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**A Subject Re-viewed:  
An Aesthetic Construction of the Self  
in Kierkegaard, Critical Theory and the Visual Arts**

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Submitted for the Master of Theology degree (M.TH.)  
The Centre for the Study of Literature and Theology  
University of Glasgow, Divinity Faculty  
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## Abstract

This essay examines the role language and images play in the construction of subjectivity. Apart from many theories of subjectivity (especially psychoanalytic) which base the development of the subject almost solely in language, i argue that there are other media (i.e., images) which contribute to the formation of the subject. Using Kierkegaard's concept of the aesthetic as narrative thread, i weave together the thought of several recent theorists (Kristeva, Lacan, Baudrillard, and Derrida) and several paintings (by Rembrandt, Kandinsky, Dalí, and Magritte) to illuminate the role images may play in understanding the pre-linguistic self. By paralleling Kierkegaard, critical theory, and the visual arts, visuality is shown to be a key function of the self. This conception gives not only a chronological, or developmental, view of the subject, but also provides a topographical mapping where vision stands aside speech as diverse constitutive elements of the fully-functioning subject.

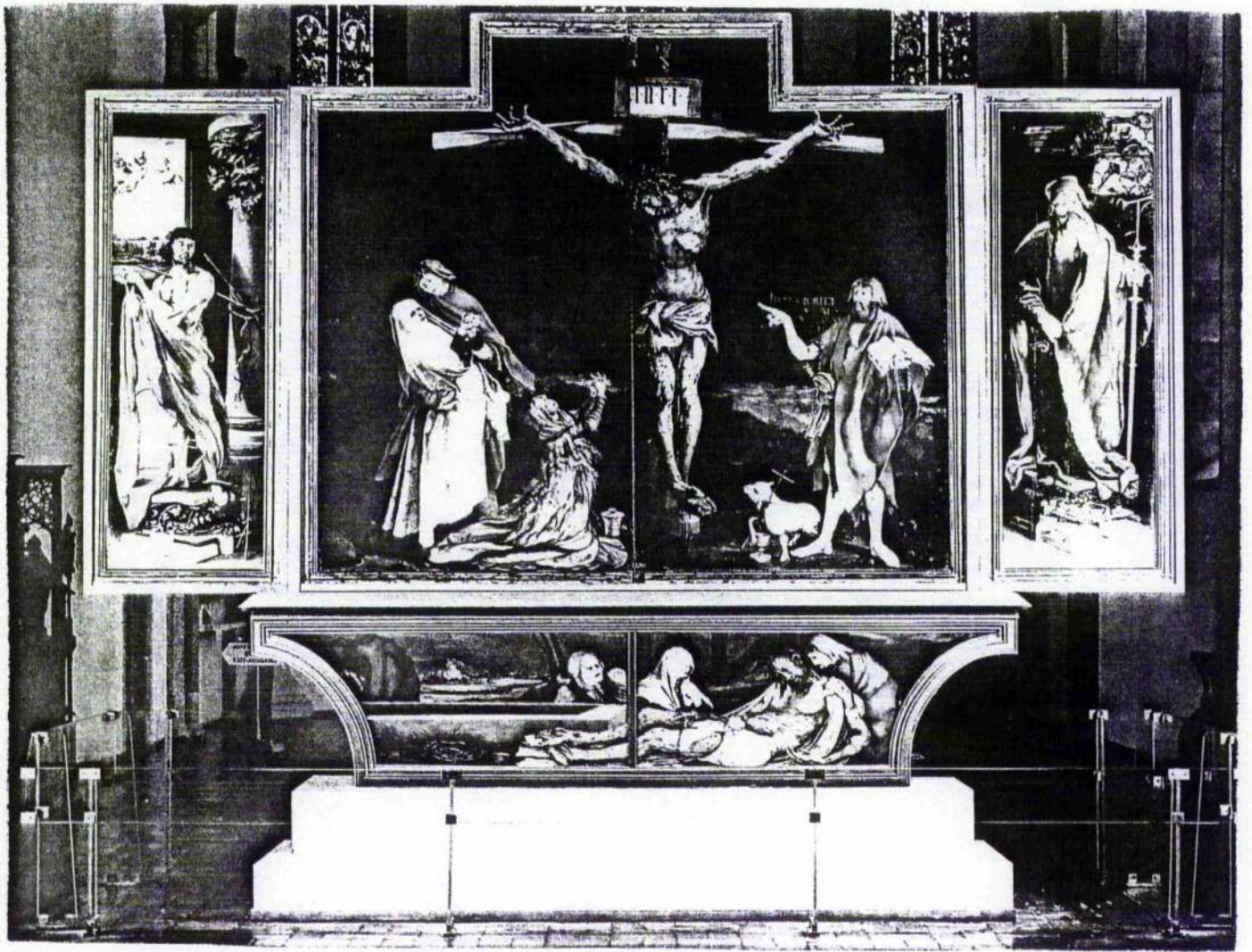
By shifting critical emphasis away from 'language' to the broader notion of 'media of communication,' images are separated from the domain of language. In this scheme, language and images are considered as distinct media which supplement ("add to and replace") one another. The 'media of communication' view of the subject is analogous to Kierkegaard's three stages, or "modes," of existence (the aesthetic, ethical, and religious). Just as each medium of communication supplements another, the aesthetic and ethical (and religious) modes of existence similarly supplement and overlap each other. The human subject, then, is constructed by words *and* images, and exists in aesthetic *and* ethical modes, among others.

In the end, these various media and modes play off of each other, giving way to a 'subject in process.' Subjectivity becomes a movement with no fixed or final place for ultimate meaning, no teleological progression toward a final salvation. This movement of the subject is what i am labelling, following Kierkegaard's religious category, 'faith.' Such a non-traditional notion sees faith not as an attainable object, but relates it to the psychoanalytic concept of *desire* and the poststructural view of writing (*écriture*). Faith is the movement of the subject which resists structures, singular media, or modes, and takes risks.

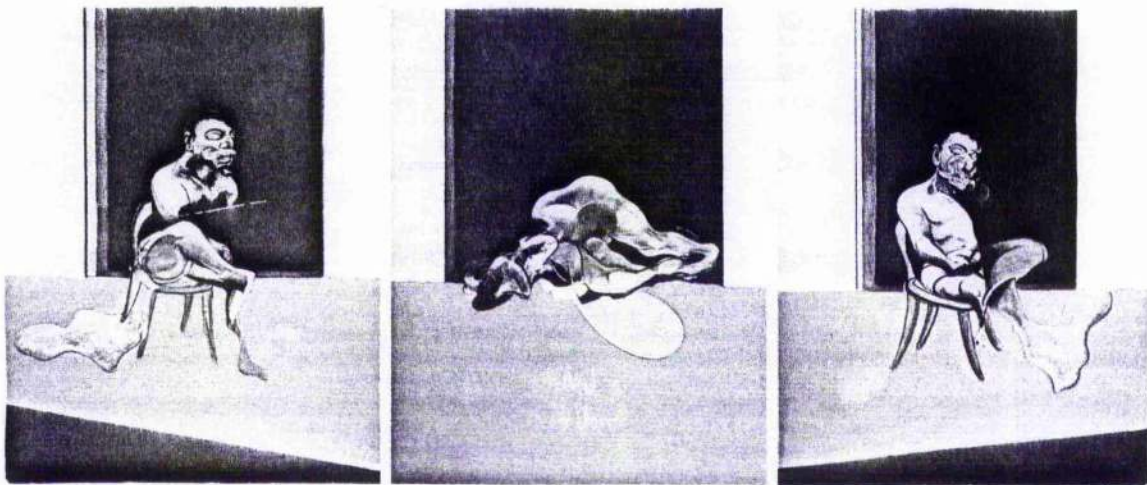
As a conclusion to the examination of the aesthetic stage, i make a brief foray into Kierkegaard's ethical stage and take the literary trope of irony into consideration, especially as it relates to the discrepancy between the *form* of communication and the *meaning*. Here there is a move to examine the function of language in subjectivity. A question arises: in terms of this essay, if the aesthetic is "pre-lingual" (and image separate from the word) how can one theorize the images of the aesthetic using language? Irony comes into play and in this play a different view of language surfaces. Furthermore, the subject is seen as an ironic subject split between form and content. Finally, repetition is the doubly-reflective movement out of these stages, propelling the subject to more movement.

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Matthias Grunewald, *Crucifixion (Isenheim Altarpiece)* (1512-1516) Oil. Colmar



Francis Bacon, *Triptych-1972* (1972) Oil on canvas; each panel 198.1x147.3 cm. The Tate Gallery

Scholarly discourse is no longer distinguishable from that prolix and fundamental narrativity that is our everyday historiography. Scholarship is an integral part of the system that organizes by means of 'histories' all social communication and everything that makes the present habitable.

-Michel de Certeau<sup>1</sup>

The "essay"--which should be understood as the assay or test by which, in the game of truth, one undergoes changes, and not as the simplistic appropriation of others for the purpose of communication--is the living substance of philosophy, at least if we assume that philosophy is still what it was in times past, i.e., an "ascesis," *askēsis*, an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought.

-Michel Foucault<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Heterologies*, 205. Full bibliographic references are given in the Bibliography unless it is a book not directly consulted in which case full bibliographic information will be provided in the footnotes.

<sup>2</sup> *The Use of Pleasure*, 9.



### Prescript<sup>3</sup>

The scholarly essay must have a signature, a name which gives it a place. How then assay a self from the position of a self? If the subject of writing is the subject, who then writes the subject? In the beginning was the word, but who wrote the word? Co-existent and co-creating, the writing and the subject tangle with images and bodies from the beginning. The beginning comes without an origin.

Grunewald's sixteenth-century *Isenheim Altarpiece* brings John the Baptist back from the dead and into literacy by displaying him with an open book and pointed finger, the book reading, "He must increase, but I must decrease." How can the one who is already dead decrease more? The decrease of the book then? "The end of the book and the beginning of writing"<sup>4</sup> The writings which survive show no indication of Jesus or John the Baptist writing anything, yet here they are imag(in)ed with a book: one dead but alive, one dead awaiting resurrection.

The grotesquely long finger, of course, points to the mangled body of a crucified Christ. Originally located at an Antonite monastery devoted to healing the sick, patients were paraded in front of the painting in hopes of an instant cure, the illness expelled from the body and offered to Christ. The illnesses affected a range of bodily disintegration, with the body of Christ sufficiently gruesome to mirror the patient's bodies. The artist as pharmacist moves the viewer from fragmentation to redemption and wholeness, moving through the crucifixion to resurrection of the body. "The body

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<sup>3</sup> The word, "Prescript," is used for several reasons. First, obviously, it is "before the writing," a title or heading, which is a writing itself. The word "script" conjures up a play, a theatrical performance, full of actors. Similar to a "text" with various threads, the analogy to script shows the various threads to be the performances of actors playing roles, of which the current script entails only one. The theatrical theme will continue in the body of the script. Also, "prescript" is related to "prescription," which designates, "the means of acquiring or of freeing oneself, through a certain passage of time, and under the conditions determined by the law" (Lyotard, "Prescription," 176). Finally, script(ure) is a possible translation of the French *écriture*. While this term usually gets translated simply as 'writing,' the linkage with scripture suggests itself as a religious category which has echoes through this essay.

<sup>4</sup> See Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 6-26.

of Christ is a continuous appropriation of the body; it is composed of the bodies that dissipate in front of it."<sup>5</sup>

At the beginning: a book, a gesture, a body, an image, a subject. Created and recreated along the way of such various media, the subject must inscribe itself in the process, a process of death and sur-vival.

The essay which follows is, broadly speaking, situated at an intersection of theology, the visual arts, and critical theory. To weave these typically separated disciplines together, i bring out a relationship between them through what i see as three interrelated strands of current theoretical discourse. Not meant in any way to be exhaustive of the disciplines or theoretical problems mentioned, this essay cuts across grains of disciplines and lines of thinking in order to come to its own way of thinking; a thinking which bears on the issue of *subjectivity*.<sup>6</sup> The strands of theory which are here brought forward are: 1) the influence of images on communication and culture, 2) questions about language and the limits of language, and 3) the materiality of the body.

### the image

Within the first strand of theory i am interested in the implications of a western culture increasingly influenced by and dependent on images. Images--whether those of television, film, advertisements, pictures in magazines, fashion, et al.--constitute a mode of communication other than that of the printed word or speech, i.e., language. At the

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<sup>5</sup> Nick Millet, "The Fugitive Body," 42-43.

<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of this study, i am using the term "subject" rather than "self" to link it to objectivity and ways of reading and speaking. Barbara Johnson begins her Introduction to the Oxford Amnesty Lectures of 1992 by explaining differing views of self and subject. The French tradition--from Descartes on--sees a "subject," contrasted with an "object," centered on reason and thought, and resembling a grammatical function. The Anglo-American tradition sees a "self," which is bound up with ideas of property and inseparable from "rights" (*Freedom and Interpretation*, 3).

same time, images are often bound up with verbal language (filmic dialogue, captions), with music (as in dance), or the economic market (as in advertisements), and the ability to ferret out a particular medium (e.g., gesture, or music) from the others seems to be impossible; they must be analyzed as they work together in a particular context. "[T]he society in which we live is a society of generalized communication. It is the society of the mass media."<sup>7</sup> Within a mass media society knowledge and communication structures are, to say the least, complicated.

What is vital it would seem is a continual analysis of the way communication patterns, the shaping of culture and, finally, the construction of knowledge are constituted and reconstituted by new media. Eric Havelock, Marshall McLuhan, and Walter Ong are a few of the scholars who have brought attention to the way communication media alter consciousness and culture through their studies of orality and literacy.<sup>8</sup> It has come time to extend these projects into the postmodern world of the mass media.

Hegemonic control which would limit modes of information making culture an easily definable, easy-to-live-in place, is no longer possible (and, most would say, certainly not desirable). This essay is part of an attempt to think about new ways of reading (and therefore also writing, and therefore also living) by bringing signs from various media and various disciplines together. This essay then is part of an attempt at rethinking the existing structures and media of knowledge.

Elsewhere i have used the title 'Imagology'<sup>9</sup> to encompass these ideas. The project

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<sup>7</sup> Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, 1.

<sup>8</sup> See bibliography under these names for references.

<sup>9</sup> I must point out that i have been using this term in currently unpublished papers long before Mark C. Taylor and Esa Saarinen's *Imagologies* was published. It is somewhat ironic though, considering the influence Taylor's previous work (and *Imagologies* is a radical break from his other work) has had on my own thinking.

The neologism comes from Milan Kundera who, in his book *Immortality*, gives a first view of what is entailed,

Imagology! . . . this word finally lets us put under one roof something that goes by so many names: advertising agencies; political campaign managers; designers who devise the shape of everything from cars to gym equipment; fashion stylists;

of imagology, as I conceive it, is taken up in a critical way in the work of theorists such as Gregory Ulmer, Mieke Bal, J. Hillis Miller, W.J.T. Mitchell and Kaja Silverman.<sup>10</sup>

Jonathan Culler gives a nod to the shift toward images and provides a strong indictment for the hard work that must now take place in education:

[W]hen one thinks about the future of our multilingual, multiracial society, one finds it hard seriously to imagine the establishment of a common culture based on the Greeks or other classics. Such common culture as we have will inevitably be based on the mass media--especially films and television. Schools will not counter this culture effectively by requiring the study of particular historical artifacts, seeking to impose a canon. The struggle against the debilitating effects of mass culture must take place on a different front: by teaching critical thinking, perhaps by analyzing the ideological stakes and structures of mass-media productions and exposing the interests at work in their functioning. Arguments about what literary works and what historical knowledge to require will only distract attention from the pressing problem of how to insure that schools encourage intellectual activity by teaching critical thinking, close reading, and the analysis of narrative structures and semiotic mechanisms.<sup>11</sup>

The shifting of media requires a shift in the critical thinking structures we have inherited.

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barbers; show-business stars dictating the norms of physical beauty that all branches of imagology obey (114).

But Kundera goes on and the consequences become a bit more sinister,

[I]n the last few decades, imagology has gained a historic victory over ideology. All ideologies have been defeated: in the end their dogmas were unmasked as illusions and people stopped taking them seriously. . . . Reality was stronger than ideology. And it is in this sense that imagology surpassed it: imagology is stronger than reality. . . . [I]deology belonged to history, while the reign of imagology begins where history ends (114, 116).

Here we are reminded of the great champion of postmodern cynicism, Jean Baudrillard, who claims, "there is no longer such a thing as ideology; there are only simulacra." There are strong arguments against "end of ideology" thinking (especially in the work of Christopher Norris), but it is not too much here to realize the sheer power of imagology as Kundera describes it above. Baudrillard will be returned to in the following study.

<sup>10</sup> Within literary and critical theory several recent books have appeared which examine, in varying ways, the relationship of word and image. See Ulmer, *Teletheory*; Miller, *Illustration*; Bal, *Reading "Rembrandt"*; Mitchell, *Picture Theory*; Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*. (Full references given in Bibliography.)

<sup>11</sup> "The Future of Criticism," 31-32.

No simple re-application of literary tools on to images will do.

This project of imagology needs a place from which to critique. But part of the entry into the postmodern world entails the end of oppositional critiques and the end of 'utopia' as a place from which to criticize. So, rather than a "strategy" of critique it may be of more importance to look for "tactics." Tactic is a term borrowed from Michel de Certeau who contrasts it with that of strategy. A strategy is a judgement from a point of power and control, "every 'strategic' rationalization seeks first of all to distinguish its 'own' place, that is, the place of its own power and will, from an 'environment.'"<sup>12</sup> In this way, a strategy is inherently "modern," if the modern is to be understood in its Cartesian and scientific objectivity (this will be developed further). By contrast, "The space of a tactic is the space of the other. . . . It does not have the means to *keep to itself*, at a distance, in a position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection. . . . It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. . . . In short, a tactic is an art of the weak."<sup>13</sup> This project may then be thought of as a pocket full of tactics, a few places among many of countering and, perhaps a better term for the purposes here, subverting existing configurations of knowledge, but moving within them at the same time. As an essay using tactics, it also becomes impossible to claim a 'discipline' out of which to criticize, be it theology, literary theory or psychoanalysis. A tactic necessarily remains apart from the grounding provided by any particular discipline.

