, Pasolini’s *Salò* has no intention of giving.<sup>78</sup> What *Salò* betrays, then, is its ethical responsibility both in light of Pasolini’s “adapting” of Sade and his “abstracting” of fascism: “In short, Pasolini did twice what he was not supposed to do. From the point of view of its *value*, his film loses on both sides, for all that which *de-realizes* fascism is bad; and all that which *realizes* Sade is bad.”<sup>79</sup>

For Pasolini, who cites Barthes’ *Sade-Fourier-Loyola* (1971) alongside the work

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<sup>78</sup> Roland Barthes, “Sade-Pasolini” in *Le Monde*, June 16, 1976. “Les sadiens (les lecteurs enchantés du texte de Sade) ne reconnaîtront jamais Sade dans le film de Pasolini. La raison en est générale : Sade n’est d’aucune façon figurable”; “Du point de vue politique, Pasolini s’est trompé aussi. Le fascisme est un danger trop grave et trop insidieux, pour qu’on le traite par simple analogie, les maîtres fascistes venant « tout simplement » prendre la place des libertins. Le fascisme est un objet contraignant : il nous *oblige* à le penser exactement, analytiquement, politiquement.”

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. “En somme, Pasolini a fait deux fois ce qu’il ne fallait pas faire. Du point de vue de la *valeur*, son film perd sur les deux tableaux : car tout ce qui *irréalise* le fascisme est mauvais ; et tout ce qui *réalise* Sade est mauvais.”

of Klossowski at the beginning of his film, this review (granted Pasolini were alive to receive it) would have incited an interesting response. “Sade can in no way be represented,” writes Barthes: “Just as there is no portrait of Sade (except an imaginary one), there is no possible image of Sade’s universe: the latter, because of an imperious decision made by the writer Sade, is entirely given over to the power of *écriture*. And if this is so, there exists a privileged agreement between *écriture* and phantasm: both,” he says, “are perforated; the phantasm is not the dream, it does not follow the continuity, whether contorted or not, of a story; and *écriture* is not a painting, it does not follow the plenitude of the object: the phantasm can only be written in script and not description.”<sup>80</sup>

But does Pasolini not admit this? In the excruciating point-of-view of the binoculars sequence, is not the very point of this sequence the intolerable nature of this libertine’s phantasmal vision—a vision that does not follow the continuity of the film, a vision that stands out in its brutal radicality, its isolation?

In an essay that ought to dissociate Sade and fascism once and for all, the philosopher Georges Bataille explains that Sade, in his description of violence, attributes to the executioner the paradoxical language of the victim: he writes, “As a general rule the torturer does not employ the language of violence he exercises in the name of an established authority; rather he speaks the language of the authority itself, and that gives

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid. “Sade n’est d’aucune façon figurable. De même qu’il n’y a aucun portrait de Sade (sauf fictif), de même aucune image n’est possible de l’univers sadien : celui-ci, par une décision impérieuse de l’écrivain-Sade, est tout entier remis au seul pouvoir de l’écriture. Et s’il en est ainsi, c’est sans doute qu’il y a un accord privilégié entre l’écriture et le fantasme : tous les deux sont *troués* ; le fantasme n’est pas le rêve, il ne suit pas le lié, même biscornu, d’une histoire ; et l’écriture n’est pas la peinture, elle ne suit pas le plein de l’objet : le fantasme ne peut que s’écrire, non se décrire.”

him his apparent excuse.... If he bothers with his fellow men, he talks the language of the State to them. And if he is under the sway of passion himself, his sly silence gives him the only pleasure geared to his needs”; “Thus Sade’s attitude,” argues Bataille, “is diametrically opposed to that of the torturer. When Sade writes, he refuses to cheat, but he attributes his own attitude to people who in real life could only have been silent, and uses them to make paradoxical statements to other people.”<sup>81</sup> This conception of Sade-the-ventriloquist is precisely what is at stake in Pasolini’s theory as it concerns the property of cinema known as the ‘free indirect subjective’—the concept that film (narrative film) must speak through its characters, framing the “givens” of the scenario through this organization, all the while using character to effectively mark the camera’s point of enunciation—the objective “camera consciousness”—in a maneuver that puts the position of the camera *beyond* the realm of “subjective” and “objective” imagery towards what would be an “autonomous vision of the content”—this is the “historical present” that Pasolini associates with the culmination of montage.

In a memorable passage from Barthes’ *Sade-Fourier-Loyola*, Barthes writes that a particular sequence of Sade’s *Nouvelle Justine* presages the cinematic apparatus: the scene in which two libertines, Cardoville and Dolmus, mocking the magic lantern, construct an apparatus to ‘project’ Justine’s body towards each of the perverts in

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<sup>81</sup> Georges Bataille, *L’Érotisme* in *Œuvres complètes*, t. X (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 186. “En règle générale, le bourreau n’emploie pas le langage d’une violence qu’il exerce au nom d’un pouvoir établi, mais celui du pouvoir, qui l’excuse apparemment.... le bourreau parle à ses semblables, s’il s’en occupe, le langage de l’État. Et s’il est sous la passion, le silence sournois où il se seul plaisir qui lui convienne”; “Ainsi l’attitude de Sade s’oppose-t-elle à celle du bourreau, dont elle est le parfait contraire. Sade en écrivant, refusant la tricherie, la prêtait à des personnages qui, réellement, n’auraient pu être que silencieux, mais il se servait d’eux pour adresser à d’autres hommes un discours paradoxal.”

attendance, each part selected and divvied up according to the pervert's fetish and systematized like clockwork: "each in turn will make the patient suffer the pain assigned him. These turns will be rapidly alternated; we will imitate the ticking of a clock," says Dolmus. "A remarkable arrangement," Barthes observes, "for in the Sadean film, no one—no *I*—is actually the subject of the sequence: no one is filming it, no one is projecting it, no one is seeing it: a continuous image is locked on nothing but time, the clock."<sup>82</sup> And if one follows this particular sequence in Sade's text, one sees that this apparatus—with no *I*, no director, no projector, and no audience—after a few cycles, eventually falls apart; each one of Sade's pervers, connected with his or her beloved part, the limb or organ of the victim that he or she fetishizes best, cannot help but fall from this machine, having become impotent, exhausted, or sore. The "accursed virility" of these pervers, again citing Klossowski, leads the scene to its conclusion, the suturing of Justine's orifice, hence the closing of the film.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Roland Barthes, *Sade-Fourier-Loyola* (Paris: Seuil, 1971), 155. "«[T]our à tour chacun fera lestement subir à la patiente la douleur dont il sera chargé. Ces tours se recommenceront avec vitesse; nous imiterons le battement d'une horloge » : disposition surprenante, car dans le film sadien, personne prement le sujet de la séquence personne—aucun *moi*—n'est proprement la sujet de la séquence : personne ne la filme, personne ne la monte, personne ne la fait passer, personne ne la voit : une image continue s'enclenche sur rien d'autre que le temps, l'horloge."

<sup>83</sup> Jane Gallop, in her text *Intersections*, reads Sade similarly, through Georges Bataille, as a 'reversal' of the Hegelian dialectic of Master/Slave. One might point to the infamous coprophagia scene in Pasolini's *Salò* and reply with Gallop's "the turd will not be *aufgehoben*." Pasolini's scene, taken from Sade's text, manifests the libertines' joyous consumption of their victim's waste. Klossowski, in *SMP*, describes the meaning behind the libertine's pathological desire for recuperation. As Gallop summarizes: "The turd is the dead moment fallen out of the process. To eat it is to incorporate that which has already been detached." It is Bataille's and Klossowski's discovery that this recuperation arrives only in the form of a suspension, the suspension of identity which Klossowski terms "integral monstrosity." Paired with the libertine's exhausted virility, his inability to digest shit, to produce from it anything other than shit, indeed, according to Gallop: "the turd will not be *aufgehoben*." Jane Gallop, *Intersections, a Reading of Sade with Bataille, Blanchot, and Klossowski* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 47.

In Pasolini's version, marked by the experience of the duc and the bishop, whose remark ("like that of a deaf-mute's sign-language, a secret code inviolable by us no matter how great our power") tells the story of this accursed virility, it is the resurgence of this "silence" within the garrulous language of the victim (the disarticulate shouting and screaming, the pleading to stop) that announces then the paradoxical relationship that exists between the victim and torturer: the libertine, following Bataille, speaks the language of the victim, but the victim itself has no language except that "language" of dissimilitude—the language that the libertine wishes to speak for himself.

#### "Homme Entier"

For over a hundred years, Sade's texts had been banned in France and most of Western Europe, leading eventually to their revival by a group of artists and theorists associated with the French avant garde of the 1930s/40s, among them, Breton and the Surrealists, Lacan, Bataille, Eluard, Barthes, Blanchot, Paulhan, and de Beauvoir. When the Italian director Pasolini makes his film *Salò* in 1975, the induction of Sade into arguments regarding literature, language, meaning, etc., were by this point commonplace in the philosophical reading of Sade, but no less divisive.<sup>84</sup> Such can be seen, for example, with Roland Barthes' critique of the film, cited above—an idea against the

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<sup>84</sup> Carolyn J. Dean provides an excellent account of the recuperation of Sade in the second chapter of her book *The Self and Its Pleasures: Bataille, Lacan, and the History of the Decentered Subject*. According to Dean, these precursors to poststructuralism, Bataille, Lacan, and the others, effectively recovered Sade in order to introduce and theorize new literary and psychiatric constructions of the 'Self.' See Carolyn J. Dean, *The Self and Its Pleasures: Bataille, Lacan, and the History of the Decentered Subject* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 123-200.

pictorial ‘representability’ of the Sadean text as a language that closes in on itself. Whereas Pasolini skirts Barthes’ problem (by collapsing literature and cinema, part of his argument concerning a cinematic free indirect discourse), the problem, as Barthes would contend, points to a more specific issue with the literature of Sade, and, I would add, to the historical reception of his texts. I argue, furthermore, that Pasolini’s adaptation, through his reading of Sade in *Salò*, and through the evolution of his thoughts on ‘Sadism’ in the various treatments of *Porno-Teo-Kolossal* (1966-1975), parallels, in a curious way, the evolution of Klossowski’s thought on le Marquis de Sade, between the 1947 edition of *Sade mon prochain* and the heavily re-edited and re-conceptualized edition of 1967.

It should be noted that Klossowski’s 1947 study was perhaps the most influential text on Sade in the early post-war period and spurred a heated polemic with his colleague Georges Bataille, an argument that would shape the changes made in Klossowski’s later edition. The most straightforward difference between the two editions (1947/1967) could be summarized as follows: whereas both texts deal with the paradox of the limit in Sade, between the necessary dual conceptualizations of the law and its transgression, it is in the 1947 edition that Klossowski argues on the side of the preservation of the moral categories. No matter how hard the libertine tries, he (or she, in the case of Juliette) can never truly dissolve the existence of his/her neighbor, and thus his/her conscience. Although recognition is deferred in the libertine’s repetitive acts of a continuous, apathetic destruction, this project is, according to the 1947 argument, always doomed for

failure. What arises as the failure of this deferment and, ergo, failure of the abolition of the moral categories, is a re-affirmation of the law, a re-affirmation of the existence of the other and therefore of the existence of God. What emerges through this reading is a God-obsessed, crypto-Christian Sade who writes in a profane, fallen language to exalt the omnipotence of the divine Law. (It is here on this 1947 account that Lacan bases his exemplary reading of ‘the Law as the sadistic superego’ and cites Klossowski’s achievement being the first to outline this tortuous and difficult argument).

I argue that this reading of a ‘crypto-Christian Sade’ fits remarkably well with Pasolini’s engagement of Sade’s text in *Salò*—the emphasis on the failure of ‘becoming integral,’ as regards both the ambition of the libertine torturer as with the vision of Pasolini’s cinema apparatus itself. I will attempt to explain this argument in greater detail in the pages that follow. This reading squares, as well, at least on its face, with what we understand to be the cynical turn in Pasolini’s Catholic faith. The movement towards Klossowski’s 1967 reading is a warming up of Klossowski to the ideas of Bataille, which Klossowski begins at last to incorporate into his reformulation of ideas in *Sade mon prochain*, in his re-working of the essay “Esquisse du système du Sade” and in the new introduction “Le philosophe scélérat.” This reconceptualization in no way undoes the complexities of Klossowski’s 1947 argument, but adds an additional operation to the libertine’s quest: the libertine’s crime is understood no longer in the sense of obliterating *the other* as a social fact; this, Klossowski knows, is impossible. Rather what the libertine achieves, in common with his comrades, is the articulation of a conspiracy against God,



and against the entire structure of the moral order, illustrating a fissure through which the figure of the libertine's individual sovereignty might emerge—what Klossowski calls the “integral man” or the “integral atheist.” Rather than land on the side of the structure of the law (as the Christian rendition would have it), this reading lands squarely on the paradox in question—the conformity of the definition of the law to its transgression.

This paradox is perhaps what best situates Barthes' critique— How could one possibly create a plastic representation of the relationship between the law and its radical transgression without falling back on an affirmation of the old conservative structures, ergo betraying Sade's project? In many ways, Klossowski, in the 1967 re-edition, is returning to a decades-old argument with Bataille, realizing finally the import of the concept of ‘secret society’ at the heart of the formation of the College of Sociology and *Acéphale*. Though this argument exists in a germinal stage within the 1947 edition, the definition of the conspiratorial community arrives in clearer view—a community, like the intellectual bond between Klossowski and Bataille, plus that which connects them to the historical person of Sade, is premised on the unspeakable nature of this conspiracy—the impetus of Sade's project, an expression of the libertine's absolute anarchy and, most of all, the dissolution of the self. I argue that Pasolini enacts the notion of the conspiratorial community in his characterization of individuals striving together in a world wherein God is dead—a world that Pasolini discovers on the other side of his philosophical and technical innovations in *Salò*, beyond the atheistic world(s) of *Porno-Teo-Kolossal*.

As for the relevance of the 1947 edition of *Sade mon prochain* for the

development of Pasolini's scenario for *Salò*, the debt is stated explicitly by Pasolini in an interview he gives for the August 1975 issue of *Filmcritica* (no. 256). Asked by the journal to elaborate key aspects of his film, Pasolini instead paraphrases concepts from Klossowski's text, arguments related specifically to the phenomenon of the reiterated act in allusion to the importance of the sodomistic gesture. He says, "Power codifies and ritualizes, as do erotic acts, and since the gesture is always the same, and forever repeated the same way, the sodomite gesture is the most typical of all, because it is the most useless and best sums up the repetitiveness of the act, precisely because it is more mechanical than the others. Into this context is added the gesture of the executioner, which is anomalous, because the executioner can perform his act only once; and indeed so as to have more than one victim, it becomes a question of a thousand just to be able to repeat oneself...."<sup>85</sup> After explaining the allure of sodomy for the Sadean system—its rebellious profligacy and the ability of the sodomite to infinitely repeat this gesture—Pasolini moves, as does Klossowski, to a paradox of Sade's when this profligate drive is rendered into the territory of the executioner, whose experience (executing an individual) is unique to that occasion.<sup>86</sup> The same would be the case for deflowering the

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<sup>85</sup> Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Intervista rilasciata a G. Bachmann e D. Gallo" in *Per Il Cinema*, 3027-3028. "Il potere è codificatore e rituale, e anche i gesti erotici lo sono, e siccome appunto la gesticolazione è sempre la stessa, e si ripete eternamente eguale, risulta che la statualità sodomitica è la più tipica di tutte perché è la più inutile, quella che meglio riassume la ripetitività dell'atto, appunto perché è la più meccanica delle altre e a questo si inserisce la gesticolazione del carnefice che è anomala, perché il carnefice può ripetere il gesto una sola volta; qui ancora infatti si pone il problema di ammazzarne, anziché una di vittime, mille, sempre per potersi ripetere."

<sup>86</sup> According to Bataille, the premise of the entire Sadean universe is based on the infinite repetition of the executioner's act: "The only conceivable end is the desire of the executioner himself to be the victim of torture" ("Le seul terme imaginable est le désir que le bourreau pourrait lui-même avoir d'être la victime d'un supplice"). Bataille, *La littérature et la mal, Œuvres complètes*, t. IX, 250.

virgin and the paradoxical quest of the libertine to ‘possess’ (or, rather, infinitely “undo”) the virgin’s purity in the very moment that it disappears. “Indeed all of Sade’s work appears to be one desperate cry, thrown at the image of inaccessible virginity, a cry enveloped, and, as it were, enshrined in a canticle of blasphemies.”<sup>87</sup>

Yet, as Klossowski explains, what situates the libertine’s need for endless profligacy is a confused mixture of early rational materialist philosophy with the now-incomprehensible metaphysical goals of sovereignty, aspirations connected to outmoded virtues of purity and fidelity whose acquisition is collapsed with crude materialist expressions of power.<sup>88</sup> “[B]y using their victims’ bodies as things,” remarks Pasolini, “[they] are, in reality, nothing more than gods on earth—that is, their model is always God; at the moment they passionately deny him, they make him real and accept him as their model.”<sup>89</sup> In Pasolini’s rendition of the *120 Days of Sodom*, set in the republic of Salò, this anachronism is what allows the intermingling of industrial / scientific technique with the barbarism of racial genocide (the oft cited critique of the death camps evident in this film). The articulation of the *jouissance* of the executioner in this case, as cited by Pasolini above, combined with the technology at his disposal,

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<sup>87</sup> Klossowski, *Sade mon prochain* (1967), 148. “Toute l’œuvre de Sade paraît bien n’être qu’un seul cri désespéré, lancé à l’image de la virginité inaccessible, cri enveloppé et comme enchâssé dans un cantique de blasphèmes.”

<sup>88</sup> Gallop locates this same idea of monstrosity in Sade’s reading of nature as the “preoedipal, phallic mother,” versus the “castrated nature” of ‘normal’ sexual reproduction: the phallic-woman of Sade’s text is Nature herself: the image of maternal indifference par excellence. See Jane Gallop, “Sade, Mothers, and Other Women,” in *enclitic*, Vol. IV, no. 2 (1980).

<sup>89</sup> Pier Paolo Pasolini, “Intervista rilasciata a G. Bachmann e D. Gallo” in *Per Il Cinema*, 3028. “... nell’adoperare i corpi delle vittime come cose, altro non sono che degli dèi in Terra, cioè il loro modello è sempre Dio; nel momento in cui lo negano con la passione, lo rendono reale e lo accettano come modello.”

becomes a thing of atrocious consequence. Being the industrial art par excellence, the registry of images captured by the apparatus creates some parallel with this overt political content: narrative cinema, argues Pasolini, aims towards a universality of the image incommensurate with the subjective nature of the shot, its composition, its perspective, framing, etc. This universality is doomed to failure, falls back onto the pathology of the filmmaker. (Think, for instance, of the false objectivity of Leni Riefenstahl's aerial camera over the Nuremberg Rally. The triumph of the German 'mass ornament,' located in these images, leads directly to Kracauer's psychological critique of the Nazi cult).

For Pasolini, this failure of the apparatus to close itself from the subjectivity of its source is allegorized in the inability of the Chateau (the setting of the adaptation) to close itself off from the outside world, from the libertines' own feelings of guilt and from the social mores associated with the interdiction of their crimes. The film is, in other words, punctuated with subtle moments of relief, accentuating the agony of the repetitive scenes of torture—but moments nonetheless where the cruelty of the protagonists, or of the filmed content itself, is commented upon moralistically, in, for instance, the suicide of the pianist (who, having seen enough, jumps from the Chateau's third story window); the couple in love (who would rather die than be subjected to further humiliation); or the pathos of the young pregnant victim (concocted by Pasolini as a particularly poignant figure whose suffering we are meant to empathize with). Such moments do not exist in *Sade*. The subjecthood of the libertine and his order is all-encompassing in the organization of the narrative. However true the depicted scenes of torture are to the

Sadean imaginary, it is the filmmaker's commentary, distinct from the material, that evokes the theologian Klossowski's outraged reading of Sade in 1947: glimpses of subjective pathos in a filmed content so otherwise thoroughly dominated by the oppressive, unrelenting vision of Pasolini's camera. All of this, I argue, is meant to enunciate Klossowski's thesis: so long as these libertines commit their atrocities in the name of breaking with moral virtue, they are secretly recognizing this moral power.

In an essay published in a 1947 issue of *Critique* (*Critique* 15/16), titled "Le secret de Sade," Bataille takes on Klossowski's Christian formulation of Sade in *Sade mon prochain* (1947), and during the years leading up to its publication. In this article, Bataille quotes appreciatively from Klossowski's "Sous le masque de l'athéisme," remarking on his enthusiastic support of Klossowski's argument regarding the constant 'negative' moment required for Sade's libertine, agreeing that this "pure transgression" of the law can be understood only mythically and remains forevermore an unactualized ideal. Bataille, however, "cannot follow Klossowski" when the latter refers to the "romantic soul of the libertine" as nothing more than a nostalgic state of faith—a statement that, Bataille argues, takes the necessity of the libertine's psychical movement (before and after the act of transgression) as a confirmation of the moral categories transgressed. (For the theologian Klossowski, the libertine can only defer this dilemma by means of perpetual transgression. In the exhaustion of his conscience he turns this violence inwards, which amounts to his submission to the law [the definition of this violence turned inward]). Bataille explains that the libertine's actions do not affirm the

other (the victim), nor does the contrariety of his behavior affirm the moral order; rather, the transgressions of Sade's libertine function to deny the homogeneous order its illusive appearance of universality. This suspension (the denial of the order of propagation for the sake of the pure violence of the libertine's waste/excess) is what necessitates the libertine's reiteration of the sodomistic act. Bataille stresses *this* moment over what Klossowski recognizes as the moment's eventual narrative outcome.

The support for this argument Bataille had already dreamed up a decade earlier, in an essay entitled "La valeur d'usage de D.A.F. de Sade." In this essay, Bataille offered Sade as the subject par excellence for the project of defining a "heterology." Sade, in both his writing and in his reception, unveils the "deux impulsions humaines polarisées" (the two polarized human impulses) of society: "l'excretion et l'appropriation" (excretion and appropriation). Everything in Sade's text which remains socially unassimilable (*le corps étranger* of Sade's oeuvre), he argues, is excreted, while that which proves conceptually or politically useful is appropriated. This is an activity based, of course, on a violent suppression of excess and the reduction of Sade to an exemplary case. For Sade's work to maintain its subversive character, in order to stave off appropriation by either clinical psychology or the field of literary studies, it would have to maintain its transgression against both the primary violence of excretion and the secondary violence of appropriation— perfecting a practice wherein certain techniques are activated to summons the heterogeneous elements of the social: eros and death. Klossowski's Christian apologia was, according to Bataille, on par in function with the clinical/literary

readings of Sade, which sought, in all three cases, to reign in Sade's excess.

It isn't until 1963, the year following Bataille's death, in a dedication to Bataille titled "A propos du simulacre dans la communication de Georges Bataille," that Klossowski follows Bataille's recommendation to reconfigure his theory to consider the moment of transgression as a phenomenon beyond appropriation. This new turn in Klossowski's theory moves the earlier argument beyond a critique of "rational atheism" (the maintenance of reason after the death of God), thereby allowing Klossowski to drop the theological premise to embrace instead the figure of "integral atheism": "One who says *atheology*," writes Klossowski, "also says *vacancy of the self*—of the self whose vacancy is experienced in a consciousness that, since it is not in any way this self, is in itself its *vacancy*."<sup>90</sup> The question remains for Klossowski how this dissolution of the self (elaborated in the dialectic of integral atheism) could be communicated. Sade's answer is to (mis)translate this experience into conventional language—eliciting within the context of his 'poor writing' a conspiracy against language itself. As Klossowski says, Sade presents "the culmination of an old conspiracy initiated in the past by isolated individuals who had passed on its watchword while apparently remaining unknown to each other"<sup>91</sup>—from the philosopher Heraclitus to Sade, extended to Nietzsche, and then to Bataille and Klossowski in the secret society of Acéphale, in their ritual visits to the forest at

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<sup>90</sup> Pierre Klossowski, "À propos du simulacre dans la communication de Georges Bataille" in *Critique*, nos. 195-196 (August-September 1963), 792. "Qui dit *athéologie* dit aussi *vacance du moi*, —du moi dont la vacance est éprouvée dans une conscience laquelle pour ne point être ce moi en est elle-même la *vacance*."

<sup>91</sup> Pierre Klossowski, *Sade Mon Prochain* (Paris: Seuil, 1947), 168. "[L]'aboutissement d'une conjuration déjà ancienne, amorcée dans le passé par des individus isolés qui s'en étaient transmis le mot d'ordre, bien qu'apparemment ils fussent sans rapport entre eux."

Marly to celebrate the death of God, and the consequent dissolution of the self and ego.

In a society atomized by the profane, the “sacred” re-emerges as “communitizing movements” that unite rather than produce further interstices in the social fabric. At least, this was the premise for both Bataille’s College of Sociology (1937-1939) and the secret society of Acéphale. As Denis Hollier notes, what separated this group’s effort was the reorganization of their concept from the production of “works” to the production of a community. The real content of the various groups of the historical avant-garde, Hollier argues, is really this “communal experiment” (“an experiment in transforming social life into art”), whereas the commercial proliferation of “works” represents their historical failure (“works” at the service of existing organizations—capital, the art market, etc.). The concentrated organization of the “group,” explains Hollier, “functions as an instance of enunciation that would be the modern equivalent of the (collective) myths of antiquity and the (anonymous) epics of the Middle Ages. Having made a break with any authorial regime, it would allow the resurgence of that anonymous enunciation, belonging to great periods of community, in a contemporary setting.”<sup>92</sup> Though Acéphale existed in two forms (as a journal and as a monthly “ritual meeting” in the Marly forest), the works of the College, like the Acéphale meetings themselves, existed as ephemera—meetings, lectures, anonymous publications—artifacts that history would have trouble recuperating.

In a paper given at the first meeting of the College, at the Grand Véfouf café in March 1937, Bataille spoke of the realization of a *homme entier*—a “total man” whose

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<sup>92</sup> Denis Hollier, “Collage” in *The College of Sociology*, ed. Hollier (U of Minnesota Press, 1988), XIV.



absence in modern society is due to the fragmentary nature of the fictions that form the basis of his secular knowledge—art, science, and politics—the very fictions that the society would, in its organization, attempt to disappear. This *homme entier* is precisely the “integral man” of Sade, the quest of the aristocrat, forgotten in modernity, to contain in his being the true universality of existence. This project, however, becomes strange when the world of the aspirant integral man becomes subject to social and theological fissure; such were the conditions during Sade’s time, and one could make comparisons, as well, to the interwar period of the French 1930s, the disillusionment of many of these artists and theorists following WWI and to the evidence of the rise of fascism across Europe. Just as Sade prescribed the social model of perpetual revolution for his countrymen (a ‘truly republican’ society renewed continually by the repeated ritual sacrifice of the sovereign), Bataille, at the College, stressed the horrors of the Dionysian carnival as the bulwark of a ‘true democracy.’ Like Sade, Acéphale posed itself in opposition to any normative structure (social or institutional organization) that sought to impose its rule from the ‘outside,’ what Bataille called the tricephalous monster of Christianity, communism, and fascism. Acéphale and the College, therefore, (as codified in the College’s “Declaration of the International Crisis”) would be postured towards the formation of an integral man against utility, denouncing “all present-day undertakings, positions and programs, whether they are revolutionary, democratic or national,” in favor of focusing the group’s attention on obtaining, in repeated ritual, the irreducibly personal experience of absolute loss (that is, the practice of an integral atheism).

As I describe ahead in section four, “Powers of the False,” the setting of *Porno-Teo-Kolossal* represents precisely this fissured landscape, across which Pasolini enacts the formula of the ‘road film,’ reprising the archetypes he had established in *Uccellacci e uccellini* (1966). In the earlier film, the aimless wandering of the protagonists, the nonsensical small talk, and, most importantly, the persistent annoyance exhibited by the protagonists when confronted with the philosophical lectures of the Marxist crowd, hint at the formation, in Pasolini’s edifice, of a subproletarian subject aloof to the encroachments of what Bataille calls the “tricephalous monster.” Depending on which treatment you read, *Porno-Teo-Kolossal*, Pasolini’s unfinished final film project (*PTK*), makes clear what viewers of his earlier *Uccellacci* could only have assumed. In the first scene of both the first and last treatments of *PTK*, the tale is told achronologically, from the revelation of the death of God to the wanderings of the magus, and back to considering the full weight of this revelation (that “God is dead”): “Believing that one has reached a goal,” writes Pasolini, “one discovers reality as it really is, without any goal whatsoever.”<sup>93</sup> In a moment within the film treatment that I will examine in greater depth in part 4, Pasolini’s magus dispenses his treasure once reserved for the infant Christ to help the perverts he encounters along the road satisfy their urges (“Here too the Wise King squanders the treasure he is carrying with him to honor the Messiah, in order to help men with their pitiful vices”<sup>94</sup>). What Pasolini envisions with his

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<sup>93</sup> Pier Paolo Pasolini, “Le Cinéma” in *Porno-Théo-Kolossal*, ed. Davide Luglio (Éditions Mimésis, 2016), 119. “Croyant atteindre une fin, on découvre la réalité telle qu’elle est, sans fin aucune.”

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 122. “Là encore le Roi Mage gaspille la trésor qu’il porte avec lui pour honorer le Messie afin d’aider les hommes dans leurs vices pitoyables...”

protagonist's charity is the manufacture of a community centered around the dissipation of the pervert's drive, premised on the death of God and on the new weight given to the "moment," a sense of (libidinal) history liberated from the notion of divine providence.

On this subject of the "moment," in a note written by Klossowski for his first attendance of a sessional meeting of *Acéphale* (July 1937), Klossowski makes a controversial and somewhat derogatory remark against Bataille, comparing him unfavorably with Nietzsche: "the Death of God," he says, "for Bataille, would result in a condition of immanence which would cease to be an immanence because no transcendent current would be able to raise it any further outside itself": this would be "a life in the present pure and simple, which in my view would take on the character of nihilism from the moment it ceased to be denied by dissatisfaction and personal anguish. For Nietzsche, the death of God was quite the opposite, and signified for him that God had lost all transcendental virtue, since God had fallen to the level of the present pure and simple; hence the birth of Dionysus, hence the deepening of the moment and freedom from immediate necessity through the eternal return of the moment."<sup>95</sup> What we understand of

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<sup>95</sup> Pierre Klossowski, "À propos Nietzsche et de l'instant" in *L'Apprenti sorcier du cercle communiste démocratique à Acéphale : textes, lettres, et documents (1932-1939)*, ed. Marina Galletti (Paris: Éditions de la Différence, 1999), 389-390; "On Nietzsche and the Moment," trans. Natasha Lehrer, in *The Sacred Conspiracy* (Atlas Press, 2017), 182. The editor of this volume, Marina Galletti, found this unpublished fragment among the papers of Henri Dussat and Pierre Andler. The fragment in question is dated July 1937. Klossowski read the text at the 22 July meeting of *Acéphale*. "[L]e Mort de Dieu, chez Bataille, aboutirait à une immanence qui cesserait d'être immanence puis-qu'aucune courant transcendent ne la soulèverait plus hors d'elle-même": ... "à une vie dans l'immédiat pur et simple qui a mes yeux prendrait la caractère du nihilisme dès qu'elle cesserait d'être niée par l'insatisfaction et l'angoisse spirituelle. Au contraire, le Mort de Dieu chez Nietzsche signifiait que pour lui Dieu avait perdu toute vertu transcendantale, Dieu étant tombé au niveau de l'immédiat pur et simple : d'où la naissance de Dionysos, d'où l'approfondissement de l'instant et la libération de la nécessité immédiate par l'éternel retour de l'instant."

Klossowski's evolution, between this comment, the 1947 edition of Sade, through the death of Bataille and the reedition of 1967, is the obliteration of this difference with Bataille—and the recognition (like Pasolini's in *Porno-Teo-Kolossal*) that this community is not built on a nihilism, but on the *communication* of the common rule of man's isolation ("l'aboutissement d'une conjuration déjà ancienne, amorcée dans le passé par des individus isolés qui s'en étaient transmis le mot d'ordre, bien qu'apparemment ils fussent sans rapport entre eux"). This community, premised on sacrifice, is, for Bataille, furthermore, based on the conspiracy of laughter: "From one end to the other of this human life that is our lot, consciousness of the lack of stability, even of the profound lack of all real stability, liberates the enchantment of laughter," he writes.<sup>96</sup> "Laughter" is precisely what is missing in Pasolini's *Salò*, just as it is missing in Klossowski's original critique. However, as Bataille points out, laughter abounds in Sade's writing. Laughter, he explains, is the element wherein the conspiracy against language resides—in Sade's laughter or in Nietzsche's. Bataille's squaring of "laughter" and "apathy" is the trick of Klossowski's later formulation, something he achieves in the conception of the philosopher-villain. This philosopher-villain is the philosopher of the "integral man," who muses on the libertine's action as the eruption of an unstoppable force.

We might see that, on the other side of his accomplishment in *Salò*, Pasolini then understands the reason why the suicide of the chateau's pianist is so at odds with the

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<sup>96</sup> Bataille, *L'expérience intérieure*, OC, t. V, 112. "D'un bout à l'autre de cette vie humaine, qui est notre lot, la conscience du peu de stabilité, même du profond manque de toute véritable stabilité, libère les enchantements du rire."

joyful timbre of the Sadean fantasy. In the treatment of *Porno-Teo-Kolossal*, Pasolini is sure to avoid his own instinctive collapse into moralism, a reminder which he marks in the treatment of *PTK* with the following emendation to the film's ending: "The film risks becoming tragic," he warns. "And so Romanino the servant takes a small flute from the hands of a dead little boy and begins to play, a cheerful triumphant march, a sort of new *Ça ira*, and Eduardo the magus sings along, improvising merry words extolling the death of these people. The magus sings a little, the servant sings a little, in a amoebaeian song in the middle of the vast cemetery."<sup>97</sup> Hence the change in Pasolini: from the nihilistic devouring of the Marxist crow (Pasolini's criticism against the underdeveloped subject of the Roman subproletariat, his two lumpen wanderers) to an overcoming of this (/his) nihilism in the embrace of the subject's excess *over* his (Pasolini's) love for discourse (the talk of the literate crow disrupted eternally by music, laughter, and stupidity...).

We might compare this movement, at last, to the evolution in Klossowski's reading of Sade, which delivers us away from the omnipresence of the Law, affirmed in the ultimate failure of the libertine's adventure, to the elaboration of joyful sovereignty. In the next chapter, we will investigate how sovereignty manifests on-/off-screen through yet another intermediary: the exemplary case of *Robarte el arte* (dir: Juan José Gurrola, 1972), an example of acinema that performs a clear demonstration of the principles of

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<sup>97</sup> Pasolini, "Le Cinéma" in *Porno-Théo-Kolossal*, 124. "Le film risque de virer à la tragédie. Alors, le valet Romanin prend un pipeau qu'un petit garçon mort tenait entre ses mains et commence à jouer une marche joyeuse et triomphale, une sorte de nouveau *Ça ira*, et Eduardo le suit en chantant avec de joyeuses paroles improvisées qui exaltent la mort héroïque de ce peuple. Tantôt c'est Eduardo qui chante tantôt c'est son jeune valet, un chant amébée au milieu de cet immense cimetière."

exchange as elaborated in Klossowski's later formulation of libidinal economy, a discussion of pathological desire measured out within the nexus of value formation and the ever always-unrealized libidinal project to remunerate the passions.

### Pt. 3: The Anti-Kinetic Film

In the summer of 1972, the Mexican theater director, artist, and filmmaker Juan José Gurrola staged a “conceptual art heist” at *documenta 5*, where he, alongside the artists Gelsen Gas and Arnaldo Coen, submitted the “stolen works” of the event to the anti-economy of his experimental film-action, *Robarte el arte* (1972) (Fig. 3.1, 3.2). The action includes scenes of the trio at *documenta* interspersed with title cards and appropriated sounds and found footage, including sequences from a low-budget stag film re-enacting the crimes of the serial killer Gregorio “Goyo” Cardenas. Gurrola’s pun (re: “the heist”) was to render the artwork’s empty commodity *materially* absent, rhyming the two senses with which the word “absence” can be employed: from (1) the definition of art as something beyond (absent from) the ordinary systems of exchange *and* (2) the economic principle of scarcity (“absence” or “near-absence”) as an element representing one of the factors determining an art object’s exchange value. In the opening salvo of *La monnaie vivante*, a work parodying the genre of political economy, Pierre Klossowski posed Gurrola’s question the following way: “How does the use of useful objects differ from the use of art objects, which are ‘useless’ for any actual purposes of subsistence?”<sup>98</sup> “This is where,” he says, “the modern notion of the ‘priceless’ nature of art—of ‘pure art’ in particular—originates, which amounts to denying that pathos can be priced, insofar as

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<sup>98</sup> Pierre Klossowski, *La monnaie vivante* (Paris: Payot et Rivages, 1997), 11. This edition consulted for the convenience of page numbers. Orig. publication: *La monnaie vivante* (Paris: Joëlle Losfield, 1970); repr., 1994; new ed., Paris: Gallimard, 2003. With photographs by Pierre Zucca. “[Q]uoi donc l’usage des objets ustensilaires diffère-t-il de l’usage de ceux que produit l’art, « inutiles » à la subsistance?”

instinctive pathos is a source of ‘free’ creation.”<sup>99</sup> By re-engaging these two forms of ‘absence’ as both beyond and within the economical, one belonging to the concept of priceless art, from the irreducible non-commodifiable pathos of the aesthetic, and the other (“scarcity”) defining a characteristic of market valuation, there occurs in Gurrola’s film a reinvigoration of the art object not at the level of the sterility of the market (that which makes “even” all objects through the principle of their exchange) but rather presents the object (the target of Gurrola’s heist) as a disturbance leading its spectator back to the model of art’s pathetic exchange: “that means that economic norms are, like the arts or the moral or religious institutions, or like all forms of knowledge,” writes Klossowski, “one mode of the expression and representation of impulsive forces.”<sup>100</sup>

In the anti-economy that Gurrola establishes via the conventions of film montage, Gurrola presents an enigmatic exchange between certain images: (1) the documentary footage of the exhibited artworks, (2) the image of the artist/interloper/“thief” as he makes his way through documenta, and (3) the appropriated pornographic film sequences depicting the erotic re-enactment of Goyo’s crimes. The pathos associated with the object and its genius is made, here, exchangeable with the pathos of perversion encapsulated in the figure of Goyo’s sadistic acts, albeit through an economic disjunct of dissociated images. What, after all, does the stag film have to do with documenta 5 or the appearance

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 16. “D’où la notion toute moderne de la « gratuité » de l’art—de l’« art pur » notamment—, laquelle revient à dénier toute capacité comptable au pathos pour autant que le pathos pulsionnel serait source de création « gratuite ».”

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. “[R]evient à dire que les normes économiques sont au même titre que les arts et les institutions morales ou religieuses, au même titre que les formes de la connaissance, un mode d’expression et de représentation des forces impulsives.”



there of these three subversive auteurs? Before proceeding with a speculative reading of *Robarte el arte*, it becomes necessary first to formalize the layered theoretical and critical tensions relevant to Gurrola's film, an elaboration that might help organize our reading of the extensive thought on economy and violence which Gurrola is engaged.

Klossowski, theorizing desire as the forebearer of industrial production, points to the creation of utensil objects as one of the primary sites of industry's neutralizing power: "Looking at the way industry conceives itself, with its innumerable techniques, would lead one to believe that manufacturing instrumental, factory-made, utensil objects is the modern industry's way of neutralizing the impulsive drives. But with its own standards, it provokes, on the contrary, a phantasmic representation of these forces."<sup>101</sup> Klossowski outlines the instinctual drive at the heart of economic exchange, the elusive connection that Gurrola himself sought to establish in his commentary. For Klossowski, this reappraisal is represented by the project of the utopian socialist Charles Fourier, who, in his 19th century treatise on political economy,<sup>102</sup> describes a reciprocity of passionate exchanges as that which might restructure society into freely associated classes of affinities, an explanation that might, in turn, clarify the connection between the act of perversion (Goyo's) and the artist's defiance of use-value in the production of 'useless' objects. For this truly reciprocal (and hence non-alienated) political economy that Fourier

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 33. "La façon dont l'industrie se conçoit elle-même avec ses innombrables techniques porterait à croire qu'elle neutraliserait les forces pulsionnelles par la fabrication d'objets instrumentaux, usiniers, ustensilaires. Or, par ses propre normes, elle provoque au contraire la représentation phantasmatique de ces forces."

<sup>102</sup> Fourier's treatise, entitled *Le Nouveau monde amoureux*, was written in 1818, but concealed by its author. The manuscript was published eventually in 1967 in the *Œuvres complètes* of Charles Fourier, volume 7, ed. Simone Debout-Oleszkiewicz (Paris: Editions Anthropos, 1967).

wishes to establish, in order, he explains, for the “free associations” of material exchange to occur, *labor* must be redefined according to the passions, work parsed out according to the “voluptuous emotions” of the laborers, as emotions which, in themselves, presuppose the value of their production.

Arising a complicated combination of polygamy and polyandry, rigid societal organizations meld into separate communities organized by whatever passions dominate there. On this basis, the communities, rather than their individual members, would be understood as *producers* within the larger network of libidinal work relations: the commodities that these communities produce are meanwhile the passionate bodies of its denizens, submitted to the market in the form of a free flowing universal prostitution. This economy, for Fourier, resolves the evils of private property by resigning ownership to the vagaries of the collective libidinal drive. Marx, however, a few decades after Fourier’s original formulation, addresses the problem of “universal prostitution” as follows: “Just as woman passes from marriage to general prostitution, so the entire world of wealth (that is, of man’s objective substance) passes from the relationship of exclusive marriage with the owner of private property to a state of universal prostitution with the community. In negating the personality of man in every sphere, this type of communism is nothing but the logical expression of private property.”<sup>103</sup> Fourier’s radical economy can be seen, in other words, as a project envisioning a *universal capitalism*—by bringing the entirety of human pathos into the light of private capitalist exchange. Would this

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<sup>103</sup> Karl Marx, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, ed. D. Struick (Int’l Publ., 1969), 133.

universal capitalism, envisioned in the free flowing prostitution of Fourier's system, be then the thing to resolve the social and narrative disconnect between the image of Gurrola's artist and the libidinal productions of the perverse criminal?

According to Klossowski, it is within the program of Sade's anti-utopianism that the meaning of Fourier's concepts of economic freedom (and likewise universal capitalism) comes to be fully understood. Sade develops a kind of communization premised on the universal *violation* of human rights, rather than, as in Fourier, their positive elaboration: "Since the moral God, guarantor of the self-identical, responsible self, has disappeared, each person belongs to everyone, and everyone belongs to each, as *goods*."<sup>104</sup> Sade's monstrosity, describing the universalizing impulse of industry to assimilate everything into potential commodification, diverges from the utopianism of Fourier on the premise that there will always, in Sade, exist a non-assimilable remainder, which is the universalizing impulse itself (an integral perversion) which can never be contained, for instance, in the simulacrum of Sade's literary works. It is in view of Sade the artist, as manufacturer of perverse simulacra (*The 120 Days of Sodom*, *Justine*, etc.), that we might then negotiate the relationship between the stag film, the re-enactment of its sadistic act, and the subversive relation of the artist (Gurrola, Sade) to the conventional economies interpolated in their work: the artist, explains Klossowski, "serves as the intermediary between two different worlds of value-appraisal. On the one hand he represents the intrinsic value of the simulacrum manufactured according to

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<sup>104</sup> Klossowski, *La monnaie vivante*, 32. "Du fait que le Dieu moral, garant du moi responsable et identique à lui même, disparaît, chacun appartient à tous et tous à chacun, en tant que *biens*."

institutional standards. On the other, he serves to valorize the phantasm by keeping with the obsessive constraint of perversion.”<sup>105</sup> The value of the art object, in this scenario, comes from its ability to ward off its institutional sublimation, a short-lived, if ever, ability which winds up culminating in the object’s eventual historicization within the society that it imagines. It is Sade’s revelation that the notions of value and price “are inscribed in the very foundation of the voluptuous emotion, and that nothing is more contrary to enjoyment than having it for free.”<sup>106</sup> For example, in Sade’s *La Nouvelle Justine*, upon seeing d’Esterval’s “priceless” penis-sized clitoris, Verneuil refuses to copulate with it until he has figured out how to properly remunerate d’Esterval for its use: “an objectifying act of valuation which causes her to have an immediate orgasm.”<sup>107</sup> Industry and the aesthetic of the arts (i.e. whatever it is in art that causes the art-lover to regard it as “priceless”) are thus co-extensive entities furnishing the always unrealized universal project to remunerate the passions: to exteriorize the unknowable internal drives as the source of both industrial striving and the aesthetic experience.

Gurrola’s entry into film was through an adaptation of his friend Juan García Ponce’s story “Tajimara,” which Gurrola, with the aid of García Ponce as well as several members of the artist group La Ruptura, adapted into a short film within the two-film anthology *Los bienamados* (1965). The film’s narrative was concerned with what would

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 66. Translation modified. “ [ ... ] comme un intermédiaire entre deux mondes d’évaluations différentes. D’un côté il représente la valeur intrinsèque du simulacre fabriqué selon les normes institutionnelles, qui sont celles de la sublimation. De l’autre, il est au service de la valorisation du phantasme selon la contrainte obsessionnelle de la perversion.”

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 67. “Sade prouve justement que la notion de valeur et de prix est inscrite dans le fond même de l’émotion voluptueuse, et que rien n’est plus contraire à la jouissance que la gratuité.”

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 64. “[ ... ] mise à prix objectivante qui provoque chez celle-là une jouissance immédiate.”

be a recurring theme for García Ponce, the pre-significant adolescent sexual event prior to its traumatic symbolization, an event whose thematic culmination would comprise a large portion of García Ponce's 1984 novel *De Anima*, where the protagonist Paloma's early incestuous relationship with her uncle is considered in terms of its pre-symbolic and hence pre-traumatic significance as a pure material event determining the trajectory of her then-latent sexuality. *Tajimara*, which deals with an incestuous relationship between brother and sister, two characters Carlos and Julia, as observed by someone who doesn't understand or see the relationship for what it is, the narrator Roberto, is a film that foregrounds recursion and transgression through aberrations in chronology: for instance, a scene displaying the drunken aftermath of a wedding party cuts to the party *in medias res*; the smashed pre-Columbian artifacts lining the walls of Roberto's roommate are seen again in the next scene fully in-tact. The spectator is left to piece together a chronology based on clues left by an unreliable narration of images, a narration whose apparent organization is based on the film narrator's recursive memories. The jumbled chronology is hence meant to resemble shifts in García Ponce's source material between the free indirect discourse of the characters and the actions relayed to his reader via the pathological limitations of Roberto's stream-of-consciousness narration. This recursion plays out on multiple levels. For instance, in an apt commentary on the opening sequence of the film, the critic Juan Bruce-Novoa points out the abstraction of the introductory credits as homage to the abstract works of the Rupturist painter Vicente Rojo and his series of paintings known as *Señales*. He writes, "Rojo's *señales* (symbols) never become

*signos* (signs) and thus create the floating ambiguity.”<sup>108</sup> According to this argument, abstraction is paired, within a narrative film economy, with its eventual redemption by means of the film’s continuity editing: where image is given in advance of its narration.

It is here that we might begin to appreciate the inclusion of the re-enactments of the Goyo Cardenas crimes appropriated seemingly arbitrarily within the “anti-narrative” of *Robarte el Arte*. Besides being footage culled from a pornographic film, as a genre that defies passive spectatorship (by the encouragement of masturbation) and whose narration is (usually) a mere pretext for pornography’s non-narrative excess (Cardenas’s story provides an alibi for the representation of sexual violence), it is the inclusion of the subject of Goyo Cardenas specifically that interests the hallucinatory or spectral dimension of this originary form of violence that looms so large over the narratives of Gurrola and García Ponce in general (for which the incestuous assault becomes the motivation for the entire pathology of *De Anima*, a novel which, given its themes of incest, re-envisions the platonic thesis of the profane copy through the lens of Klossowski’s definition of the simulacrum: film, literature, and painting as providing placeholders for an unrepresentable, originating act of violence). Cardenas’s trance, represented, for instance, in the hallucinatory flights of Jodorowsky’s protagonist in the film *Santa Sangre* (1989), is a state of psychological dispossession, untethering the subject’s actions from their meaningful effects. Much like the late Althusser, Cardenas does not *meaningfully* strangle women to death, but does so under the duress of a demon,

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<sup>108</sup> Juan Bruce-Novoa, “From Text to Film and Back” in *Discourse*, Vol. 26 (Spring 2004), 157.

a state of passion which, at the very least, according to the law, accounts for the dismissal of the subject's ethical intentions from the realm of his bodily actions. The question thus arises for the relevance of the Cardenas image, as simulacrum for the killer's phantasmal dispossession, to this concept of the "anti-kinetic," as it's understood in the context of *Robarte el Arte*—as the suspension of (narrative) movement in a film document that defies the easy suture.

Here, we'll take a short detour through Klossowski to explicate this term *anti-kinetic*, before returning to the specific dimensions of the "Sadean artist" outlined by the figures of Gurrola/Gas/Coen and Goyo Cardenas in *Robarte el Arte*. In the earlier version of an essay entitled 'Esquisse du système de Sade' (which shares a thesis with two other essays by Klossowski, "Le mal et la négation d'autrui dans le philosophe de Sade," and "Temps et Agressivité," appearing as early as 1934 and incorporated in the first edition of *Sade mon prochain*), Klossowski makes the point that the libertine's project of transgression, or the attempted negation of the Other (and of the social entirely), results in a dialectical impossibility. Instead of negating or eliminating the other, the libertine is capable only of confirming the other's existence. By enacting "evil," he engages in a polemic with God that necessarily preserves both God and his moral categories (from which the category of 'evil' is given sense)—a circuitous argument made similarly by Augustine in *The Confessions*, wherein the confirmation of moral law occurs through the inability of any radical transgression, the supremacy of the law marked hence by its eternal return. Sadism is here understood by Klossowski as

pertaining to this dialectical situation, with the sadistic act being the (accidental) culmination of intersubjectivity. Perhaps representing the kernel of Klossowski's thought, which carries over even into his later revision of the argument of "Esquisse" (which, by the end of the decade, abandons its Christianity and embraces something similar to Bataille's heterology) is Klossowski's theory of the "non-parole," or the unsaid or unspoken, which is represented, in both versions, fleetingly in the fantasy of the libertine in his dialectical movement of violence. In Klossowski's concept of the psychological movement of the libertine, accompanying the physical movement of the torture and murder of the victim, the libertine must, in a peculiar and paradoxical way, engage a rationalistic discourse in order to undo or transgress discursivity in a quest towards achieving the irreducible singularity of the "unsaid." At the center of this violent activity there exists for Klossowski the frozen image of the libertine's phantasm. Klossowski explains this event with terminology borrowed from the theologian Thomas Aquinas, the *delectatio morosa*: Aquinas's concept for the suspension of time in the experience of the sinner as he broods over pornographic images. For Klossowski, the frozen image, set in the midst of the libertine's apparent dialectical movement, represents the climatic apex of the sadistic act: a moment through and during which the libertine realizes the other as never-existent. In this moment, the whole dialectical struggle is won for the libertine (in fact, for Klossowski, this would be the only room for the libertine's project to succeed, as it is only here that the libertine evades the dialectic). According to its Christian rendering, this suspension represents a lost moment, understood as the impossibility of possession:



the libertine can only defer his dilemma by means of perpetual transgression. In the exhaustion of the libertine's conscience, he turns this violence inwards towards himself. His place as an individual is never questioned, despite the fact that his universality has been denied, the realization of which amounts to a submission to law, the definition of this violence turned inward: the law and repressed desire as "one in the same thing."

Jacques Lacan, addressing Klossowski's earlier thesis in the essay "Kant Avec Sade," notes the following point, in response to Klossowski's quasi-utopian description of the Sadean tableau: "[I]t cannot be true that Sade, as Klossowski suggests—all the while noting that he does not believe it—achieved the sort of apathy that involves having 'returned to nature's bosom, in the waking state, in our world' inhabited by language."<sup>109</sup> There is little therefore to be said, according to Lacan, in terms of desire given Sade's account. If desire is the metonymy of lack (the libertine's failure to 'possess' the victim in the act of his/her destruction), it is "at most but a tone of reason."<sup>110</sup> The libertine's right to *jouissance*—the key demand in this revolutionary struggle—ought to be recognized as the final (unstable) term in a dialectic within which this right was originally barred.

Yet a problem arises for the orthodoxy of Klossowski's reading of Sade, re-doubled in the argument by Lacan, which understands Sade for the promotion of a universal morality, rather than, as Sade explicitly claims, its destruction. In a review for

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<sup>109</sup> Jacques Lacan, "Kant avec Sade," in *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), 790; Lacan, "Kant with Sade," in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (NY: Norton, 2006), 667 (English). "Il nous indique assez en tout cas qu'il ne saurait être question que Sade, comme P. Klossowski le suggère tout en marquant qu'il n'y croit pas, ait atteint cette sorte d'apathie qui serait « d'être rentré au sein de la nature, à l'état de veille, dans notre monde », habité par le langage."

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. "[...] au plus qu'un ton de raison."

*Sade mon prochain*, given in the aftermath of its initial release, the philosopher Georges Bataille addresses the dilemma by proposing, in the place of Klossowski's Christian mysticism, a thorough-going heterology. After first applauding Klossowski's argument highlighting the continual negations required for Sade's libertine, where pure transgression comes to be understood as an ideal activity, Bataille suddenly cannot follow the next stages of the argument, where Klossowski refers to the "romantic soul" of the libertine (marked by his dialectical failure) as nothing more than proof of a "nostalgic state of faith," something the libertine must repetitively deny by taking new victims. For Bataille, the libertine's actions cannot affirm the identity of his victim, nor does the contrariety of his actions affirm a moral order; rather, the transgressive movement of Sade's libertine denies this order for what it shows itself to be: precisely that, a false stable totality. The Bataillean heteronomic critique that Klossowski eventually incorporates within his later edition of *Sade mon prochain* thus renders null this thought of transgression as anything other than the ultimate form of appropriation of the original violence of the law (that is, the violence of state power) to the heteronomic non-order of libidinal desire, manifesting solely as fissures in this structure. Hence, the subject of Bataille's critique comprises the theological argument that Klossowski eventually nixes in his later 1967 re-working of 'Esquisse du système de Sade,' and attempts, moreover, to correct by means of the addition of the essay entitled "The Philosopher-Villain," which re-emphasizes the libertine as the productive force working at the limits of reason. Klossowski takes into account, in this final instance, the difference between a "rational

atheism,” incapable of denying God while also preserving the subject and hence the moral categories with which he finds himself inextricably bound, and an “integral atheism” as that which effectively liquidates the subject, god and the other, for which “non-identity” is understood as the product of the heteronomic process for which the libertine’s destructive repetition functions (the contradictory law of obeying, above all else, the vagaries of one’s own impulses). If homogeneity, in the sense of the ‘making-equivalent’ of subjects under the rule of law, is based, as Bataille argues, on a violent suppression of all that is excessive (i.e. pathological desire at its extreme), in order for true heterogeneity to emerge there is required a continual transgression of these limits by means of processes counteracting the original forms of state violence, as a violence that is itself always working to preserve its command.

At the same moment when Bataille was perfecting his reading of Sade, he was likewise pursuing a parallel theory of heterology based in principle on the findings of the sociologist Marcel Mauss, whose anthropological work focused on primitive economies of exchange centered around practices of sacrifice. Following Mauss, Bataille advances an argument for the destruction of traditional political economies through the experience of “non-productive expenditure,” as a concept not altogether foreign to the libertine’s interest in sodomy. Subversions through which the “productive expenditure” of trade becomes undone can be further understood in the symbolically subversive act of “giving gifts,” with no expectation of return—hence representing in Bataille’s thought a theoretical remove from an understanding of ‘terror’ as the sole arbiter for a heterology.