Appropriate here may be the use of the word 'theory,' and indeed it is this word which i will use throughout this essay for a few reasons. The first reason is its etymological roots (*theōros*, spectator; *theōreō*, look at; related to theatre) which relate it to sight and 'speculation.' (Granted, 'speculation' is a loaded word with many ideologically-motivated variants, some of which will be worked with in the writings which follow). As this essay is about images, a linking with sight may be somewhat tactical. But much more than this, i take the use of the term 'theory' from two other theorists. I use it in the sense that Culler argues for it:

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<sup>12</sup> *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 36.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

[W]hat distinguishes members of this genre [i.e., theory] is their ability to function not as demonstrations within the parameters of a discipline but as redescription that challenge disciplinary boundaries. The works we allude to as 'theory' are those that have had the power to make strange the familiar and to make readers conceive of their own thinking, behavior, and institutions in new ways.<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, Mark Poster sees the socio-political implications of theory's movement across modes of knowledge. He argues that poststructural theory is a necessary social force, picking up where the modernism of the Frankfurt School left off:

The labor of theory . . . is to relate conceptual advances to their context not to reduce them to it but, quite the opposite, to demonstrate that the link between discourse and society gives discourse its generalizing force while providing what Fredric Jameson has called a 'cognitive mapping' of society.<sup>15</sup>

'Theory' then, as i am using it, is decidedly inter- and trans-disciplinary, but not as an end in itself. Rather, theory is the restructuring of boundaries (not a striving for a place "outside the boundaries") that has political implications in today's context. This essay is about re-theorizing, or, "seeing again" from a new perspective. This has long been one of the aims of the visual arts.<sup>16</sup>

In the following essay i move beyond a semiological analysis of image culture to the point where my interests meld with theological interests. Here the implications of the proliferation of the image are much more severe, and here is found a link between the first and second strands of theory i am examining; for theology (specifically, Christian

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<sup>14</sup> *On Deconstruction*, 9.

<sup>15</sup> *Critical Theory and Poststructuralism*, 7.

<sup>16</sup> The use of 'theory' by the likes of Poster and Culler has interesting resonances with modernist theories of the visual arts. One might consider, for example, Bertolt Brecht's use of the Russian formalist's theory of 'estrangement' in order to see in a new way through "making strange." There are many other examples throughout modern art--from the Cubists to Soviet montage (Eisenstein, Vertov) and all manners of the avant-garde--of de-familiarizing so as to see from a new perspective.

theology) has been centered around a concept of the *logos* through most of its history.<sup>17</sup> Such a conception has not always been explicitly stated using the term, *logos*, and while the *logos* has meant different things in different places, the last few hundred years (especially within protestantism since the reformation and the invention of the printing

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<sup>17</sup> The *logos* within christianity grows out of the prologue to the gospel of John and, stemming from this, the logos-christology of early apologists such as Justin Martyr and Origen. In these early and Platonic views christians and non-christians alike have access to the *logos*, but only christians have full access because of its manifestation in Christ. Tied to this is the interesting concept of *logos spermatikos* ("seed-bearing Logos") a sowing of seeds throughout human history.

There may be seen two main significations of the *logos* through christian history: knowledge and salvation. *Logos-as-knowledge* is seen in statements such as, "The Logos . . . is to be thought of as the ultimate source of all human knowledge" (Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 282); or, "Christian logos-theology was influenced by developments in later Judaism which tended to conceive God as remote and transcendent, communicating with the world by agencies such as his Word (*membra*) or his Wisdom. . . . In particular Philo of Alexandria, interpreting the Greek OT [sic] in terms of Greek philosophy, depicted the Logos as the intelligible element in God's mysterious being; the means of God's self-disclosure to the world; the source of its rational order, understood as Plato's 'Forms,' and its controlling principle" (Christopher Stead, "Logos," 339). Here is the notion of the "presence of God" existing in the medium of 'knowledge' between transcendent God and fallen humanity. Tied to *logos-as-knowledge* is many interpreters arguments relating *logos* to the Hebrew Bible notion of wisdom (Heb. *chokmah*, Gk. *sophia*). Bultmann, for example, points this out in particular relating John 1 to passages such as Proverbs 8.22 ("The History of Religions Background").

Not dissociated from *logos* as knowledge is *logos* as salvation. Here the mediating form of the *logos*, for groups such as the Alexandrian School, takes human nature upon itself (incarnation) in the world in order to redeem the world. The Alexandrian's concerns are soteriological (McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 287-8). Paul Lamarche also sees the link between the *logos* of John 1 with the wisdom of the Hebrew Bible, but focuses on the salvific element of the *logos*: "the title of the Logos designates not only the *Word*, as we now call him, but Christ the Saviour" ("The Prologue of John," 41). The precise meaning of Logos in John 1, according to Lamarche, is "the divine plan of salvation for all, conceived by God 'before the foundation of the world' in other words the Word that is Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, destined to take flesh and to save mankind" (41).

Most importantly, both of these views work with the notion of a 'mediating presence,' an ultimate security of salvation, whether the Word is that of Christ or the rational knowledge bound to language. Such a "filling" will have important implications as the development of subjectivity is pursued in the following essay.

press<sup>18</sup>) has seen the *logos* congeal into an emphasis on the medium of the verbal word. Quoting Werner Kelber, Stephen D. Moore sees a two-part structure in the fourth gospel where Jesus is elevated to "the primordial position of a transcendental signified" and "the incarnation is not fleshly only; the *Logos* is doubly incarnated 'through the materiality of written communication.'"<sup>19</sup> It is the co-occurrence of *logos-as-transcendent-presence* (giving salvation) and *logos-as-word* (giving knowledge) that i wish to pursue.

Recently, diverse movements such as feminism, poststructural theory, liberation critiques from the two-thirds world, as well as the rise of television and film in western culture, have created a multi-faceted affront on the structures of the *logos*.<sup>20</sup> For my study here, i am bringing together the force of these "non-logocentric" movements through two inseparable strains within theology (and implications are felt in other fields as well).<sup>21</sup> Just as i have stressed the *logos* to be two-part, the movement against the *logos* is also two-sided. The image functions as a de-powering of the verbal word; it is a challenge to the *medium* of the *logos*. But also, non-logocentric thinking has questioned discourses that make a privileged claim backed up by transcendence which exist throughout theology; this questioning is a challenge to the metaphysical claims of *presence*. This leads directly into the second and related strand of theory touched upon in this essay: the limits of the

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<sup>18</sup> For effects of the printing press on society see Elizabeth Eisenstein's two-volume, *The Printing Press as Agent of Change*.

<sup>19</sup> Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 152. Inner quote from an (at the time) unpublished essay of Kelber, "In the Beginning Were the Words."

<sup>20</sup> This listing is not intended to equate or reduce each of these movements to the same; they are related in this context in their working against hegemonic and logo-centric thinking.

<sup>21</sup> "Critiques" (if we can call them that) of logocentricity often neglect one or the other of these elements of the *logos*. What seems to me to be of particular interest within theology and much of the humanities is the way the medium itself has become intimately bound to privileged transcendent discourse. At the same time, these two elements may be temporarily separated to show the reliance of one on the other. Derrida clearly deals with each of the two--medium and metaphysics--in *Dissemination* and *Of Grammatology*. It is this line of thinking i will be following.



logocentric language of presence and direct communication.

### the word

When Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous, among others, began reworking concepts of western metaphysics in the 1960's and 70's, avenues began to open up for new modes of communication. Interdisciplinary studies began to rise up, and 'theory,' as outlined above, became a genre of its own. But it is precisely this theory which constrains theology to reconsider its structure such as it is. The hierarchy of knowledge is being dismantled, boundaries refigured, and language can no longer be considered a totalizing, all-encompassing explanatory force. Certainly not all traditions and currents of thought have considered language thus, but here *post*-structuralism must be seen in relation to what may have been the last great movement of modernity: structuralism. As Robert Detweiler has stated, "Structuralism's search for universal laws of language to replace those of history . . . attest to the weight of the role assigned to language in the mid-late century's quest for a signifier of survival."<sup>22</sup> Language, according to poststructural theory, has limits, it is not a perfectly present mediator.

I take 'language' to mean the verbal, spoken and printed word. The image, as i am viewing it, is not part of language. When image analysts (or, 'iconologists') approach the image, there is a continual temptation to equate the image with language. In the introduction to the collection of essays, *The Language of Images*, W.J.T. Mitchell aligns the contributors through the relationship of language and image:

By the "language of images," then, we mean three sorts of things: (1) language *about* images . . . the interpretive discourse a culture regards as appropriate to its image systems; (2) images regarded *as* a language; the semantic, syntactic, communicative power of images to encode messages, tell stories, express ideas and emotions, raise questions, and "speak" to us; (3) verbal language as a system *informed by* images.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> "Overliving," 241.

<sup>23</sup> "Introduction," *The Language of Images*, 3.

Mitchell goes on to state his awareness of making a categorical mistake, putting two things together which do not belong together, but wants to look instead at what separates "different symbolic modes." As he elsewhere states, "The point, then, is not to heal the split between words and images, but to see what interests and powers it serves."<sup>24</sup> While in many respects i agree with this interrelation of word and image--especially option 3--there is a tendency (as evidenced throughout *The Language of Images*) to analyze images from a fundamental re-presentational and linguistic basis. The images i will be considering are such that representation itself becomes problematic and the ability for language to comment on the image breaks down. Here is where i see the use of poststructural theory as an adequate response in a questioning of the image, for they each are dealing with the thresholds of language. Or, in Foucault's pre-poststructural terms, "if it is true that the image still has the function of speaking, of transmitting something consubstantial with language, we must recognize that it already no longer says the *same thing*; and that by its own plastic values painting engages in an experiment that will take it farther and farther from language, whatever the superficial identity of the theme."<sup>25</sup> There is a relationship between words and images which i suggest is best brought out when they are understood as distinct media.

In contrast to 'language,' i want to propose the tentative phrase, *media of communication* as an encompassing notion within which to approach word and image. It takes no time to realize the shortcomings of such a phrase if one is to take poststructural theory into account with its questioning of both 'communication' and 'media.' Perhaps, in Heideggerian terms, it would better be stated: *media—of communication*, whereby a trace of the 'communication' remains. These *media—of communication* would be in agreement with Derrida's notion of *grammatology* in its listing of such linguistic and non-linguistic media: "we say 'writing' for all that gives rise to an inscription in general, whether it is literal or not and even if what it distributes in space is alien to the order of the voice: cinematography, choreography, of course, but also

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<sup>24</sup> "What is an Image?" 530.

<sup>25</sup> *Madness and Civilization*, 18.

pictorial, musical, sculptural 'writing.'<sup>26</sup> Definitions for 'language' and media of communication must be kept separate, but it is their interaction which will be of interest throughout this essay.

Taking seriously the "critiques" levelled against logocentrism, this project begins from the question, "What can be done (i.e., thought, felt, lived) theologically in a post-logocentric world?" Connected with the move to an "image culture," a preliminary answer is to argue for a new theological dimension of "materialist aesthetics," with special attention given to recent theories of *visuality*. Acknowledging the impact of images on the western culture, the following is a look at these images and their disruption of logocentric language (on two inseparable levels: as printed or spoken word and as transcendent guarantor of Truth and presence), but it is also a new look at images for further theological thinking.

Let it be said up front that such theological thinking is no return to an aesthetics of 'beauty,' but a "dangerous and necessary" (Derrida) wandering into the dark night of the soul. I usually try to keep the apocalyptic overtones to a minimum, but part of finding myself within western culture in the 1990's is finding myself continually verging on apocalyptic thought--perhaps especially as one who has lived in America with its handguns and fundamentalist televangelists. This is written in a *fin-de-millennium* epoch, a time of waiting and ambiguity, of upheaval and rapid change. While providing comfort and security may be one important element of religion, this project is more aggressive, its answers remaining unsettled.

### the body

The unsettling factors involved bring up the theme of wandering. This is not only to be taken metaphorically, but also to allude to a place for space, a place for the material human body to move and *matter*. This is the third strand which i hope to weave into this essay. Though this strand will not be as prominent as the first two, it will be important

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<sup>26</sup> *Of Grammatology*, 9.

nonetheless. As mentioned above, part of the space opened up in the critique of logocentrism is a space for the material, and it is within aesthetics that i attempt to bring out the import of materiality. One of the major moves in theoretical circles seems to be a move from word to image, but another important move seems to be the shift from language to bodies, from the semantic to the somatic. In Judith Butler's words, "Theorizing from the ruins of the Logos invites the following question: 'What about the materiality of the body?'"<sup>27</sup> These two shifts (word to image, language to body) i believe are related and will require more attention throughout this essay. Just as language came to the fore in twentieth-century theorizing and with it the rise of literary studies, the end of the twentieth-century seems to mark, among other things, a move toward materialist communication and the rise of body theories. Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Donna Haraway and the *ZONE* series from MIT Press are just a few examples of the locations of this new strand of theoretical discourse. Here too it is poststructural and poststructural-influenced theory that show the limits of language, allowing holes at the thresholds, thereby giving way to new media of communication.

### the subject (of the essay)

These three strands (which may be seen as *leitmotifs* throughout this study) are threaded together here in the construction of *subjectivity*. This essay will be working with the constitution and (dis)solution (Solution: "Dissolving or being dissolved; separating, breaking." Dissolution: "Disintegration; undoing of bond; coming or being brought to an end, disappearance."<sup>28</sup>) of the subject; the possibility and impossibility that a human subject can be constructed and deconstructed in part by media of communication.

While images and words have an impact on cultural communication, they also have an impact on the subject. Social constructs are tied to subjective constructs and the

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<sup>27</sup> *Bodies That Matter*, ix.

<sup>28</sup> *Concise Oxford Dictionary*.

two cannot be separated. As Julia Kristeva states, "The text is a practice that could be compared to political revolution: the one brings about in the subject what the other introduces into society. The history and political experience of the twentieth century have demonstrated that one cannot be transformed without the other."<sup>29</sup> The transformation and "trials" of the subject (and, therefore, also of society) within this essay depend on the importance of the body and vision, a "materialist aesthetics." The "texts of transformation" are visual images as well as printed texts. Implicit in such a rethinking of subjectivity is a move from language and linguistic analysis to media-oriented analysis.

Mieke Bal's *Reading "Rembrandt"* has as its subtitle, "Beyond the Word-Image Opposition," and sets out to consider images and words in relationship with each other and how this interrelation may provide new ways of "reading": a reading of both verbal texts and visual images. Similarly, I will be arguing for the importance of images in constructions of subjectivity not so as to replace verbal language, but to *supplement* it. In Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, the interaction of speech and writing are considered to be in supplementary relationship; a relationship in which there is no simple replacement of the preceding by the latter--speech by writing--rather the relationship is more complex. *Supplement*, in the French, has two significations. First, it means "addition": "the supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the fullest measure of presence."<sup>30</sup> But second, it means "substitute": "if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence."<sup>31</sup> As writing is a supplement to speech, it is dangerous and necessary, for "that what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence."<sup>32</sup> As the word fades away in the current culture, the image becomes a supplement: "opening meaning."

To establish a *supplementary* relationship between word and image within the

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<sup>29</sup> *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 17.

<sup>30</sup> *Of Grammatology*, 144.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

subject i will be working with the "stages" of Søren Kierkegaard. While there can be found three separate and interrelated stages within Kierkegaard's writing (the aesthetic, ethical and religious), i will be concentrating on the aesthetic stage with a brief move into the ethical by way of conclusion. Kierkegaard's aesthetic and ethical stages--as found most especially in *Either/Or*--provide the narrative thread of this essay. Woven into the narrative of Kierkegaard's stages are the paintings and writings of several diverse theorists and artists as they help to move the Kierkegaardian-conceived stages in new directions.<sup>33</sup> The relationship of the stages to each other may be thought of in terms of Derrida's notion of 'supplementarity,' and in this way i am relating them also to the relationship between word and image: the aesthetic tentatively corresponding to the image, the ethical to the word.

Working from the thesis that various media are responsible for the construction of subjectivity, i am especially interested in the role images--and correlatively, visibility--play in psychoanalytic, philosophic and aesthetic theories. Through the use of several theorists (most especially the psychoanalytic theories of Lacan and Kristeva, poststructural theorists like Jean Baudrillard, Derrida and Jean-François Lyotard, and feminist-poststructural theorists Butler and Hélène Cixous) i will reread Kierkegaard's aesthetic stage and open up possibilities to consider images (specifically for this essay, paintings by Rembrandt, Magritte, Kandinsky and Dalí) as functioning at this stage. I have chosen the traditional category of painting and am considering 'canonical' painters to help prove the point that

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<sup>33</sup> Kierkegaard's view of stages should not be thought of as independent steps which one leaves wholly as one moves to the next step, rather, they should be thought of as 'spheres' or 'existence-spheres,' as he calls them in *Stages on Life's Way*. His translators suggest, "'Sphere' and 'existence-sphere' more readily denote qualitative possibilities involving the discontinuity of a leap, reflection, and an act in freedom. Furthermore, the spheres are not discrete logical categories, and therefore the lower qualitative sphere is not annihilated but is caught up and transformed" (*Stages on Life's Way*, "Historical Introduction," x). Yet, there are important reasons for the maintaining of the term, 'stage,' as will become clear especially in relation to Jacques Lacan's theories of subjectivity.

For Kierkegaard, as with Derridean *supplementarity*, each sphere/stage, is "that what opens meaning and language." The stages are a palimpsest where the writings underneath are erased but not totally, the traces show through. There is no *tabula rasa* on which subjectivity rests, inscriptions are always already placed on the subject/body.

disruptions to logo-centric thinking have always already been part of 'western culture.' Reading recent theorists and paintings alongside Kierkegaard, i am arguing that images may function as an early and "pre-lingual" constructor of subjectivity. This is not only to give a chronological view, but a topographical view as well whereby an image will "bring one back" to pivotal spaces in the construction of subjectivity and suggest themselves as aporias and points of deconstruction.

While many of these ideas stem from the above-mentioned theorists themselves, this essay moves visuality--and by extension the visual arts--into a position on par with the "coming into language" (Oedipal and other) that marks many theories of subjectivity. It is in no way as simple as suggesting that images come before words (as some sort of "Ur-medium"), and the (un)concluding final chapter will be a return of verbal language, through which, of course, this entire essay is communicated. The method is discursive, and i have hoped to present a conversation between various modes of thought and communication. There is no systematic and comprehensive account of any one of the thinkers or paintings involved, nor--considering the a-systematicity of each of the writers invoked--could there be. I have chosen to trace a particular thread through various texts for the purposes of this essay.