How the subversive economy of the gift relates to the Sadean experience of the law becomes the topic of a set of fictional works by Klossowski, a trilogy known as “The Laws of Hospitality” (*Roberte ce soir*, *La Révocation de l’édit de Nantes*, and *Le Souffleur ou le théâtre de société*, respectively). The centerpiece of this trilogy, from where it gains its name, is the set of laws pinned to the bedroom wall of Klossowski’s Octave and his wife Roberte, the respectable society-woman who holds a seat on the French Board of Censorship. By stripping his wife of the definitions he, as husband, imposes on her (for instance, her attribute as “mistress of the house”), Octave renders possessable that which he would have otherwise been barred: the realization of his wife’s essence as the generous “hostess.” The precursor to this elaborate conceit is, undoubtedly, Bataille’s concept of the potlatch, conceived by Bataille five years prior to the writing of *Roberte ce soir* and published in Bataille’s 1949 collection of essays (volume 1 of *La part maudite*) meant to illustrate the notion of a ‘General Economy’ (as opposed to the restrictive spheres of economic exchange dictated by the modern liberal market). In the essay on potlatch, Bataille outlines a customary Amerindian form of “commerce” based not on the individual’s acquisition of goods in trade but rather on the symbolic gesture of these goods’ expenditure. Bataille theorizes this notion of ‘loss’ in terms of the gift’s material sacrifice as representing instead a gain on behalf of the giver: the accrual of symbolic capital in the sense of debts to be paid. The acquisition of power by means of the dissipation of a productive surplus value (the ritual sacrifice of goods) hence undermines the principle of equivalence represented in these goods’ circulation.

Klossowski's Octave, by offering his wife to his house-guests, assumes a position of power both over the object he offers as well as the guest who receives it, a vantage pronounced by the sudden exteriority of the host to the system of material exchange within which he was once implicated. According to this logic, if vision takes the form of possession, consisting in a doubling, a dividing and a multiplying of the image, the voyeur, in witnessing what occurs, has a more intense participation than if he were immediately involved. This offering of the object to the possessive sight of the voyeur, for which the identities of both subject and object dissolve within an image of ecstasy, presents precisely the transgression illustrated by Bataille in his analysis of Sade: "Il n'y a plus sujet = objet, mais «brèche béante» entre l'un et l'autre et, dans la brèche, le sujet, l'objet sont dissous, il y a passage, communication, mais non de l'un à l'autre: l'un et l'autre ont perdu l'existence distincte."<sup>111</sup> What appears common in the two examples (the libertine and the host) is the non-reciprocal nature of their form of "communication," as Bataille describes it. Both the Sadean fantasy (marked by the perpetual transgression of the other) and potlatch (wherein power is invested in the giver and not the receiver), the "subject" 'uses' the "other" in an attempt to possess what is inexchangeable: value by means of an absolute transgression of values.

However, Klossowski's discussion through which this "new" political economy is based—that is, on the non-reciprocity of the "hospitable sadist"—takes a bizarre turn

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<sup>111</sup> Georges Bataille, *L'expérience-intérieure*, OC, t. V (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 74. "There is no longer subject-object, but an open gap between the one and the other and, in the gap, the subject and the object are dissolved; there is passage, communication, but not from one to the other: the one and the other have lost their separate existence."

within the fictional scenario. In the third and final installment of his trilogy, Octave and Roberte's narrative (the first two entries of the *Laws of Hospitality* trilogy) is revealed as a fiction within the diegetic world of a writer named Theodore Lacase, who bases his account of Octave and Roberte's customs on his own strange relationship with his "real" wife, whose name, to complicate things further, is also Roberte. This third and final novel (*Le Souffleur ou le théâtre de société*, 1960) is marked with a series of reversals through which the identity of Roberte becomes obscured by the sudden appearance of an uncanny look-alike named Valentina, whom Theodore suspects to have traded places with his wife at some point, or even continually, over the course of their marriage. A crisis ensues for Theodore, ushered by this obscurity that threatens to ruin both the fictional, theoretical project of the "laws of hospitality" (the premise of his novels) and his practical interests of instating these laws within his own life: what if, he asks, the 'gift', his wife, was never his to give in the first place? After looking further into the problem, matters only worsen: the other woman, Valentina, a woman who is potentially 'also' his wife, perhaps his 'real' wife or potentially her imposter (if indeed Roberte is who she claims to be), is married to another man, named K., a writer of erotic fiction much like Theodore himself, but who, unlike Theodore, supports his vocation by prostituting "his" and/or "Theodore's" wife. Prostitution, in this case, is not, as Theodore aspires, for the mystical ends of attaining Roberte more thoroughly via her ritual offering, but is rather meant as a vulgar means for supplementary revenue. Enlisting the aid of a psychoanalyst, Theodore is prescribed 'reciprocity' as the cure to his dilemma: the analyst tells him that it is not only necessary

for Theodore to enact *his* perversions (to participate as voyeur in his wife's infidelities), but that *she too* should be allowed to enjoy the same custom. *He* should be possessed by *her* in his infidelity as she is in hers—and it would be thus in this “truly” reciprocal, universal prostitution that the multiple lives of Roberte become trivial to Theodore's own sexual multiplication— a seemingly appropriate resolution to Theodore's dilemma.

Reciprocity, however, is the illusion continually upset by the emergence of the Sadean subjectivity. Without the Law there would be no perversion (no transgression), and the concept behind the “making positive” of the perverse libidinal band renders a direct impossibility, a dark night of terror (an excess) that cannot possibly sustain itself in any positive form.<sup>112</sup> It is similar, for instance, to how the philosopher Gilbert Simondon condemns the traditional notion of reciprocity in his elaboration of the “transvidual”: the ‘reciprocity’ of two individuations within a collective (system) cannot be marked by their occupation of “identical” poles, but must rather be understood as a compound of a multiplicity: the individual's relationship with other individuals not defined as a multiplicity of relationships between subject-object, but as pertaining to a relation of relations (as multiple products relate to a single differential equation) defining the transvidual unity of the entire system. The result of the transvidual conception would therefore be the ruin of the notion of a reciprocal equality, as an ethics not at all compatible with a system defined by the impartial inequalities of its system's cuts and flows. Thus, what we are left with by our understanding of reciprocity is not at all the

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<sup>112</sup> Refusal of reciprocity is, after all, what de Beauvoir cites in “Must We Burn Sade?” (1953) as the fault in Sade's ethical construction, resulting in his refuge in the reiterated philosophical alibi for cruelty.

system that Theodore's psychoanalyst prescribes: reciprocity cannot factor into the concept of the individual through the sense of the 'pure dissipation' that the doctor elaborates (and of which little can be said). Rather the individual, Octave, Roberte, Theodore, etc., is defined in his or her symbolic non-reciprocal acquisition of power—an acquisition assumed within the anti-dialectical position of something like the Bataillean notion of sacrifice or the sadistic act of violence. Returning to Gurrola, it is here, according to the anti-dialectical image of the libertine's "pornographic brooding," that the time code at the bottom of the frame of *Robarte el Arte* might now be understood as pertaining to the "laws" of progression assumed by the moving image (as the narrative chronology repeatedly upset, for instance, by the narrative disruptions of Gurrola's *Tajimara*), and against which the anti-dialectical images of the Cardenas crimes, the illegible title cards, the appropriated sounds, and the appearance of Gurrola/Gas/Coen, materialize as a string of filmic aberrations whose a-chronological effects are quickly tamed by the reminder of the film's official running time. Gurrola thus arrives at documenta as the non-reciprocal Sadean artist, working towards the premise of art's activity of pure dissipation via the perverse economics of expenditure, the splicing together of disconnected sequences with no intent at synthesis.

What Gurrola reveals for the market, meanwhile, the setting for his heist, is the fraudulence of the numeraire (the object, "empty," "non-reciprocal") at the center of all the bartering and haggling. As Klossowski writes: "such is the commodification of the



[unassimilable] voluptuous emotion.”<sup>113</sup>

### “Fraudulent Exchange”

Before getting into the relevance of the subversive model of the readymade for the artist Gurrola, both in his filmmaking and in his conceptualization of the practice of ‘Dom Art,’ I want to draw out the theoretical stakes of such a comparison. Whereas the framework of my argument above concerned Klossowski’s *La monnaie vivante*, situating Gurrola’s film between a reading of Fourier and Sade to construct a theory of libidinal economy, there is perhaps an easier set of references if the question indeed regards *where* and *how* this intervention of the readymade takes place, the theory of reification/commodification re: Marx, Lukács. Utilizing de Duve’s Marxist reading of the Duchampian readymade, moreover, will help establish an essential background for understanding what is meant by the readymade’s ‘short-circuiting’ of the art market.

In Volume 1 of *Capital*, Marx’s analysis of the commodity concerns the asymmetry of exchange made apparent when the commodity in question is the abstract labor power of the worker, a commodity that entails both ‘price’ (a ‘wage’ for the worker) and ‘surplus value’ (the incentive of the producer to contract this labor), an unevenness between use value and the worker’s salary unveiling the exploitation inherent in this exchange. In the Spring of 1917, when Duchamp anonymously submits the *Fountain*, signed with the factory worker’s name (“R. Mutt”), to an exhibition held by the

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<sup>113</sup> Klossowski, *La monnaie vivante*, 57. “Tel est le projet mercantilisateur de l’émotion voluptueuse.”

Society of Independent Artists, an organization for which he served on the board of directors, Duchamp activated, in a single instance, a short circuit of this very asymmetrical tension, a tension that apparently exists *within* the bourgeois artist himself as relates to his own labor and to the object that he produces. Of course, for Marx, the effect of this asymmetry becomes inextricably linked to the mystification of the commodity implicit in this formation—for which the object itself comes to conceal the social relations that account for the formation of its value. Duchamp’s intervention lies in swapping an industrially-produced utility object for the art object, revealing the seemingly arbitrary nature of the latter’s valuation. As Thierry de Duve writes, “Duchamp didn’t make the *Fountain* with his own hands, like an artisan; he bought it from its manufacturer, the J.L. Mott Iron Works. The name Mutt signals the provenance with little disguise. ‘And I added Richard,’ Duchamp said.... He couldn’t have been more explicit. The signature acknowledges the double status of the nobody who proclaims himself an artist.... On the one side there is the manufacturer, Mutt or Mott, who stands in for the artisan, and on the other Richard, the capitalist, the stockholder.”<sup>114</sup> De Duve’s remark is that, in the person of Duchamp-the-artist there is a split occupation between the “artisan” and the “capitalist”; and moreover whereas this ‘split,’ an amalgamation of

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<sup>114</sup> Thierry de Duve, *Cousus de fil d’or: Beuys, Warhol, Klein, Duchamp* (Paris: Art édition, 1990), 81; De Duve, *Sewn in the Sweatshops of Marx*, trans. Krauss (University of Chicago Press, 2012), 63 (English). “Duchamp n’a pas fait *Fountain* de ses mains, comme un artisan, il l’a achetée chez son fabricant, The J.L. Mott Iron Works. Le nom « Mutt » cite, à peine déguisée, cette provenance. « et j’ai ajouté Richard », dit Duchamp, « ce n’est pas un mauvais nom une pissotière, vous saisissez ? Le contraire de la pauvreté. » On ne peut plus clairement, la signature prend acte du double statut du quidam qui s’auto-proclame artiste.... Il y a d’un côté le fabricant, Mutt ou Mott, qui tient lieu d’artisan, et de l’autre Richard, le capitaliste, l’actionnaire.”

provocative social forces, is usually concealed within the commodity the artist produces, the *Fountain*, with its recognizable shape and the signature of the contracted “worker” emblazoned on the front, dislocates this concealment in its raw and confused presentation of social elements, its shattering of the aesthetic mystifications that go into the valuation of the art object. (In an absurd twist, the collector Arensberg hands over to the gallery a blank check to purchase the *Fountain*, sight unseen).

As de Duve points out, Marx analyzes this very tension in his discussion of the artisan-worker in his *Theories of Surplus Value*, book 4 of *Capital*. According to Marx, a differentiation must be made between the ‘unproductive labor’ of the artisan (for whom no surplus is garnered) and the ‘productive labor’ (generation of surplus) of the artisan worker contracted by the merchant. “[T]he small artisan who works on commission sees, whether or not he wants to, whether or not he knows it, the social division of labor penetrating his own body and lives out his own activity in the mode of division, because separation of labor and capital is the dominant mode of social relations. He is a capitalist who owns his means of production, who employs himself as wage laborer, who buys his own labor power, who exploits his own overtime, and who pockets the surplus thus created. The predictable outcome of this contradiction... is that either the artisan prospers, hiring workers and becoming a boss in his turn, or he fails, losing his means of production and ending up in the employ of somebody else.”<sup>115</sup> De Duve explains, “Mutt

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 68 (86). “Il fait remarquer que le petit artisan qui travaille à son compte voit, qu’il le veuille ou non, qu’il le sache ou non, la division sociale du travail traverser sa personne, et qu’il vit son activité sur le mode de la séparation parce que la séparation du travail et du capital est le mode des rapports sociaux dominants. Il est un capitaliste propriétaire de ses moyens de production qui s’emploie

is like Mott, artisan-painter or small industrialist. As artisan, Mutt suffers from having to separate his person into an exploited worker and a merchant who pockets the surplus value. As industrialist, Mott doesn't suffer, he exploits his workers. Mutt envies Mott and fears for his trade... Feeling that he will soon have nothing but his creativity to sell, he withdraws his savings, stakes them all, and subcontracts. Mutt is once again like Mott, alternatively buyer and seller."<sup>116</sup> The *Fountain*, removed from its context, voided of its use-value, turned upside down and rendered as pure profit, garnering from Duchamp's investor a literal blank check, would be both the originating moment and the self-conscious posing of the question concerning the 'new' relationship of the art object to this 'new' arbiter of value, the artist-producer—a shift in power, negotiated between the institution and the artist, leveraged by the cunning of Duchamp to realize this integral split within his very person. As Adorno remarks, “emphatic modern art does not flourish in Elysian fields beyond the commodity, but is, rather, strengthened by way of the experience of the commodity.”<sup>117</sup> In a certain sense, Duchamp invented this field by giving name to the conundrum of valuation/commodification, at least as it concerns the art object. The trick to understanding the readymade therefore lies in disentangling the

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lui-même comme travailleur salarié, achète sa propre force de travail, exploite son propre surtravail et empoche la plus-value ainsi créée. L'issue prévisible de cette contradiction [...] est soit que l'artisan prospère et finira par embaucher des ouvriers pour devenir patron à son tour, soit qu'il périclite, perdra ses moyens de production et finira à l'emploi de quelqu'un d'autre.”

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 70 (88). “Mutt est comme Mott, artisan-peintre ou petit industriel. Comme artisan Mutt souffre de séparer sa personne en un ouvrier exploité et un marchand qui empoche la plus-value. Comme industriel Mott n'en souffre pas, il exploite ses ouvriers.... Sentant qu'il n'aura bientôt plus que sa créativité à vendre il rassemble ses économies, joue son va-tout et sous-traite. Mutt est à nouveau comme Mott, marchand, tour à tour acheteur et vendeur.”

<sup>117</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Hullot-Kentor (University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 298.

dense web of social relations reified in the object, for which the readymade, in its short circuiting of these operations, begins to decenter the now suddenly-realized distorted ideological mystifications behind the object's inherent value.

According to Lukács, in his 1923 *History and Class Consciousness*, an analysis which, building upon Marx's account, defines reification as constitutive of a social norm related not merely to commodities but to the psychic procedures that shape our consciousness (social relations reified in the circulation of objects), 'reification' means this conceptual reflection of the commodity as a structural limitation in bourgeois thinking, that which prevents the subject from grasping the totality of the social conditions surrounding him, misunderstanding therefore the effects of the structural limitation as precisely that. We know, for instance, the ensuing history of the *Fountain*, its replication in the *Boîte-en-valise*, and in museums around the world, all part of the legacy and mythology of Marcel Duchamp. What this legacy describes is the dematerialization of art from the object to the concept, thus enthroning the artist-provocateur, such to where the art *itself* becomes the "blank check," as we see with the speculative value of Duchamp's fabricated *Tzanck Check*, which Duchamp used to pay his dentist, a conceptual object whose value (in the cleverness of its pun) mirrors the power formerly wielded by the patron Arensberg. As such, the transfer of power associated with Duchamp's intervention is a revolution radical in its application but conservative in its effect, preserving at least the institutional metric of value in the name of the artist, even when this artist proposes a radical decentering and wrestles this power

from the old institutional forms. As de Duve explains, “Every artist, even and above all the *enfant terrible* of the avant-garde, writes checks on tradition.”<sup>118</sup> This concession is what allows the painter of *Nude Descending a Staircase* the capital with which to trade his speculative works on the open market. In this arrangement, we still haven’t achieved (that is, in the realm of the class struggle) what Lukács understands to be the end-game of reification—though Duchamp understands it well and turns this to his advantage—the revelation that *labor-as-commodity* means that the workers themselves, as a collective force, are a *thing* to be traded, therefore a power to be leveraged. Duchamp, with his readymade, realized this process could be hastened in the art world, given the strange entity of the artist, simultaneously non-productive laborer *and* capitalist.

When Gurrola, expanding Duchamp’s project, envisions “Dom Art,” he comments on the blindness of collective labor to this fact of labor-as-commodity and therefore produces a manifesto for an art movement that, like any revolutionary art movement, can only be conservative in scope. In the Dom Art manifesto, Gurrola writes, “The Dom movement, apart from not being a movement because it does not need one, is about protest. The preservation of the family [is] its highest ambition.”<sup>119</sup> Where Duchamp’s innovation of the readymade laid the groundwork for pop art, as one case of the institutional absorption of this conceptual form as a new fashionable art commodity,

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<sup>118</sup> De Duve, *Sweatshops*, 76 (94). “Tout artiste, même et surtout l’enfant terrible des avant-gardes, tire des chèques sur la tradition.”

<sup>119</sup> Qtd in Mariana Botey, “Discurso Sobre lo Ausente: Juan José Gurrola El Doblez de la Neovanguardia Mexicana,” in *La boîte de J.J. Gurrola*, eds. Andrea Ferreyra (Mexico City: Fundación Gurrola, Vanilla Planifolia, Jumex, 2014), 405 (183). “El movimiento Dom aparte de no ser un movimiento porque no lo necesita, es de protesta. La preservación de la familia, su máxima ambición.”

Gurrola re-opens the investigation by instigating this form as an element of a provocative propaganda, addressing the conceptual acts of the artist to the collective society that remains immune to these innovations. The “works” would take the form of media interventions, appropriated advertising images of household commodities and the performance of Western leisure activities, to parodically stress the artist’s conservative message (Fig. 3.3). As Mariana Botey has argued, what defines these strategies from the pop art idiom that Gurrola seemingly adopts are the Duchampian mechanisms of super registration and appropriation that underwrite this particular form of dematerialization. Dom art “effectively closes the cycle of objectivization (reification) of modern life as an object of contemplation open to doubt, and perhaps, to the crack of an overlapping danger,”<sup>120</sup> quoting James Metcalf, “by questioning the object’s function, [Gurrola] has violated its symbolic untouchability.”<sup>121</sup> According to this reading, Gurrola fashions an art movement based on the (re-)registration of the objects of pop (commercial objects re-contextualized as art) *back* within the context of commercial circulation.

In the preceding section, I present a reading of Gurrola’s film *Robarte el arte* via Klossowski’s thesis in *La monnaie vivante* concerning an economics of expenditure. In this reading, I follow Klossowski’s claim that ‘industry’ and the aesthetic of the arts (that is, whatever it is in the work that causes the art-lover to write the so-called ‘blank check’ for the object) are co-extensive entities furnishing the always unrealized project to remunerate the passions (“nothing is more contrary to enjoyment” says Klossowski, than

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<sup>120</sup> Botey 406-7.

<sup>121</sup> Qtd in Botey 408 (189). “... violar la simbólica inexpugnabilidad del objeto al cuestionar su función.”

receiving “for free” that which one deems ‘priceless’). Gurrola’s project for a ‘Dom Art,’ in reference to the idiom, is to suggest the dark underside of this valorization of the industrial/pop cultural object, an underside evident in Duchamp’s subversive operation of the readymade, an operation one suspects has evaporated in the assimilation of the readymade by the academy. As Duchamp in his notebooks makes clear, the incorporation of the readymade in the gallery, the distribution of its manifold replications, is not to contribute to an auratic tradition, nor are these conceptual objects given over to purely optical considerations. What the objects produce is what Duchamp calls the ‘sententiousness’ of the artwork, product of the short circuit, the revelation of a circular hermeneutic that exists in the exchange between words and the visual. Making clear the relevance of the disjunct of language to the logic of exchange, Klossowski defines “currency” as follows:

In the realm of exchange, the most general sign of equivalence will always be currency [*monnaie*], whose function is analogous to the role played by the *word* in the realm of communication. Given the syntax of money, the (economic) intelligibility of the use-object as a commodity guarantees the same fraudulent operation (in relation to needs and their objects) as does the intelligibility of language (in relation to the life of the impulses). Except that the intelligibility of use is concretely circumscribed by the differences between the individual unities which, through use, express themselves through their mode of existence, voluntarily or involuntarily. The limit of intelligibility is found in the unexchangeable, in accordance with its degree of idiosyncrasy—that is, the obscure propensity revealed in the conventional word or the supposed accord between the need and its object. In this universal case, only the creation of an equivalent can compensate for the use-object (inasmuch as the equivalent is irreducible to any other way of using



something), and this is precisely the role of money.<sup>122</sup>

What Klossowski calls the ‘fraudulent exchange’ is premised on a psychological condition in ‘our world of industrial fabrication’: “what appeals to people,” he explains, “is not what seems naturally free of charge, but rather the price that is put on what is naturally free of charge.”<sup>123</sup> This ideological distortion is redoubled in our language. To speak of the ‘use value’ of the object suggests a shift from signification to the signifying cause, all taking place in an imaginary experience of meaning whose inherent constituent is a misrecognition of the cause, what Klossowski calls the ‘unexchangeable voluptuous emotion’ at the center of the market’s structuring desire. Reification, in other words, is what prevents the bourgeois subject from comprehending society as a “totality.” (This, however, is where the thesis splits: Fourier’s fantasy of a ‘total capitalism,’ endorsed by Klossowski, is quite far off in its prescription from the utopian element of Lukács, the realization of the proletarian labor force of its own existence as a commodity in contention with the overall network of exchange).

“Art practice,” says Klossowski, describes a particular operation (‘the naming of

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<sup>122</sup> Klossowski, *La monnaie vivante*, 57-58. “Le signe d’équivalence le plus général reste toujours la monnaie dans le domaine des échanges selon une fonction analogue à celle du mot dans la communication. L’intelligibilité (économique) de l’objet d’usage sur le plan de la marchandise en vertu de la syntaxe monétaire assure la même opération frauduleuse par rapport aux besoins et leurs objets que l’intelligibilité du langage par rapport à la vie pulsionnelle. Sauf que l’intelligibilité de l’usage est circonscrite concrètement par la différence des unités individuelles qui, par l’usage, s’expriment dans leur manière voulue ou involontaire d’exister. La limite de l’intelligibilité est celle de l’inéchangeable, selon le degré de l’idiosyncrasie, soit de la propension obscure qui s’ignore dans le mot institué autant que dans la prétendue concordance de l’objet et du besoin. Il n’y a dans ce cas universel que la création d’un équivalent qui puisse compenser l’objet d’usage en tant qu’irréductible à quelque autre manière d’user de quelque chose—et c’est le rôle de la monnaie.”

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-57. “Dans le monde de la fabrication industrielle, ce n’est plus ce qui semble naturellement gratuit qui forme l’attrait mais le prix de ce qui est naturellement gratuit.”

the phantasm’), but, in this process, the object is taken out of its proper circulation: the arts—along with the “moral and religious institutions and forms of knowledge—are modes for the expression and representation of impulsive forces. The way they are expressed in the economy, and ultimately in our industrial world, depends on the way they have been incorporated into the economy by our reigning institutions.”<sup>124</sup> He continues, “Hence, if these forces are expressed specifically in accordance with existing economic norms, then they themselves create their own repression....”<sup>125</sup> Gurrola’s intervention in *Robarte el Arte*, is to correct this process (the process illustrated in Dom Art), to subject the art objects of documenta to their proper libidinal investment—from the stultifying organization of the institution (what Gurrola calls “stagnant academicism”) to the peripheries of a freewheeling libidinal economy. On the very basis of this threat to meaning, Gurrola and his team are unwanted interlopers, arousing the suspicion of the institution and the institution’s henchmen (this context is made clear in the clandestine nature of the footage). The motivation for a “conceptual art theft,” in this regard, would be to ‘steal’ the object from its institutional rendering (its false inertness), and to render it ‘back’ into the market as a ‘living object.’ This act would indeed constitute a disruption or “swooping” of the financialization of the art world from the metropolitan center (the context of documenta), as Gurrola and his cast represent precisely the type of artist shut

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 16-17. Translation modified. “[L]es institutions morales ou religieuses, au même titre que les formes de la connaissance, un mode d’expression et de représentation des forces impulsives. La manière dont elles s’expriment dans l’économie et finalement dans notre monde industriel répond à la manière dont elles ont été traitées par l’économie des institutions régnautes.”

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 17. “Alors, si ces forces s’expriment spécifiquement d’abord selon les normes économiques, elles se créent elles-mêmes leur propre répression....”

out from this exchange (literally, from the event itself). What is denied by the context of documenta and the Euro-American institutional art world is art's unfortunate remainder; this remainder is reintegrated by the help of the re-enacted Cardenas crimes 'snuff' footage, the inclusion of shots of salacious newspaper clippings (Fig. 3.4, 3.5), the appropriated sounds of a "drunk" Liz Taylor, and the illegible type throughout—facets of film that defy the institutional remedy. If Marx's analysis referred to the commodity as the ossification of the energies of exchange, leading then to this distorting/distorted ideological effect, it is Gurrola's attention to free these energies from this determining institutional event that is the project of his work. This, in the end, is what is meant by the "anti-kinesis" of Gurrola's film: the halting of the processes of value formation by the (re)registration of the art object, from its purely commercial understanding, underwritten by art world pretensions, to the pulsating, libidinal chaos of the other scene.

#### "Klossowski's System"

Something we have avoided so far in our discussion of *Robarte el Arte* is a more thorough examination of a moment included within the appropriated footage of the stag film, a scene in which Goyo, in the midst of the act of burying the body of his victim, lifts the sheet that had been covering the corpse to expose the victim's genitalia (Fig. 3.6, 3.7). The scene is consistent with the popular myth of Goyo reproduced in Jodorowsky's film, *Santa Sangre*: the paranoiac compelled to eliminate desire, i.e. the "desire of the other." In the film, the strangler, played by Jodorowsky's son Axel, is driven to eliminate the

other as soon as there arises in him feelings of sexual longing (an impulse compelled by the demands of his superegoic apparition-mother). Certainly Freud's writing on psychosis is one way to engage this "Goyo" myth, to speak of a 'hole' in the symbolic order and the "patch" with which the psychotic attempts to remedy it, part of the delusional structure that characterizes the psychotic's distorted interaction with the external world.<sup>126</sup> It is clear from the appropriated scene that *this* Goyo, too, like Jodorowsky's, must confirm, by means of lifting the sheet, what he is compelled to exclude. Spoken in terms relevant to acinema, what does this confirmation of lack (e.g. "the lack of the victim's phallus"), embedded in Goyo's act, signify within the radical syntax of Gurrola's film?

Whereas the argument above (in the opening section of this chapter, "The Anti-Kinetic Film") illustrated the acinematic properties of *Robarte el Arte*, for which the appropriated "Goyo" sequences are understood as one tool among others in service of the film's radical syntax, I have yet to give a clear outline of Klossowski's system, which will be necessary before moving forward. I argue that this system provides a compelling rationale for examining the weight of Gurrola's incorporation of the "Goyo" myth.

The aim of Klossowski's system was, according to Deleuze, to "introduce desire into the infrastructure, or inversely, to introduce the category of production into desire."

<sup>127</sup> Klossowski sidesteps both Marx and Freud by implementing the more obscure "economic" and "psychological" thought of le Marquis de Sade and the utopian socialist

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<sup>126</sup> See Lacan, *Le séminaire, livre III: les psychoses* (1955-56).

<sup>127</sup> Letter to Pierre Klossowski, 21 April 1971 in Gilles Deleuze, *Lettres et autres textes* (Paris: Minuit, 2015), 61. "Vous introduisez le désir dans l'infrastructure, ou ce qui revient au même, inversement, vous introduisez la catégorie de production dans le désir."

Charles Fourier, two influences whose effects we examine above.<sup>128</sup> The tissue of Klossowski's argument comprises, however, a concept of epistemology furnished by the philosopher Nietzsche. An important part of the French post-war intellectual rehabilitation of Nietzsche was an illuminating set of critical essays written by Klossowski that eventually formed his monograph, *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux* (1969). These essays explored Nietzsche's theory of the drives as they relate thematically to the "sick body" of the philosopher, forming a "philosophical description" of Nietzsche's own valetudinary states prior to his eventual convalescence. (We will examine aspects of this monograph later, in chapter IV, section 2, "The Sovereign Artist.") The thesis of Klossowski's *La monnaie vivante*, that the economic norms are "a mode for the expression and representation of impulsive forces"<sup>129</sup> derives explicitly from Nietzsche's formulation of impulsive life—the subterranean drives as the immanent cause of all human activity—a theory encapsulated in the work of these earlier essays. What Klossowski achieved, in effect, was to re-direct Nietzsche's critique of the productive drives to the field of political economy, specifically to supplant Marx's theory of base/superstructure. "*The real producer and consumer*," Klossowski writes, "*is not the purely fictional unity of the individual, but rather his impulsive phantasms.*"<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Deleuze, again, remarks: "In his recent works, Klossowski indicates to us the only means of by-passing the sterile parallelism where we flounder between Freud and Marx" ("[D]ans ses oeuvres récentes, Klossowski nous indique le seul moyen de dépasser le parallélisme stérile où nous débattons entre Freud et Marx"). Deleuze and Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), 75.

<sup>129</sup> *La monnaie vivante*, 16. "[Les normes économiques sont] un mode d'expression et de représentation des forces impulsionnelles."

<sup>130</sup> Pierre Klossowski, *Les derniers travaux de Gulliver, suivi de Sade et Fourier* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1974), 51. "[L]e vrai producteur et le vrai consommateur n'étant du tout l'unité purement fictive de l'individu, mais ses impulsions phantasmiques actuel."

Following the work on Nietzsche, Klossowski argues that the formation of the “fictional” (that is, “ideological,” or “conscious”) subject (also known as the “self,” what Marx, in a different sense, refers to as the product of a certain “false consciousness”) occurs within a recurring three step process: first, where the internal impulses vie for dominance within the organism; second, wherein the agitation of the drives produces for the individual a constraint that Klossowski calls the “phantasm,” the ambiguous expression of the subject’s desire (“Nothing,” he says, “exists apart from *impulses* that are essentially *generative* of *phantasms*”<sup>131</sup>); and third, where the subject, by the necessity of his compulsion, fabricates a “simulacrum,” a representation of this obsessive constraint that the subject himself is driven to (re)produce so as to communicate his “need.” The simulacrum becomes, through a project of socialization, in Klossowski’s term, “garrulous.” It is assimilated into the social hierarchy of needs, i.e. it is made productive, re-configured, so that the phantasmic obsessive constraint of the subject now presents as the productive “need” of the individual, rather than as, formerly, the framework for the drive’s non-productive expenditure (like the dissolutive impulse that Freud labeled “the death drive”). The fabrication of simulacra cast originally by the obsessive constraint of the phantasm is therefore re-directed into the fabrication of useful “commodities,” a further consolidation of the individual subject, its survival, its reproduction, etc. The psyche’s objects are henceforth recovered in a denigrated form, what Klossowski calls institutional “stereotypes.” They have undergone, at this stage, a

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<sup>131</sup> Klossowski, *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux*, 196. “Rien n’existe en dehors des *impulsions* essentiellement *génératrices* de *phantasmes*.”

process of “reification” during which the object loses its originally affective character. The object becomes therefore a purely rational entity, existing only in support of propagating the existence of the productive (that is, industrial/bourgeois) subject. “*This hierarchy of needs,*” Klossowski explains, “*is the economic form of repression that existing institutions impose by and through the consciousness of the subject onto the imponderable forces of its psyche.*”<sup>132</sup>

According to Klossowski, the impulses, which are located at the origin of this entire industrial architecture, supply the force that essentially *creates* the economic infrastructure. Similar to Marx’s theory of the economic base, this infrastructure (which, Klossowski says, forms simultaneously with the subject) generates in him a sort of “false consciousness,” a reaffirmation of an illusory unity tied to the “objective” expression of his (the subject’s) own material production and consumption. “[I]ncapable of asserting himself directly through the movements of his affective life,” Klossowski explains, “[the subject] maintains his unity only through his ability to possess goods external to himself.”<sup>133</sup> What this “false consciousness” means, then, as the ideological product of an infrastructure conceived according to the vicissitudes of impulsive life, is that the impulses themselves create the vehicle for their own repression, an exceptional maneuver in Klossowski’s text, for it poses an answer to the essential question of human

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<sup>132</sup> Klossowski, *La monnaie vivante*, 18. “[L]a hiérarchie des besoins est la forme économique de répression que les institutions existantes exerceront par et à travers la conscience du suppôt sur les forces impondérables de sa vie psychique.”

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.* “[I]l ne lui appartient pas de s’affirmer par les mouvements de sa vie affective mais, en tant que possédant son unité, par son aptitude à posséder des biens extérieurs à lui-même.”

subjectivity: why the subject, confronted with the means of fulfilling his desire, would choose instead his own subjugation. “Industrial civilization has been anathematized for ravaging the life of the affects,” Klossowski explains. “We thereby recognize in this mode of production, under the pretext of denouncing its ‘demoralizing’ influence, a considerable moral power.”<sup>134</sup>

How then does Goyo fit within this elaborate architecture? Goyo’s (reiterated) crime of passion is itself the *simulacrum* of a singular, hence non-communicable, *phantasm*. It manifests the drive to eliminate “sexual difference,” spoken by Goyo unconsciously in his perverse but instructive ritual, the compulsion to confirm the lack of the victim’s phallus. Moreover, Goyo enacts the premise recovered by Klossowski in Sade: the inalienable “right to pleasure.” It is the elimination of “lack” that ensures this absolute right— and therefore what Goyo shares with the “accursed virility” of Sade’s libertine: the compulsion to apathetic repetition.

According to Klossowski, in order for a “simulacrum” to remain a “simulacrum,” it must remain “economically sterile.” Unlike the simulacrum, “utensil objects” are instinctive products that have been diverted and reconfigured economically, i.e. conditioned for the needs of the subject. The simulacrum, on the other hand, to remain a representation of its “incommunicable” source, must remain a fundamentally *useless* object: an imaginary, plastic, or written transcription of the phantasm. In this context,

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 11. “[...] les anathèmes ont été lancés au nom de la vie affective contre les ravages de la civilisation industrielle [...] c’est, sous prétexte de dénoncer son emprise démoralisante, lui reconnaître une puissance morale considérable.”



simulacra survive only as perversion, a turning-away of the object from society's productive aims. Since the matrix of economic consumption is the very thing that solidifies the ego ("[the subject] maintains its unity through its ability to possess goods external to itself"), the simulacrum, in relief, must exist at the expense of this unity. If we understand Goyo's crime as a representation of his phantasm, we may now theorize why the apparent object of his desire must be eliminated, moreover why he must confirm its successful elimination. We see here also the connection to Jodorowsky's interpretation in *Santa Sangre*: the superego-mother who drives her son to annihilate the object, the "mother" whose eventual psychic disappearance means the "full restoration" of Goyo's mental health. For Goyo's paradox is precisely the misrecognition of desire as something contained within his victim, therefore capable of destruction: a conflation of the commodity (the "proper" fetish) with the prohibited fetish of the living object (the "whole-body-as-commodity" denied entry into the industrial economic circuit). The perpetuation of Goyo's "accursed virility" relies therefore on his inability to recognize the hidden logic of his gesture (the compulsion to crime), and for this gesture to remain unconscious in his activity. The delusion that compels him to destroy "lack" is at least philosophically in line with the aims of his society—the superegoic injunction (the mother's) that commands him to *jouissance* while overtly prohibiting it.

This convergence of passionate crime with the deep tissue of industrial society is why Goyo was, historically, the perfect candidate for official state rehabilitation: pardoned by the president and invited with a hero's welcome to speak at the *Congreso de*

*la Unión* in 1976, the rehabilitation of Goyo “el estrangulador” represents, in other words, the industrial society’s simple fix—a redirection of the monstrous libidinal drive towards its proper “utensil” object.

The noncommunicable phantasm driving the heart of the economic system is hence the revelation of the “short circuit,” as we found in the previous section. In the instance of Goyo, we see that Gurrola has extended the metaphor: the strangler, the perfectly assimilable remainder of institutional logic, is that which, by giving a price for the phantasy, implicitly advances its cause.

#### “The Metamorphosis of Bodies”

How does the concept of the “whole-body-as-commodity,” brought up in the previous section, work in Klossowski’s system? In other words, to re-enter the “body” into the circuits of commercial exchange—the apparent anathema of the industrial institution?

The psychoanalyst Hervé Castanet attempts to answer Klossowski’s question: “The abolition of norms that [Klossowski’s] integral atheism achieves has a fresh consequence,” he says: “Expropriation. For in suppressing the ‘limits of the responsible and self-identical ego,’ one concomitantly abolishes the identity of one’s own body.”<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Hervé Castanet, *Pierre Klossowski, la pantomime des esprits, suivi d’un entretien de Pierre Klossowski avec Judith Miller* (Nantes: Éditions Cécile Defaut, 2007), 46; Hervé Castanet, *Pierre Klossowski: The Pantomime of Spirits*, trans. Adrian Price in collaboration with Pamela King (Berlin: Peter Land AG, 2014), 65 (English). “La perversion aboutit à « l’expropriation du corps propre et du corps d’autrui ». L’abolition des normes que réalise l’athéisme intégral a une conséquence: l’expropriation. S’il y a suppression des « limites du moi responsable et identique », il y a concomitamment suppression de l’identité du corps propre.”

This term “expropriation,” of course, requires further consideration. Institutional logic presupposes the identity of the “stable subject”—a subject whose integrity is ensured by the prosthesis of the industrial hierarchy of needs. As we learned from Klossowski’s lesson with Sade, the expropriation of the neighbor’s body entails as well the dissolution of the libertine’s own subject, lost in the apathetically reiterated act of destroying his victim. “Expropriation” would mean therefore stripping the subject of this integrity. “The basis of the Klossowskian economy is that which is played out, actualized, and ‘represented’ in the (provisional) unity of the agent.”<sup>136</sup> Writes Klossowski: “The body in itself is the concrete product of the individuation of the impulsive forces realized according to the norms of the species. This body has only been restored to ‘me’ corrected in certain ways—certain forces have been pruned away, others subjugated by language. ‘I’ then do not possess ‘my’ body save in the name of institutions.”<sup>137</sup>

The pervert’s situation is situated, Castanet claims, in these effects of “transformation and metamorphosis”: “The greatest crime ‘I’ can commit” says Klossowski, “is not so much to take ‘his’ body from the ‘other’ [that is, to destroy my victim’s body]: it is to break ‘my’ body away from this ‘myself’ instituted by language.”

<sup>138</sup> Castanet reminds us that Klossowski insists on this logic, a logic we find located in his

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 143 (99). “La base de l’économie klossowskienne est celle qui, inauguralement, se met en scène, s’actualise, «se représente» comme il dit, dans l’unité (provisoire) du suppôt.”

<sup>137</sup> Klossowski, *Sade mon prochain* (1967), 46. “Le corps en soi est le produit concret de l’individuation des forces impulsives selon les normes de l’espèce.... [C]e corps n’a été restitué qu’à « moi-même », corrigé d’une certaine manière, c’est-à-dire que certaines forces en ont été élaguées, d’autres asservies par le langage: en sorte que « je » ne possède « mon corps » qu’au nom des institutions dont le langage en « moi » n’est que le surveillant.”

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. “Le plus grand crime que « je » puisse commettre, ce n’est pas tant d’ôter « son » corps à « autrui »; c’est de désolidariser « mon » corps d’avec ce « moi-même », institué par le langage.”

analysis of Sade: “The representation of having a body whose state is not that of one’s own body is clearly specific to perversion. Although the pervert feels the alterity of the alien body, he feels much more the body of the other being his own; and the body that normatively and institutionally is his he experiences as being really foreign to himself.”<sup>139</sup> According to Castanet, these remarks “are extremely accurate for describing imaginary identification such as it is laid bare in perverse intersubjectivity. The pervert, having identified with his [victim], tries to grasp this irruption of the solvent force in the other’s body....”<sup>140</sup> For Klossowski, the pervert obtains, “albeit partially, the expropriation that would signal the abolition of the ego’s limits and its external guarantor: institutional language and universalizing reason.”<sup>141</sup>

However, what does the logic of expropriation entail for the question of “price,” central to Klossowski’s system? We recall Lyotard’s “acinéma” essay where he writes, “[w]e must sense the price, beyond price, as Klossowski admirably explains, that the organic body, the pretended unity of the pretended subject, must pay so that the pleasure will burst forth in its irreversible sterility.”<sup>142</sup> “The object, the victim, the prostitute,” he says, “takes the pose, offering him or herself as a detached region, but *at the same time*

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 46-47. “La représentation d’avoir un corps d’une condition autre que le corps propre est de toute évidence spécifique de la perversion: bien que le pervers sente l’altérité du corps étranger, ce qu’il ressent le mieux c’est le corps d’autrui comme étant le sien; et celui qui est de façon normative et institutionnelle le sien comme étant réellement étranger à lui-même.”

<sup>140</sup> Castanet 65 (47). “Ces remarques sont d’une extrême justesse pour décrire l’identification imaginaire telle qu’elle se dénude dans l’intersubjectivité perverse. Le pervers, identifié à son partenaire, tente de saisir cette irruption de la force dissolvante dans le corps d’autrui.”

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. “Pour lui, le pervers obtiendrait, même partiellement, cette expropriation qui signerait suppression des limites du moi et de son garant extérieur: le langage institutionnel et la raison universalisante.”

<sup>142</sup> Lyotard, “L’acinéma,” 66-67.

*giving way and humiliating this whole person.* The allusion to the latter is an indispensable factor in intensification, since it indicates the inestimable price of diverting the drives in order to achieve perverse pleasure.”<sup>143</sup> Is this “price,” which is paid, as Lyotard says, for the pleasurable dissolution of an intensity, different from the value associated with “money” (re: Klossowski’s “universally intelligible equivalent”)? As we know, the simulacrum originates with this very model of equivalence: it “excludes any intelligibility of what a body *momentarily represents* to the one who enjoys it, unless it be in fact his body or that *thing* that his expropriated body may be worth for and in the phantasm of the other.”<sup>144</sup> Castanet explains: “The body, disconnected from itself (i.e. from its agency of appropriation which fixes it down and names it as an individuated unity) becomes the equivalent of the phantasm, it enciphers the impulses in silence. If this same expropriated body is integrated into a psychical economy of exchange then, because it is taken up in the field of value, it is constructed as a simulacrum of this same mute phantasm.”<sup>145</sup> “[T]he expropriated body,” writes Klossowski, “is recovered as a phantasmatic domain such that it becomes merely the equivalent of the phantasm. But it will only really be the simulacrum of the phantasm provided it is produced under the sign

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 67. “L’objet, la victime, la prostituée prend la pose, s’offrant ainsi comme région détachée, *mais il faut qu’en même temps elle se dérobe ou s’humilie comme personne totale.*”

<sup>144</sup> Pierre Klossowski, “Sade et Fourier” in *Topique*, No° 4 (Paris: 1970), 58. “[Le simulacre] excluant toute intelligibilité de ce qu’un être représente à ce moment pour celui qui en jouit, si ce n’est celle proprement corporelle, à savoir ce que son corps exproprié peut valoir pour et dans le phantasme de l’autre.”

<sup>145</sup> Castanet 73-74 (52). “Le corps déconnecté du moi-même, soit de son instance d’appropriation qui le fixe et le nomme comme unité individuée, devient l’équivalent du phantasme en tant que, comme lui, il chiffre en silence les impulsions. Si ce même corps exproprié est intégré dans une économie psychique d’échange alors, parce que pris dans le champ de la valeur, il se construit comme simulacre de ce même phantasme mutique.”

of value or price.”<sup>146</sup>

When the title card of *Robarte el Arte* appears on screen, mocking Ben Vautier’s slogan at documenta 5 (“KUNST IST ÜBERFLÜSSIG (art is superfluous)” (Fig. 3.8)), what is precisely the point we’re to take from Gurrola’s derision? It is, I argue, a point that Gurrola shares with Klossowski, one of the theses of *La monnaie vivante*: that the value of the “useless” art object and the value of the “useful” industrial product are constituted by the same logic. “To say that there is an articulation between the two logics of utensil and waste has a consequence: in both cases, any possible act confronts and manipulates the same forces.”<sup>147</sup> This use/useless dichotomy (wherefore ‘priceless art’ claims its conceptual moralism) therefore proves inadequate... What Gurrola derides in Vautier’s naive invocation of art’s “uselessness” is the same blindspot that compels Klossowski’s construction of the libidinal “counter-utopia”: that is, what is “unsaid” in Vautier’s formula, which, incidentally, is also what makes Klossowski’s system unrealizable: the structural impossibility of giving a “positive form” to perversion. The question compelling Klossowski’s analysis proceeds from the paradox of elaborating this impossible-to-realize system (a system that Klossowski claims *already exists* in industrial society): “The day human beings will have overcome the monstrosity of the hypertrophy of ‘needs,’ and will consent, in return, to the dissolution of their fictive unity, a

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<sup>146</sup> Klossowski, “Sade et Fourier,” 58. “[L]e corps exproprié se récupère en tant que domaine phantasmatique ; de la sorte il devient seulement l’équivalent du phantasme; mais il n’en sera réellement le simulacre qu’à condition de se produire sous le signe de la valeur, soit du prix.”

<sup>147</sup> Castanet 141 (98). “Poser que ces deux logiques ustensilaire ou gaspilleuse s’articulent, a une conséquence quant à l’acte possible : dans les deux cas, il s’affronte et manipule les mêmes forces.”

concordance will be struck between desire and the production of its objects in a rationally established economy in accordance with its impulses.”<sup>148</sup> We know, because Klossowski has told us, that this “rationally established economy” is impossible. “To pay the price of what is priceless, to bankrupt oneself in order to possess what cannot be possessed: ‘Here we find the overdrawn account of the individual unity.’”<sup>149</sup> What proceeds, instead, is a description of this (“non-reciprocal”) *universal prostitution*: “every man and woman is called upon to sell him or herself; for each person to be sellable, they must keep their moral ownership, of which constitutes the value of the individual put on sale.”<sup>150</sup>

The explanation for *why* this “moral ownership of the self” (a “fiction” from the standpoint of the Real) was *always necessary* in Klossowski’s logic (following Sade, etc.) emerges here—“beings,” he writes, “can only communicate amongst themselves as tradable objects.”<sup>151</sup> Yet the “value” they derive is precisely the product of this fictional “self.” Insofar as this fiction constitutes “real labor” (the “real labor” involved in providing the evidence that “I” exist) is the “price paid” for achieving the voluptuous emotion. Is this not then the interpretation that comes from the sequence of Gurrola ‘fighting’ the artist Vito Acconci (something we haven’t yet mentioned in our reading of

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<sup>148</sup> Klossowski, *La monnaie vivante*, 54. Translation modified. “Le jour où l’être humain aura surmonté, donc réduit la perversion externe, soit la monstruosité de l’hypertrophie des « besoins », et consentira en revanche à sa perversion interne, soit à la dissolution de son unité fictive, une concordance s’organisera entre le désir et la production de ses objets dans une économie rationnellement établie en fonction de ses impulsions.”

<sup>149</sup> Castanet 149 (103). “Payer le prix de ce qui n’a pas de prix, se ruiner pour posséder ce qui est impossédable. « Voilà le ‘solde débiteur’ de l’unité individuelle ».”

<sup>150</sup> Klossowski, *La monnaie vivante*, 32. “[C]hacun et chacune sont appelés à se vendre, ou proposés à l’achat ; pour que chacun et chacune soient vendables, il faut que chacun garde sa propriété morale qui constitue la valeur de l’individu mis en vente.”

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 33. “[L]es êtres ne peuvent jamais communiquer entre eux qu’en tant qu’objets trafiquables.”

the film)—the near effacement, on screen, of the ‘legible’ body of the artist, reduced to a blur of frantic outlines and a rustle in darkness? Of course, what we know of this scene we know almost entirely *anecdotally*, for the material image itself reveals little, the result of extreme underexposure, a technical error, yet included in the film anyway (Fig. 3.9). What our reading requires, therefore, first, is some understanding of the characters involved, *something therefore that we must be told*, a set of references that we must pull from elsewhere to make sense of this scene. What we know of it is itself a product of labor, even if it isn’t ours, initially—part of the work that Acconci has achieved in order to establish his own credentials, part of the labor of the historians and the critics to establish the ‘value’ marked under his name. As well as the knowledge that it is fact Acconci who we see tussling about with Gurrola in the darkened frame (something we must be told in order to appreciate). This knowledge is, in turn, the set of references that we must *expend* in order to arrive at a reading of the film, which centers on the impulses, but a reading which tells us, still, little about the scene.... about Gurrola, about Acconci, about the circumstances in particular necessary for our appreciation of the scene, certainly, but only in the context of dispensing with these considerations.... This reading, however, isn’t a “reduction”—we’re reminded to resist this thinking—in the sense of the ideological “superfluous art” of Vautier’s claim—it is the reduction of an entirely different sort. We will return to elaborate this difference momentarily.

Castanet’s apt reading of *La monnaie vivante* (which appears in his monograph, *Pierre Klossowski, la pantomime des esprits*, op. cit.) culminates in his consideration of



the text as the analysis of a counter-utopia, hence belonging to the genre of “utopian literature,” that which, by virtue of its subject matter, endeavors to express the inexpressible. (From Sir Thomas Moore’s conceptualization of utopia as the “non-place,” *u-topos*, we adopt the concept of “utopia” as that place which cannot exist).<sup>152</sup> If you had trouble following Klossowski’s elaboration of the libidinal system (both apparently aspirational, utopian, and likewise said to “already exist”) it is by virtue of this *fact* of the “utopian text.” Klossowski, Castanet says, invites us “to picture a society that returns to reinitializing exchange based on custom, towards a reign of goods that only know use value. We are warned from the outset, however, that such a ‘regression [is] apparently impossible.’”<sup>153</sup> What Klossowski describes when he imagines the scenario “when human beings will have overcome the monstrosity of the hypertrophy of ‘needs’” is therefore not a simple regression to a pre-capitalist form of barter. This, as we make sense of it, is what Klossowski means when he says that the libidinal economy “already exists”: money functions to obscure the fact that the industrial economy is performed on the human body, for which the body—within the division of labor—is rendered an abstract power and traded. Klossowski, instead, envisages a society where this exchange is no longer mediated: “How can the human ‘person’ fulfill the function of currency? How ever will producers instead of ‘treating themselves’ to women, get paid ‘in women?’”<sup>154</sup> Of

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<sup>152</sup> Castanet 154 (107).

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 152 [106]. “Il faut imaginer une société qui ferait retour pour réactualiser un échange basé sur une coutume: ce serait le règne des biens ayant seulement une valeur d’usage. D’emblée nous somme prévenus: une telle « régression [est] apparemment impossible ».”

<sup>154</sup> Klossowski, *La monnaie vivante*, 69. “Comment la « personne » humaine peut-elle remplir la fonction de monnaie? Comment les producteurs, au lieu de « se payer » des femmes, se feraient-ils jamais payer « en femmes »?”

course, from our position, we see a clear discrepancy in the equation. Klossowski's description of utopian economics resembles Luce Irigaray's description of the "current" economic condition of patriarchal finance in her infamous critique in "Le marché des femmes" (from *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*), exchange of women at the heart of the industrial market, and we recall here her essay's final question: "What modifications would [the social order] undergo if *women* left behind their condition as commodities—subject to being produced, consumed, valorized, circulated, and so on, by men alone—and took part in elaborating and carrying out exchanges?"<sup>155</sup> Klossowski attempts to answer her question: he says: "Women will be paid 'in boys.'"<sup>156</sup> "The possessor"/owner/capitalist, in Klossowski's society, "does not possess himself, but rather constitutes a 'collection of persons' up for barter."<sup>157</sup> Men and women, in other words, are simultaneously the objects and subjects of exchange, never in fact possessing "themselves" as value. *La monnaie vivante* is thus founded on this logical impossibility: the same that we have examined with the paradox of reciprocity in the Klossowskian fiction, which was clarified in the examples of Sadean violence and the Bataillean potlatch: the "subject" 'uses' the "other" in an attempt to possess what is inexchangeable: value by means of an absolute transgression of values. On this transgression of the

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<sup>155</sup> Luce Irigaray, "Le Marché des femmes" in *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Minuit, 1977), 185. "Quelles modifications subirait celui-ci si les femmes sortaient de leur condition de marchandises—soumises à la production, la consommation, la valorisation, la circulation... par les seuls hommes—et prenaient part à l'élaboration et au fonctionnement des échanges?"

<sup>156</sup> Klossowski, *La monnaie vivante*, 69. Translation modified. "[D]es femmes exerçant un métier se feront payer « en garçons »."

<sup>157</sup> Castanet, 153 (107). "[L]e possesseur ne se possède pas soi-même, il constitue des « collections de 'personnes' » à troquer."

individual, how then could you build a positive system of exchange (one that would by necessity be ‘reciprocal’)? The quick answer is, of course, you can’t. This paradox is precisely the foundation of Klossowski’s utopia.

According to Castanet, *La monnaie vivante*, qua “utopian text,” must remain unrealizable in its systematics as anything but *text*. He cites Louis Marin’s *Utopiques: Jeux d’espaces* (1973) as advancing the reading of the utopian text along these lines: “the ‘content’ of utopia is the organization of space as text; the utopian text, its formal structuring and its operational processes, is the constitution of discourse as space.”<sup>158</sup> In other words: *pseudo-topia*: utopia as the form of a non-space realizable only in discourse. This definition of the utopian text (that it “breaks down what it claims to construct, rendering inaccessible what it nevertheless shows to be present”) is how Castanet makes sense of Klossowski’s many (contradictory) descriptions.<sup>159</sup> These contradictions are summarized in Klossowski’s endeavor to give value to the voluptuous emotion, something albeit “unexchangeable”—to make the “unexchangeable” an operable term within the “new customs” of economic exchange. “Search as we might,” Castanet says, “the reply to this question is missing. The demonstration we had been waiting for is nowhere to be found.”<sup>160</sup> “In order for a living object (a source of rare emotion) simply to prevail as currency, there will be no denying that a psychical state must have been

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<sup>158</sup> Louis Marin, *Utopiques : jeux d’espaces* (Paris: Minuit, 1973), 24. Qtd. in Castanet 155 (108).

<sup>159</sup> Castanet 154 (108). “[E]lle démantibule ce qu’elle prétend construire, elle rend inaccessible ce que pourtant elle montre comme présent.”

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 157 (110). “À l’écouter, à le lire ligne à ligne, fait défaut la réponse à cette question. La démonstration attendue manque.”

universally achieved; that this state expresses itself in the form of undisputed practices and customs,” Klossowski writes.<sup>161</sup> But what does this mean, specifically, this “psychical state”? What practices and customs would allow for the unexchangeable emotion to take on positive value within a system of exchange? These are the essential questions that a close reading of Klossowski’s text will inspire, yet, if we’re to understand what qualifies the text as “utopian,” these are not at all questions that will, by definition, find satisfaction in the pages that follow. Is this not the same concern that, after all, led Lyotard to his eventual recapitulation of cinema as “virtually impossible”—the concerns that caused him to re-organize his musings on libidinal cinema from the questions of the libidinal’s “positive conceptualization” in the breakdown of cinematic technique to his eventual elaboration of the “impossible” space of the unconscious as scenic operator, something realizable only in the space of his (theoretical) text? For Gurrola, as well, it would suffice to say that *Robarte el Arte* exists only as text; —we can say this with confidence: the problem for transcription is nearly insurmountable—from the task of decoding the title cards, to mapping the chaotic field of sound and vision, to providing a summary of whatever “plot” occurs therein, the film is obviously one that resists easy translation and exists to be spoken about by its critics only in the sense that it constitutes a “text” with certain jarring effects. Whereas Lyotard abandoned a ‘positive’ conception of libidinal cinema (as something non-actualizable), just as Klossowski makes no

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<sup>161</sup> Klossowski, *La monnaie vivante*, 71-72. “Pour que l’objet vivant, source d’émotion rare, puisse seulement prévaloir en tant que monnaie, force serait d’admettre qu’un état psychique fût alors universellement atteint; que cet état s’exprimât sous forme de pratiques et de coutumes incontestées.”

pretense (beyond parody) to provide a 'positive' conception of libidinal economics, it occurs to us now the sense in which we understand the "reduction" required for our reading of such texts... *Robarte el Arte* included, as a certain theoretical / conceptual exercise of a number of these premises (which the film must ultimately fail)... : that the text itself, the echo of perverse, destabilizing structures, can (re)produce in the work of its commentators only a 'false study'.