At the beginning of each of the two following sections (the main body and conclusion), i will give a different reading of Rembrandt's painting, *The Slaughtered Ox*, in order to preface and foreshadow many of the issues at stake in the aesthetic and ethical stages. This multivalent painting has continued to prove its excessive meaning throughout my essay and the reading and re-reading of it serves to bring out more than one rhetorical point. For one, the two readings make use of a Kierkegaardian method of reading, brought out in the four readings of Abraham and Isaac found at the beginning of *Fear and Trembling*. Each reading of the ride to Mount Moriah and subsequent attempt at the "sacrifice" of the child suggests something vastly different than the previous reading. It is not exegesis but rather, "the beautiful tapestry of imagination."<sup>34</sup> Kierkegaard is reader

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<sup>34</sup> *Fear and Trembling*, 9. Kierkegaard ironically, and indirectly, notes in the "Exordium" that these readings are not those of an exegetical scholar for "if he had known

first, but then again, "all reading is writing."<sup>35</sup>

The notion that "reading is writing" and the use of *re*-reading brings up another tactic, that there may be found in Kierkegaard many already existing parallels to poststructuralism. This case is made most strongly by Mark C. Taylor in works such as *Altarity*, *Disfiguring*, *Nots*, and *Erring*. Indeed, his *Disfiguring* is a central text for the essay under consideration here as i intend to bring out similar links and show how poststructural theory may be enhanced by Kierkegaard and how Kierkegaard may be reread through poststructural eyes. My work overlaps with Taylor's in a few different ways. For one, in *Disfiguring* Taylor loosely uses the three Kierkegaardian stages as ways of rethinking three "epochs" in 20th century art: modernism, "modernist" postmodernism, and postmodernism *sensu strictissimo*.<sup>36</sup> Also, Taylor, like myself, is concerned with the refiguring of the relationship between theology and the visual arts. Along these lines there is a conviction that theory (especially of the poststructural variety) opens a new space for the theological imagination, leading the way to an "a/theoesthetics," as Taylor calls it taking after Georges Bataille's *La Somme athéologique*.

But there are differences in Taylor's and my approach to Kierkegaard, poststructural theory and the visual arts, three of which i mention here. First, my essay is a study of the construction of subjectivity; it brings various disciplines together, but specifically as they bear on the subject. Taylor touches on subjectivity at various points (especially in *Altarity*), but his studies have had other foci. Also, in *Disfiguring* Taylor moves chronologically, from the 18th century to the present, looking at general "movements" in art and criticism, while my essay bounces around to various periods, creating a "chronology" (but also a "topography") of the subject. Finally, Taylor has

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Hebrew, he perhaps would easily have understood the story and Abraham" (9).

<sup>35</sup> Timothy K. Beal, "Ideology and Intertextuality," 27.

<sup>36</sup> See ch.1, "Program." The differences between these three epochs, in Taylor's mind, generally revolve around questions of presence/absence and transcendence/immanence with figures like Kierkegaard, Derrida, the painter Anselm Kiefer, and the architect Peter Eisenman being the subverters of modernist notions of presence.



considered Kierkegaard's stages in light of three art movements (mentioned above), keeping the "epochs" separate from each other. For me, modernism and postmodernism work together and against each other and each will, therefore, make appearances throughout this essay.

While i would be hesitant to label this essay "postmodern"--as if something can simply *be* postmodern--it surely situates itself within such a climate. I agree with Michèle Barrett when she states, "post-modernism is not something that you can be for or against: the reiteration of old knowledges will not make it vanish. For it is a cultural climate as well as an intellectual position, a political reality as well as an academic fashion."<sup>37</sup> That said, i am initially concerned with two elements of the postmodern in which i may situate myself. The first has been mentioned above and is that of an opening to interdisciplinary studies; this essay touches on feminist theory, film studies, psychoanalysis, theology, philosophy, cultural studies, et al. The second element of the postmodern which i include here is an initial definition of the postmodern as given by Lyotard in his essay, "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?":

A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant. . . . The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself.<sup>38</sup>

This cursory definition is given because it points out the necessary relation of the modern and post-modern, reason enough for me not wanting to claim this to be an "either/or" study. It also suggests, as i will point out below, the impossibility of presenting the "unrepresentable"; the unrepresentable here being the aesthetic stage. That is, if the aesthetic is truly pre-linguistic, how can i write about it? And yet, it is "put forward" in the following.

The interaction of diverse structures and disciplines in this essay are brought together in order to highlight connections that have not been previously highlighted and

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<sup>37</sup> *Women's Oppression Today: The Marxist Feminist Encounter*. (London: Verso, 1988) xxxvi. Quoted in Landry and MacLean, *Materialist Feminisms*, 6-7.

<sup>38</sup> "Answering the Question," 79, 81.

to attempt a restructuring of existing categories of academic knowledge as they come to bear on the issue of subjectivity. The writing i am engaging in here recalls the notion of the tactic and further tries to follow the lead of Michel de Certeau:

de Certeau's approach seeks neither to affirm some evanescent unity nor to play the role of the protector of the integrity of the present configuration of knowledge. . . . [H]e seeks to exacerbate the fragmentation by deliberately uncovering the ways in which the various disciplinary enterprises rely upon models and paradigms borrowed from each other, and never less so than when they proclaim their independence, so that the mutual relation of the disciplines is never one of autonomy or of heteronomy, but some sort of complicated set of textual relations that needs to be unraveled in each instance.<sup>39</sup>

Again, an interdisciplinary approach teases out implications of particular ways of thinking which could not be seen without this particular juxtaposition. More than comparing thinkers, i am also attempting to compare the media of their thought, the reliance of words on images and vice versa. And again, it is within subjectivity that i propose to "contain" these relationships; though the container, this academic exercise, is leaky and, as with Francis Bacon's 1972 *Triptych*, things keep spilling out of the body.

Another tactic i should point out here entails the reading of Kierkegaard alongside psychoanalytic theory. While much of psychoanalysis cannot help but establish a *chronology* of subjectivity, and therefore continually runs the risk of 'prescription' for human development, Kierkegaard's stages function as more of a *topography* of subjectivity, establishing 'modes of existence,' and therefore are not limited to development. As i have suggested above, the stages are in a supplementary relationship and, following Maurice Blanchot's reading of Kierkegaard, Kevin Newmark suggests that "we begin to suspect that the ordinary conception of the three stages as an existential *movement* or history . . . is already a kind of rhetorical device or figure in the narrative form of an allegory."<sup>40</sup> Narrativized renderings of the stages stem from existential readings of Kierkegaard in the pursuit of a final "authentic self." But, Newmark

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<sup>39</sup> "Foreword: The Further Possibility of Knowledge," in de Certeau, *Heterologies*, x.

<sup>40</sup> "Taking Kierkegaard Apart," 9.

continues, within

a nonnarrative structure, the *form* of communication (which is partly, though not entirely, a question of *aesthetics* since it is concerned with the outward form or sensuous appearance of the communication) and the *meaning* of the communication (which would at some point become *religious* truth as inwardness) are maintained indissolubly in a relationship of nonadequation as the result of a *philosophical* theory of indirect communication or, better, as the result of a purely *linguistic* predicament (that the communication of truth is by necessity indirect).<sup>41</sup>

Newmark describes, in this dense sentence, the interrelations of the aesthetic, ethical and religious stages, with the ethical (the *linguistic*) being a necessary middle (media) element; language stands at the crux of the aesthetic and religious. Weaving concepts of Kierkegaard's stages throughout this essay brings together issues already mentioned regarding the two-fold nature of the *logos* (here mentioned as *form* and *meaning*), the failings of communication and a topographical construction of subjectivity.

What must here be emphasized is the non-necessity of reading the stages as a forward progressing movement. If the stages are read synchronically rather than as a linearly developing narrative of the self, there is an opening to a "modes of existence" view in considerations of subjectivity. A modes of existence view is linked to media of communication and sees many possibilities for a subject to exist and communicate. The modes, as *supplements*, "add to" and "replace" other modes.

An adult reading (or writing) this essay, or Kierkegaard's aesthetic stage, cannot understand their own subjectivity as being beyond the scope of aesthetics, for there are writings and images--and this is a key point i hope to show--which bring the viewer/reader "back" to such an 'infantile' state (*in-fans*: "without speech," i.e., "speechless"). That is, in a strictly chronological view of the stages, one could read and view the stage as that from which she or he came and be interested in the aesthetic as purely an interesting part of history. In a modes of existence, or topographical, view one is confronted with the continual disruption between modes and media. At the same time, chronology and topography will continue to play against each other and my writing will

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 9.

at times slip into one or the other mode.

### theo-logos

This essay is a rethinking of subjectivity and, correlatively in a theological setting, faith. The idea of faith as some arbitrary set of beliefs constructed in such and such a way may be another study, but here i want to rethink the typical concept of faith itself. Faith, as generally conceived in theology, is intimately tied to reason, the emotions, and/or the will; all three of which depend on a singular agent to possess faith. Faith becomes an object, attainable, possessable. The faith i hope to point toward is Kierkegaard's faith of trials and ordeals reread most especially through Kristeva's *subject in process/on trial* (*subjet en procès*), Lacan's *desire*, and the imaginative aspects of the visual arts. Faith, i hope to show, is related to the psychoanalytic notion of desire, it is a catalyst for the separations occurring along the creation of the subject; and it is related, again i hope to show, to the poststructural view of 'writing' (*écriture*). Faith is full of risks, not the least of which is the risking of the death of God and the death of the Self; in other words, the end of a guarantee of redemption.

What much of current theology has yet to come to terms with is the dissolution of the stable, "certain" and unitary subject conceived in the modern industrial western society. Theology has killed its God, its church, its "religiosity," but it has not allowed for the death of the subject. This is in some respects a very curious notion. It would seem [Is there any way to give quantifiable reference for this?] that among the more radical approaches to theology--i would consider here those influenced by hermeneutics (stemming from Ricoeur) and the turn toward literary analysis and textuality--there is always a reading-subject claiming the undecidability of a text, the "conflict of interpretations," or the death of God.<sup>42</sup> It may be said that the *logos* has come to rest in

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<sup>42</sup> Theologians and biblical critics influenced by poststructuralism (E.g., Mark C. Taylor and Stephen D. Moore) must be considered "more radical" than hermeneuticists like David Tracy, but on the whole it would seem that poststructural thinking has yet to have a major impact on academic theology. For every one Moore there are twenty-five

the subject-reader, a transcendental ego (Husserl's and other's) providing the final promised land of certainty and stable ground. This essay then, approaches a deconstruction of the subject-who-has-faith.

The deconstruction of the subject (which, as Derrida has continually reiterated, is not a "destruction" or end of the subject) is a shaking of certainty, and then a wilderness. Who is in the wilderness? A *subject in process*; a subject (dis)illusioned through image and word, through an aesthetic which strikes the *subject in process* causing reordering of boundaries: inside/outside, subject/object, etc. This occurs through discourse in which there are no dogmas, no promised lands, paradises or utopias. Again, the theme of wandering is touched on, and in this place, it is wandering as "dis-course." The etymological roots of discourse have to do with "running to and fro," a "meandering" which may not have a final resting place, but ends up in an "adventure of uncertain outcome." Wlad Godzich ably describes this wilderness setting in a discussion of the thought of Emmanuel Lévinas:

Lévinas argues that there is a form of truth that is totally alien to me, that I do not discover within myself, but that calls from beyond me, and it requires me to leave the realms of the known and of the same in order to settle in a land that is under its rule. Here the knower sets out on an adventure of uncertain outcome, and the instruments that he or she brings may well be inappropriate to the tasks that will arise.<sup>43</sup>

This is a journey of faith. Inappropriate to a contemporary analysis of the subject are linguistically-oriented "instruments." The writing i am undertaking here is to consider the

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historical critics and a dozen hermeneuticists. Even so, there is still little critique of the subject with any of these more radical thinkers.

Within theology, Tracy is much more "popular" than the poststructural-influenced religious thinkers but is, at the same time, treated with skepticism when he focuses on plurality and openness. In spite of his openness, in the end Tracy gives a guarantee of a self who can read words. So when he states, "Some have recognized that, on the other side of our enjoyment of the enrichment of each by the pluralism present to all, lies the *fascinans et tremendum* reality of each one's seeming inability to become a single self any longer," the very next paragraph brings it all together, "As a single one, each theologian finally must decide on her or his own" (*The Analogical Imagination*, 30).

<sup>43</sup> "Foreword," xvi.

construction of the subject through a non-logocentric aesthetics which resides on the thresholds of language.

The concept of the subject needs to be briefly unpacked here before going any further. The "modern (enlightenment) subject" i am writing of has its roots in Descartes *cogito*. As Godzich puts it,

The great revolution of modern science is not to value lived experience over the authority of acquired experience, but to have referred knowledge and experience to a single subject, which is nothing more than the point in which they coincide in an abstract Archemidean point: the Cartesian ego cogito, consciousness. . . . This single subject is universal and impassive, just like its predecessor, the nous,<sup>[44]</sup> but it is not divine; it is an ego that unites within itself all the properties of the separate intellect and of the subject of experience.<sup>45</sup>

It was for Descartes' skeptical questioning finally a search for certainty, an "Archemidean point" providing an origin and fundamental ground for all knowledge. And here is seen most clearly how the *logos* may be said to rest in the stable certain subject in ways that a consideration of historical theology may help illuminate (see footnote 17 above). *Logos* assures that the splits in the creation of the subject will be filled; presence/salvation/knowledge is about filling/bridging the gaps.

The fundamental enlightenment subjectivity particularly continues in the thought of Kant and Husserl, but it is Freud's *ego* which will constitute the construction of the subject as i am working with it here. Lacan links Descartes and Freud precisely in this search for certainty: "Freud's method is Cartesian--in the sense that he sets out from the basis of the subject of certainty."<sup>46</sup> The "subject of certainty" relies on language (*logos*) to give knowledge, leading to wholeness and slavation. While Freud posits that the ego

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<sup>44</sup> "For Aristotle and his medieval successors, knowledge does not have a subject as such, certainly not in the sense of the modern ego; the nous as intellectus agens, as agential intellect, actualizes knowledge in the person who submits to it, that is in the person who makes of his or her self the subjectum, the subject of this nous, which is unique, separate, and divine" (Godzich, "From the Inquisition to Descartes: The Origins of the Modern Subject," 10).

<sup>45</sup> "From the Inquisition to Descartes," 16.

<sup>46</sup> "Of the Subject of Certainty," 35.

is not a 'point,' as with most foundational thought, but is fundamentally divided, language used in analysis provides the teleological opportunity for the subject to be whole again. This essay moves beyond Freudian ego-theory to consider also the aesthetic, and specifically images, in the construction of subjectivity, hinting at the difficulty of "certainty" when language is destabilized.

A "deconstruction of the subject" is not motivated by looking around for something new to deconstruct, rather, it is motivated by ideas such as Barbara Johnson's in her introduction to the 1992 Oxford Amnesty lectures:

If the 'deconstruction of humanity' is an *interpretation* of what humanist writings already make available to be read, if the 'contemporary' critique of the subject is a rereading of the texts in which that subject has been formulated, it is not that there was once something that is now being taken away, but that a new way of encountering the challenges that those texts were written to meet (or to avoid) should be undertaken. Could it not be that governments imprison dissidents for the same reasons that the rational, controlling ego attempts to banish unwanted impulses from itself? That is, could it not be that the rigidity involved in the casting out or denial of anxiety-inducing otherness both from the polis and from the self would arise out of a similar attempt to become selfsame, unified, without internal difference? In that case, a study of the ways in which the ego attempts to achieve mastery by projection and repression might be of the greatest interest for defenders of prisoners of conscience.<sup>47</sup>

The concerns given here--as with those pointed out above concerning 'theory'--would also function as a border-crossing in the typically conceived theory/practice opposition. As this prescript's epigraphs of Foucault and de Certeau make clear, subjectivity and thinking are not separable, and socio-political concerns cannot remain bound to outdated modes of thinking no matter how liberating they may seem.

from language to writing

And here i am faced with an impossible project which cannot be answered but only approached. The task is to write an academic essay which ends up outside of

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<sup>47</sup> "Introduction," *Freedom and Interpretation*, 8-9.

academic writing. Academic writing is logocentric. It relies on verbal language and is based on the clear presentation of ideas from author to audience. Within Kierkegaard's stages, academic writing and logocentricity would exist in the ethical stage, with the aesthetic and religious falling on the edges of this stage. I am writing not only on the ethical stage, but on the aesthetic as well. Kierkegaard confronted the same difficulty and developed a rigorous system of pseudonymous authorship, creating multiple layers of editors, letters, "found" diaries, and poets. In this way, Kierkegaard's literary talents become as groundbreaking as the ideas he communicated indirectly through these other voices.

For me to write about the edges of the *logos* and about images means i must paradoxically begin (and somehow end) with logocentric language. I must write verbally and in a way oriented toward the direct communication of ideas. This is an academic enterprise. So, how do i get around these rhetorical problems? My attempt is to write in a manner that is 'doubly-reflective,' what Kierkegaard, as will be shown, calls a 'repetition.' My writing will necessitate the need to move in and out of the academic discourse i am engaged in, to reassess where i-as-writing-subject am in regards to the discussion of subjectivity.<sup>48</sup> In the (un)concluding final chapter i must assess where i-as-writing-subject have reached a stage of dissolution. I will point to the places where language must end, but to be true to the aesthetic stage means i cannot finally explain it. Paradoxically, the most communicative way of relating these ideas is to move away from them, to write, as will be seen with Kierkegaard's pseudonyms, indirectly and ironically.

This essay is not precisely a-historical but at times it may be de-historical in an attempt to "defamiliarize" that which has become too familiar, to e-strange the family as

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<sup>48</sup> At this point i should perhaps supply some thoughts on the use of the lower-case 'i.' This usage is motivated by fact that no other pronouns in english are capitalized, and, further, that the personal pronoun in other languages (*moi, ich*) is also left in lower-case. One must wonder about the importance given to the english 'I' by putting it in upper-case. By keeping it in lower-case, i am ironically drawing more attention to it then there would be in normal usage (i.e., in upper-case) while at the same time de-emphasizing it. It is a simple gesture, and perhaps not terribly meaningful, but it does coincide with the subject of this essay.



typically conceived (the "family of knowledge"). The historical context i-as-writing-subject am writing from is the current context of theology, the visual arts, and theory as they appear in certain circles in North America and Western Europe. While certainly i can state my socialized race, gender and social status it inevitably becomes clear that i cannot provide a total context out of which I am writing. Contextualizing one's self is undoubtedly important, but the compulsion to state one's social status seems to edge towards a politics of identity, and something i am hoping to argue against in the end. This in no way negates self-reflexive writing, rather it radicalizes such writing by showing contexts to be continually moving; nomadic.

At the same time, i am writing in a context of which i have been greatly influenced by the concerns of marginalization. The critiques out of the two-thirds world and the voices of the multiplicity of persons who have not been heard due to political, religious and other oppressions influences this present work. They have become part of who i-as-writing-subject am. I hope that many voices will come through in these writings, and there can be heard an unheard conversation between the cries of the unheard and the silence and disappearance that marks the thresholds of language: the site of the aesthetic. My hope is to open up holes at the margins of discourse whereby mediated communications from other places can be heard and seen, but also to realize where the other cannot be heard, for too quick an assimilation of the other negates its otherness.