#### Pt. 4: Powers of the False

When the theater director Antonin Artaud turned to writing about film in the late 1920s, he conceived his project largely as an extension of his attitude concerning the stage, considerations related specifically to the insufficiency of “thought” in theatrical representation. Artaud’s revelation for the cinema, repeated by Deleuze in *Cinema II*, is that the physiological shock produced by the movement-image contains within itself the potential to express thought’s highest power—the idea of thought’s *powerlessness* in its confrontation with its object. “As long as [Artaud] believes in the cinema,” writes Deleuze, “he credits it not with the power of making us think, but on the contrary with a dissociative force which would introduce a ‘figure of nothingness’, a ‘hole in appearances.’ As long as he believes in cinema, he credits it not with the power of returning to images, and linking them with the demands of an internal monologue and the rhythm of metaphors, but of ‘un-linking’ them, according to multiple voices, internal dialogues, always a voice in another voice.”<sup>162</sup> For Deleuze, the connection between Artaud’s revelation (a “cinema of cruelty”) and Pasolini’s concept of cinematic free indirect discourse is the following: “thought,” he says, “finds itself taken over by the exteriority of ‘belief’, outside any interiority of a mode of knowledge.”<sup>163</sup> Barring the

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<sup>162</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma 2: L’Image-temps* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1985), 218; Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 167 (English). “Tant qu’il croit au cinéma, il le crédite, non pas du pouvoir de faire penser le tout, mais au contraire d’une « force dissociatrice » qui introduirait une « figure de néant », un « trou dans les apparences ». Tant qu’il croit au cinéma, il le crédite, non pas du pouvoir de revenir aux images, et de les enchaîner suivant les exigences d’un monologue intérieur et le rythme des métaphores, mais de les « désenchaîner », suivant des voix multiples, des dialogues internes, toujours une voix dans une autre voix.”

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 175 (228-229). “La pensée se trouve emportée par l’extériorité d’une « croyance », hors de toute

“interior,” however, is what separates Artaud’s vision of cinema squarely from the “spiritual automaton” of the surrealist or impressionist dream sequence, where a relay of images is analogized with an interior mental state. Instead of continuing to rely on analogy, it is essential, says Artaud, to put an end to this subjugation. The project of the cinema of cruelty is therefore to find what in cinema dissociates it from its subjugation by discourse. The mission would be to recover that ‘shock’ by which cinema, free of interference, acts directly upon the “gray matter of the brain.”

“[But] we should perhaps understand something else,” says Deleuze, “in Pasolini’s work as well as in Artaud’s projects.”<sup>164</sup> In Pasolini’s *Uccellacci e uccellini* (*The Hawks and The Sparrows*, 1966), the film’s father-son protagonists, after listening impatiently to the crow’s lecture (Fig. 4.1), eventually kill and eat their enlightened fellow traveler. In the absurdist scenario, a hyper-literate talking crow descends on the lumpen father-son travelers and subjects them to a lecture on class consciousness. This death is what Deleuze might call a resolution to the “problem” of the film—the destruction of the “outside” instigator (the crow), who introduces the ‘event’ of the narrative (“the ideological fable of the hawks and the sparrows”). Against an aimless subjectivity—the wandering of the father-son duo—characterized then by the crow’s attempt to organize this space, this ‘interference’ is stymied by the protagonist’s (literal) consumption of their narrator. Without the crow’s commentary, the film returns to the

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intériorité d’un savoir.”

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 174 (227). “Il faut peut-être comprendre autre chose, dans l’œuvre de Pasolini autant que dans les projets d’Artaud.”

commentary-less motif of the father-son's wandering (and the film promptly ends). Loss or refusal of narration, parodied in *Hawks and Sparrows*, informs as well Pasolini's unfinished screenplay *Porno-Teo-Kolossal* (1966-1975), where the problem is translated into the setting of the Magi tale. In this story, a wise man and his slave (replacing the father-son duo) wander the desert, compelled by an obscure theological conviction (they follow a flying meteorite referred to in the treatment as "The Ideology"). Pasolini's comment, however, is that the magus arrives too late—the manger, where Christ ought to appear, is already empty. The messiah is, they are told, dead; the religion he invented, forgotten with him. Pasolini marks this loss as the potential denouement of the film. In an earlier treatment, he writes it as the story's achronological origin. Regardless of where this realization fits within the narrative, the protagonists of *Porno-Teo-Kolossal*, reminiscent of the two in *Hawks and Sparrows*, remain aloof to the absence that motivates their wandering. With no sacred text to guide them, no politics to conform them, their wandering points to the extrinsic, uncertain character of their thought, to the absence at the center of their experience.

By no coincidence, *Porno-Teo-Kolossal* is premised on the concept of "pornotheology" coined by Deleuze in the essay he dedicates to Klossowski in the appendix of *Logic of Sense*. The "pornotheological" essence of Klossowski's *Le Baphomet* (1965), a novel set in the spiritual realm, derives from this very absence—in this case, the missing edict that would ensure the integrity of minds and bodies. In *Baphomet*, St. Theresa's announcement that the disembodied spirits of the afterlife would



remain forever unmoored, that God's judgment will be infinitely suspended, echoes the infamous announcement of Nietzsche's madman—an announcement that plunges the world of spirits into absolute chaos, the death of God.<sup>165</sup> Deleuze writes, "It is insofar as it is tied to a body and is incarnated that the mind acquires personality: separated from the body, in death, it acquires its equivocal and multiple power... Liberated from its body, declining or revoking its body, the spirit would cease to exist—rather it would 'subsist' in its disquieting power."<sup>166</sup> Sovereignty, insofar as it, as a form of power, is tied to the soul's corporeal liberation, is now understood in the unrestricted sense only once the limit is abolished—once the threat that maintains "false sovereignty" (i.e. God's judgment) is disavowed. This is a recurrent theme, as well, in the critical writings of Artaud. "To be done with the judgment of God" is to enter a new mode of living, no longer predicated on adherence to an order imposed from the outside. When, in *Porno-Teo-Kolossal*, the magus and slave embark on their journey, their motivation for travel (following the star) unfurls into a disorganized encounter with the characters they meet. Over the course of the narrative, the magus's treasure is spent chasing the follies of the pitiful subjects he meets along the way—donating to them whatever material support they need to achieve climax. In this sense, the spirit of charity is turned on its head, aimed no longer at advancing the rectitude of subjects, but rather seeing their "sins" expended. Closer to

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<sup>165</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §125.

<sup>166</sup> Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, 339. Translation modified. "C'est en tant que lié à un corps, incarné, que l'esprit acquiert la personnalité : séparé du corps, dans la mort, il retrouve sa puissance équivoque et multiple... libéré de son corps, déclinant son corps, révoquant son corps, l'esprit cesserait d'exister, mais « subsisterait » dans son inquiétante puissance."

Klossowski and Bataille's lexicon, folded into experience, then, this death (the death of god, the death of the subject) is simulated in every transgression; the concomitant death of the subject being the factor operating the dissolution of the partial drives.

Pasolini, in his note on the sequence shot, argues that this peculiar concept of death ('death of the subject,' dissipation of the drive) is what structures our reception of the moving image: "death" he says, "effects an instantaneous montage."<sup>167</sup> Certainly what Pasolini refers to here aligns with a cinematic concept having to do with the representation of the coordinates of time through the free indirect style of editing. Deleuze translates Pasolini in this way: the free indirect subject opens to a direct representation of time as series ("According to Pasolini, 'the present is transformed into past' by virtue of montage, but this past 'still appears as a present' by virtue of the nature of the image."<sup>168</sup> What occurs in montage is a reduction of the entire field of images to this particular logic—the translation of the "subjective present" into the "objective past" presented on film, without shedding the character of either tense. Admitting no objectivity on part of the camera itself, the "objective history" of the cinema collapses if the work of montage is left incomplete (if the "subjective" forces of the image remain unwieldy). What is produced therefore is a simulation of history, a reality effect given over through certain technical considerations aimed toward aesthetic completion. That is, says Deleuze: "The story no longer refers to an ideal of the true which constitutes its

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<sup>167</sup> Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, 236 (245). "La morte compie un fulmineo montaggio della nostra vita."

<sup>168</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 36 (52). "Selon Pasolini, « le présent se transforme en passé », en vertu du montage, mais ce passé « apparaît toujours comme un présent », en vertu de la nature de l'image."

veracity, but becomes a ‘pseudo-story,’ a poem, a story which simulates or rather the simulation of a story.”<sup>169</sup>

Artaud’s unrealized *Les Dix-huit secondes* (1925-1926) provides perhaps the best allusion to this problem—the flickering of ‘subjective’ images before the spectator (in this film, the “suicide case”) who cannot make heads or tails of what he sees. This flicker substantiates the “simulation” at the heart of cinema, and of thought itself, neither of which could satisfy Artaud in his consideration of the ‘totality’ of cinema-thought relations (towards the “navel of the dream”)—this relation provides only the surface of things, alluding to a missing depth incapable in thought, itself constrained to the exterior relay of images. In *Dix-huit secondes*, the hero “is reduced to watching a procession of images, an enormous number of contradictory images without very much connection from one to the next.... Barely eighteen seconds have passed; he takes one last look at his miserable destiny. Then, without hesitation or the slightest emotion, he takes a revolver out of his pocket and puts a bullet in his temple.”<sup>170</sup> According to Artaud, suicide, as it is conceived in this treatment, is an act against the subject’s passivity before the automatic parade of images (“suicide for me is nothing other than a means of violently reconquering myself, of brutally interrupting into my own being, of forestalling the unpredictable advances of God”).<sup>171</sup> Thus, when confronted with the automatism of the cinema,

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 149 (194). “Le récit ne se rapporte plus à un idéal du vrai qui en constitue la véracité, mais devient un « pseudo-récit », un poème, un récit simulant ou plutôt une simulation de récit.”

<sup>170</sup> Antonin Artaud, “Les Dix-huit secondes,” in *Œuvres complètes*, t. III (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), 12, 15. “[I]l en est réduit à ne voir défiler en lui que des images, un surcroît d’images contradictoires.... Dix-huit secondes à peine se sont écoulées; il contemple une dernière fois sa destinée misérable, puis sans hésitation ni émotion aucune, il sort un revolver de sa poche et s’en tire une balle dans la tempe.”

<sup>171</sup> Antonin Artaud, “Sur le suicide,” in *Œuvres complètes*, t. I (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), 221. “Si je me

Artaud's goal is to think beyond what is permitted, to the thought of powerlessness at the heart of thought itself, and to the act of radical autonomy that might put an end to this imaginary relay. "[T]he problem for [Artaud]," explains Deleuze, "is not a simple inhibition that the cinema would bring to us from the outside, but of this central inhibition, of this internal collapse and fossilization, of this 'theft of thoughts' of which thought is a constant agent and victim"; "The navel... is no longer the irreducible core of the dream which thought comes up against, on the contrary, it is the core of thought, 'the reverse side of thoughts,' which itself is what dreams come up against, rebound, and break."<sup>172</sup>

For the character Octave (from Klossowski's *Roberte ce soir*), who recounts another aspect of this thought-image relation, the desiring "fictions" he produces (culminating, as discussed earlier, in his subjective dissolution) are made via a passive brooding over tableaux vivants. Rather than allow desire to incorporate a particular object (we see the "object" Roberte, his wife, infinitely redoubled), Octave's phantasy recurs as "sequence," modulations of syntax related to the overdetermined field of the unconscious. The image is, in Klossowski's word, only the simulacrum of Octave's obsessional phantasm, the unconscious network of images and movements produced

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tue, ce ne sera pas pour me détruire, mais pour me reconstituer, le suicide ne sera pour moi qu'un moyen de me reconquérir violemment, de faire brutalement irruption dans mon être, de devancer l'avance incertaine de Dieu."

<sup>172</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 166 (216, 217). Translation modified. "En effet, il ne s'agit pas pour lui d'une simple inhibition que le cinéma nous apporterait du dehors, mais de cette inhibition centrale, de cet effondrement et de cette pétrification intérieurs, de ce « vol des pensées » dont la pensée ne cesse d'être la victime et l'agent"; "L'ombilic, ou la momie, n'est plus le noyau irréductible du rêve auquel la pensée se heurte, c'est au contraire le noyau de la pensée, « l'envers des pensées », auquel même les rêves se heurtent, et rebondissent, se cassent."

instinctively from the life of the impulses. More than this, the phantasm represents the site of perpetual psychic permutations, caused by means of the subject's defenses, reversals, negation, and projection. Octave's dream is to render this field without distortion, to see the image extended infinitely along every axis of every possible pathological desire. Theresa's announcement in *Le Baphomet* renders the afterlife into this very *mise-en-scène*: she unleashes a scenario for desire that, barring any particular object, permeates *everything*. If Octave sought Roberte in her essence, beyond simulation, it is within Theresa's anarchic orgy of identities that Octave's theological aspiration is accomplished. On this note, the orgy, in *Artaud le momo* (1947), is the site where Artaud theorizes the alien otherness of the body (that which the protagonist of *Dix-huit secondes* kills). This orgiastic body exists outside the "individual," an object given over to convulsions, spasms—the sensuality of "bad spirits"—it exists for Artaud as something similarly undignified.

In Pasolini's *Porno-Teo-Kolossal*, the orgy is represented, too, in menacing terms. In the ritual orgies of Sodom and Gomorrah, viewed from atop a distant hill by the magus and his slave, there occurs a thematization of the Freudian "death drive" and "eros," respectively. The life affirming erotic freedom of Sodom vs. the oppressive institutional coercion of Gomorrah are written by Pasolini as symbolic representations of the internal life of the drives, divided, as Freud had done, between these two general, impulsive modes: the life instincts (bonding, productive) and the death instincts (destructive, inorganic). Like any binary, Pasolini shows the collapse of these structures, one into the

other, in the categorical haziness that emerges between the two—the forced “productive” heterosexuality of the Gomorrah regime (i.e., the magus witnesses fascist goons enforcing heterosexual reproduction) against the non-productive gay orgies of Sodom. It is within the realm of heterosexual reproduction that the wild life of the impulses becomes subjugated by the imposition of an outside power (the preservation of the species), and within homosexual non-reproduction that these forces are given full expressive freedom, freedom to dissipate without recourse to the preservation of order. But this heterosexual/homosexual divide, as enticing as it stands for reading these two fictional societies, cannot be produced in an analysis of the drives. As Laplanche and Pontalis point out in their entry for the “death instincts” in *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, “what Freud was explicitly seeking to express by the term ‘death instinct’ was the most fundamental aspect of instinctual life: the return to an earlier state... [the death drive] is rather the factor that determines the actual *principle* of all instincts.”<sup>173</sup> What Freud eventually must do, says Laplanche, is introduce a radical innovation: if pleasure aims towards the discharge of an individual drive to nil, there must be a terminological differentiation to mark the death drive in its coercive form, the destructive instinct, the instinct for mastery or the will to power from that which aims towards a non-productive stasis. The so-called Nirvana principle, introduced by Freud for

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<sup>173</sup> Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, “Pulsions de mort,” *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967), 376. Translation modified; Laplanche and Pontalis, “Death Instincts,” in *Vocabulary of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: The Hogarth Press, 1973) (English). “En fait ce que Freud cherche explicitement à dégager sous le terme de pulsion de mort, c’est ce qu’il y a de plus fondamental dans la notion de pulsion, le retour à un état antérieur.... Au-delà d’un type particulier de pulsion c’est ce qui serait au principe de toute pulsion qu’il désigne ici.”

this reason, while though it expresses a trend towards the dissipation of the drives, represents instead their absolute suspension—not towards the repose of the inorganic, but a suspension that preserves the libidinal non-order of impulsive movement.

What is brought to light here, at the end of this adventure, is the sense with which Deleuze recoups Artaud's thesis: "It is indeed a matter, as Artaud puts it, 'of bringing cinema together with the innermost reality of the brain,' but this innermost reality is not the Whole, but on the contrary a fissure, a crack."<sup>174</sup> Far from closing in on itself, the cinema operates *in* reality. If the filmmaker redoubles discourse in his objective rendering of time, it is from within this process that the image of time is split. If indeed "we have not yet begun to think" it is because we are not yet capable. To think beyond the servility of thought in the cinema (as Lyotard proposes with acinema, as Gurrola sought with his manifesto against movement, or Pasolini in his reflections in *Salò*) is to think in terms of its sacrifice. "At the same time that bodies lose their unity and the self its identity, language loses its denoting function (its distinct sort of integrity) in order to discover a value that is purely expressive... It discovers this value, not with respect to someone who expresses himself and who would be moved, but with respect to something that is purely expressed, pure motion or pure 'spirit.'"<sup>175</sup> What follows, as far as the cinema is concerned, is a new status for narration: as Deleuze says, "a narration that ceases to be

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<sup>174</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 167 (218). "Il s'agit bien, comme dit Artaud, de « rejoindre le cinéma avec la réalité intime du cerveau », mais cette réalité intime n'est pas le Tout, c'est au contraire une fissure, une fêlure."

<sup>175</sup> Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, 347. "En même temps que les corps perdent leur unité, et le moi son identité, le langage perd sa fonction de désignation [sa manière à lui d'intégrité] pour découvrir une valeur purement expressive... non pas par rapport à quelqu'un qui s'exprime et qui serait ému, mais par rapport à un pur exprimé, pure motion ou pur « esprit »."

truth, that is, to claim to be true, and becomes fundamentally falsifying.”<sup>176</sup> If our encounter with the moving image were to manifest the feeling of a “true,” unrestricted sovereignty, our access to this feeling would be experienced in relief—as an experience of cinema’s objective, falsifying movement, rather than as the product of any particular (“subjective”) content—it is this ethic that supersedes the true, that collapses the present tense of cinema into a series of impossible pasts and presents—a doubling, a dividing, a multiplying... the emancipatory potential embedded within the image.

#### “The Sovereign Artist”

One of the central components to Klossowski’s formulation of libidinal economy is the productive theory of the drives furnished by the philosopher Nietzsche. The theory is elaborated in Klossowski’s monograph *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux*. According to Klossowski, what circumscribes Nietzsche’s philosophy is the impulse responsible for the figure of the Eternal Return. This image is the simulacrum of a phantasm, he says, the otherwise incommunicable valetudinary state associated with a “real” physiognomical event. What is simulated in the figure of the Return is the experience of subjective dissolution, a mystical affirmation in which the philosopher receives momentary access to the non-symbolizable reef that structures his thought. This experience, however, is “forgotten” the instant Nietzsche returns to the field of language. Unable to recount the triumph of the unconscious drives, he is left only to communicate the description of his

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<sup>176</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 131 (171). “[L]a narration cesse d’être véridique, c’est-à-dire de prétendre au vrai, pour se faire essentiellement falsifiante.”



descent. “Not only do I (Nietzsche) learn that I have been brought back to the crucial moment in which the eternity of the circle culminates, the moment when the truth of its necessary return is revealed to me; but I learn at the same time that I was other than I am now for having forgotten it, thus becoming another for having learned it.”<sup>177</sup>

The “inability to think” associated with Nietzsche’s experience of Return is, according to Klossowski, thematized in his philosophy in the form of a doctrine that abolishes the egoism of the subject. This reading, centered around the articulation of Nietzsche’s lived experience, is none other than what Nietzsche himself had prescribed in the analyses he addressed to previous philosophers; from Descartes to Kant, he analyzed their work in terms of the predominant impulses (the “moods”) that colored their thought. The “plastic representation” of his *own* philosophy, in this vein, takes the form of a doctrine that seeks a way beyond any limiting determinations; a philosophy that evaluates methods of departure from its own frailties. What this ‘will to knowledge’ amounts to, in Nietzsche, is an attempt to engage the field of warring impulses that (as discovered in the midst of his *Stimmung*) threatened to destroy his psychological consistency. Nietzsche thus externalizes these impulses into particular images: in the conniving priest, a dimension of his sickness, the diagnosis of *ressentiment* as a will to death; in the pagan Greeks, his vitality. It is the thematization of this unconscious field, the substratum of Nietzsche’s pathos, that readers are led to contemplate. This concept of the “self,” with

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<sup>177</sup> Klossowski, *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux*, 94. “Non seulement j’apprends que moi (Nietzsche) je me trouve revenu à l’instant crucial où culmine l’éternité du cercle, alors même que la vérité du retour nécessaire m’est révélée; mais j’apprends du même coup que j’étais autre que je ne le suis maintenant, pour l’avoir oubliée, donc que je suis devenu un autre en l’apprenant.”

which Klossowski transposes the term “suppôt,” from the Latin *suppositum* (“that which is placed under”), even in the case of describing his most “authentic self” (the “Nietzsche” of the ecstasy at Sils-Maria, or the “Nietzsche” of the collapse at Turin, for instance), is nothing more than a fiction that underlies the generative eruption of these impulses, made known to us through particular themes, images endowed with an impulsional intensity that circulate endlessly within the conceptual edifice of the “philosopher Nietzsche.”

Klossowski refers to these themes as “phantasms,” images which we are given access only via the obsessional constraints produced instinctively in the writings. A few we have intimated already from the published works, the images that dominate his critical output: the Eternal Return, the Death of God, Greece, Socrates, Dionysus, and the Crucified. But these images, Klossowski tells us, appear in his correspondence as well: the phantasms of Lou Salomé and Cosima Wagner, the latter to whom he writes a number of his last ‘coherent’ letters, and whose image he transfers onto the more universally recognizable persona of the goddess Ariadne. “Cosima,” the graphic mark we encounter in the letters, was never ‘more’ or ‘less’ this image, an image from Nietzsche’s biography exchangeable with that of the mythical goddess: her name equaling a simulacrum, a willed reproduction of her phantasm within the pathos of Nietzsche. “Cosima” is, here, ‘inverted’ *as an image identical with that of Ariadne*: the simulation of the agitation caused in Nietzsche by a particular libidinal connection, lost, intangible, yet recurring infinitely within the “unraveling” of the philosopher’s mind.

Concerning Nietzsche's free association of cultural and psychological imagery, Klossowski begins to pull *Ariadne's thread*, so to speak. He regards Nietzsche's idiosyncratic use of culture—the phantasmal charge that he projects onto certain historical and mythological figures—as an indication of the tremendous sovereignty of his thinking.<sup>178</sup> This psychological reallocation of history, according to Klossowski, admits a sovereignty that seeks not, like Artaud's 'body without organs,' to enclose itself off, *contra mundum*; it aims, rather, to express itself indefinitely, as if the goal of Nietzsche's thought were the colonization of all history. This "colonization," however, is not colored by the same rationalizing impulse that informs, for instance, Hegel's dialectical method. The difference is one that Klossowski is quick to illustrate, with a short detour through the lessons of Kojève. —The slave, who structures Hegel's system through recognition of the 'sovereignty' of the master (who, in turn, depends on the mediate recognition of the slave for his lordship), is a figure of discourse belonging to none other than Christian morality. Whereas in Nietzsche, there is no need for this reciprocity: "On the contrary," says Klossowski, "given his own *idiosyncrasy—the sovereignty of an incommunicable emotion*—Nietzsche remains foreign to the idea of a '*consciousness for itself mediated by another consciousness.*'"<sup>179</sup> Georges Bataille was likely the first commentator to highlight this dissymmetry, based on his reading of

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<sup>178</sup> The context which Klossowski refers to highlight's Nietzsche's eventual refusal to sign his name, to don instead historical and mythological guises, "Nietzsche Caesar," "Dionysus," and "the Crucified," endowing his signature with allegorical significance. Klossowski, *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux*, 227-37.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid. 32. "Bien au contraire, du fait de sa propre *idiosyncrasie: la souveraineté de l'émotion incommunicable*, Nietzsche reste étranger à une « *conscience pour soi médiatisée par une autre conscience* »."

Nietzsche's *The Genealogy of Morals*.<sup>180</sup> He argued that Nietzsche's "ignorance" of Hegel would, *by means of the radical idiosyncrasy he produces into thought*, overturn the entire Hegelian system. Nietzsche's ecstatic laughter in the face of death puts the moment of recognition into endless suspension. The moment of negativity, the master's risking his life in order to gain advantage over the slave—a moment of sovereign excess made meaningful through its incorporation into Hegel's rational system—remains yet a virtually 'meaningless' phenomenon for Nietzsche. This moment, when the master's attempt at sovereignty languishes in the 'necessary' recognition of the slave, is best understood as belonging to the history of *ressentiment*—a history sidelined by Nietzsche's untimely meditations on the "true history" that precedes every waking moment—the history of the unconscious play of the drives. As Bataille elaborates: "Seriousness alone has *meaning*: play is serious only to the extent that 'the absence of meaning is also a meaning' [i.e., the Hegelian motif], but is always lost in the night of an indifferent nonsense. Seriousness, death, and pain are the basis of this obscure truth. But the seriousness of death and pain is the servility of thought."<sup>181</sup>

According to this "method of play," which Bataille signifies as the force

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<sup>180</sup> "Nietzsche ne connut guère de Hegel qu'une vulgarisation de règle. *La Généalogie de la morale* est la preuve singulière de l'ignorance où demeura et demeure tenue la dialectique du maître et de l'esclave, dont la lucidité est confondante (c'est le moment décisif dans l'histoire de la conscience de soi et, il faut le dire, dans la mesure où nous avons à distinguer chaque chose qui nous touche l'une de l'autre nul ne sait rien de *soi* s'il n'a saisi ce mouvement qui détermine et limite les possibilités successives de l'homme)" Bataille, *L'expérience-intérieur*, OC, t. V, 128.

<sup>181</sup> Georges Bataille, "Post-scriptum 1953" in OC, t. V, 234. Translation modified. "Le sérieux a seul *un sens* : le jeu, qui n'en a plus, n'est sérieux que dans la mesure où « l'absence de sens est aussi un sens », mais toujours égaré dans la nuit d'un non-sens indifférent. Le sérieux, la mort et la douleur, en fondent la vérité obtuse. Mais le sérieux de la mort et de la douleur est la servilité de la pensée."

motivating Nietzsche's philosophy, Klossowski finds in this method the codex with which to interpret Nietzsche's sovereign (i.e. *libidinal*) redemption of the figures of history. In the 'first fragment,' which Nietzsche writes in the Fall of 1887, he lays out the "fundamental innovations" with which his philosophy seeks to 'revaluate' society. These five innovations comprise a) the replacement of moral values with natural values; b) the replacement of 'sociology' with 'formations of sovereignty'; c) the replacement of 'society' with the 'culture complex'; d) the replacement of 'epistemology' with the perspectivist theory of the affects; and e) the replacement of 'metaphysics' with the doctrine of the Eternal Return. The most characteristic of these objectives, granted that each is dependent on the formulation of the others, is, for Klossowski, the "proposal to substitute for *sociology* the notion of *formations of sovereignty*."<sup>182</sup> The relevance of this objective is that if culture were to be revised according to the doctrine of the Eternal Return, or according to the perspectivism of the drives—that is, if the exercise of power were to be verified in this way, according to the libidinal pulsions of the body—then "*sovereign formations*," formations characteristic of Bataille's 'play,' would emerge as the dominant forces of society, with "no other purpose than *to mask the absence of any goal or meaning*" ("alors les *formations souveraines* n'auront d'autre propos que de *masquer l'absence de but et de sens*"): "This apparent conformity to a goal," says Nietzsche, "*is simply subsequent to this will to power unfolding in every event*; — the becoming-strongest brings with itself organizations that have a certain resemblance to a

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<sup>182</sup> Klossowski, *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux*, 157. "Le plus caractéristique est son propos de substituer à la *sociologie* sa notion des *formations de souveraineté*."

project of finality: — the apparent goals are not intentional, but once the supremacy over a lesser power is attained, and the latter is made to work on behalf of the greatest, a hierarchical order of organization must take on the appearance of means and ends.”<sup>183</sup> Whereas the competing internal forces express a ‘will’ of their own, a will that is expressed as a disruption, as a break with “servitude,” the recollected impressions of these varying wills become ‘useful’ in the sense that they serve a purpose other than that of the body’s unity (Nietzsche warns: “The danger of the direct questioning of the subject *about* the subject and of all self-reflection of the mind lies in this, that it could be useful and important for one’s activity to interpret oneself *falsely*”).<sup>184</sup> The sacrifice involved in interpreting oneself *falsely* becomes then the greatest sacrifice of utility imaginable: the realization that consciousness itself is nothing other than the *deciphering of an impulse* leads to a conception of fatality that implies an irreversible course. “Consciousness,” explains Klossowski, “is itself nothing other than the encryption of messages transmitted by the impulses” (“La conscience même n’est autre chose que le chiffage des messages transmis par les impulsions”) such that Nietzsche, in other words, “did not speak of a ‘hygiene’ of the body, established by reason. He spoke on behalf of corporeal *states* as the authentic data that consciousness must conjure away in order to become individual”;

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<sup>183</sup> Qtd in Klossowski, *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux* 174. “L’apparente conformité à un but est simplement consécutive à cette volonté de puissance se déroulant dans tout événement ; — le devenir-plus-fort apporte avec soi des organisations qui ont quelque ressemblance avec un projet de finalité : — les buts apparents ne sont pas intentionnels, mais dès que la suprématie sur une puissance moindre est atteinte et que cette dernière travaille en tant que fonction de la plus grande, il faut qu’un ordre hiérarchique de l’organisation suggère l’apparence d’un ordre de moyens et de buts.”

<sup>184</sup> *Will to Power*, § 492.

<sup>185</sup> “Thus in each person,” he continues, “apparently as their own possession, there moves an intensity, its flux and reflex forming significant or insignificant fluctuations of a thought that in fact belongs to no one, with neither beginning nor end”; “Where our own fluctuations start and stop, so that signs can permit us to signify, so to speak, to ourselves and others, we do not know—except that there is *one* sign in this code that always corresponds to either the highest or lowest degree of intensity: namely, the *self*, the *I*, the *subject of all our propositions*”;<sup>186</sup> In summation: “Nothing,” furthermore, “could be more arbitrary—once we admit that everything is on a single circuit of intensity. For a designation to be produced, for a meaning to be constituted, *my will* must intervene.”<sup>187</sup>

But how could this ‘will’—“*my will*”—intervene? In other words, to fix a goal? To give meaning? What would be the ultimate lesson of the Eternal Return? What could be contained for us in the willing of this non-willed past? The enslavement of the will to infinite determination was that which nauseated Zarathustra, a nausea that persisted only until after it occurred to him that this “riddle and dreadful chance,” in fact, dissolves all constraint. “What is at first sight the most burdensome pronouncement—namely, *the endless recommencement of the same acts and the same sufferings*—now appears as

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<sup>185</sup> Klossowski, *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux*, 52. “Nietzsche ne parle pas pour une « hygiène » du corps, établie par la raison. Il parle pour les *états* corporels en tant que les données authentiques que la conscience ne peut pas ne pas escamoter pour en être une individuelle.”

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 99. “Ainsi en chacun, apparemment par-devers soi, se meut une intensité dont le flux et reflux forment les fluctuations signifiantes ou insignifiantes de la pensée qui n’est en fait jamais à personne, sans commencement ni fin” ; “Où commencent, où s’arrêtent nos propres fluctuations pour que ces signes nous permettent de signifier, de nous parler à nous-mêmes tant qu’à autrui, nous n’en savons rien, si ce n’est que dans ce code *un* signe répond toujours au degré d’intensité tantôt le plus élevé, tantôt le plus bas : soit le *moi*, le *je*, *sujet de toutes nos propositions*.”

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 100. “[I]l n’y a rien en somme de plus arbitraire si l’on admet qu’en fait tout n’est jamais qu’un même circuit d’intensité : pour qu’une désignation se produise et que se constitue un sens, mon vouloir doit intervenir.”

redemption itself, once the soul realizes that it has already lived through all these other individualities and experiences.”<sup>188</sup> But for the fact that no interpretation could ever suspend the metamorphoses involved in this revelation, “the shapes that it adopts, nor the pretexts that provokes them,” the legitimacy involved in “preaching” this doctrine must be called into question.

According to Bataille, *Zarathustra* presents its parables only by imitation of the literary form (the ‘sacred text’ of the Christian liturgy) that it works simultaneously to destroy. Bataille asks: Would we not be once again stuck in the dialectical grips of recognition? The recognition that interns us to a life of servitude, as ‘false masters’? Or again: how could the radical sovereignty associated with the experience of Return (of Zarathustra’s inestimable joy, his mad laughter) possibly be translated into the mediocrity of a “borrowed language”? Bataille here repeats the derision of Nietzsche cast by the writer André Gide, who claims that Nietzsche’s jealousy of Christ, enunciated in his acerbic preoccupation with his teaching, is actually the greatest impediment for Nietzsche in his articulation of sovereignty: “I feel him constantly to be jealous of Christ,” Gide states, “anxious to give the world a book that can be read *as one reads the Gospel*. If this book [*Zarathustra*] has become more famous than all the others, it is because, in effect, it is a *novel*. But, for this very reason, he addresses himself to the lowest class of his readers: those who still need a myth. And what I especially like in Nietzsche is his hatred

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 107. “L’annonciation accablante de prime abord, à savoir le recommencement ad infinitum des mêmes actes, des mêmes souffrances, apparaît désormais comme la rédemption même, dès que l’âme se sait avoir déjà parcouru et ainsi être destinée à parcourir encore d’autres individualités, d’autres expériences.”



of fiction.”<sup>189</sup> What is most loathsome for Gide, in other words, is *Zarathustra*’s blatant artificiality, the fact that, in writing *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche conforms to the space of the artist rather than the traditional philosopher or theologian—that is, by consciously producing something that is false. However, Gide could not have been more mistaken about Nietzsche’s attitude towards fiction, nor the relevance of fiction to the entire project of the Will to Power. According to Bataille, it is precisely through maneuvers of fiction that profane art is able, at last, to recapture the mystical sovereignty of the long extinct sacred art, whose subject had always been *the sovereignty of others*: “Profane art,” says Bataille, “found its integrity in maintaining this modesty.... at all events it confined itself as best it could to expression of the subjectivity of others besides itself.... the expression of personages who were not aware of being sovereign and whose fleeting subjectivity... does not recognize itself for what it is.”<sup>190</sup> Ergo Bataille asks: “Isn’t Zarathustra the transposing onto others of the expression given by Nietzsche *to his own subjectivity*?... the plagiarism of sacred literature, bringing onto the stage a character from the sacred world, recognized as such, or meaning to be... in the tradition of profane literature... the expression of a fictitious subjectivity.”<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> André Gide, *Journal II, 1926-1950*, ed. Martine Sagaert (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 207. “Sans cesse je l’y sens jaloux du Christ ; soucieux de donner au monde un livre qu’on puisse lire *comme on lit l’Evangile*. Si ce livre est devenu plus célèbre que tous les autres de Nietzsche, c’est que, au fond, c’est un *roman*. Mais, pour cela précisément, il s’adresse à la plus basse classe de ses lecteurs: ceux qui ont encore besoin d’un mythe. Et ce que j’aime surtout en Nietzsche, c’est sa haine de la fiction.”

<sup>190</sup> Bataille, *La Souveraineté, Œuvres complètes*, t. VIII (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 443. “L’art profane trouva son honnêteté dans le maintien de cette modestie.... il se bornait du moins, s’il le pouvait, à l’expression de la subjectivité d’autres que lui... l’expression de personnages qui ne se savaient pas souverains et dont la subjectivité fugace... ne reconnaît pas elle-même ce qu’elle est.”

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 447. Translation modified. “Zarathoustra n’est-il pas la transposition en autrui de l’expression donnée par Nietzsche à sa propre subjectivité?... le plagiat de la littérature sacrée, il met en scène un personnage du monde sacré, reconnu comme tel, ou se proposant de l’être... dans la tradition de la

“If we de-mystify,” writes Klossowski, “it is in order to mystify more thoroughly.”<sup>192</sup> If the Death of God and the experience of the Eternal Return intimate *anything* to us, it is this loss of a center, carrying the concomitant lesson that the values that we encounter in the world come to us necessarily via the congealment of our own “pulsional thinking.” And from this revelation the relevance of a destructive, satirical fiction emerges: “If the meaning of all eminent creation is always to break the gregarious habits that direct existence towards ends that are useful *exclusively* to the oppressive regime of mediocrity, then in the experimental domain *to create* is to *do violence* to what exists.”<sup>193</sup> Yet, this method comprises “not simply a matter of destroying the notions of the true and false; it also concerns the entry of obscure forces on to the stage.”<sup>194</sup> *To fix a goal, to give a meaning*—“not only to orient living forces, but also to create *new centers of force*: this is what the simulacrum does: a simulacrum of purpose, a simulacrum of meaning—*which must be invented!* Invented from what? From the phantasms of pulsional life—the impulse, as *will to power*, already being the first interpreter.”<sup>195</sup>

The culmination of this process, the “destruction of the gregarious mediocrity” and the “introduction of obscure forces onto the stage,” occurs most clearly in the late

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littérature profane... l’expression d’une subjectivité fictive.”

<sup>192</sup> Klossowski, *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux*, 194. “[O]n ne démystifie que pour mieux mystifier.”

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 190. “Si le sens de toute création éminente est déjà de rompre les habitudes grégaires qui dirigent toujours les existences vers des fins exclusivement utiles au régime oppressif de la médiocrité — dans le domaine expérimental : créer, c’est faire violence à ce qui existe.”

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 194. “Il ne s’agit pas seulement de détruire les notions du vrai et du faux, à partir de la ruine morale de l’intellect, l’entrée en scène des forces obscures.”

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 197. “*Fixer un but, donner un sens*—pour, non seulement orienter les forces vives, mais susciter de *nouveaux centres de forces*, voilà donc le propos du simulacre : un simulacre de but, de sens—à *inventer!* A partir de quoi? des phantasmes de la vie pulsionnelle, —l’impulsion, en tant que « *volonté de puissance* », étant déjà le premier interprète.”

correspondence, in the days before the experience of euphoria at Turin, and the collapse into silence—the moment Nietzsche’s life itself becomes satire. In a letter dated 5 January 1889, addressed to the art historian Burckhardt, Nietzsche writes,

*I would much rather be a Basel professor than God; but I have not ventured to carry my private egoism so far as to omit creating the world on his account.... I have kept a small student room for myself, which is situated opposite the Palazzo Carignano (in which I was born Vittorio Emanuele) and which moreover allows me to hear from my desk the splendid music below me in the Galleria Subalpina.... This autumn, as lightly clad as possible, I twice attended my funeral, first as Count Robilant (no, he is my son, insofar as I am Carlo Alberto, my nature below), but I was Antonelli myself.... I go everywhere in my student overcoat; slap someone or other on the shoulder and say: Siamo contenti? Son dio, ho fatto questa caricatura.... Tomorrow my son Umberto is coming with the charming Margherita whom I receive, however, here too in my shirt sleeves. The rest is for Frau Cosima... Ariadne... From time to time we practice magic....<sup>196</sup>*

This letter, which circulates as an illustration of his mental collapse, signifies the end of the “philosopher Nietzsche,” while representing simultaneously “the full apotheosis of [his] intellect”:<sup>197</sup> “[N]o longer a question of the *will to power* or the *Eternal Return*,

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 341. “[E]n fin de compte je serais plus volontiers professeur à Bale que Dieu; mais je n’ai osé pousser mon égoïsme privé assez loin pour négliger à cause de lui la création du monde.... Cependant je me suis réservé une petite chambre d’étudiant qui se trouve située en face du Palazzo Carignano (dans lequel je suis né en tant que Vittorio Emmanuel) et qui me permet en outre d’entendre, de ma table, la superbe musique qui se donne dessous moi, dans la Galleria Subalpina.... Cet hiver, aussi chichement vêtu que possible, j’ai deux fois de suite assisté à mon propre enterrement, d’abord en tant que Comte Robilant (— non, celui-ci est mon fils, pour autant que je suis Carlo Alberto, infidèle à ma nature) mais j’étais moi-même Antonelli.... Je me promène partout vêtu de mon froc d’étudiant, çà et là je tape sur l’épaule de quelqu’un et lui dis: siamo contenti? son dio, ho fatto questa caricatura.... Demain viendra mon fils Umberto et la délicieuse Margherita, mais que je ne recevrai ici également qu’en bras de chemise. Le reste pour madame Cosima... Ariane... de temps en temps on fait de la magie....”

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 343. “la pleine apothéose de l’« intellect » nietzschéen.”

which are terms destined for reflection and philosophical communication, but of the obverse side of the *death of God*: namely, the kingdom of Heaven, from which emanates the *creation of the world*.”<sup>198</sup> It is this movement, where Nietzsche finds “himself” “everywhere,” and expresses his person through a variety of guises (Count Robilant, Carlo Alberto, Vittorio and Antonelli) that Nietzsche transcends the role of the philosopher-artist, or of the imposter-philosopher, and descends into the very heart of his creation. He attends his multiple funerals, is re-birthed into new identities, produces children, and recalls the magic of past loves. No longer a matter of ‘naming the impulses,’ Nietzsche portrays his life in Turin as a question of living the impulses “informally” (“in his shirt sleeves”).

#### Tableau Vivant (II)

In 1957, Klossowski wrote an essay concerning two paintings by his brother Balthus, an article entitled “Du Tableau vivant dans le peinture de Balthus.” Commencing as a straightforward appraisal of Balthus’s work, Klossowski’s essay takes an extraordinary turn, introducing the conceptual model of the tableau vivant with which to read the paintings.

To begin with, it would be useful to engage the concept of the tableau from the specifically theological dimensions that Klossowski applies in his reading. According to

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 343. “Il ne s’agit plus alors ni de volonté de puissance, ni de l’Éternel Retour, vocables destinés à la réflexion, à la communication philosophique. Mais de l’envers de la mort de Dieu: du royaume du Ciel, d’où émane la *création du monde*.”

Klossowski, the “demon” is the name given for the indiscernible, intangible aspects of the work that beguile the spectator (perhaps common to what Bataille had described in his reading of Manet).<sup>199</sup> Klossowski’s understanding of this figure stems from his writings on the philosopher André Gide, who in his literature often dealt with strange admixtures of theological and erotic subjects. Not long after Klossowski’s tenure as Gide’s assistant did the latter form a nemesis in the writer and theologian Charles du Bos, who, one-time friend, became Gide’s most virulent attacker. At the center of their feud was a disagreement over the concept of the demon. According to the Christian philosopher Tertullian, whom du Bos followed closely, the demon is something like a “spiritual parasite” lacking its own singular essence. It would therefore be opposed to the “real” human body. The definition employed by Tertullian configures du Bos’ traditional, scholastic ontology, where “God” is understood as “existence” and the “demon” is understood as “pure spiritual negativity.” Du Bos reproaches Gide for following what he conceives to be the opposite formulation: Gide, he argues, perceives the demonic as a matter of the concrete, and, by extension, the source of an illusory “freedom”—the “demonic indiscernibility” from which the simulation of freedom arises (... as that which separates man’s will from God’s).

In 1949, Klossowski writes an essay taking the side of his old master, having

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<sup>199</sup> Bataille describes the nude of Manet’s *Olympia* (1865): “Her real nudity (not merely that of her body) is the silence that emanates from her, like that from a sunken ship. All we have is the ‘sacred horror’ of her presence—presence whose sheer simplicity is tantamount to absence” (“[S]a nudité (s’accordant il est vrai à celle du corps) est le silence qui s’en dégage comme celui d’un navire échoué, d’un navire vide : ce qu’elle est, est l’ « horreur sacrée » de sa présence—d’une présence dont la simplicité est celle de l’absence”). Bataille, *Manet*, OC, t. IX, 142.

already adopted Gide's conception of the "demonic" in his own work. Involving a similar preoccupation with the idea of the indiscernible as it appears in Gide, Klossowski, two years prior, published a series of essays on le Marquis de Sade, focusing on the "indiscernible" as it is produced in the libertine's transgression of Christian moral law. The argument in the 1947 edition of *Sade mon prochain* works in the following way: the libertine must, in acts of violent reiteration, engage his victim in order to transgress the victim's bounds. For the libertine, this reiteration is tantamount to the quest for the absolute limit—to possess what is least possessible, to "capture" the victim at the moment of loss. At the center of this violent activity there exists for Klossowski the frozen image of the libertine's phantasm. The correlation here to Gide is the omnipresence of God's word and the temporary disruption of the word by the parasitic demon. This disruption is essentially the "indiscernibility" affected by the tableau vivant according to Klossowski's concept, a suspension of narrative movement. Access to that which exists outside the bounds of God's language, the Law, and the coherence of the victim presents an intangible figure known only via the suspension of judgment. Du Bos reproaches Gide for his belief in the demon as a *coherent thing*. "A man can honestly believe in God without believing in the Devil, can believe in the Devil without believing in God, and can admit the demonic without believing in either one," Klossowski explains. "Catholic dogma affirms that only God is existence and that the Devil, as Devil, is nothing and exists as a pure spirit only by having received being like every other creature; a created spirit, he reveals his demonic tendency by his contradictory aspiration

to to be in order to cease to be, to be in order not to be at all, to be by not being.”<sup>200</sup> The demonic spirit, in other words, must therefore “borrow” a being other than its own (for it has none), to exercise negation—to associate itself with creatures in order to know its contradiction, to enunciate its “nonexistence” within the “real” immanence of people and things. “The identification of God with being, and of the demon with nonbeing, is a rough translation of common sense onto the plane of reality, and immediately provides an account of the morality of ‘good sense’: transcendence in its totality, everything that is given as transcendent or supernatural, is to be blamed on the wicked power”: “Is it a question here of an inversion as claimed by du Bos, who, according to Gide[’s polemic], wants to see a substitution of Satan for God?” asks Klossowski. “Absolutely not, for on the basis of concrete experience, which is also Tertullian’s, the temptation of the spirit is always the same: either to deny what is there, or to affirm what is not there. To succumb to the Devil is to succumb to deception. And this is indeed Gide’s position: whatever reveals is of God, whatever prevents discovery is of the Devil; here again the terms God and Devil have a character that is only natural.”<sup>201</sup> These are the grounds, Klossowski

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<sup>200</sup> Pierre Klossowski, *Un si funeste désir*, Paris, Gallimard, 1963, 39. “Un homme peut honnêtement croire à Dieu sans croire au Diable croire au Diable sans croire à Dieu, et ne croire ni à l’un ni à l’autre en admettant le démoniaque. Le dogme catholique affirme que Dieu seul est l’existence et que le Diable, en tant que Diable, n’est rien et qu’il n’existe comme pur esprit que pour avoir reçu l’être comme toute autre créature esprit créé, il révèle sa tendance démoniaque par son aspiration contradictoire à être pour cesser d’être, à être pour n’être point, à être en n’étant pas.”

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 41. “L’identification de Dieu avec l’être, et du démon avec le non-être, traduite grossièrement sur le plan de la réalité du sens commun, rend compte aussitôt de la morale du bon sens la transcendance dans sa totalité tout ce qui se donne pour transcendant ou sur naturel est à mettre sur le compte de la puissance mauvaise” ; “S’agit-il ici d’une inversion comme le prétendra Du Bos, qui, chez Gide, veut voir une substitution de Satan à Dieu Absolument pas; car sur cette base de l’expérience concrète, qui est aussi celle de Tertullien, la tentation de l’esprit est toujours la même ou nier ce qui est là, ou affirmer ce qui n’est pas là. Succomber au Malin, c’est succomber à l’imposture. Et telle est bien la position de Gide; ce qui est à découvrir est de Dieu, ce qui empêche la découverte est du Diable, encore que les

explains, on which du Bos reproaches Gide for “evading the principle of contradiction”—“because Gide never forgets that art is a simulacrum, the artist a simulator, specifically the one who exhausts language”—that this exhaustion (the artist’s work) is, beyond the necessity of moral judgment (du Bos), the demonic submission to a demand greater than the artist’s will alone—the demand for “nonexistence” as a natural, impusional drive, an immoral but ultimate “real” force that conspicuously conflicts its host. In other words, the demonic force underlying the suspended image of “nonexistence” (the phantasm) is product of a “real” composition of being. It is this imaginary activity that Gide collapses with the figure of the artist who succumbs to a demand other than his own—to produce in his work that which remains indiscernible to language (that is, beyond judgment).

It is in this sense that Klossowski bases his analysis of Balthus’s *La Chambre* (Fig. 4.2) on the contradiction of its otherwise formulaic composition, a suspended composition of three discrete, ambiguous figures: the adolescent nude, the dwarf and the cat. “With what does the frozen attitude of these figures correspond?” Klossowski asks. “Would it be to evoke a fundamental scene [the original determining event] of which one will find fragments dispersed in some of his other canvases? Or is it a hidden order of the archetype which is mimed in their gestures?”<sup>202</sup> To answer this question, Klossowski incorporates Gide’s lesson, admitting the *existence* of the demon: “Both perhaps,” he

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termes de Dieu et de Diable n’aient ici de caractère que naturel.”

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 115. “À quoi en effet répond l’attitude figée des figures? Cherche-t-elle à évoquer une scène capitale dont on retrouverait dans certains tableaux des fragments dispersés? Ou bien est-ce cet ordre caché des archétypes qui miment leurs gestes?”



says, “for the reconstitution of any fundamental scene could not but reveal the soul’s aspiration to reintegrate a hidden order of immutable images. Here the artist succeeds in converting the time in which beings live into the space where they subsist outside of life and beyond death; hence this impression of living statues given by the immobile pantomime in some of Balthus’s big compositions.”<sup>203</sup> He writes: “In the large painting *La Chambre* the voluptuous impression given by the provocative nakedness of the girl on the chaise longue is in some way made uneasy by the presence of a demon. The picture as I remarked at the outset shows things by depriving words of them; once painted the things become unnameable.”<sup>204</sup> As Klossowski says, the demon is what exhausts his language—in the description of a painting that, without adherence to the demon, might otherwise betray its sensuous content. “Let us look at the room” he instructs. “At first we say there is a nude in such and such a pose and then there is what? And in fact we are immediately compelled to delay our impression and to keep it at a distance by means of words. The figure of a dwarf with pageboy haircut and dry angular face pulling back the curtain of a high window—is this the old demon of infantile vices, or is it simply the soul of the artist disguised as a chambermaid for the occasion?” he asks. “Could it be the personification of his own glance avid for visual treasures? Have we happened on the

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid. “Pour autant que la reconstitution de toute scène capital révélerait toujours une aspiration de l’âme à réintégrer l’ordre caché des images immuables? Ici l’artiste en arrive à contenir le temps dans lequel vivent les êtres, en un espace où ils subsistent hors de la vie, au-delà de la mort; d’où cette impression de « tableau vivant » inscrit à l’intérieur du tableau, de pantomime immobile que donnent certaines de ses grandes compositions.”

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 116. “Dans la grande *Chambre* l’impression voluptueuse dégagée par la nudité provocante de la fille a la renverse sur la chaise longue est en quelque sorte « inquiétée » par la présence de deux monstres. Le tableau, disais-je au début, montre en général des choses en les ôtant la parole une fois peintes, elles sont innommables.”

issue of sinister adventures? Daylight falls on the physical charms of the victim; she is thrust back and offered to the sight. Is this the scene following a rape? Or has nothing at all happened?”<sup>205</sup> “The picture,” Klossowski muses, “seems situated at the extreme point where the nothing-has-happened and the irrevocable are held in equilibrium. The determined gesture of the figure drawing back the curtain is like an endless reiteration of the flagrant offense which only the cat on the table witnessed: this cat belonging to the same demonic race as the dwarf in skirts observes with astonishment the light-bringing act of its partner. And what result has the latter in view other than to expose to our sight a sumptuous picture?”<sup>206</sup>

Klossowski cites Baudelaire in his essay on Gide: “There are in every man two simultaneous postulates: one to God, the other to Satan. Invocation of God or spirituality is a desire to climb higher; that of Satan, or animality, is delight in descent.”<sup>207</sup> Where the dwarf represents an unnatural privation (the violence of rape) his act, whose occurrence

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 116-7. “Considérons *La Chambre* : nous disons ; voici un nu dans telle pose, etc., et puis voici ... voici quoi? et en effet, nous sommes tout de suite obligés mettre du retard dans l’impression produite et de nous en distancer par des mots : le personnage nain, coiffure de page, la face anguleuse et sèche, qui soulève d’un geste énergique le rideau de la haute fenêtre, est-il le démon vieilli des vices infantiles, ou simplement l’âme de l’artiste, déguisé en femme de chambre, pour la circonstance...” ; “[S]erait-ce comme la personnification camouflée de son propre regard avide de trésors visuels? Sommes-nous au lendemain d’une sinistre aventure? La lumière du jour tombe sur la victime offerte et renversée sur la chaise longue; est-ce par l’orgasme consécutif à un viol? Ou bien ne s’est-il rien passé?”

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 117. “Le tableau semble se situer au point limite où le rien ne s’est passé et l’irrévocable se tiennent en équilibre. Le geste décidé du personnage soulevant le rideau assure comme une réitération sans fin du flagrant délit dont seul le chat sur la table a été le témoin : ce chat (de la même race que le nain en jupe) suit avec quelque étonnement le geste éclairant compare quelles conséquences ce dernier va-t-il tirer de ce qu’il fait voir, sinon un somptueux tableau?”

<sup>207</sup> Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*. Ed. Marcel A. Ruff (Paris: Seuil, 1968), 632; Baudelaire, “My Heart Laid Bare,” in *Intimate Journals*, trans. Christopher Isherwood (San Francisco: City Lights, 1990), XLI, 63 (English). “Il y a dans tout homme, à toute heure, deux postulations simultanées, l’une vers Dieu, l’autre vers Satan. L’invocation à Dieu, ou spiritualité, est un désir monter en grade; celle de Satan, ou animauté, est une joie de descendre.”

itself is an explicit ambiguity, is met with the nonchalance of the tableau rendering, an indifference redoubled with the presence of Balthus's cat. The pornographic image over which the pervert broods, the idea of the orgasm, or the mutilation, or the molestation, marks a chronological suspension before the picture's curtain is drawn. The demon is exorcized when the homogenous order resumes beyond the anomaly of this excessive event. In reference to this order, Balthus's excess is shown, like Tertullian's parasite, only through his quotation of the academic tradition from which the tableau formally derives. "There is a nude in such and such a pose," Klossowski asks, "and then there is what?"

In his short essay on the painter Paul Klee, Klossowski examines the historical disjunct occurring at the advent of abstract art as pertaining to the era during which Balthus presents his distinctive paintings. The anatomy of the nude gives way to the technical anatomy of the canvas. "The very idea of the Nude," he writes, "is only a neutralization of a primitive and violent act, an aesthetic and social compromise. It is against this neutralization that the most subversive spirits in modern painting have rebelled. Strange outcome: their rebellion has destroyed what they wanted to liberate, the break with this neutralization has only been at the cost of this primitive act."<sup>208</sup> In reverse order, the abstract painter, who wishes to render at the level of the canvas ("pure anatomy") what is neutralized in the concrete form of the female nude (not the 'fortuitous

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<sup>208</sup> Pierre Klossowski, *La décadence du nu* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2002), 121. "La notion même du Nu n'est qu'une neutralisation un compromis esthétique et sociale d'un fait primitif et violent c'est contre cette neutralisation que les tempéraments les plus subversifs de la peinture moderne se sont insurgées. Résultat étrange: leur insurrection a détruit ce qu'ils voulaient libérer, la rupture de cette neutralisation n'a été qu'au prix de ce fait primitif."

nude,’ but the model) only in fact neutralizes the primitive violence of the profaner’s gaze, for which the canvas is merely a simulacrum: “The simulacrum is both this side and beyond the violence, wholly contained in the look.”<sup>209</sup>

Balthus’s mannerism, hearkening this earlier tradition (against both the figure of the erotic nude and the vacuum of abstraction), defines itself *in-between*. Hence the forms of the erotic are abstracted by means of the indiscernible negativity of the scene. There is, for instance, according to Klossowski, a lineage connecting Manet’s cat in the subversive *Olympia* to the presence of Balthus’s cat in *La Chambre*. The nonchalance of the animal’s gaze ruptures the stratified looks associated with whatever is the dominant eroticism—a subversion of classical plasticity by the classical nude’s demonic transgression. “An ‘erotic’ painting,” Klossowski explains, “representing a violent scene, has nothing in common with the appropriative simulacrum of the female body by the vision of her as a nude. Such explanation is only a fortuitous explanation for the primitive violence inherent in the looks cast upon this figure.”<sup>210</sup> There is, in Klossowski’s reading of Balthus, the enunciation of the material canvas’s two postulates: invocation of God as a desire to climb higher (representation, figure), or that of the demon, as a delight in descent. The demonic invocation, characterized by Klossowski as summoning the anxiety of the spectator, marks a descent into the canvas’s irreducible singularity.