This essay, then, is about language and media of communication, about the limits of language and media of communication, and about the connection of language and media of communication with living, breathing, speaking, material bodies; with the *subject in process*. The approach here to subjectivity is not unrelated to Derrida's approach to *grammatology* and i end this beginning of a writing with a quote from his writing:

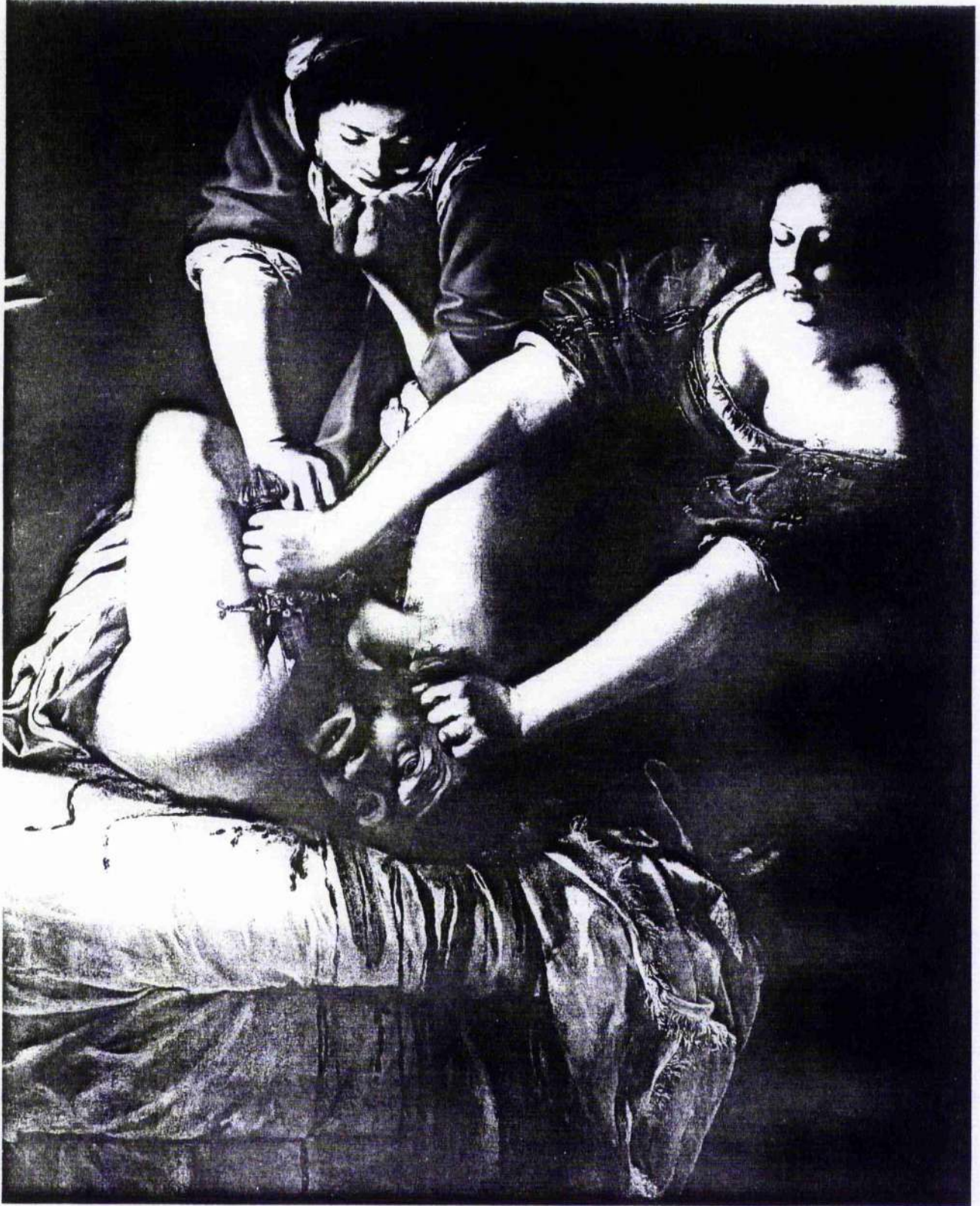
*Of Grammatology* is the title of a question: a question about the necessity of a science of writing, about the conditions that would make it possible, about the critical work that would have to open its field and resolve the epistemological obstacles; but it is also a question about the limits of this science. And these limits . . . are fundamentally and systematically tied to metaphysics.<sup>49</sup>

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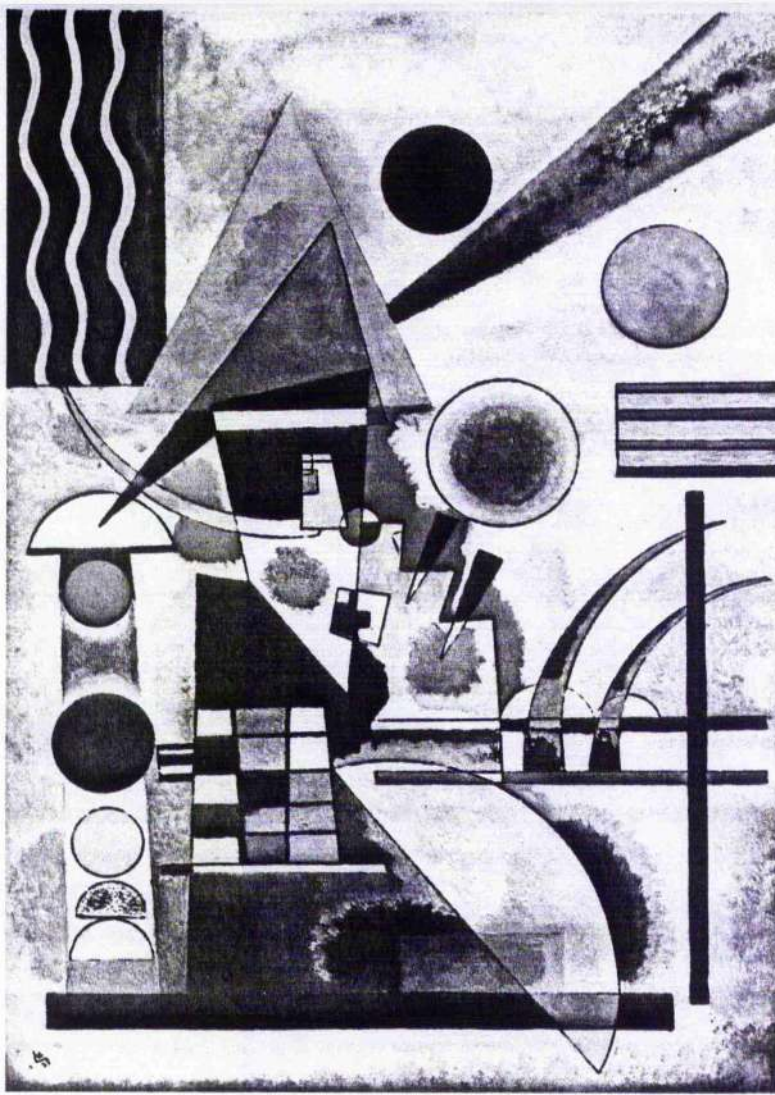
<sup>49</sup> *Positions*, 13.



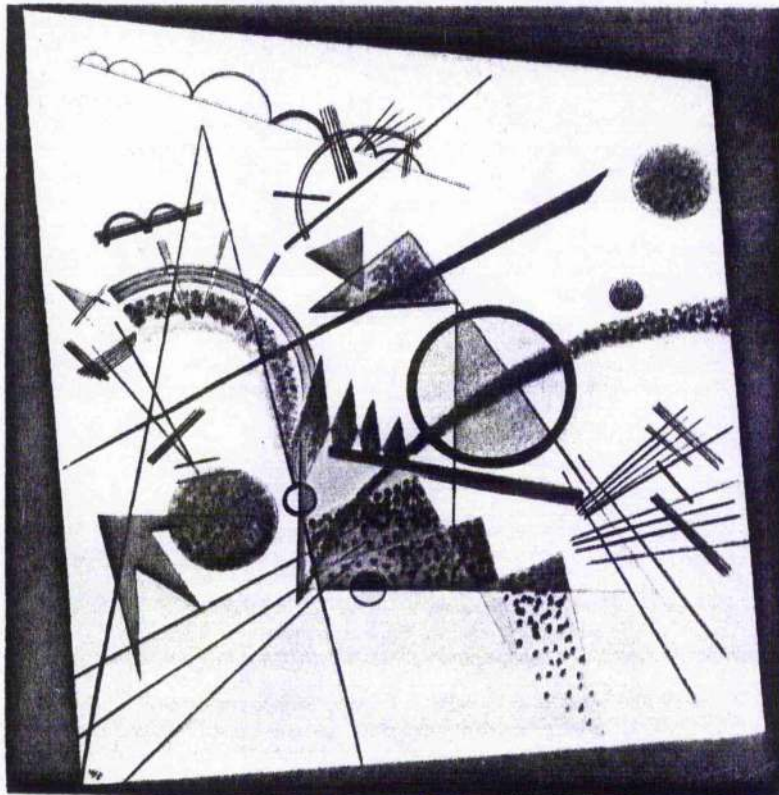
Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Slaughtered Ox* (1643?) Panel 73.3x51.8 cm. Kelvingrove Art Gallery, Glasgow



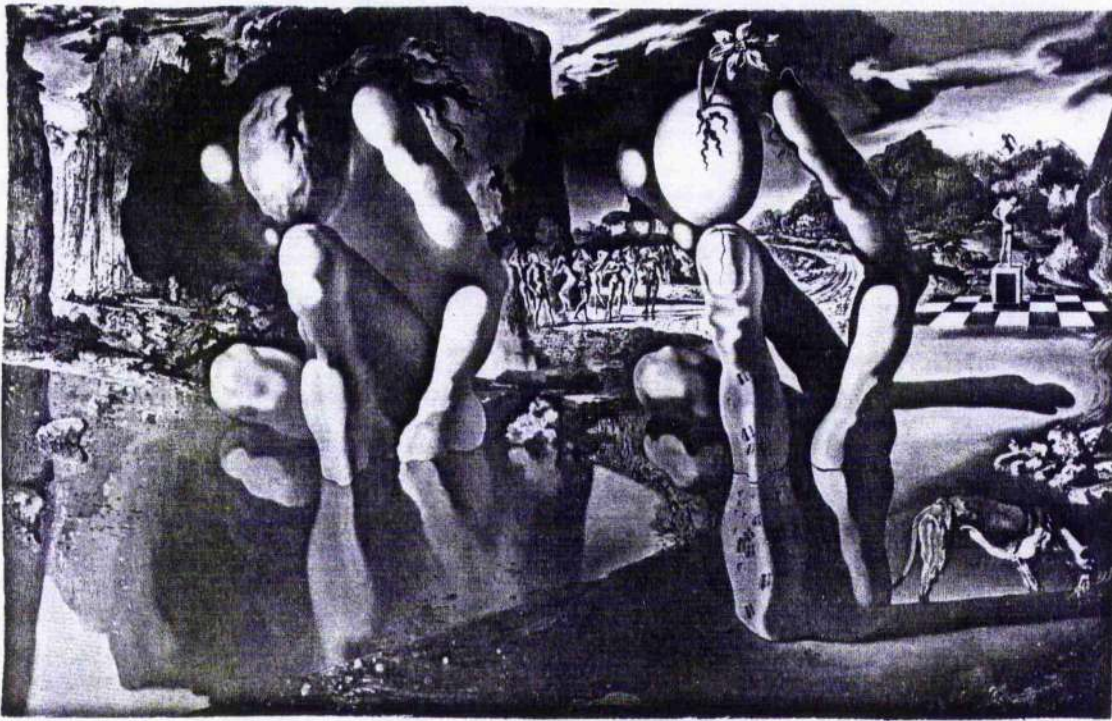
5. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, 1612–13. Naples, Museo di Capodimonte



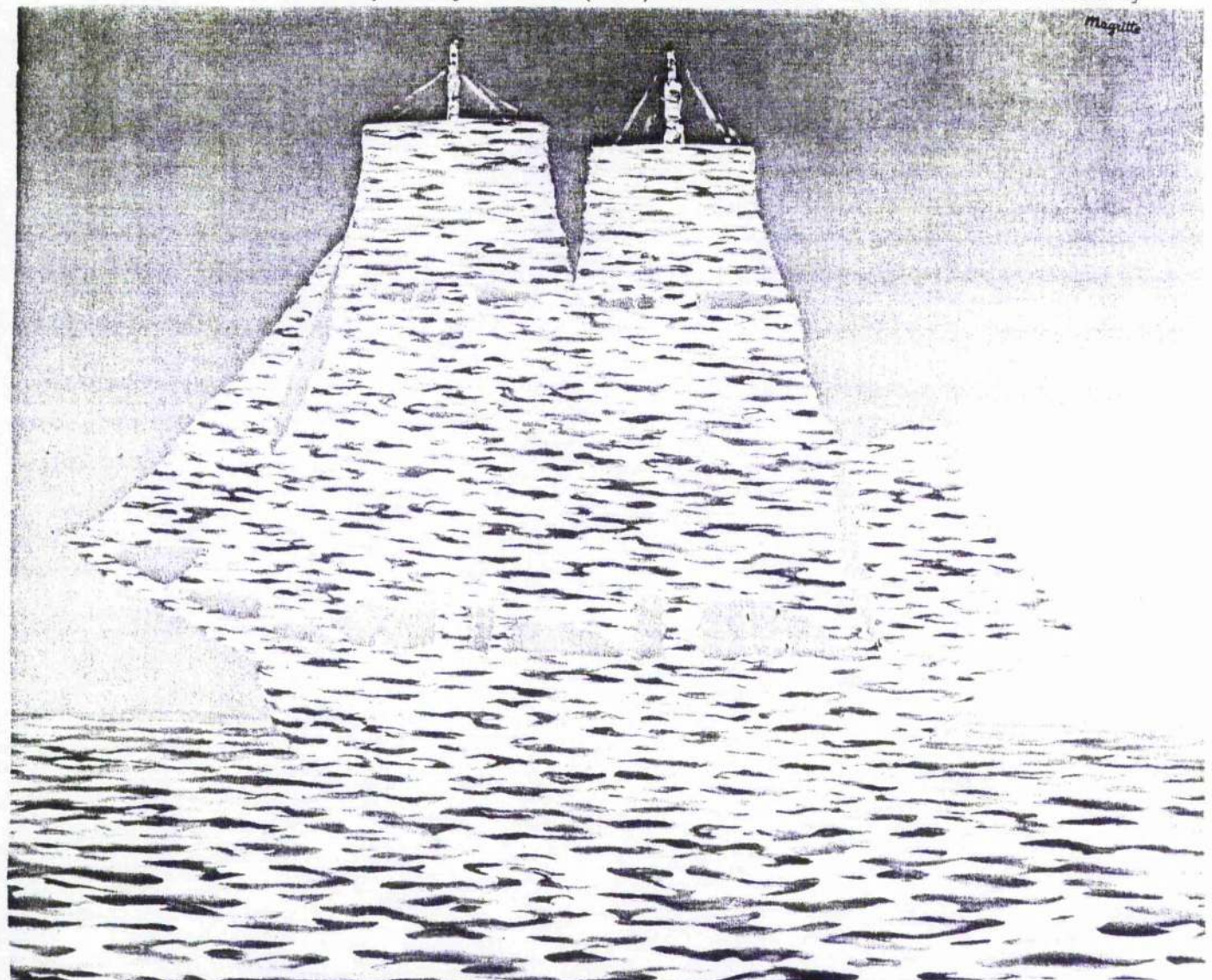
Wassily Kandinsky, *Swinging* (1925) Oil on canvas 70.5x50.2 cm. The Tate Gallery



Wassily Kandinsky, *In the Black Square* (1923) Oil on canvas 97.5x93 cm. Guggenheim Museum



Salvador Dalí, *The Metamorphosis of Narcissus* (1937) Oil on canvas 51.1x78.1 cm. The Tate Gallery



Rene Magritte, *Le séducteur*, (1951) Oil on canvas 50x60 cm.

# The Aesthetic

## *Induction*

Draw: "1 pull or cause to move towards or after one. 4 take (a person) aside. 5 attract; bring; take in (*drew a deep breath; felt drawn to her; drew my attention*). 9a (also absol.) make (a line or mark). b produce (a picture) thus. c represent (something) thus. 18 (of tea) infuse. 21 write out or compose (a cheque, document, etc.). 22 formulate or perceive (a comparison or distinction). 23 disembowel."<sup>1</sup>

The drawing of Rembrandt's *The Slaughtered Ox*. Big and startling in the gallery, contrasting sharply with the Mackintosh style.<sup>2</sup> The fascination of the sight of the drawn ox draws one towards. Drawn to that which is drawn, i feel drawn. Who drew the ox that now draws the viewer? Did the painter draw the ox? Or was it the butcher? Or, am i drawing the ox?

There are four draws of the ox: 1) the butcher draws the ox, leaving a disemboweled beast; 2) Rembrandt draws the ox, re-producing the animal that can no longer reproduce; 3) the viewer of the painting is drawn to the ox, fascinated; 4) i am drawing the ox here, now, as i write out and formulate commentary on the painting of the butchered animal.

Working from these above four theses, i consider that the form--and the move into formlessness--of the painting draws the viewer first. The slaughtered ox hangs on a crossbar with the arms tied up and spread, the crossbar perpendicular to the background wall. Recently slaughtered, the hide and head of the animal lie in the bottom right corner, the woman with bucket and rag cleans up. Bloody hues pervade and light illuminates the opening of the flayed animal. The body cavity is enormous and the viewer is brought to face a vast open space; a void which was once filled with life is now the emptiness of death. The presence of the trace of the internal organs forces the viewer to acknowledge that this is/was an animal.

But once the immediate form is noticed, the viewer realizes the blindness to a crucial element: the ox is upside-down. When, on first sight, the crossbar is considered, one is tempted to see arms with legs going out below--as in a crucifixion. Also, the tail-bone is in(ad)vertedly seen as a

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<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Dictionary of Current Usage.*

<sup>2</sup> Dated 1643 and in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery, Glasgow.

head and continues the appearance of rightside-up. But upon seeing the "lower part" (lower in the painting) of the ox, it is revealed that the head is the lower part and those arms on the crossbar are the hind legs. The "head" (or what would be the head if it still existed) is turned away from the viewer making clear that what is illuminated at the top of the painting are the "lower" parts of the animal, the locus of intestines and genitalia (or lack thereof, considering it is an "ox"). The inversion disrupts the first reading of the painting and multiplies the fascination.

Further, this lower part of the ox (the upper part of the painting) becomes a significant point of ambiguity. The marks of inside and outside are clear at the point of the chest of the ox, but moving downward (upward) the lines disappear. Reaching the place of sexuality and digested food (shit, and the stench of death) the inside can no longer be differentiated from the outside. This is also the most illuminated place, light pouring in from somewhere right of the scene of the painting. The unclear marks of inside and outside, the opened and illuminated hind quarters, and the spread legs, come together at the point where in a crucifixion scene the "head" would be. Not only is the head missing where the viewer looks for it (at the "top" of the painting), but the head is not where it should be either at the "bottom." Here, the viewer is left to wonder, to stare, to gaze at the undifferentiated mass of flesh.

The drawing of the ox is finally a headless drawing--like Acephale, Holofernes, Goliath--a castrated death. According to Freud, "To decapitate=to castrate,"<sup>3</sup> but this animal has suffered both. Headless and de-gendered, the body remains.

The sexuality theme is doubled as one considers the decapitated ox and its relation to the woman. The head of the ox is gone, but the woman stands in its place. Had there been a head, the woman would have been mostly covered up by it; in its absence the woman--bent and working--comes into view. In this undifferentiated realm, gendered readings become mixed up, distinctions difficult to draw. It could be read--though i am not drawing this reading here--that the woman is a medusa figure, she has

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<sup>3</sup> "Medusa's Head," 212.

taken the place of the head. As Freud says, "The hair upon Medusa's head is frequently represented in works of art in the form of snakes, and these once again are derived from the castration complex. It is a remarkable fact that, however frightening they may be in themselves, they nevertheless serve actually as a mitigation of the horror, for they replace the penis."<sup>4</sup> But contrarily, the viewer may be drawn in to the interstices of the painting (between ox and woman) and function as Hélène Cixous claims, upsetting the Freudian view: "They riveted us between two horrifying myths: between the Medusa and the Abyss. That would be enough to set half the world laughing, except that it's still going on. For the phallogocentric sublation is with us, and it's militant, regenerating the old patterns, anchored in the dogma of castration. . . . You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing."<sup>5</sup> From an entirely different "masculine" point of view on castration/beheading: "I could not help envying the heathen Holofernes who came to such a bloody end, beheaded by a regal lady."<sup>6</sup>

Is the castration/beheading of the ox a display of engendered power as in Artemisia Gentileschi's *Judith and Holofernes*? Only now the scene is after the fact? Or is it a weakness of the ox, castrated, beheaded, stripped naked and put on display? The "engendered woman" reading is problematized by the fact that the woman herself is drawn into an ambiguous place. Is she looking inward (contemplating) while she works outwardly (cleaning)? She stoops in a doorway, an opening, the intersection of inside and outside. The ambiguity of the doorway and the insideness and outsideness of the woman is exacerbated by the realization that it is not entirely clear what is inside and what is outside in the space of the painting. Does the ox hang "outside"? But one catches a glimpse of a roof above the hanging beast. Is the woman's bottom "outside" and she is facing "inside"? The darkness behind her in the doorway suggests there is still more inside.

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<sup>4</sup> "Medusa's Head," 212.

<sup>5</sup> "The Laugh of the Medusa," 885.

<sup>6</sup> Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Venus in Furs*.



Perhaps it is all inside and there is no outside. The viewer may be trapped, claustrophobically so, in the internal regions with a decaying, once living beast. The viewer too is inside the cavernous body: "Instead of being inside a butcher shop, we are within a body."<sup>7</sup> The dark body--which in the painting is the only light part--is the inside from which we cannot escape (besides the doorway is blocked). Is this the heart of darkness? But the heart of the beast is absent.

Drawn "in" (perhaps involitionally, perhaps not, and this is the point, the viewer does not know if they really are against their will) the viewer faces the unknowing mass of undifferentiation. This is the confrontation: "What we have to deal with--what the work does not spare us from--is the effect of the putrifying smell of paint. The medium of overcoming death . . . becomes here the medium of overcoming the nonrepresentability of death."<sup>8</sup> There are ways of seeing whereby we become blind, for good sometimes, not always so. Can we make distinctions as to how to see clearly and thoughtfully and avoid the times we cannot?  
 . . .

#### *Kierkegaard's Aesthetic*

In the beginning was/is *tohu bohu*.<sup>9</sup>

A person, a world, does not begin with nothing, but with everything. It is not every *thing*, but a flux of undifferentiation. It is a void that is not hollow but chaos, not an empty "hole" or "shell," but a labyrinth that cannot be defined or brought into coherence. This is the beginning which is not really an origin, but a place to begin. We start with something.

Søren Kierkegaard began his pseudonymous authorship by writing of a stage along life's way he termed the "aesthetic stage." As mentioned in the Prescript, the stages do not necessarily progress with one replacing

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<sup>7</sup> Bal, *Reading "Rembrandt,"* 387.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 386.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. the first verses of the Hebrew Bible: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was a vast waste (*tohu*), darkness covered the deep (*bohu*) . . ." (Genesis 1.1-2, *Revised English Bible*).

the previous, rather it may be more fitting to think of them as overlapping spheres in *supplementary* relationship, the previous always just below the current stage, adding to and replacing. This "beginning" stage begins not at biological birth so much as the birth of the subject. Here at the beginning of the aesthetic, the individual is not really a subject yet and cannot be a subject until it moves into the later spaces of the aesthetic (the 'reflective aesthetic') and the spheres of the ethical and the religious. The beginning of the aesthetic is the place of pre-self.

'Aesthetic' as it is used in Kierkegaard's writings and as i will be using it here, is related to, but not equivalent to, the aesthetic tradition in philosophy. This tradition--which began with A.G. Baumgarten's first use of the term 'aesthetic' in his 1735 thesis, *Reflections on Poetry*,<sup>10</sup> and extended through the Romantics and Kant to Hegel--seeks to make aesthetics a separate discipline of philosophical study. While Kierkegaard understands this tradition, his radical use of aesthetics comes, not in a new advance for the science, but in the "existentializing" of aesthetics. As Eric Ziolkowski argues, "Kierkegaard's innovative transformation of aesthetics as science into the aesthetic as existential stage furnishes a supreme example of one of the hallmarks of his philosophical thinking: his tendency to move from the speculative to the existential and concrete."<sup>11</sup> The aesthetic is a way of life, a mode of existence. As Kierkegaard himself says: "personal life does not find its fulfillment in thought alone but in a totality of kinds of existence and modes of expression."<sup>12</sup> This philosophy is an embodied philosophy, one lived out, pursued and described in the twentieth-century by Michel Foucault:

I believe that . . . someone who is a writer is not simply doing his work in his books, but that his major work is, in the end, himself in the process of writing his books. The private life of an

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<sup>10</sup> Certainly, aesthetics in some senses extends throughout western thought, but Baumgarten is often considered the originator because of his push to make the philosophical study of the arts a discipline separate from other sciences such as religion and philosophy.

<sup>11</sup> "Kierkegaard's Concept of the Aesthetic," 43.

<sup>12</sup> *Journals and Papers*, 2:215, #1593 (III C 33). Quoted in Ziolkowski, "Kierkegaard's Concept of the Aesthetic," 39.

individual, his sexual preference, and his works are interrelated, not because his work translates his sexual life, but because the work includes the whole life as well as the text.<sup>13</sup>

Foucault and Kierkegaard would agree that life cannot be lived in "thought alone," that there are a plethora of possibilities in which one can express life and pursue differing "modes of existence."

Within Kierkegaard's aesthetic life there are two dimensions and a movement from one to the other: immediacy to reflection. Even though there are two sides, each belongs within the sphere of the aesthetic for one key reason: the absence of decision, the inability to function in a symbolic/ethical existence as a speaking subject through the use of language. Roughly speaking, the "immediate aesthetic" is a portrayal of the Romantic tradition in aesthetics, while the "reflective aesthetic" is a portrayal of Hegelianism. Kierkegaard rhetorically creates an argument against both modes of thinking in his "existentialized" description of the aesthetic life. He embodies the philosopher's thoughts to show their limits in concrete, lived life. While borrowing many ideas from previous philosophers, the concern is for the use of these ideas in historical time and place. Now, without delay, I turn to the immediate.

So, into the *tohu bohu* we dive to find the character of the immediate aesthete, living a life of indeterminacy. This character is played out most fully in part one of "Kierkegaard's" *Either/Or*, where the editor, Victor Eremita,<sup>14</sup> has collected a series of essays and letters from a "young man" (the immediate aesthete). The reader is invited to share in the reading of these "found" notes and letters, a scattered assortment of thoughts and ideas on life, love, music, the erotic, and one's relation to the

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<sup>13</sup> "An Interview with Michel Foucault," *Death and the Labyrinth*. Trans. Charles Ruas. (New York, 1986) 184. Quoted in Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, 19.

<sup>14</sup> One of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms. Kierkegaard published many books under pseudonyms such as Hilarius Bookbinder, Johannes de Silentio, Constantine Constantius, Johannes Climacus and Anti-Climacus. The strong rhetorical element to his pseudonymous authorship will be played out throughout this essay. For now it will be noted that I will refer to the authors of particular quotes by their pseudonym rather than attribute it to Kierkegaard.

world.

At the beginning of the sphere of the aesthetic lives the immediate person (as portrayed by the "young man"), the person who lives the etymological definition of *aisthetikos*: "pertaining to sense perception." The senses are functions of the body and therefore im-mediate, and, therefore also, what is most abstract. Abstraction and immediacy at first might be seen as radically differing concepts, but are part of the same in the sense that they are each removed from history and language (mediating and symbolic factors). As the young man states, "[t]he most abstract idea conceivable is the sensuous in its elemental originality."<sup>15</sup> The aesthete lives abstractly with no divisions, a life in and for the senses. To live concretely would be to live with language and history which would necessarily create divisions. Without language and history the aesthete floats through life without roots and without direction.

The abstract life of the aesthetic is described in fragments (for no one within this stage could present a coherent view of their self, and no one outside would understand) scattered throughout Kierkegaard's works (especially in *Either/Or I* and *Stages on Life's Way*, both published pseudonymously), but it is the section, "The Immediate Erotic Stages or The Musical Erotic" in *Either/Or I*, which provides a good overview of the immediate aesthetic. In the title of this section are given several important terms for a description of the life of the aesthete: immediate, erotic and musical. These terms are intertwined and have one common thread, that of a 'sensuous' life in all the connotations of the word.

Music, according to Kierkegaard's young man, is the very consummation of the immediate life. It is the medium which is im-mediate, without medium. In music, communication is stripped bare and presence exudes throughout life: "sensuousness in its elemental originality is the absolute theme of music."<sup>16</sup> Without mediation and without history, music is non-language; "[t]he immediate is the indeterminate, and therefore

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<sup>15</sup> *Either/Or I*, 56.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

language cannot grasp it."<sup>17</sup> Without distinction there is no language. Without language there is no subject and no action. As Mark C. Taylor remarks, "When sunk in sensual immediacy, selfhood is dissipated in the transient moods and multiple pleasures of the effervescent moment."<sup>18</sup>

*Taking a pulse*

Before going in to further description of the immediate aesthetic life, I want to foreground Julia Kristeva's category of the *semiotic* in order to draw parallels between the aesthetic and the semiotic. These realms exist at the beginnings of Kierkegaard's and Kristeva's views of the subject and are marked by immediacy, undifferentiation and bodily drives. Kristeva's work will continue to be key in a rereading of Kierkegaard. As her semiotic is tied here to the aesthetic, her "symbolic" realm may also be related to Kierkegaard's ethical stage, and her notions of poetic language and abjection will be read along with further readings of the aesthetic stage.

There is a beginning before the word, before language, this is the semiotic:

In that anteriority to language, the outside is elaborated by means of a projection from within, of which the only experience we have is one of pleasure and pain. An outside in the image of the inside, made of pleasure and pain. The non-distinctiveness of inside and outside would thus be unnameable, a border passable in both directions by pleasure and pain. Naming the latter, hence differentiating them, amounts to introducing language, which, just as it distinguishes pleasure from pain as it does all other oppositions, founds the separation inside/outside.<sup>19</sup>

The semiotic is pre-lingual, and separations of inside/outside,

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 70. Here, of course, the analogy to music breaks down, for music cannot be produced without distinction; tone, timbre and tempo all rely on difference. Even so, the Romantic (and naïve) urge to posit the "basic" elements of music continue (e.g., in George Steiner's *Real Presences*).

<sup>18</sup> *Journeys to Selfhood*, 235.

<sup>19</sup> *Powers of Horror*, 61.

subject/object have yet to be made.

The drives of the semiotic, according to Kristeva, are linked to the psychoanalytic notions of primary processes: Freud's displacement and condensation, the anal and oral drives, those elements--pre-verbal and, hence, pre-subject--where the in-fant ("without speech") is enmeshed with the mother and, more specifically, the mother's body. Let me begin with a dense quote from Kristeva, and then try to unpack it.

We understand the term "semiotic" in its Greek sense: *σημείον*= distinctive mark, trace, index, precursory sign, proof, engraved or written sign, imprint, trace, figuration. . . . Discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such and, in the course of his development, they are arranged according to the various constraints imposed on this body--always already involved in a semiotic process--by family and social structures. In this way the drives, which are "energy" charges as well as "psychical" marks, articulate what we call a *chora*: a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated.<sup>20</sup>

The *chora* (a term borrowed from Plato's *Timaeus*) is somewhat of a "receptacle" for the drives of the infant. At the same time, the receptacle is without form, amorphous, it is infinitely divisible and separable, and "can never be definitively posited."<sup>21</sup> The *chora* is nourishing and maternal, a wet nurse, according to Plato.<sup>22</sup> Such a description may provide a metaphor of fluidity which would not be altogether inappropriate here, for this "receptacle" is semi-permeable and the drives and pulsions

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<sup>20</sup> *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 25. The etymological definition of "semiotic" is similar to Derrida's function of writing [*écriture*] in *Of Grammatology* and, indeed, Kristeva points this out later (*Revolution* 40-41). She keeps the word "semiotic" because it is linked to "symbolic" and "signifiante" which come together to create the signifying process. The signifying process is too complex for her to simply condense it into one term (i.e., *écriture*). It could be understood, through Kristeva, that Derrida's *grammatology* is concerned wholly (as with the psychoanalysts) with the "semiotic" side of language. On the other hand, linguistics has been concerned almost wholly with the "symbolic" side of signification. These are the two main types of analysis Kristeva attempts to bring together in her *Revolution in Poetic Language*.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 26, 240 n.14.

constantly flow in and out of the body of the infant. Entirely dependent as it is on the mother at this point, the infant nonetheless is full of energies and rhythms which "precede evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality, and temporality."<sup>23</sup>

Like Thor, it sucks through a horn, the tip of which rests in the ocean; but the reason that it cannot suck its object to itself is not that the object is infinite, but that this infinity cannot become an object for it. Thus the sucking does not indicate a relation to the object but is identical with its sighing, and this is infinitely deep.<sup>24</sup>

In other words, the infant has no self-conception, no way of seeing itself as separate or unified unto itself, it is caught in the flow with the mother. "Neither model nor copy, the *chora* precedes and underlies figuration and thus specularization, and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm."<sup>25</sup>

Because there are as yet no separations--infant from mother--there is no linguistic sign to serve as representation of a split, a lost object. Kristeva's theory, like Lacan's (discussed later in this essay), establishes movements and constructions of subjectivity that are pre-Oedipal, and hence, pre-lingual and pre-gender construction. Regardless, any "signifying process" (made up in connection with the "symbolic," and articulated through a "speaking subject") must have the semiotic "as a psychosomatic modality of the signifying process; in other words, not a symbolic modality but one articulating a continuum."<sup>26</sup> Such a theory gives language a fundamental materiality.

What is more, Kristeva's theory gives primary positioning in the construction of subjectivity to the mother's body's relation to the infant's body. As the concrete operations and primary processes of the infant's body are connected to the mother, "the mother's body is therefore what mediates the symbolic law organizing social relations and becomes the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>24</sup> Kierkegaard's young aesthete in *Either/Or I*, 77.

<sup>25</sup> *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 26.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 28.

ordering principle of the semiotic *chora*."<sup>27</sup> Judith Butler adds, "The *chora* is that site where materiality and femininity appear to merge to form a materiality prior to and formative of any notion of the empirical."<sup>28</sup> At the same time, the drives are ambiguous: both destructive--battling stases--and assimilating--connecting to the mother. This leaves the conclusion that, "the semiotic *chora* is no more than the place where the subject is both generated and negated, the place where his unity succumbs before the process of charges and stases that produce him."<sup>29</sup>

As mentioned above in the discussion of the role of music in the immediate aesthetic and as will be seen in the next section on Kandinsky's painting, the analogy to "vocal rhythm" is worth highlighting. It is here, in the voice, in "the mother's tongue," that analogy may help in the understanding of the semiotic. Sounds (and stemming from this, 'speech') are thought to be the most "im-mediate" ("without medium") of expressions. The sound of music, Kristeva considers echoing Kierkegaard, is "constructed entirely on the basis of the semiotic."<sup>30</sup> While it is true that the semiotic "precedes spatiality and temporality," the use of rhythm seems to lend weight to time, albeit not historical time.

On the other side of the signifying process is the *symbolic*. Strictly speaking, the symbolic does not come about until after the aesthetic and semiotic--until the entry into the Law of the Father (Lacan)--, but a brief description here will be of use. The symbolic is the structuring of language into forms by which meaning comes into being. This is the realm of signification. It is a matter of positions and of judging<sup>31</sup>; it is syntactical and creates, ultimately, a speaking subject. "Meaning" according to Husserl via Kristeva, "is thus nothing other than a projection

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

<sup>28</sup> *Bodies that Matter*, 17.

<sup>29</sup> *Revolution*, 28.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. de Certeau's description of 'strategy' in the *Prescript*, p.6.



of signification (Bedeutung) as it is presented by judgment."<sup>32</sup> This judging ability can come only with the development of subjectivity, and subjectivity only through the separation from the Mother, when objects become identifiable. "Symbolic would seem an appropriate term for this always split unification [of the signifier and signified] that is produced by a rupture and is impossible without it." It is "a sign of recognition: an 'object' split in two and the parts separated, but . . . brings together the two edges of that fissure. As a result, the 'symbol' is any joining, any bringing together that is a contract . . . and, finally, any exchange."<sup>33</sup> By 'exchange,' a symbol is a socially agreed upon means of communication, and, far from being natural or inherent, the symbolic realm shows the constructed nature of language. Though unnatural, the symbolic is nonetheless necessary for communication. Mark C. Taylor gives an historical context for symbols:

In ancient Greece, the symbol was the means by which communication was secured. When a messenger departed, he was given one half of a broken staff that was called a symbol. The message he bore upon his return was deemed trustworthy only if the messenger brought back with him the other half of the staff. When the two halves of the symbol were 'thrown together,' the circuit of communication was completed and the message transmitted.<sup>34</sup>

Between these two--the semiotic and symbolic--is the *thetic* phase. The thetic comes after the semiotic and links the semiotic to the symbolic, becoming "the threshold of language"<sup>35</sup> and the basis for all signification. Though it resides primarily on the side of the symbolic, it is also a connecting point between the semiotic and symbolic. The place of the thetic would be a "safety zone" where the pulsating and disruptive drives of the semiotic meet the social constructs of the symbolic. Yet, the thetic keeps the symbolic from obliteration. Kristeva stresses the need for the thetic over and over again. The thetic is what is at stake in the

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>34</sup> "The Eventuality of Texts," 227-228.