It is at this junction that I would like to integrate the conversation back into the

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 122. “Le simulacre est à la fois en deçà et au-delà de la violence, tout entière dans le regard.”

<sup>210</sup> Ibid. “Un tableau dit érotique représentant une scène de viol, n’a cependant rien de commun avec le simulacre de l’appropriation du corps féminin par sa vision en tant que nudité. Pareille représentation n’est qu’une explication fortuite de la violence primitive inhérente au regard jeté sur la nudité.”

works of Pierre Klossowski, before returning to his reading of Balthus, specifically Klossowski's Galerie Beaubourg exhibition of the late 1980s that became the setting for a set of short films by the filmmaker Pierre Coulibeuf. Klossowski's Beaubourg show marks an exhibition during which Klossowski supplied reproductions of the same, monotonous scene: the figure of St. Nicholas saving adolescent boys from the peril of devious roving pedophiles (Fig. 4.4). It is this moment-between-acts captured in the drawings that produces in the spectator a feeling of suspension not dissimilar to the Balthus painting. In the drawings what is captured is either the moment between two impending dooms (Nicholas is conceivably another pedophile) or the moment between an act of sexual violence and a redeeming humanism. Beyond the content of the drawings, the interest in this installation, specifically, is its incorporation into a set of short experimental films during which a few of the relevant concepts worked out by Klossowski are enacted: the tableau vivant, the invocation of the demon, and the idea of the pedophile. This last concept is realized in the form of a college professor who attempts to lure a set of young male gallery patrons by sharing with them his own erotic descriptions of the scene (Fig. 4.5). In this sequence the film attempts to interpret the drawings of Klossowski by means of the concepts provided by the author not through formal analysis of the pictures themselves but through the thematic ruminations of the pedophile—employing the figures of the author's discourse in order to engage the 'literary aspect' of the work. In this way, the film's endeavor is not categorically distinct from that of the seductive professor, who, as soon as he gives a name to what he deems to

be the drawing's phantasm, loses the interest of the boys. It is at this prior moment that the professor, like St. Nicholas, like the film itself, appears most seductive to the two young men, relying not on his own communicative powers, powers of description and dissimulation, but rather on the power of the demon, the intangible aspect within the work itself, to discern the obsessional motif common to all participants—what must remain unsaid between the spectator, the artist, and the figure.

After previewing a number of Klossowski's pictures, Coulibeuf's film starts with one of the aforementioned schoolboys opening to a page from Klossowski's "Retour à Hermès Trismégiste (de collaboration des démons dans l'œuvre d'art)." In this essay, Klossowski describes the role of the demon within the ancient Greek and Roman fabrication of simulacra, predating its Christian theorization. "The demons invoked here," he explains, "would be, according to the Neoplatonic representation, the intermediate nature between the impassive gods and the men subject to the passions—sharing with the gods the eternity of their aerial bodies, with men their passional agitation—contradictory natures, thereby making the demons indispensable mediators between men and the inaccessible deities."<sup>211</sup> Klossowski's originality was to have resuscitated the pre-Christian category of simulacra in order to dislocate the demon from its retral position in Christian theology. Following the account of Hermes, Klossowski undoes the

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<sup>211</sup> Pierre Klossowski, "Retour à Hermès Trismégiste – de la collaboration des démons dans l'œuvre d'art" in *La Ressemblance* (Marseille, Éditions Ryoan-ji, 1984), 95. "Les démons invoqués ici seraient, selon la représentation néoplatonicienne, les natures intermédiaires entre les dieux impassibles et les hommes assujettis aux passions—partageant avec les dieux éternité de leurs corps aériens, avec les hommes l'agitation passionnelle—donc natures contradictoires et de ce fait les médiateurs indispensables aux hommes auprès des divinités inaccessibles."

paradox of the demon's negative existence by transferring the issue (back) onto its pagan logic. "Demons," no longer "parasitical," are conceived as the hypostases of obsessional forces, otherwise unknown to the artist except in this plastic form. The artist, he explains, "maintains the hypothesis of a demonic world analogous to these forces, to the point of treating any movement of the soul as correlative to some demonic movement—constitutes the very imperative of visual suggestion that he then pursues... to seduce by the resemblance of his simulacrum and thus to circumscribe a figure whose aspect would act on the contemplator in the same way as his model acting on the artist.... We come to treat his painting as a pure and simple 'outlet.'"<sup>212</sup>

Klossowski therefore reveals the stratagem that connects the production of the artist (the artwork / the artist's "loss of will") to the obscure force that haunts the spectator. "The demon," he writes, "was both in the thing shown and in the one to whom the thing was shown": "If, therefore, such a 'demonic' complicity, insofar as it is always experienced by the artist as external to his will, provokes in him the obsessively persistent vision of something, it is that it arouses in the artist a state wherein the aspect under which the obsession appears reappears on the painting and awakens in the contemplator a state responding to this aspect... Reproducing the stratagem, it is for the artist to exorcise the obsession."<sup>213</sup> Describing Klossowski's St. Nicholas series, the

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 96. "[L]'artiste... maintient l'hypothèse d'un monde démoniaque analogue à ses forces, au point de traiter tout mouvement de l'âme comme corrélatif à quelque mouvement démoniaque—constitue l'impératif même de la suggestion visuelle qu'il poursuit... donc à ... séduire par la ressemblance de son simulacre et ainsi à le circonscrire par une figure dont l'aspect agirait sur le contemplateur au même titre que son modèle agissant sur l'artiste.... [O]n vient à traiter son tableau comme pur et simple 'exutoire.'"

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 96-7. "Le démon était à la fois dans la chose qu'il faisait voir et dans celui à qui il faisait voir la

pedophile says, “the sadistic fantasy is amusing, obstructed bodies, secret and obscure premises... The demonic influence results in pleasing images.” The demon, according to Klossowski, is not what in the picture causes misinterpretation; it is what in the picture bars the risk of misinterpretation altogether. The demon is nothing more than the name given to a force multiplied between obsessive minds: the communication, in other words, of an incommunicable phantasm. Certainly, says Klossowski, the obsession of the artist and that of the spectator are not the same event, nor are they symmetrical. What the pedophile seeks in the painting is this aspect that Klossowski has called ‘demonic,’ the aspect which is the artist’s rendering of the indiscernible force that motivates the work. The obsession induced by the phantasm works simultaneously but differently between the artist and the spectator. If communication occurs, it is not between the two, the artist and the work’s contemplator, but instead between the individual and the mediating demon. “What sustained the action of the completed painting, if not between the artist and his simulacra, between the simulacra and its audience, is the coming and going of the demon, which intensifies and modifies the painting, extends itself in order to separate itself from misinterpretation.”<sup>214</sup>

In the final installment of the series, Klossowski, from his studio, argues with one of the young gallery patrons over whether or not his drawings, large-scale drafts

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chose” ; “Si donc semblable complicité ‘démoniaque’ pour autant qu’elle est toujours éprouvée par l’artiste comme extérieur à son vouloir, provoque en lui la vision, obsessionnelle parce que persistante, de quelque chose, c’est qu’elle suscite chez l’artiste un état auquel répond l’aspect sous lequel l’obsession réapparaît sur le tableau, mais éveille dans le contemplateur un état répondant à cet aspect.... Reproduire le stratagème, c’est pour l’artiste exorciser l’obsession.”

<sup>214</sup> Pierre Coulibeuf, *Peintre-exorciste*. France, 1987.



conceived in colored pencil, ought to be considered within the long tradition of oil painting, as he insists they should (Fig. 4.6). “Tell me,” he asks, “is the pencil inferior to the brush, even if it is also endowed with colors? Even if these colors are produced, in either case, by means of oil? Do pencils obtain the same nuances as brushes? Yes or no?”

<sup>215</sup> Where medium matters little beyond the reasoning of the canvas, and/or the obsessive quest to reproduce the demon’s voluptuous effect, there is little doubt that medium is what most fully separates the celebrated paintings of Balthus from the drawings of his older brother—the tradition’s longstanding neutralization of impulses echoed in the mannerism of Balthus set against the acentered monotonous obsessions of the older Klossowski, an obsession concerning neither medium nor style, nor tradition, but rather the ancient dilemma at the heart of representation, a dilemma reconstituted across a variety of media (drawing, photography, film and sculpture) as the inability to possess. “But is not the promise of breaking through this despair held in hand?” asks Klossowski. “If the *tableau vivant*, a false genre itself, informs us about this effort of life to find a meaning in life’s suspension, then the insertion of the ‘living picture’ in the painting which I detected in Balthus’s work reveals the function of the suspending gesture as an apprehension of the repose in which lies *final perfection*—coinciding with the supreme spectacle.”<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Klossowski, *Tableaux vivants*, 117. “[S]i le tableau vivant, genre faux en soi, nous renseignait sur cet effort de la vie pour trouver sa signification transcendante par la suspension de la vie, l’inscription du tableau vivant dans le tableau, que je décelais parfois chez Balthus, révèle la fonction même de la suspension du geste, en tant qu’appréhension du repos en lequel réside la perfection finale et qui coïncide avec... le spectacle suprême.”

In his remarks on *La Chambre*, Klossowski writes, “I think of this large painting by Balthus, which for a while stood in the middle of this room [this room where I now live], and I find nothing within myself except these words: the room—a painting by Balthus, with everything it suggests in terms of atmospheres, discussions, sympathy or antipathy, and so on” (“[J]e pense alors à ce grand tableau de Balthus qui un certain temps se dressait au milieu de cette chambre, et je ne trouve rien au-dedans de moi sinon ces mots la chambre tableau de Balthus, avec tout ce que cela suggère d’atmosphères, de discussions, de sympathie ou d’antipathie, etc”). “What is strange,” he says, “is that the painting represents precisely this room I inhabit. I return home and there is no longer a painting, but now there is a mirror there... an illusory means to capture the atmosphere... but in that respect it is an imperfect simulacrum that our verbal reverie comes to supplement; between the reflected image and the image of my reverie the word still insinuates itself indefinitely.”<sup>217</sup> Klossowski here records an anecdotal fact of the painting’s history, the painting having once belonged in the room where Klossowski at the time of writing lived and worked.

As the Balthus commentator Jean Clair muses, “One may wonder just what the relationship can be, in fact, between the imaginary *Chambre* that Balthus was painting and the room where his brother lived, the room in which he had set the action of his

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 110. “Ce qu’il y a d’étrange est que ce tableau représente précisément la chambre que j’habite... Je reviens chez moi, et il n’y a plus ce tableau, mais il y a là un miroir abstraction faite de son usage... le miroir répond à notre obscur besoin de passer à une réalité impérissable... Mais sous ce rapport c’est un simulacre imparfait auquel vient suppléer notre rêverie verbale entre l’image reflétée et l’image de ma rêverie la parole s’insinue encore indéfiniment.”

erotic and religious story.”<sup>218</sup> Clair refers to Klossowski’s *Roberte ce soir*, a story where the enigmatic character Roberte resists visual appropriation by the various suitors who wish to obtain her. Understood in this way, the dwarf’s reveal in *La Chambre* opens less to a definitive content (the violence done) than to that aspect of the picture which remains unseen, the suspension between past and future. Klossowski writes, “Two voices seem to alternate and echo one another; ‘so it was’ and ‘so it will be forever’—like an evocation of things past and the perpetual return of that evocation in the pace of self-resigned everyday life.”<sup>219</sup> Like the surface onto which the dwarf opens the shade, what the ‘mirror’ of the painting shows is the opacity of the window—the passage that refuses to show anything at all.

Opacity is the link that Klossowski eventually draws between *La Chambre* and another of Balthus’s works, *Le Passage du Commerce-Saint-André* (Fig. 4.3). The drafts of this later painting make evident Balthus’s method for composition: to begin with an empty scene to later be filled in by people and objects, each one, in progression, an uncertain figure. Only in the final work do these figures take on the strange solidity characteristic of Balthus’s characters, the stiff, automaton-like appearance of the child with doll, the eerie two-dimensionality of the thinking girl, the caricature of the matronly hunchback. From among the figures in this crowd, however, there are precisely two that

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<sup>218</sup> Jean Clair, “From the *Rue* to the *Chambre*: A Mythology of the *Passage*,” in Jean Clair, ed., *Balthus* (London, Thames & Hudson, 2001), 27.

<sup>219</sup> Klossowski, *Tableaux vivants*, 118-9. “Deux voix semblent alterner et se répondre ; « c’était ainsi » et « il en sera toujours ainsi » — comme une évocation de choses passées et le retour perpétuel de cette évocation dans le rythme de la vie quotidienne résignée s elle-même.”

Klossowski relies upon to substantiate his reading: the crouched man and the walking figure receding into the scene. The crouched man is more or less, like the cat and the dwarf, associated with the demon. He makes no attempt to escape the plane; in fact, his gaze navigates its width, falling on the figure in the corner, a young androgyne lifting its skirts, echoing the promise of *La Chambre*'s reveal and its uncertainty. Is it any coincidence that this demon in *Passage* so closely resembles Pierre Klossowski? The wiry frame, the dark brow, the prominent nose? It has been theorized that Balthus, too, is present in this painting, as he is said to appear in others: the artist receding into the scene. If the demon is anchored within the painting as a reminder of the picture's demonic uncertainty, the walking man is a force that both redoubles and upsets this uncertainty. "It is from him [the artist]," writes Klossowski, "that proceeds the sense of uncertainty in the painting; at the center of the magic circle formed by 'so it was' and 'so it will be forever,' he himself is at once under the spell and yet free from it.... The man who is walking and yet in his walking is immobile, is holding the very promise of breaking the hopeless circle, and breaking out of it: the loaf of golden bread, in which we might recognize something like an emblematic intention on behalf of Balthus"<sup>220</sup>

It is in this sense, returning to the critique of the demon in Gide, that the artist is surmised as both that force that follows the demonic whim yet in his activity has the

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 119. "[C]'est de lui que procède l'ambiance d'expectative du tableau : au centre du cercle magique que forme « c'était ainsi » et « il en sera toujours ainsi », lui-même appartient à la fois à l'envoûtement et y échappe néanmoins.... Mais l'homme qui marche et se tient cependant immobile dans sa marche, a dans la main la promesse même de rompre le cercle désespérant et de franchir : la baguette de pain doré, où l'on reconnaîtrait comme une intention emblématique de Balthus."

means to break away from it—by giving this activity a name, by thematizing the demon in accordance with the artist's deepest obsession.

## Epilogue

In 1978, Klossowski met the Italian filmmaker Michelangelo Antonioni. The director, visiting a gallery exhibition of Klossowski's colored pencil drawings, commented to the artist: "how remarkable it is for you to be able to reproduce your vision without constraints."<sup>221</sup> According to Klossowski, this exchange confirmed a point he had been making for some time. Even a figure such as Antonioni was, by his own admission, a slave to the culture industry. What apparently freed Klossowski from such constraints was his own *obscurity* as an artist and theorist—what Klossowski calls, in his last essays, "the Gulliverian point-of-view," or the "disproportionate vision" of the monomaniacal artist.

A year later Klossowski tested the theory, seeking in *Roberte* (1979)<sup>222</sup> a set of contradictory goals seemingly incompatible with narrative film—to subject his own "disproportionate vision" to the conventional gaze of the film director, Pierre Zucca. What, after all, can the mechanized vision of the movie camera make of Octave's perverse point-of-view, his phantasy of a "Roberte" that explodes all categories, that defies the rational limits of the image and the limits of the frame as such?

In his essay on the free indirect subjective, the theorist Pasolini illustrates a

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<sup>221</sup> The exchange between Klossowski and Antonioni, which took place at Klossowski's gallery opening at the Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea in Milan, was immortalized in Klossowski's essay "L'indiscernable," published in *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, June 1978. Reprinted with an English translation in *Decadence of the Nude: Pierre Klossowski, Maurice Blanchot*. Sarah Wilson, ed. (Revisions. London, UK: Black Dog, 2002), 141-159.

<sup>222</sup> *Roberte* (1979) refers to the film-adaptation of the "Laws of Hospitality" that Klossowski made in collaboration with the artist Pierre Zucca, who served as the film's director. Zucca had worked with Klossowski earlier, as photographer for the illustration plates that accompanied *La monnaie vivante*.

conception of cinema's natural bind—the inability of a “closed film” to attain a “complete view” of the events being captured. He uses the example of the infamous Zapruder film, an artifact tied necessarily to the delimited, subjective, not-yet-properly-historical point of view of the camera's operator. In contradistinction to Zapruder, Pasolini imagines instead an endless sequence edited together from an impossible amount of simultaneously recorded footage, something that might attain to an objective, and therefore historical, point-of-view. This dream of an infinite accumulation of sound and vision is precisely where Pasolini overlaps the concerns of Klossowski's Octave: to ‘possess’ what exceeds personal experience, to yield, in Pasolini's term, an ‘objective cinema.’

In Pierre Zucca's 1979 *Roberte*, Octave shows his nephew a series of projected black-and-white photographic transparencies. The concept of the “objective image” is addressed through the apparent “other” in the photograph, an introduction, via the discourse of uncle Octave, to the Absent One, whose gaze (like the ‘objective’ lens of the camera itself) mediates ours. The projection from Octave's photographic carousel reveals candid snapshots of Antoine's aunt, Roberte. The recurring image is that of Roberte and her famous gloved hand, allusion to the indecipherability of her gesture (Fig. 5.1, 5.2). Octave, who lectures Antoine on the status of his aunt, muses: “It is not your aunt Roberte of whom I speak... but of someone who perhaps concerns her just the same.” I am speaking of that person, he says, “who is interposed between you and me, between me

and your aunt Roberte, between your aunt and yourself.”<sup>223</sup>

The photographs described in the novel (from which the sequence is adapted) are, however, less innocuous than those shown in Zucca’s film. From the opening of *Roberte ce soir*, the photograph over which Octave lingers shows a convoluted scene: Roberte’s skirt is engulfed in flames, she’s being assisted by a man (whom we later learn to be her nemesis, Vittorio). The scene yields a suggestive situation for Roberte: a chaos of limbs; and her simultaneous ravaging/rescue by the heroic stranger. The photograph gives Octave the occasion to address a number of potentially contradictory interpretations of the image, which he then relates to Antoine. The “undecidability” of these interpretations is the “pure spirit” to which he offers her name (and to which all her definitive attributes must be denounced—the cornerstone of his Laws of Hospitality). Interpretive variables which would otherwise be dispelled by the resolution of action associated with the moving image are granted permission by photography (and hence the “Absent One” remains). At its surface, the image, the fortuitous record of a moment in time, shows a mishap by a fireplace. But in Octave’s musing, the image maintains the potential for a variety of impossible interpretations (the “pure spirit”), existing forever without closure.

When Klossowski describes the value of the film *Roberte*, he refers to the ingenuity of its casting, not to any attribute of formal innovation. The film itself has,

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<sup>223</sup> Pierre Klossowski, “Roberte interdite” in *Roberte au cinéma* (Nyons: Éditions Borderie, 1978), 38. “Ce n’est pas de ta tante Roberte que je parle [...] mais de quelqu’un... qui peut-être la concerne tout de même [...] Celui qui s’interpose entre toi et moi, entre moi et tante Roberte, entre ta tante et toi même.”



arguably, no answer to the limits of cinema. The adapted scenario is rendered via the standard conventions of continuity and narrative voice (in, for instance, the narrative voice-overs of Roberte). In the sequence cited above, the image pertains to “acinema” only for the reason that its focus (the slideshow lecture) is, indeed, not cinematic, but based instead on the reading of a set of still images. In the novels, there are deliberate formal divisions in perspective. In the film, there exists nothing but the standard conventions of narration and continuity; there is no attempt at what Pasolini would call a “cinema of poetry.” When Pasolini defined this term, his point of reference was, as it happens, the aforementioned Antonioni—“poetic cinema” he defined as the ability of a director to establish, through manipulation of cinematic conventions and stereotypes, a ‘pathological’ camera, a way of shooting that constitutes the formal expression of an individual point-of-view. Octave’s descriptions in the novel, however, do not allude to some heightened or diminished psychological state, such as can be represented through this or that twist of formal conventions. These descriptions have an intellectual or otherwise literary relationship to perception, for whose thought they must remain description (for they would have no properly ‘cinematic’ analogue).

For comparison, we turn now to a successful adaptation of the material, cast into a different medium: the adaptation of *Roberte ce soir* belonging to Juan Jose Gurrola, who, in his 1975 theatrical staging, attempted a visual approximation of Klossowski’s “exploded subject,” not through differentiations marked in character point-of-view, but through experiments in scenography. In *Roberte, esa tarde*, Gurrola (with his art director

Fiona Alexander) built his stage according to curious dimensions. The classical proscenium was negated; the stage, all but closed off to the spectator. The area wherein the actors perform was surrounded on all sides by an unbroken wall of mirrors. The spectator, in turn, gains entry onto the scene from a thin slit that spans the entirety of the otherwise enclosed area. From his/her position at the periphery, this spectator must decipher the play action through the manifold reflections that distort his or her view (Fig. 5.3, 5.4). For Gurrola, this construction was a matter of ‘corporealizing’ the spectator within the dynamics of the enacted scenario as voyeur, a situation in which the discrete physical space of the narrative and that of the spectator are collapsed in simulation of a perverse, secret interaction. The production is therefore given over to the turbulence and vulnerability of an ‘unscripted’ Real, ultimately an ambiguous and deceptive space—a circumstance created by the construction of the hall of mirrors, one which relates, directly, thematically, with Octave’s vision of Roberte (here, played by the voluptuous burlesque Fuensanta Zertuche, against the characterization of “Roberte,” the uptight, bourgeois society woman, Fig. 5.5). This “Roberte,” Gurrola’s burlesque Zertuche-Roberte, is offered to our vision as the liberated libidinal monster, “exploded” in description and multiplied in the possessive gaze of the voyeur.

Now it is beyond the purview of this dissertation to analyze Gurrola’s techniques as they relate to the conventions of theater production. Its value for us, instead, relies on whatever analogy we can establish between such techniques and the way that the adaptation unfolds, for instance, in Zucca’s film: the failure to translate the experimental

narrative of Klossowski's "Laws of Hospitality" into a conventional film text. When Pasolini describes the conventions of the emergent "Cinema of Poetry," he writes of a 'subterranean' text that altogether defies linguistic and narrative convention, an unrealized film that exists just beneath or beyond the "poetic cinema." This text, he explains, is "the one that the filmmaker would have made even without the pretext of the *visual mimesis* of his protagonist," a document crosshatched with the author's idiosyncrasies, a catalog of "obsessive shots" put to movement via an obsessive rhythmic montage.<sup>224</sup> The subterranean text that Pasolini describes is precisely the idiosyncratic and perverse text that implicates the gaze of its spectator, and it is precisely in this sense that we must understand the tactics of Gurrola: to implicate his audience as voyeur. As a theater critic at the time wrote: in *Roberte, esa tarde*, "the public is [incorporated as] a perverse angel who excurses upon the secrets of a goddess."<sup>225</sup> This goddess, like Klossowski's vision of Diana, is a figure who explodes narrative bounds; in Gurrola's re-telling, this explosion relies not on an exasperated attempt at description (such was Klossowski's method), but on a spatialization of this exasperation in scenographic terms.

Would not also *Robarte el Arte* fit within this description – as an example of an exasperated film? What is meant by the "anti-kinetic" problematic at the heart of its text? Like any film product, *Robarte el Arte* presents a montage of otherwise discontinuous fragments. But what can be said of their order? Rather than succumbing to a basic

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<sup>224</sup> Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, 182.

<sup>225</sup> Orlando Guillen, "Juan Jose Gurrola Propone su Apología de los Cuernos. Inédito Espacio Escénico" in *El Nacional*, 22 Julio 1975. "[E]l público es un ángel perverso que incursiona en los secretos de un diosa."

representational matrix, we are given an *alibi*, a pun through which the entirety of the film operates: the conceptual robbery of the already missing art object. Coincidentally, Lyotard's "Acinema" begins with a pun as well. Enunciated out-loud its title forms the non-grammatical *la cinéma*, the apparent misgendering of the masculine *cinéma* in the mouth of its speaker. The productive term, the cinema of insemination, is substituted for nonsense, for a grammatical mistake—the basic summation of Lyotard's argument: the emergence of the avant-garde as the production of an intentional error. In an earlier section, we tied this issue of gender to the provocative scene of Goyo, who in the midst of Gurrola's film, checks the cadaver for the phallus before being content to finish his endeavor. What are we meant to see? What is Goyo meant to see in the unveiling? Does it exist in this frame or ever outside its limit? What are we to make of this missing phallus?

For Klossowski, the effect of the pun has a clear relevance for distortions in perspective. One can be speaking in double meaning and never realize it. As a child he dreamt a version of *Gulliver's Travels* where the protagonist, reduced to the size of the Lilliputians, engages in erotic behavior with giants. Except the behavior isn't at all erotic, at least not for Gulliver. When Gulliver climbs the expanse of Roberte's bosom and describes the landscape below, it is only ever for our benefit, the benefit of the reader. In Klossowski's short play *Roberte et Gulliver*, the scenario is enacted: when Gulliver, perched atop the breast of the sleeping Roberte, delivers his geological survey of Roberte's body, his lecture arouses the giants in attendance. Isn't this the position that Klossowski stakes out for his brother Balthus, as well? None of Balthus's descriptions are

erotic, per se, but diagrammatic. The violent transgression has always-already just happened in the scene. The violence is, in Duchamp's term, already "given" in the representation; the scene holds for us only the embarrassment of our interested involvement. Just so, we never catch Octave masturbating to his own descriptions. Masturbation is left for the fascist Vittorio, for the men at the parallel bars, and for the representative from the bank; Octave's currency is description, and it is through his descriptions that we are rendered the scene.

For the original and appropriated scenes of *Robarte el Arte*, there is nothing that unites these except the pun, made for our benefit. It is only in collapsing the libertine's perspective with ours that we experience the "moral shock" in Pasolini's film, situated there, also, for our benefit. We, the perverse angels... how are we to read the formulae in Sade, the diagrams of impossible sexual rituals and the laundry lists of debauched acts that make up so much of the work? Certainly these are *all* passionate texts, to be sure... Lyotard's acinema has at its heart the act of neuter, the pun of its title, repeated again at every mention of acinema's goal, to undermine the productive apparatus. Yet even with this neutering of the productive apparatus, we are told, only then can a libidinal cinema be born. Are we to believe this? In Lyotard's *Économie libidinale*, there is a lot more slicing involved in this neutering, more so than just mere castration. In the opening section of that book, Lyotard carves through the human apparatus to give us a look at the dissected libidinal band, splayed out before his reader, reduced of its complexity and made diagrammatic. Yet the band, as we know, *cannot* be diagrammed, cannot be

reduced of its complexity. There is a mistake, he admits, in our attempt to understand the structure of the unconscious; in reality there is no intelligible message waiting there to be deciphered.