<sup>35</sup> *Revolution*, 45.

unsettling elements of poetry that do not leave us with complete loss of identity, "for us, this is precisely what distinguishes a text as *signifying practice* from the 'drifting-into-non-sense' that characterizes neurotic discourse."<sup>36</sup> In the presence of the poetic, the subject is shaken, the semiotic bursts through the symbolic, yet the subject does not disappear, meaning continues in a different form.

[T]he semiotic, which also precedes it [the symbolic], constantly tears it open, and this transgression brings about all the various transformations of the signifying practice that are called 'creation.' Whether in the realm of metalanguage or literature, what remodels the symbolic order is always the influx of the semiotic. This is particularly evident in poetic language since, for there to be a transgression of the symbolic, there must be an irruption of the drives in the universal signifying order, that of 'natural' language which binds together the social unit. That the subject does not vanish into psychosis when this transgression takes place poses a problem for metaphysics, both the kind that sets up the signifier as an untransgressable law and the kind for which there exists nothetic and therefore no subject.<sup>37</sup>

The symbolic and the semiotic work together and against each other to produce signification. According to Kristeva, neither side can be neglected for personal or political analysis. More than this, if one remains interested in the idea of "revolution," one must pay attention to the functionings of poetic language, a language that disrupts and puts into process the "given" symbolic language of a society.

Though this is all getting ahead of the present essay and signification not formally possible in the stage of the immediate aesthetic, a brief discussion of the signifying process in Kristeva may serve as a check on just what sort of writing is taking place here. Tinged with the semiotic, the symbolic writing which posits thesis after thesis continues to provide a place for a coherence, a place where subjectivity can be viewed. Without the symbolic, such an essay would be impossible.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 62.

*Kandinsky's musical painting*

While the young aesthete and Kristeva's "in-fant" consider music as the most abstract medium (i.e., dissociated from history, language and bound up with bodily sensuality), twentieth-century developments in painting may provide another (im)medium of expressing the aesthetic. Most notably, the work of Wassily Kandinsky parallels many of Kierkegaard's views on the notion of the abstract, and Kandinsky goes so far as to make strong ties between music and the colors of painting.<sup>38</sup> So, while Kierkegaard's young man states, "The ear . . . is the most spiritually qualified sense,"<sup>39</sup> Kandinsky names an album of poems and woodcuts, *Sounds*, and translates an article of Viennese composer Schoenberg into Russian.<sup>40</sup>

The effort raised by Kandinsky to associate painting with music, and therefore with sound, is part of a long tradition in the west that insists on orality/aurality as the most immediately present means of communication. Through the close association of his painting to sound, Kandinsky could claim a place of privilege for the immediate perception of his paintings. If his paintings are like sounds, they are therefore like speech, and if like speech they are therefore somehow "primary," striking the viewer on a fundamental level with a minimum of mediation.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Enough of a parallel was made to cause celebrated modern art critic, Clement Greenberg, to comment, "His chief mistake was to draw too close an analogy between painting and music" (*The Nation*, 7 April 1945. In *Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol.II p.16).

<sup>39</sup> *Either/Or I*, 68.

<sup>40</sup> *Sounds* (1912) and Kandinsky's own footnotes to Schoenberg's "On Parallel Octaves and Fifths" (1911) are reprinted in *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art*, vol.1, pp. 291-339 and 91-95 respectively.

<sup>41</sup> While there are a plethora of people who could be quoted to illustrate the tendency to privilege speech over other media such as writing, I supply a quote here from one who was not so philosophically sophisticated as Plato, Derrida, Don Ihde or Walter Ong. The quote is that of Helen Keller's: "I am just as deaf as I am blind. The problems of deafness are deeper and more complex, if not more important, than those of blindness. Deafness is a much worse misfortune. For it means the loss

Around the same time that Ferdinand de Saussure was delivering his famed, "Course in General Linguistics," Kandinsky was putting together his most famous of writings, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* [*On the Spiritual in Art*]. Within this work Kandinsky discusses the nature of linguistics in a way similar to Saussure's linguistics. Kandinsky's linguistics especially parallel Saussure's examination of the "sign" ("signifier" and "signified")<sup>42</sup> as well as having "phonocentric" similarities.

Words are inner sounds. This inner sound arises partly--perhaps principally--from the object for which the word serves as a name. But when the object itself is not seen, but only its name is heard, an abstract conception arises in the mind of the listener, a dematerialized object that at once conjures up a vibration in the "heart." . . . Eventually, manifold repetition of a word (a favorite childhood game, later forgotten) makes it lose its external sense as a name. In this way, even the sense of the word as an abstract indication of the object is forgotten, and only the pure sound of the word remains.<sup>43</sup>

Words as sounds are quickly joined to painting when Kandinsky considers "[w]e may also, perhaps unconsciously, hear this 'pure' sound at the same time as we perceive the real, or subsequently, the abstract object."<sup>44</sup> In such a conception one is "dissolved into the ceremony of communication."<sup>45</sup> Mediation is eliminated and im-mediate perception is possible; the subject-

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of the most vital stimulus--the sound of the voice that brings language, sets thoughts astir and keeps us in the intellectual company of humans." (From a letter to Dr. J. Kerr Love, March 31, 1910, from the souvenir program commemorating Helen Keller's visit to Queensland Adult Deaf and Dumb Mission in 1948. Quoted in Ackerman, *A Natural History of the Senses*, 191-192.)

<sup>42</sup> There are many references in contemporary theory to Saussure's work, complete with outlines of his two-part sign structure, the "signified" and the "signifier." I use Kaja Silverman's, *The Subject of Semiotics* for a brief definition here, "Within the linguistic system the signifier would be what Saussure calls a 'sound-image,' that is, the image of one of those sounds which we shape within our minds when we think, whereas the signified would be the meaning which that sound-image generates" (6).

<sup>43</sup> In *Kandinsky: Complete Writings*, Vol.1, 147.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>45</sup> Claude Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986) 226.

object distinction is broken down in the "pure sound."

*Presence* in communication, it has often been considered, comes through speech, through transient and evanescent sounds that are tied to the immediacy of chronological life. Obviously speech is language (*parole* is within *langue*<sup>46</sup>), and the aesthete, it will be remembered, is pre-lingual. But the aesthete is not pre-aural, and the connection I am drawing here leaves aside constitutive questions of verbal language for the time being and focuses on media, i.e., sound and aurality. The young aesthete of *Either/Or I* makes the distinction that "Language [i.e., speech] has its element in time; all other media have space as their element. Only music occurs in time."<sup>47</sup> Music, like speech, exists in time and therefore becomes more primary to human communication. Writing or images, on the other hand, are commonly held to be parasitic on speech--they "re-present" what speech "presents"--and are highly mediated and secondary. Kandinsky, in a sense, tries to subvert the parasitic relationship in his attempt to paint abstractly, but in the end must rely on an analogy of his painting to sound for his justification. Voice, sound and speech are thought to be the most im-mediate communication, and the pursuit of a "musical" writing for Kierkegaard's aesthete and a "musical" painting for Kandinsky is ultimately a search for presence.

But Kandinsky's art is an inversion of Kierkegaard--if we understand the aesthetic stage as but one "mode of existence" and not as a *telos*. As the "first abstract artist," Kandinsky tries to move *towards* the aesthetic sphere as it is laid out in Kierkegaard's writings. Harmony is the key. Distinctions are to be broken down to where they no longer exist. The

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<sup>46</sup> Another element of Saussure's linguistics is *langue* ("language") and *parole* ("speech"). Again, Silverman provides a working definition of these concepts: "language finds its locus only in memory--not so much in any single memory as in the memory of a culture. As Saussure points out, 'language is not complete in any speaker; it exists perfectly only within a collectivity' ([*Course in General Linguistics*] 14). Speech, on the other hand, has an individual and localized existence. It is characterized by certain 'accidental' features, like personal intonation or style, which have no place within the more stable and normative language system" (*The Subject of Semiotics*, 11).

<sup>47</sup> *Either/Or I*, 68.

medium is to disappear into immediacy. Whereas Kierkegaard presents the aesthetic as one stage, with distinctions a necessary part of development (to be shown later), Kandinsky sees his harmonious "abstract" or "nonobjective"<sup>48</sup> painting as the culmination of a new age in the arts. The harmony attempted is, in this sense, post-linguistic or post-subjective, it is a "return" to primary immediacy.

Kandinsky began writing and painting in an optimistic age (or, so it was to him), an age before the World Wars in Europe. This optimism created a profound a-political and a-material stance in the thought of Kandinsky and he believed the time of the spiritual was dawning. Convinced, as he was, of the importance of theosophy, and especially the writings of Rudolf Steiner and Madame Blavatsky, the time had come to shed the material biases of the nineteenth-century and begin to emphasize "the spirit."<sup>49</sup> To coincide with this new age a new kind of composition had to be developed, a composition he believed that, "[o]nce found and crystallized, it will provide the expression of the Epoch of the Great Spiritual."<sup>50</sup> For Kandinsky, the "spiritual" and the aesthetic came together at this time, and harmony, the end of distinction, was the goal. Several decades later, one of Kandinsky's critics, Clement Greenberg, was

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<sup>48</sup> In the "Introduction" to volume one of *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art*, editors Lindsay and Vergo explain that Kandinsky had used both "abstract" and "nonobjective" to describe his art, but "[i]n letters to Hilla Rebay in 1936 and 1937 he explained the misunderstandings inherent in the term *abstract* ("abstracted from some object"), and said he preferred *nonobjective* (that which "creates its own elements")" (21). "Abstract" seems to be the term which has stuck, and i use it here for convenience.

<sup>49</sup> Mark C. Taylor's chapter, "Iconoclasm," (*Disfiguring*) sketches the relation of theosophy (ala Madam Blavatsky and Steiner) to the "new age" of the beginning of the twentieth-century, but also shows the impact early theosophy (in sixteenth-century figure, Jakob Böhme) had on the German Romantics and specifically Hegel. Taylor considers: "The threefold rhythm articulated in Hegel's philosophy--unity, loss/fragmentation, and return to unity--constitutes the *structural* foundation of all Theosophical systems. . . . Moreover, philosophical idealism and Theosophical spirituality agree that the *telos* of the psychocosmic process is the discovery of the implicit identity of the human and divine" (*Disfiguring*, 54).

<sup>50</sup> "Content and Form," 90.

to admit to a similar impulse which mimes Kandinsky well and reiterates precisely where we are along Kierkegaard's stages:

We are through with the big words and what they advertise; their aesthetic credit, at least, is exhausted. But in the name of 'profundity' we still long to dissolve our art and ourselves in some ultimate vagueness or confusion. And what promises this better than religion?<sup>51</sup> Yet the aspiration is an aesthetic, not a moral or religious one.

"Dissolving" ourselves in some vagueness is the undifferentiated, unified aesthetic realm of Kandinsky's abstract art.

In an essay dated 1910-1911, Kandinsky laid out a search for the perfect correspondence of form and content: "The most beautiful work is that whose external form corresponds entirely to its internal content (which is, so to speak, an eternally unrealizable ideal)."<sup>52</sup> For Kierkegaard's young man, this "most beautiful work" has already occurred: "In Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, we have the perfect unity of this idea and its corresponding form."<sup>53</sup> Kierkegaard's aesthete and Kandinsky would agree that unity of form and content, the lust for perfect communication, becomes available only through media outside, beyond, or before language--even, finally, beyond speech itself. The beyond of language is outside of history, outside of concrete action, it is the spiritual quest for *presence*.

The spiritual quest for immediate presence, to modernists such as Kandinsky, meant a striving for an internal consistency of form and content (what Kandinsky called, "internal necessity"<sup>54</sup>) which led to autonomous art. Autonomy meant the artwork had to be outside of history and material constraints. It would be a mistake, however, to consider this spiritual painting as "art for art's sake," for the *telos* was always that of stirring the soul. "Art for art's sake" existed in the materialistic age of which Kandinsky now considers to be giving way to the new spiritual age

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<sup>51</sup> From "Religion and the Intellectuals: a Symposium," *Partisan Review*. May-June 1950. Greenberg's article is in vol.3 of *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, pp. 39-42. Quote from p. 42.

<sup>52</sup> "Content and Form," 87.

<sup>53</sup> *Either/Or*, 57.

<sup>54</sup> In, among other places, "Content and Form."

at the turn of the century. He considers the soul to be "deadened and neglected by materialistic views" giving way to the opinion that "'pure' art is not given to man for a special reason, but is purposeless; that art exists only for art's sake. Here the bond between art and soul becomes half anaesthetized."<sup>55</sup> Kandinsky's art has a purpose. Greenberg describes Kandinsky's freedom of art:

Like Mondrian he spoke of 'liberation'---from the past, from nature---and was optimistic, anticipating a future of inner certainty and the 'growing realization of the spiritual.' (As far as I can make out, Kandinsky's 'spiritual' means simply intensity and seriousness and has no religious connotations.)<sup>56</sup>

Harmony, presence and the "spiritual" then, are caught up together within the aesthetic. Borders between form and content, presence and absence, and ultimately, subject and object disappear and a seamless realm of undifferentiation is born into the new spirituality of the aesthetic. Kandinsky boldly states that "[a]rt must march at the head of spiritual evolution, adapting its forms to this greater refinement, its prophetic role."<sup>57</sup> In a similarly unifying vein, Mark C. Taylor explains Kant's analysis of the work of art in *The Critique of Judgement*:

Kant attempts to discern the original unity of theoretical [the first *Critique*] and practical reason [the second *Critique*] through which the identity of nature and reason can be secured and thus truth and freedom established. The demonstration of this primal oneness establishes the *possibility* of overcoming fragmentation and alienation by recovering the unity of experience that has long been lost or hidden. The work of art opens the way to this original accord.<sup>58</sup>

"Unity," as it is used here, is close to harmony, to the elimination of boundaries and distinctions and should not be confused with "unitary." Taylor's phrase above, "primal oneness" points back to the discussion of the semiotic in Kristeva, it is a flow without boundaries--though it should

<sup>55</sup> *On the Spiritual in Art*, 212.

<sup>56</sup> Clement Greenberg, from *The Nation* 7 April, 1945. In *Collected Works II*. p.16.

<sup>57</sup> "Content and Form," 89.

<sup>58</sup> *Disfiguring*, 27.



be quickly pointed out, Kristeva's semiotic is not a pure and innocent origin, and is not attainable. The desire for the unity of a beginning is a romantic nostalgia and "The origin and end of [the Romantics] action is the ego."<sup>59</sup> This unified nostalgia is seen throughout western thought, and here the *logos* is the guarantor of redemption; if only the unity of inner necessity can be painted, im-mediacy achieved, then we will be saved, made whole again. The goal of much of modern art, was to get back to this imagined unity of things, to "recover" what had been lost. In many ways this has remained the *telos* of Freudian psychoanalysis.

But there is also another side of the modern--brought out in the term used above, 'unitary'--and that is the issue of autonomy and purity. Paradoxically, the quest for presence and harmony--a return to "primal origins"--is met with the individual unitary subject and autonomous art work. In this sense, unity and unitary are related but also contradictory, for unity would entail the end of borders and therefore the end of what is individual and unitary, or, to put it in another jargon, 'alienated.' The immediate aesthete knows no alienation for she/he has no separations. Here in the middle (*in medias*), of im-mediacy we find an aporia which may unravel all artistic attempts at unity.

Peter Bürger recasts this aporia in relation to Hegel's aesthetics, and states,

Modernity is the epoch of the great division between subject and object. Their reconciliation is only possible when mediated by the imagination (in religion) or the concept (in philosophy). Art, on the other hand, is characterized by a moment of immediacy.<sup>60</sup>

In this Hegelian aesthetic, "the artist, not yet released from his *natural* side is united *directly* with the subject-matter, believes in it, and is identical with it in accordance with his very own self."<sup>61</sup> The mimetic relationship entailed here and which Kandinsky has attempted to live "is out of step with modernity because it wants to go back to a time before

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<sup>59</sup> Bürger, "Aporias of Modern Aesthetics," 11.

<sup>60</sup> "Aporias of Modern Aesthetics," 7.

<sup>61</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Trans. T.M. Knox. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1975), I:604. Quoted in Bürger, "Aporias," 7.

division instead of trying to overcome it by means of the imagination or the concept."<sup>62</sup> The imagination or the concept would be that which is transcendent, assuring a reunified wholeness, it is *logocentric*. This is the "disappearance of art," a unity of form and content which fades away upon viewing, leaving the viewer in a primordial state. When the medium disappears—immediacy occurs—presence, and therefore salvation, can happen.

Nonetheless, for Freud, as for Bürger, there is no original point which can be apprehended; the subject is split and attempts at mediatization are all that are available to us. Freud and Bürger also concur that there is a *telos* or utopia which is strived for, albeit impossibly. The problem with much of modern art, according to Bürger, is the Hegelianism and Romanticism which would neglect the medium itself, pretending it could disappear in pure communication.

As these issues will continue to crop up in this essay, i will leave these ideas and return to Kierkegaard. Suffice it for now that in the early stages of the immediate aesthetic what is of concern is "unity." Here the ethical/symbolic realm is swallowed up into the aesthetic, the very place Kierkegaard seems intent to place alongside the ethical/symbolic. A side-by-side, or *supplementary*, view provides a place where subjectivity, language and distinction are possible and interactive with the aesthetic. Again, the aesthetic will not disappear at other stages, but remains constitutive of all these "later" stages. Entering again into the flow of life developed in *Either/Or I*, the young aesthete has a ways to go before making the move to the ethical/symbolic stage.

#### *The continuum of the immediate aesthetic*

Immediacy is not just a (non)place, it is a (non)time. This is another reason for the choice of music as the quintessence of this early stage, and why we can also consider the "abstract art" of Kandinsky as an expression of immediacy. In *Either/Or*, the young aesthete considers the most

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<sup>62</sup> Bürger, "Aporias," 7.

abstract medium to be music, from another angle, since "[i]t cannot express the historical within time."<sup>63</sup> In the immediate there is no history, everything occurs "immediately." Past and Future are not comprehended, all is now, a now which cannot see itself as now. This 'now' is echoed in a twentieth-century musically-oriented poem, T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*:

Time past and time future  
 Allow but a little consciousness.  
 To be conscious is not to be in time  
 But only in time can the moment in the rose-garden,  
 The moment in the arbour where the rain beat,  
 The moment in the draughty church at smokefall  
 Be remembered; involved with past and future.  
 Only through time time is conquered.<sup>64</sup>

Mozart is invoked as the key player for the immediate aesthete and here it is realized how close to the *tohu bohu* we are: "if [Mozart] were taken away, if his name were blotted out, that would demolish the one pillar that until now has prevented everything from collapsing for me into a boundless chaos, into a dreadful nothing."<sup>65</sup> But luckily, to the aesthete, Mozart is immortal and death has no power; for if death were real and did have power it seems the aesthete would commit suicide. Mozart is immortal precisely because death has no power. Not that there is an overcoming of death, but what is death if life is "empty and meaningless"?<sup>66</sup> Lacking "the courage to possess, to own, anything,"<sup>67</sup> even his own life, the aesthete lives on. Even death and life at this point have no distinction between them.

The aesthete lives "Either/Or" not as a choice to be made--and thereby a commitment--but in an undifferentiated realm of both:

Hang yourself, and you will regret it. Do not hang yourself, and you will also regret it. Hang yourself or do not hang yourself, you will

<sup>63</sup> *Either/Or I*, 57.

<sup>64</sup> "Burnt Norton," II.83-93.

<sup>65</sup> *Either/Or I*, 49.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

regret it either way.<sup>68</sup>

There are no divisions to be made, everything flows together as in a confluence; all of life is "a single color."<sup>69</sup> This confluent place is a place of non-action, but not in any Buddhist or mystical sense, for this is the place of the beginning, whereas a contemplative sense of non-action comes later (and so we will come to it later), it comes *after* the subject. This non-action is abstraction at a base level, a level before there is even an individual subject which could (not) act.

Recalling the three terms of the section in *Either/Or I*--immediate, musical, erotic--there is still the question of the erotic. How does eroticism function if there are no divisions or distinctions? Here too, a different twist is taken in the connotation and the element of 'desire' comes to the fore. The aesthete as immediate aesthete is not an individual subject, but a flux of sensation. Subject and object are not separated because desire itself is not yet awake. Rather, "that which is desired is continually present in the desire."<sup>70</sup> Desire has no object but turns within itself as the aesthete flows through the sensuous life, the life felt, but not felt deeply.

Desire here is asexual, unable to make gender distinctions: "The desire and the desired are joined in this unity, that they both are *neutrius generis* [of neuter gender]."<sup>71</sup> Although it is certainly implied by Kierkegaard, this does not entail a compulsory heterosexual reading of desire, but a "neutered" reading. Sexuality cannot exist in a realm of undifferentiated sex, no matter what the orientation. Sex must be constructed along the "stages" of subjectivity.

With relation to desire and the erotic, there are three stages (though "I could perhaps more appropriately use the word 'metamorphosis'"<sup>72</sup>)

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 74.

which make up the immediate aesthetic, each one a clearer separation of desire and object. The first stage of the immediate aesthete is marked, as stated and described above, by asexual desire "in which the object is stirring and is so close to the desire that it is within it."<sup>73</sup> Desire is present, but "devoid of motion, devoid of unrest."<sup>74</sup>

In the second stage desire awakens and separation begins. This is a crucial point in the development of the individual subject and one which will have continual resonances throughout the rest of this study. In spite of the fact that there is not a great deal of space devoted to this stage in Kierkegaard's writings, there are reasons for this lack of space which I hope to draw out and emphasize.

In this second stage of the immediate aesthetic "desire awakens" and it is this "awakening . . . this jolt [which] separates desire and its object, gives desire an object. . . . The desire and object are twins, neither of which comes into the world one split second before the other."<sup>75</sup> Creation occurs through separation; the object is created out of the chaos of undifferentiation, not *ex nihilo*. Newness and birth always require a splitting whether it is the mitosis of the cells of an embryo or the cutting of the umbilical cord. Yet, the split is never a final movement but only a catalyst for more moving; once desire awakens it is hard to stop:

this movement of the sensuous, this earthquake, splits the desire from its object infinitely for a moment; but just as the moving principle shows itself for a moment as disuniting, so it manifests itself in turn as wanting to unite the separated. The result of the separation is that desire is torn out of its substantial repose in itself, and as a consequence of this, the object no longer falls under the rubric of substantiality but splits up into a multiplicity.<sup>76</sup>

This multiplicity has the desirous aesthete searching in vain for its object. It seeks, but does not know what it is looking for.

This originary splitting constitutes a fundamental separation within

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 79-80.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 80.

the development of the subject, and here we touch again on the impossible "unity" which was left off in the discussion of Kandinsky's aesthetics. Derrida considers this split/break [*le coup*] to be crucial (crux) in any consideration of subjectivity, aesthetics or concept:

The exit out of the 'primitive' mythical unity (which is always reconstituted retrospectively in the aftermath of the break [*dans l'après-coupure*]), the scission, the decision--which is both deciding and decided--, the shot/throw/blow [*le coup*] parts the seed as it projects it. It inscribes difference in the heart of life.<sup>77</sup>

Here is the locus of Augustine's restless heart,<sup>78</sup> of Petrarch's wandering,<sup>79</sup> and of 'desire' as a fundamental basis of psychoanalysis.

Again, I feel this second stage in Kierkegaard's immediate aesthetic is a crucial stage and one easily overlooked. The resonances with twentieth-century psychoanalysis are astounding and it is here worth highlighting some more contemporary approaches to this original splitting. It is Freud who is, of course, of importance here, but it is Lacan's and Kristeva's interpretations of Freud which occupy our interest.

#### *Intermediary stages*

Indeed, it is a section in Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* which sparked an idea in my own mind about the second stage of the immediate erotic as a transitional and crucial stage. She sees in Freud's *Totem and Taboo* an inserted third stage which holds her attention in consideration of the "beginnings of childhood." The passage quoted from Freud is as follows:

In this intermediary stage [. . .] the sexual impulses which formerly were separate have already formed into a unit and have also found

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<sup>77</sup> *Dissemination*, 304.

<sup>78</sup> See *Confessions*, I.1.

<sup>79</sup> See, among other places, Francesco Petrarca, *Letters on Familiar Matters*, Vol. 2. Trans. Aldo S. Bernardo (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1982), *Fam.* XV, 4: pp.258-261: "I do not know whence its origin, but I do know that innate desire to see new places and to change domiciles. . . . [T]here is something truly pleasant, though demanding, about this curiosity for wandering through different regions, whereas those who remain in one place always experience a peculiar boredom in their repose" (260).

an object; but this object is not external and foreign to the individual, but is his own ego, which is formed at this period.<sup>80</sup>

For Kristeva, reading Freud, primary narcissism exists at the in-between stage between the undifferentiated pre-verbal world (the semiotic) and the linguistically constructed world of the subject and the object (the symbolic). The 'split' between these two elements (semiotic and symbolic) is not a one-time event, rather, it is a process occurring over a period of time. The initial splitting is what will be considered here, with further splits leading into the symbolic. Once the subject is established in the symbolic realm, the unstable split between these two orders continually propels the subject onward. Kristeva labels this movement, "subject in process."

Primary narcissism is the "correlation between an entity (the ego) and its converse (the object), which is nevertheless not yet constituted; with an 'ego' in relation to a non-object."<sup>81</sup> This is a place of "imprecise boundaries," and "inside and outside are not precisely differentiated here, nor is language an active practice or the subject separated from the other."<sup>82</sup> It is at this crux, this narcissistic, ambiguous, undifferentiated realm which "renders unstable the ego's identity."<sup>83</sup> Between, but not reduced to either the subject or the object, this crux is the site of the *abject*.

The abject is something which cannot be simply defined or assimilated, but only, as in the first section of *Powers of Horror*, "approached," and that approach through difference. "The nothing that approaches without being present can be approached only indirectly. In this uncanny domain, communication inevitably is 'indirect

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<sup>80</sup> *Totem and Taboo*, 115-116, vol.13 *Complete Works*. Quoted in *Powers of Horror*, 62.

<sup>81</sup> *Powers of Horror* 62.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

communication."<sup>84</sup> As we approach abjection we discover a trail of oppositions which the abject comes between and foils. The abject is not opposed to these, but moves around the boundaries and at the slash which separates the oppositions.

The first opposition played with abjection is that between subject and object. Kristeva states, "When I am beset by abjection, the twisted braid of affects and thoughts I call by such a name does not have, properly speaking, a definable *object*. The abject is not an ob-ject facing me, which I name or imagine. . . . The abject has only one quality of the object--that of being opposed to I."<sup>85</sup> Yet, it is also related to the subject for, "from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master."<sup>86</sup> By touching elements of the heterogenous semiotic which become repressed, the abject remains intimately tied to the subject and is indeed inseparable. Not being object, nor subject, the abject both attracts the subject and causes repulsion. This uncanny phenomenon is seen throughout history in the spectator sports of public executions, the "rubber-necking" drivers on the roadways scanning the accident for the blood and dead bodies, or the attraction to "horror" films. When we do come upon the truly horrible, we respond by gagging, by a certain queasiness that leaves us weak in the knees. It is an encounter with an other which produces something in us that is not other, that triggers something in our *self*, whereby we respond by projecting out of our *self*. And yet, we remain enthralled by the very thing which produces this queasiness.

The connection of the abject to the subject and object is seen through that which is unclean or impure, like certain foods or, at the other end, waste products and death--the corpse. Each of these are threshold objects, existing at the point between inside and outside, subject and object, death and life. Bodily orifices, the seat of the Freudian primary processes, are the erotogenic zones, the *rim* (in Lacan's terms)

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<sup>84</sup> Mark C. Taylor, *Altarity*, 160.

<sup>85</sup> *Powers of Horror*, 1.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.



between inside and outside, and therefore the site of bodily identification. The subject--properly constructed in a symbolic realm--seeks a 'clean and proper body' (*corps propre*), and therefore waste products repulse, they bring one to the point of vomiting which is an expulsion of one's *self*, spitting one's *self* out, as a method of protection. "I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish *myself*."<sup>87</sup>

This motion is an 'abreaction,' which according to Freud is an "emotional discharge through which the subject liberates himself from the affect connected to the memory of a traumatic event, thus permitting it to not become or remain pathogenic."<sup>88</sup> Cixous and Clément note that this entails that something must "come out": "[i]t will come out, this act, in words or in tears, in devil's voice, in excrement, in laughter; but it will come out."<sup>89</sup> Again, there is an effort to "objectivize," to push out and away that which is disagreeable, but also there is a pulling, something working from within. Kristeva argues that it is finally "not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disrupts identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite."<sup>90</sup>

We come here to a key element in the understanding of abjection: the notion of identity. Identity is about borders and is established by the split between subject and object. The abject, then, figures at this border. The abject "simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject"<sup>91</sup> and, weary from this, the subject struggles to understand its identity, its borders. Eventually the subject "finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it *is* none other than the abject. The abjection of self would be the culminating form of that experience of the subject to which

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>88</sup> Freud, *Studies in Hysteria*. Quoted in Cixous and Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, 15-16.

<sup>89</sup> *The Newly Born Woman*, 16.

<sup>90</sup> *Powers of Horror*, 4

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 5.

it is revealed that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural *loss* that laid the foundation of its own being."<sup>92</sup> The "inaugural loss" is the splitting, the jolt in Kierkegaard which separates for an instant while the "moving principle"<sup>93</sup> forges an identity, eternally fragile.

The abject then, is not a "thing," an object--and this point must be stressed--but it is related to *affect*. Affect is what Kierkegaard is dealing with in the term, "moving principle," and what I am suggesting as a new way to approach 'faith.' The affect goes between, it is produced when a particular subject meets a particular object and, once the meeting occurs, the subject-object distinction is messed up and one enters a "land of oblivion."<sup>94</sup> The borders of identity are found to be less than stable, the primary splittings which begin to separate subject and object continue to rupture identity structures, propelling the subject onward.

This border crossing is paralleled elsewhere in Kristeva's writing when she considers the foreigner/exile to be one invoking something like the abject: "Confronting the foreigner whom I reject and with whom at the same time I identify, I lose my boundaries, I no longer have a container, the memory of experiences when I had been abandoned overwhelm me, I lose my composure. I feel 'lost,' 'indistinct,' 'hazy.'"<sup>95</sup> Here the foreigner disrupts the life of the staid community, challenging, like a prophet, the norms and symbols. Identity is remade.

Such instability is seen in "borderline patients," especially phobics, where "phobia bears the marks of the frailty of the subject's signifying system."<sup>96</sup> The phobic has fear, but fear of no object; the "object" is merely a "sign." It is because of "the intermediary of a *representation*, hence a *seeing*, that [the sign] holds together."<sup>97</sup> The phobic has visual

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>93</sup> *Either/Or I*, 80.

<sup>94</sup> *Powers of Horror*, 8.

<sup>95</sup> *Stranger to Ourselves*, 187.

<sup>96</sup> *Powers of Horror*, 35.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 46. Italics in original.

hallucinations which are a desire for a sign, for symbolic language, a wholeness. For the rest of us who are non-phobic (in a clinical sense), "What is it that insures the existence of the sign, that is, of the *relation* that is a *condensation* between sound image and word image? Condensation is indeed what we are dealing with."<sup>98</sup> Kristeva argues that this primary process, condensation, is fundamentally constitutive of subjectivity--as was also seen in the discussion of the semiotic. Before the Oedipal complex and the entry into symbolic language--the final establishment of the ego--condensation is a drive which holds together an image-as-sign for the not-yet-subject.

It is an image, working with the drives of the body, which establishes a primary locus for the subject, though again, not a singular point of origin, but a crucial relation. Symbolic language will complete the formation of subjectivity, but here the basis for such language is visual and material. Primary narcissism exists within the mother-child dyad, before the Oedipal triad with the Father which eventually allows for the construction of subject and object differentiation. Kristeva is arguing for this in-between stage at which there is a passive use of the signifier as opposed to the active use of the signifier. "Passive" because it is related to a *hallucinatory* sign, a non-object. This non-object is impossibly labelled the abject, the moving principle, faith. Faith not *in anything*, but faith as it is related to desire, affect and process; a faith of a fragile nature in the interstices of a severed relationship. And this is again a reminder of the frailty of the language used here by myself, and by Kristeva to describe this realm.

#### *More Early Re-flections*

For Lacan, there are two separate separations in the formation of the 'I' (ego). The first separation is that of the mirror stage and depends on the vision of the infant, while the second separation is the Oedipal stage with the child's entry into language. In an early essay, "The Mirror

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 52.

Stage" (1936), Lacan searches for a primary positing of the ego apart from the Oedipal stage laid out by Freud. When he finally revised the essay and delivered it in 1949, he had come to consider vision as a constituting experience, and, as the new title suggested, the mirror stage was "formative of the function of the I."<sup>99</sup> While Lacan and Freud were both interested in 'identification,' and 'ego-theory' was based on the search for primary identificatory loci, Lacan critiques Freud's consideration of the Oedipal phase as primary (in the early Freud) and posits his own pre-Oedipal locus, "the mirror stage." Based as it is on rivalry with an other, the Oedipal phase is already secondary to the self-rivalry in the primary narcissism of the mirror stage: "It is in this erotic relation, in which the human individual fixes upon himself an image that alienates him from himself, that are to be found the energy and the form on which this organization of the passions that he will call his ego are based."<sup>100</sup> Like Kierkegaard's desire "in which the object is stirring and is so close to the desire that it is within it,"<sup>101</sup> Lacan's desire begins within, and the primary drama of life is one with one's self.

Besides the internal ego-formation, the effects are external as well, and the mirror stage constitutes a fundamental positioning for the separation of the infant's self from the world around. Whether the behavior of the child is seen reflected in an actual mirror or whether its actions are mimed by someone else, it is *sight* which constitutes the original individuality of the infant. The child in the *in-fans* (without speech) stage before the mirror cannot walk or stand up, and must be supported, but she or he "nevertheless overcomes, in a flutter of jubilant activity, the obstructions of his support and, fixing his attitude in a slightly leaning-forward position, in order to hold it in his gaze, brings back an instantaneous aspect of the image."<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> The full title is, "The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience," in *Écrits*.

<sup>100</sup> "Aggressivity in psychoanalysis," 19.

<sup>101</sup> *Either/Or I*, 76.

<sup>102</sup> "The mirror stage," 1-2.

The mirror stage (*stade*) is also a stage (*stade*; as in, "all the world's a stage") within which the motions of "jubilant activity" are acted out; the "stage" is spatial and temporal. Pre-linguistic and still in primordial undifferentiation, this stage performance becomes a "pantomime": "dramatic entertainment by gestures to a musical accompaniment; performance of a dramatized tale followed by a transformation scene and clowning."<sup>103</sup> Musical immediacy (recall Kandinsky, Kierkegaard and Kristeva's "semiotic") and gesticulation are the components of this young life, and the "transformation scene" comes when Lacan assumes the "mirror stage as an identification, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image."<sup>104</sup> Strictly speaking in psychoanalytic parlance, the infant is-- and will remain for some time--a pre-subject, but, significantly for Lacan, "the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form."<sup>105</sup> As Malcom Bowie puts it in his work on Lacan, the mirror stage gives "an early moment in the life-cycle when the individual's humanity is already fully at stake," and "Lacan's account of the 'specular' moment provides the ego with its creation myth and its Fall."<sup>106</sup> 'Creation,' as mentioned before, comes from separation and splitting, a fall from unity, and finally the infant must separate from its immediate surroundings in order to create an identity.

Correlatively, the infant must see its image reflected for separation to occur, and this original sight provides what Lacan labels an *imago*. The wholeness and autonomy of the infant body comes into view through a *gestalt* (necessary because the infant is not independent, but still entirely dependent on adults), leaving a whole image, the 'imago.' Consider Teresa de Lauretis' relating of the physiologist Colin Blakemore's work on vision:

Our apparently unified view of the outside world is in fact produced by the interconnected operations of diverse neural processes. . . . In other words, these interacting processes do not merely record a

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<sup>103</sup> *Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*.

<sup>104</sup> "The mirror stage," 2.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>106</sup> *Lacan*, 21.

unified or preconstituted visual space, but actually constitute a discontinuous map of the external world. . . . The perceptual apparatus, then, does not copy reality but symbolizes it. . . . The perceptual apparatus, moreover, is subject to adaptation or calibration, for expectations are readjusted on the basis of new stimuli or occurrences. . . . To perceive is to make a continuous series of educated guesses, on the basis of prior knowledges and expectations, however unconscious.<sup>107</sup>

Already, in the perceptual apparatus of the infant, forces are at work synthesizing and symbolizing; the infant becomes educated to see a unified whole.

Etymologically, *imago* is "a mental object, an unconscious prototype based upon the infant's earliest experiences,"<sup>108</sup> but *entomologically* it is the "final stage of an insect."<sup>109</sup> While one *imago* is of "the infant's earliest experience," the other is a "final stage." Lacan's duplicitous intention here places the *imago* at a crucial place and time, not only is it the "earliest," it is also "final." "[T]he important point is that this form situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination [i.e., before the entry into symbolic language], in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone."<sup>110</sup>

The original sight is captivating for the infant and the fascination with the image allows an initial construction of a whole and unitary *I*. The *imago* postulates an original narrative for the self, a play to be acted out on stage through the rest of its history. In a similar way, although quite different context, cognitive scientist Daniel Dennett considers the self to be the "center of narrative gravity" and states,

This minimal proclivity to distinguish self from other in order to protect *oneself* is the biological self, and even such a simple self is not a concrete thing but just an abstraction, a principle of organization. Moreover the boundaries of a biological self are porous and indefinite--another instance of Mother Nature tolerating 'error' if the cost is right. . . . Our fundamental tactic of self-

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<sup>107</sup> *Alice Doesn't*, 53-54.