So, we therefore have the alibi, the innuendo, the premonition. Antonioni compliments Klossowski, “how remarkable it is for you to be able to reproduce your vision without constraints.” To be able to hunt the premonition, to be able to cast away the innuendo. Antonioni is mistaken for thinking this. Klossowski’s strategy involves a different set of constraints, to be exact. As his director Pierre Zucca remarked, “[B]efore being the reproduction of a reality external to itself, the image is an angle, a frame, a look. That is why it cannot be an image of something without being at the same time a very particular image. No image, however devoid of interest, escapes this quality which fundamentally distinguishes it from what it represents.”<sup>226</sup> Would this explain the decision to cast Klossowski and his wife Denise? “[I]t is precisely,” he says, “the strength of the subject represented by the image that obscures its image quality, imposing itself in its place as essential.”<sup>227</sup> As Octave asks, looking over his Tonnerre collection: “So these forgeries could be real?” As Zucca comments, yes. The figure of Roberte can “only be uncovered under the rigorous constraint of a ‘framework’”: the image of the figural—not

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<sup>226</sup> Pierre Zucca, “La double nature de l’image” in *Roberte au cinéma* (Nyons: Éditions Borderie, 1978), 4. “[A]vant d’être la reproduction d’une réalité extérieure à elle-même, l’image est un angle, un cadre, un regard. C’est pourquoi elle ne saurait être image de quelque chose sans en être en même temps une image toute particulière. Aucune image, soit-elle la plus dénuée d’intérêt, n’échappe à cette qualité qui la distingue fondamentalement de ce qu’elle représente.”

<sup>227</sup> Ibid. “[C]’est précisément la force du sujet représenté par l’image qui voile sa qualité d’image, en s’imposant à sa place comme l’essentiel.”

a “woman”— a figural specter named “Roberte,” born in the imagination of a pervert.<sup>228</sup>

So we have, in Zucca’s film, Gulliver, standing on the breast of Roberte, shouting his geography lecture. It is filmed by a human-sized camera, and edited by human-sized editors, into a narrative that fits our perspective. No one watching Zucca’s film, in other words, is “turned into a stag,” like the hunter Acteon spying the bath of the goddess Diana. What *could* her theophany look like? Is it representable? If it *were* representable, would its attempt be maddening to us? Would we storm the room like Roger Caillois, cursing Klossowski’s name after having read the “bad prose” of his *Le Baphomet*?

Certainly, Gurrola has his answer to this question, and it looks nothing like Zucca’s. Concealed in the bad form of *Robarte el Arte*, there is a sense of perfection. There is no perfection in Zucca’s film. We witness there the messy room of a haute bourgeois pervert. There is no place for this mess in Gurrola’s conception; he completely strips down Roberte and turns her into raw phantasm, from the censoring housewife to the glorious obscenity of the whore. We are reminded of the effect of Bataille’s Edwarda, into whose orifice we spy the infinite face of the universe. Is this marvelous vision the gateway to destiny that Goyo was attempting to destroy in his murder of women? How could we know? As Lacan says, it’s no use questioning the psychotic. However, we don’t need to be reminded of the origins of the Goyo sequence—its appropriation from the pornographic snuff film—nor do we need a reminder of Goyo’s fate, one and the same as his inclusion in that original film, his rehabilitation into *our* pornographic fantasy.

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 7. “[Roberte] ne peut être mise au jour que sous la contrainte rigoureuse d’un « cadre ».”

In the 1960s and again in the mid-1970s, Gurrola attempted to put to film his own “Gulliverian” dream. Not based on Swift, as Klossowski’s had been, Gurrola adapted instead an eighteenth century figure whose work countered the enlightenment rhetoric of his contemporaries. I am referring to Henry Fielding, and specifically his *Tom Thumb* plays, an anti-bourgeois satire starring the infamous penis-sized protagonist. In Gurrola’s original theater adaptation of *Thumb*, produced in the mid-sixties, the scenario was re-cast to satirize the hollow consumerism of the new international bourgeois (a concern he shared, by the way, with Pasolini, who commented on the issue in the early seventies with the contrasting lyricism of his premodern “*Trilogy of Life*”). For Gurrola, *Thumb* served the protocols of *Dom Art*, a satirical critique of fashion and bourgeois social mores in global capitalist US/Mexican society. However as the project progressed into the next decade, the adapted scenario took a new dimension. For Gurrola, by the mid-1970s, *Thumb* meant an attack on reason altogether. *Thumb*, qua “*Pulgarcito*,” is the celebrated commodity fetish, the man-turned-sex-prop, envy of everyone. True to form with Fielding’s original, the scenario, especially in the later seventies rendition, turns to objective madness. In the script for Gurrola’s unrealized film, the narrative collapses in excess: incoherent narrative is met with erratic formal and aesthetic shifts, from a setting in the 1700s to the contemporary, from live action to cartoon, from the introduction of musical numbers to softcore pornography, all while furnished with dialogue spoken in a chaotic and incomprehensible period verse, a parody of Elizabethan dramaturgy.

In both Klossowski’s and Gurrola’s intervention, the invocation of the



point-of-view of the “little man,” Gulliver and Tom Thumb, is a salute to minoritarian viewpoints, the minor elements than inhere in “major languages” (for Gurrola, e.g.: the genre languages of the musical, the period piece, the porno; for Klossowski: the language of “classical syntax,” the kind of speech parodied in the lectures of Octave and in the mock scriptures of *Le Baphomet*). “To suffer the censorship of the ‘classical’ syntax,” Klossowski writes, “is to reproduce the obsessive constraint of the [incommunicable] phantasm. Practiced wisely, institutionalized stereotypes (of syntax) cause the presence of what they circumscribe....”<sup>229</sup> Hence, to the basic nature of representation, and the whole system of stereotypes, underwriting the venture of the avant-garde: “To disarticulate syntax,” says Klossowski, “to ‘restore’ the phantasm as is, to break down the forms to reconstruct a phantasmatic, is to let go of the prey for the shadow; to liquidate any coercion without exercising any: in the name of vain freedom.”<sup>230</sup>

“Without the stereotypes of syntax, without any stereotypes,” he concludes, “there can be no simulacrum in turn binding.”<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Pierre Klossowski, “Protase et Apodose,” in *Klossowski*. L’arc, 43 (Paris: Duponchelle, 1990), 16. “Subir la censure de la syntaxe « classique » [...] revient proprement à reproduire la contrainte obsessionnelle du phantasme (incommunicable). Pratiqués à bon escient, les stéréotypes institutionnalisés (de la syntaxe) provoquent la présence de ce qu’ils circonscrivent.”

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 19. “Désarticuler la syntaxe pour « restituer » le phantasme tel quel, décomposer les formes pour en reconstruire une phantasmatic, c’est lâcher la proie pour l’ombre; soit liquider toute contrainte sans en exercer aucune: au nom d’une vaine liberté.”

<sup>231</sup> Ibid. “Sans les stéréotypes de la syntaxe, sans aucun stéréotype, point de simulacre à son tour contraignant.”

## ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 2.1: Pier Paolo Pasolini, dir., *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma*, 1975, Produzioni Europee Associate S.P.A. Rome; Les Productions Artistes Associés S.A. Paris, DVD.



Figure 2.2: Pier Paolo Pasolini, dir., *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma*, 1975, Produzioni Europee Associate S.P.A. Rome; Les Productions Artistes Associés S.A. Paris, DVD.

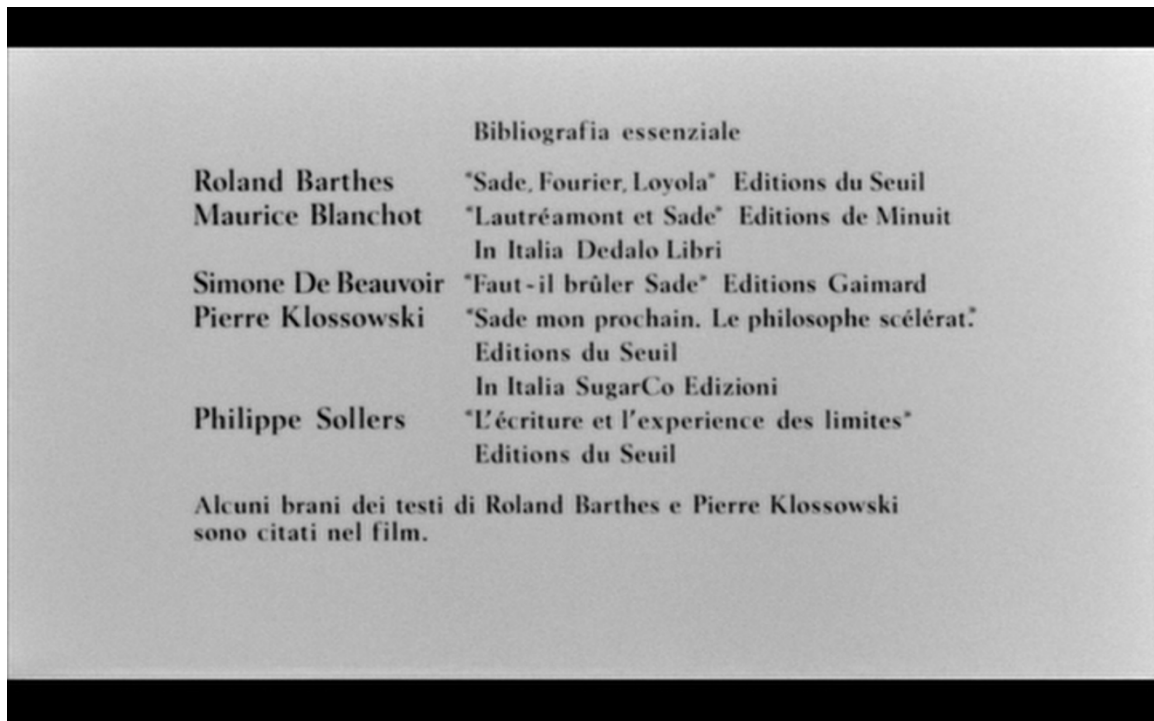


Figure 2.3: Pier Paolo Pasolini, dir., title card ('essential bibliography') in *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma*, 1975, Produzioni Europee Associate S.P.A. Rome, Les Productions Artistes Associés S.A. Paris, DVD.

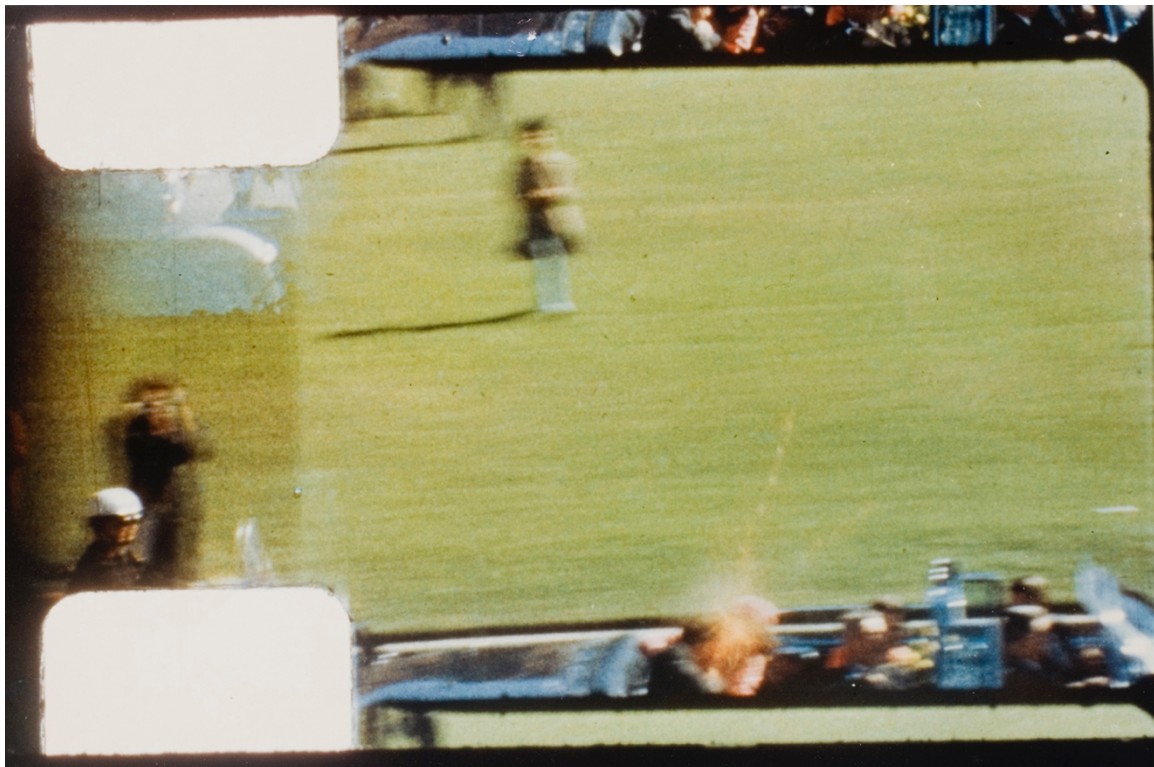


Figure 2.4: Abraham Zapruder, dir., Frame 313 from 8mm home movie of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, Jr. November 22, 1963, Zapruder Film © 1967, The Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza, 8mm Film.





Figure 2.5: Pier Paolo Pasolini, dir., *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma*, 1975, Produzioni Europee Associate S.P.A. Rome, Les Productions Artistes Associés S.A. Paris, DVD.



Figure 2.6: Pier Paolo Pasolini, dir., *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma*, 1975, Produzioni Europee Associate S.P.A. Rome, Les Productions Artistes Associés S.A. Paris, DVD.



Figure 3.1: Juan José Gurrola, dir., *Robarte el Arte*, 1972, Mexico: Trecevision Activa, Fundación Gurrola, DVD.

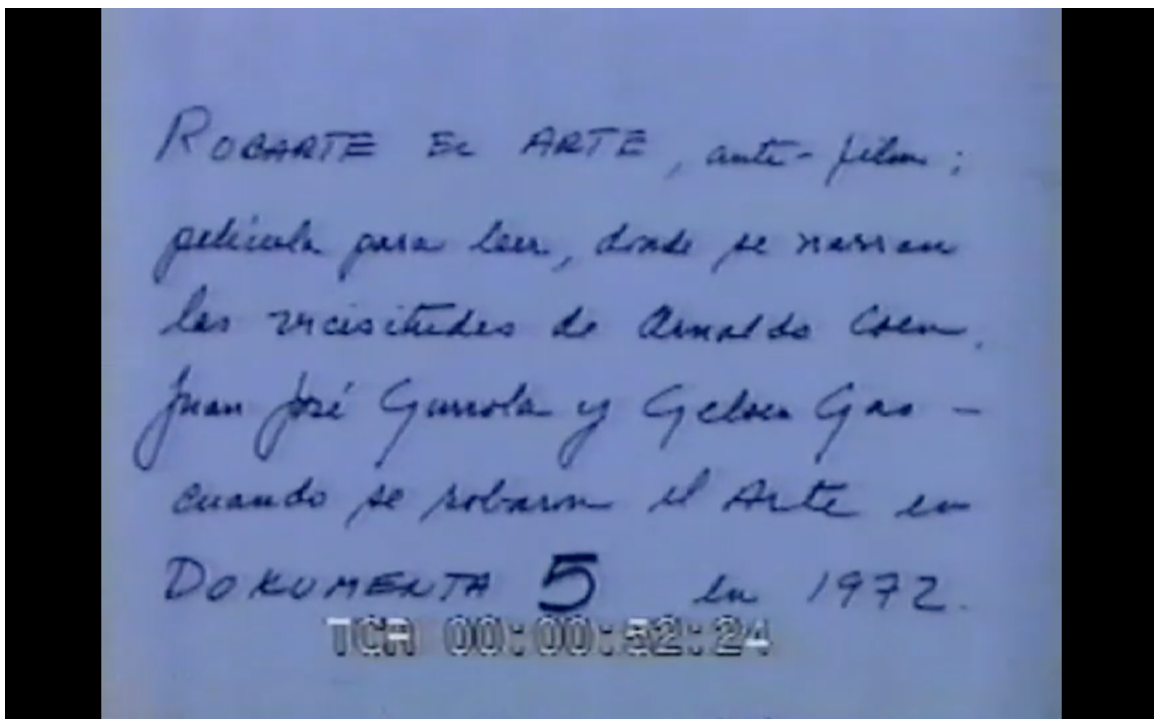


Figure 3.2: Juan José Gurrola, dir., *Robarte el Arte*, 1972, Mexico: Trecevision Activa, Fundación Gurrola, DVD.



Figure 3.3: *Familia Sandwich* (from the Dom-Art series), 1962. Transfer on canvas, 71.73 x 69.76 x 1.77 inches (182.2 x 177.2 x 4.5 cm.) © Fundación Gurrola, Mexico City. Photo: House of Gaga, Mexico City.



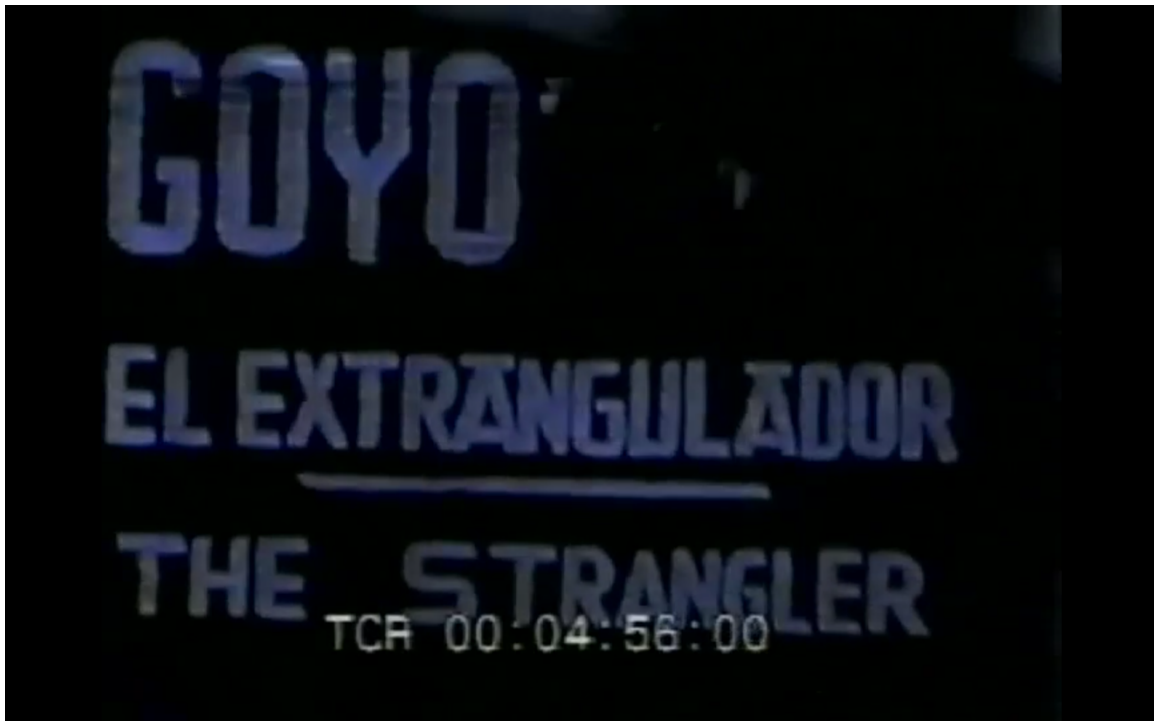


Figure 3.4: Juan José Gurrola, dir., appropriated title card from “Goyo el estrangulador” in *Robarte el Arte*, 1972, Mexico: Trecevisión Activa, Fundación Gurrola, DVD.



Figure 3.5: Juan José Gurrola, dir., collage of newspaper clippings in *Robarte el Arte*, 1972, Mexico: Trecevisión Activa. Fundación Gurrola, DVD.



Figure 3.6: Juan José Gurrola, dir., appropriated image from “Goyo el estrangulador” in *Robarte el Arte*, 1972, Mexico: Trecevision Activa, Fundación Gurrola, DVD.



Figure 3.7: Juan José Gurrola, dir., appropriated image from “Goyo el estrangulador” in *Robarte el Arte*, 1972, Mexico: Trecevision Activa, Fundación Gurrola, DVD.



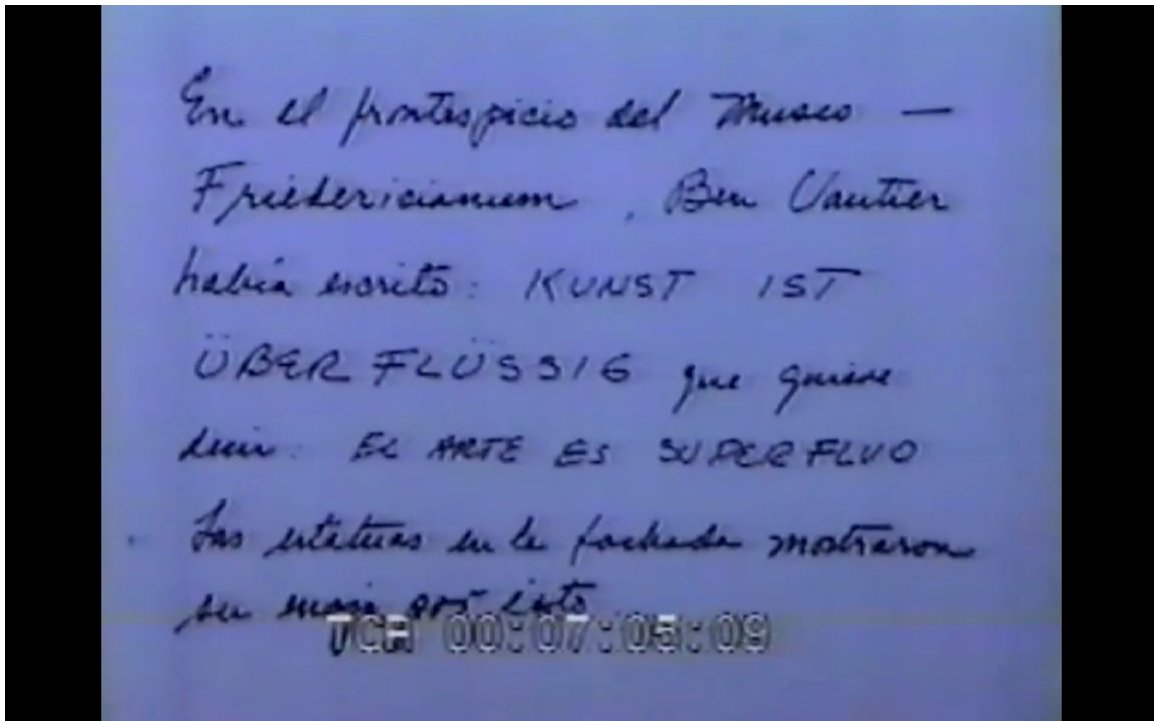


Figure 3.8: Juan José Gurrola, dir., “Robarte el Arte, 1972, Mexico: Trecevision Activa, Fundación Gurrola, DVD.



Figure 3.9: Juan José Gurrola, dir., underexposed image (‘wrestling with Vito Acconci’) from *Robarte el Arte*, 1972, Mexico: Trecevision Activa, Fundación Gurrola, DVD.



Figure 4.1: Pier Paolo Pasolini, dir., the wandering father/son accompanied by the Marxist crow in *Uccellini e uccellini* (*The Hawks and the Sparrows*), 1966, Italy: Arco Film, DVD.

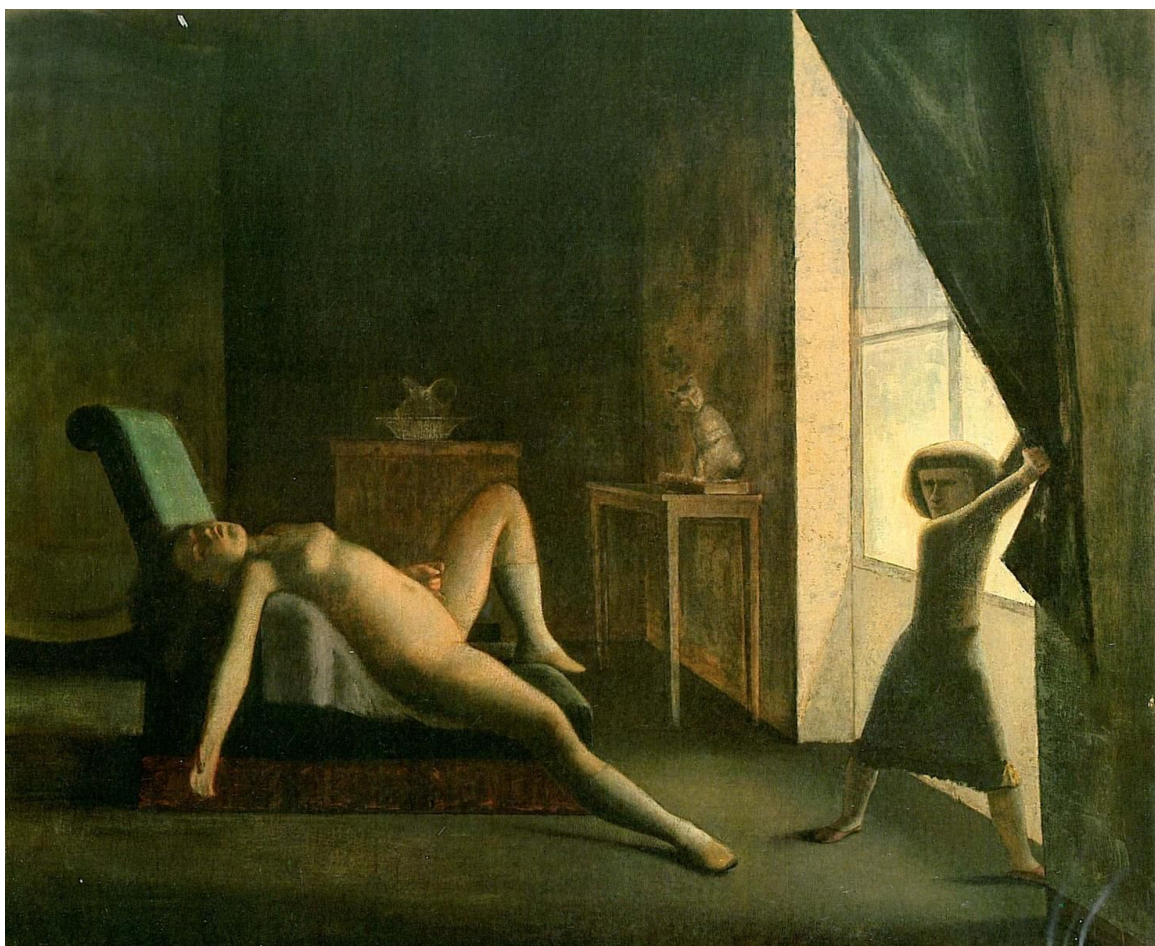


Figure 4.2: Balthus, *La Chambre*, 1953. Oil on canvas, 335 x 270.5 cm. Private Collection.





Figure 4.3: Balthus, *Passage du Commerce-Saint-André*, 1952-1954. Oil on canvas, 294 x 330 cm. Private Collection.



Figure 4.4: Pierre Klossowski, *Saint Nicholas*, 1987. Colored Pencil on Paper. 170 x 150 cm. Private Collection. Photo: Gallerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin, Germany.





Figure 4.5: Pierre Coulibeuf, dir., still ('professor lecturing to two young gallery patrons') from *Klossowski, peintre-exorciste*, 1988, France: Regards Productions, Délégation aux Arts Plastiques, DVD.



Figure 4.6: Pierre Coulibeuf, dir., still from *Klossowski, peintre-exorciste*, 1988, France: Regards Productions, Délégation aux Arts Plastiques, DVD.



Figure 5.1: Pierre Zucca, dir., *Roberte*, 1979, France: Filmoblic, Carlotta Films, DVD.



Figure 5.2: Pierre Zucca, dir., slideshow image of *Roberte* in *Roberte*, 1979, France: Filmoblic, Carlotta Films, DVD.



Figure 5.3: Spectator point-of-view, Fuensanta Zertuche in *Roberte, esa tarde*, written by Pierre Klossowski, directed by Juan José Gurrola, 1975, Teatro de la Casa del Lago, UNAM, Mexico City. Photo: Fundación Gurrola.



Figure 5.4: Demonstration of mirror effect in *Roberte, esa tarde*, written by Pierre Klossowski, directed by Juan José Gurrola, 1975, Teatro de la Casa del Lago, UNAM, Mexico City. Photo: Fundación Gurrola.





Figure 5.5: Fuensanta Zertuche in *Roberte, esa tarde*, written by Pierre Klossowski, directed by Juan José Gurrola, 1975, Teatro de la Casa del Lago, UNAM, Mexico City. Photo: Fundación Gurrola.

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