<sup>108</sup> Bowie, *Lacan*, 29.

<sup>109</sup> *Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*.

<sup>110</sup> "The mirror stage," 2.

protection, self-control, and self-definition is not spinning webs or building dams [as with spiders or beavers], but telling stories, and more particularly concocting and controlling the story we tell others--and ourselves--about who we are.<sup>111</sup>

What Dennet here describes are the constructed stories which stem from that original *imago*. It is the infant's conservative vision which acts against the recurrence of dreams of the "fragmented body" (*corps morcelé*) and keeps things together for the *I*, giving an "armour of an alienating identity."<sup>112</sup>

Meanwhile, the fragmented phantasies of the human body relentlessly haunt the *I* as visions--like those of Hieronymous Bosch<sup>113</sup>--reveal the "lines of 'fragilization'"<sup>114</sup> inherent in the anatomical self. As the subject goes through various separations in its evolution, these separations and "lines of fragilization" are immediately met with a unification in which the split is kept together. With the inkling of 'desire' in Kierkegaard's aesthete, there occurs an "earthquake" that "splits the desire from its object infinitely for a moment; but just as the moving principle shows itself for a moment as disuniting, so it manifests itself in turn as wanting to unite the separated."<sup>115</sup> Here the "moving principle" is Dennet's story-telling and Lacan's *imago*; unifying forces resealing the gaps and splits in the formation of the subject. At the same time, these forces are not simply unifying, for, like Kristeva's abject and Kierkegaard's moving principle, the separation continuously reveals "lines of fragilization," simultaneously beseeching and pulverizing the subject.

At the end of the mirror stage it is realized that a fundamental split has occurred which shapes the rest of the development of the individual subject. "It is this moment that decisively tips the whole of human

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<sup>111</sup> *Consciousness Explained*, 414, 418.

<sup>112</sup> "The mirror stage," 4.

<sup>113</sup> Lacan saw the fifteenth-century paintings of Bosch as well representing the visions of fragmentation occurring in the individual.

<sup>114</sup> "The mirror stage," 5.

<sup>115</sup> *Either/Or I*, 80.

knowledge into *mediatization* through the desire of the other" (emphasis mine).<sup>116</sup> The im-media-cy that marks the beginnings of the life of the infant begin to be shaken and a lack exists which must now be filled in by some media. Without lack there is nothing to be mediated, no spaces between; with lack, something must fill it to allow unity to continue. "Mediatization" involves making connections between what is split.

It is important to realize here that while Lacan is content to consider this splitting as creating a "gap" or "lack" and hence, in need of mediatization and filling--a phallogocentric view though perhaps not quite logocentric because it lacks the guarantee of filling--i should like to emphasize notions (metaphors? images?) of difference and splits. In this sense subject and object are separated (subject/object), but separated by the slash, the scission which is not necessarily an empty space to be filled, but a passable boundary-marker. This is also the (non)place of Kristeva's abject which is not a thing, but an affect refiguring the split. It is, to use the language of a poet, "the still point of the turning world" (Eliot). Hence, 'media,' as i am suggesting, does not fill a gap, but confounds existing relationships (inside/outside, content/form, male/female). Rather than a faith of *logos* (and promise of filling) this faith continually defers and reorders the splits.

#### *Narcissus learns to swim*

As Lacan was finishing his doctoral dissertation in 1932 (*On Paranoiac Psychosis in its Relations with the Personality*), Salvador Dalí was formulating similar concepts on paranoia. Indeed, Dalí eventually read Lacan's thesis and came to see it as a justification of his own thinking even though his ideas arose independently of Lacan's.<sup>117</sup> Dalí's ideas came

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<sup>116</sup> "The mirror stage," 5.

<sup>117</sup> See Dawn Ades, *Dalí*, 122-124. Ades quotes Dalí commenting on Lacan: "'Lacan's [thesis] perfectly gives an account of the objective and "communicable" hyperacuity of the phenomenon [paranoia], thanks to which the delirium takes on this tangible character, which is impossible to contradict, and which place it at the very antipodes of the stereotypes of automatism and the dream'" (124).



together in a method of interpretation and painting which he termed "paranoiac-critical activity":

Paranoia: delirium of interpretive association bearing a systematic structure. *Paranoiac-critical activity: spontaneous method of irrational knowledge based upon the interpretive-critical association of delirious phenomena. . . .* Paranoiac-critical activity no longer considers surrealist phenomena and images by themselves but, on the contrary, as a coherent whole of systematic and significant relations.<sup>118</sup>

Within such an activity associations become central, but these associations are not understood within the external language of a society. Rather, these associations stem from the unconscious and, according to Dalí, are "irrational."

My whole ambition in the pictorial domain is to materialize the images of concrete irrationality with the most imperialist fury of precision. -- In order that the world of imagination and of concrete irrationality may be as objectively evident . . . as that of the exterior world of phenomenal reality. The images of concrete irrationality are thus authentically unknown images.<sup>119</sup>

In this sense, Dalí remains a "representationalist" although what he represents is internal (unconscious) rather than external phenomena. The internal turns itself outward in Dalí's paintings, establishing delirious connections between otherwise familiar objects. External and internal thus come together and the split between them is broken down; subjectivity is swallowed by objectivity.

Ironically enough, paranoia as described by Dalí is analogous to Kandinsky's conception of the "spiritual." Dalí states, "I believe my paranoia is an expression of the absolute structure, the proof of its immanence. My genius consists of being in direct contact with the cosmic soul."<sup>120</sup> Kandinsky has more of a concern (and less of an egotistical attitude) for responsibility on the part of the artist--the responsibility to be true to the "inner necessity" that links form and content. But

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<sup>118</sup> Dalí, "The Conquest of the Irrational," 418. Italics in original.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 417.

<sup>120</sup> *The Unspeakable Confessions of Salvador Dalí*, 143. Quoted in Bowie, *Lacan*, 39-40.

Kandinsky also seems to believe--similar to Dalí--in a final immanence and the possibility of direct communication with a "cosmic soul." This is seen most dramatically in his consideration of the "supersensible" abstract object or sound which has a "direct influence on the soul."<sup>121</sup> Both Kandinsky and Dalí consider the artist's painting of objects, the relationship between the objects painted, and the relationship between the viewer and the paintings to be relationships in which barriers are broken down. The viewer is drawn in and categories obliterated between image/reality, form/content and subject/object. As the splitting which occurs in the infant--according to Lacan--creates a lack and a need for "mediatization," perhaps it is the medium of painting such as Dalí's surrealism and Kandinsky's abstraction in which the medium disappears into immediacy, a direct communication between viewer and object. What is a con-fusion of image and reality becomes, to the subject--not yet a differentiating subject--an in-fusion ("drawn," see beginning of this chapter), an impossible place from which to escape.<sup>122</sup>

In light of the study under way here, and as a way to continue emphasizing the second movement within Kierkegaard's stages of the immediate aesthetic, Dalí's "associations and interpretations" of the paranoiac-critical method can be expressed by way of a painting, *The Metamorphosis of Narcissus* (1937). Narcissus is, of course, an important character in the psychoanalytic tradition and one drawn upon by Freud, Lacan and Kristeva. The figure of Narcissus is important here for a number of reasons. For one, Narcissus (and the concept of "primary

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<sup>121</sup> *On the Spiritual in Art*, 147.

<sup>122</sup> However, it must be pointed out that there were plenty of differences in their ways of thinking and painting. Dalí rails against abstract and non-figurative art for its optimism and the assertion that forms and colors have aesthetic value in themselves apart from representation ("The Conquest of the Irrational"). He was a representationalist after all, but what he represented were objects of delirium brought into material reality. Contrarily, Kandinsky separates abstract art from Surrealism "by reason of the fact that [abstract art] does not set out from nature or from an object, but itself 'invents' its forms of expression in very different ways" ("Letter to Irmgard Burchard," *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art*, II:830).

narcissism") exemplifies the theories of Kristeva and Lacan and each of their reconceptualizations of Freud's original essay. Second, the myth of Narcissus, and the psychoanalytic reading of it, shows a constitutive link between vision and the construction of subjectivity. Finally, Narcissus is an interesting character because he confuses image and reality. This confusion leads to his death, a literal "infusion" into his own reflection, or, as Claire Nouvet considers in her reading of Ovid's Narcissus, "Narcissus does not properly 'die,' he *liquefies*."<sup>123</sup> This confusion has implications later in this chapter when the theme of "seduction" will be considered.

Within a paranoiac-critical painting, associations occur which create a transference from one object into the next "without any of them undergoing the least figurative deformation."<sup>124</sup> These paintings literally meld one object into the next (see, for example, *Apparition of Face and Fruit Dish on a Beach*). *Narcissus* is different than many other paranoiac-critical paintings because *Narcissus* repeats a particular form, creating a "metamorphosis," but in a way which keeps each image separate from the others. Still, *The Metamorphosis of Narcissus* was considered by Dalí in the accompanying poem ("Metamorphosis of Narcissus") to be the perfect illustration of paranoiac-critical activity.

In *The Metamorphosis of Narcissus*, associations are drawn by way of repetition, or, "similitude": "The similar develops in series that have neither beginning nor end, that can be followed in one direction as easily as another, that obey no hierarchy, but propagate themselves from small differences among small differences."<sup>125</sup> What is repeated is a form, the form of Narcissus kneeling and staring into the water. (This painting cannot simply be read left to right (or vice versa) and it is therefore impossible to consider which form is "primary"--and therefore which form could be considered authentic and which forms imitations. My choice in considering the figure of the person of Narcissus as the primary form is therefore arbitrary, and yet part of the necessity of using verbal language

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<sup>123</sup> "An Impossible Response," 125.

<sup>124</sup> Ades, *Dalí*, 126.

<sup>125</sup> Michel Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe*, 44.

to discuss a medium such as a surrealist painting.<sup>126</sup> One must begin.)

That said, there are several repeated instances of a form; the first under consideration is the figure of Narcissus staring at his reflection in the water. Soft gold tones and a play of light and shadow cause a muted figure to come into view. The right edge of Narcissus' shoulder and the torso fade away while there are sharp lines drawn on his left arm. As the viewer stands reflecting on this reflecting figure, the figure begins to disappear, to melt into the world around him, much in the same way that Ovid's Narcissus "melted" into the water after gazing at his reflected image. As Dalí considers in the accompanying poem: "Narcissus, in his immobility, absorbed by his reflection with the digestive slowness of carnivorous plants, becomes invisible."<sup>127</sup> The invitation is given to the viewer to gaze at the figure in this painting until they disappear.

Such a conception of gazing to the point of disappearance is particularly germane in the western twentieth-century where the milieu is one of thousands of images vying for attention. As a response to the image-saturation of western culture Andy Warhol has taken up the problems associated with too much looking and created films which last for several hours with themes as riveting as a man sleeping or people eating. As Warhol reflects (an oxymoron, Warhol never reflects), the gaze eventually erases the object stared at and "the more you look at the same exact thing the more the meaning goes away, and the better and the emptier you feel."<sup>128</sup> Warhol's gaze is a gaze without break, a gaze that exhausts rather than stirs to action.

Warhol could enter, in phantasy, a world of pure seriality and standardisation, in which, at one and the same time, the 'Otherness' of the image of the 'other' was effaced and the identity of the self obliterated through the agency of an impersonal machine-like

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<sup>126</sup> The choice too, is precipitated by the title of the painting, but this still does not give reason for the figure of Narcissus to be the "originary" form.

<sup>127</sup> *Métamorphose de Narcisse*, 1937 [English trans., 1937]. Quoted in Ades, *Dalí*, 133.

<sup>128</sup> Andy Warhol as quoted in Peter Wollen, "Raiding the Icebox," 23.

'Other.'<sup>129</sup>

For Dalí, the gaze which makes disappearance happen is met with a repetition (a "metamorphosis"), a return of the form albeit with different content. Once the figure of Narcissus disappears and the viewer loses interest and/or meaning, the hand holding the egg and narcissus flower comes into perspective. The "head" of the figure of Narcissus in the first form is that of a bulb,<sup>130</sup> while in the second figure the bulb comes into bloom. Spring has sprung as the egg cracks open with new life; a rebirth of the "liquefied" Narcissus. The third repetition of the form is the snow god, evident over the mountains in the upper right hand corner of the painting. As the snow god melts, the spring theme is repeated, as is the theme of reflection. Dalí's poem tells about the snow god's "dazzling head leaning over the dizzy space of reflection."<sup>131</sup> The fourth repetition of the form lies directly below the snow god: a human figure looking statuesque on a pedestal. Here the figure is reversed and the backside of the other forms is seen. The description at the Tate Gallery suggests, "Narcissus as he was is seen posing in the background" (emphasis mine). (While the form is the same but reversed, it appears to lack the knee of Narcissus or the thumb of the hand.)

Spring is, of course, the season of desire, a time of new birth and re-birth. It is the season in which desire awakens--the season of the "earthquake" of Kierkegaard's aesthete. Narcissus, fascinated with his reflection, is here reborn within the repeated form of desire breaking through the crack in the egg. The painter saves Narcissus by repeating and metamorphosizing him just as he is getting ready to disappear from view. Death (seen in the melting of Narcissus and the fossilized hand) is

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<sup>129</sup> Peter Wollen, "Raiding the Icebox," 21.

<sup>130</sup> Dalí's idea for this painting is said to have come from the overhearing of a conversation by two Port Lligat fisherman:

"First fisherman: 'What does that boy want to look at himself all day in the mirror for?

Second fisherman: 'If you really want me to tell you: he has an onion [bulb] in the head.'" (Quoted in Ades, *Dalí*, 133.)

<sup>131</sup> "Metamorphosis of Narcissus." Quoted in Ades, *Dalí*, 133.

brought into relation with the life of the flower and the activity in the background of the 'heterosexual group.' Yet, death holds life and supports it. Perhaps it is not so much rebirth as a baptism into death, "death living a human life."<sup>132</sup> In Narcissus' vanity is pure positivity and reflection, negativity is nowhere seen.

The "heterosexual group" to the viewer's right of Narcissus may also be read upon the dissolution of the first form of the kneeling youth. Indeed, the figures pose as does the Narcissus on a pedestal "as he was." None seem to take notice of each other and they all are standing on a shimmery watery surface. Though backgrounded, this group, "in attitudes of 'preliminary expectation,'"<sup>133</sup> may be the pre-scene of the myth; the purely positive vanity of reflection. In this way, a narrative may be tempting to trace out of the metamorphosis, with that-from-which-Narcissus-came, and that-to-which-Narcissus-has-gone displayed in the forms. But the repetition of forms allows no particular direction to read the story, and the continual interplay of immersion/reflection, depth/surface, pulls any reading in more directions than are possible for a linear narrative.

As spring creates a thaw, the "melting" Narcissus (as well as the snow god) still appears as a whole in contrast to the "fragment" of a body--the hand--next to him. The fragment and the whole are set next to each other and the fragment is repeated in the figure of the scavenging dog gnawing on a hand to the right of the fossilized hand. Like Lacan's *imago*, it is the whole image which protects against dreams of bodily fragmentation,<sup>134</sup> while remaining haunted by the loss of limbs. Likewise, Nouvet points out that Narcissus's "crime" was that of "pride," of not allowing others to touch him and not answering others, in other words, of maintaining a unitary and autonomous self.

Pride describes the peculiar predicament of a subject who can

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<sup>132</sup> Alexander Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947) 548. Quoted in Bataille, "Hegel, Death, Sacrifice," 10.

<sup>133</sup> Dalí makes this reference in the poem. Quoted in Ades, *Dalí*, 133.

<sup>134</sup> "The mirror stage," 4-5.

neither experience desire nor respond to desire because he undertakes to constitute himself as absolutely impervious to the other. . . . [P]ride can thus be said to define the position of any 'self' which believes in the possibility of remaining uncontaminated by an otherness.<sup>135</sup>

For Narcissus, the moment desire awakens otherness is confronted (though, recalling Kierkegaard and Kristeva, it is not the point of a complete subject-object differentiation), and simultaneously it is the moment of his "infusion" into the water. Yet in Dalí's painting, desire is reborn through the crack of the egg; a fragmented piece of a whole, petrified, with new birth and the continuation of the form held together. The repetition of form urges the viewer on, just as the subject of the painting is put in process.

Relations and associations within the paranoid irrational unconscious are here objectified, allowing a new perspective through juxtaposition. Wholeness and fragmentation, death and rebirth, solidity and liquefaction, are some of the paranoid contrasts Dalí plays with in this painting. While some borders have been liquidated, others appear in a continually shifting identity-structure. Each contrast compels more readings--narratives, linearizations--in the search to find a way below the surface texture of the paint. And so, this essay moves along in its own connections, providing scenes of interrelations in its attempt to account for reflection and subjectivity.

#### *The third stage: the erotic*

Returning to Kierkegaard after a digression taken off from this second (and, I have argued, crucial) stage of the immediate aesthetic, the third stage of the immediate aesthetic is where desire is finally qualified as desire, where "desire has its absolute object; it desires the particular absolutely."<sup>136</sup> The character chosen to "represent" this stage is Don

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<sup>135</sup> "An Impossible Response," 113.

<sup>136</sup> *Either/Or I*, 85.

Juan, "the incarnation of the flesh."<sup>137</sup> With Don Juan and his 1,003 seductions we note a shift in what is called the erotic: "the erotic is here qualified by another predicate: here the erotic is *seduction*."<sup>138</sup> As an immediate aesthete, Don Juan lives the moment outside of history. The particular is desired, but he searches for a representation, the universal embodied in the particular, "he desires total femininity in every woman."<sup>139</sup> Without history and still lacking an individual volitional self, he can only go on by "continually finishing and continually being able to begin all over again."<sup>140</sup> The particularities (i.e., the seductions) are wholly without relation to each other. Don Juan lives as one full of desire and split in a primitive way from the object of desire, but "[t]he self is not yet an autonomous individual who stands in relation to the particular object but is a restless embodiment of purely natural force."<sup>141</sup>

Due to the fact that Don Juan is not yet an individual with consciousness and lacks the ability to use language (in a historical and self-conscious manner), he cannot properly be called "a seducer." "He desires, and this desire acts seductively,"<sup>142</sup> but it is *desire* itself that is the agent of action. In the same way, he does not use language, but is used *by* language. Don Juan is pushed and pulled about life in the waves of a force stronger than himself, since he really is no subject. He is musical, the immediate, the a-historical, the seductive erotic, the embodiment of sensuousness, but he is no subject. "He dissolves, as it were, in music for us; he unfurls in a world of sounds."<sup>143</sup>

An illuminating example of the immediate aesthetic in the erotic realm

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>141</sup> Taylor, *Journeys to Selfhood*, 234.

<sup>142</sup> *Either/Or I*, 99.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 134.



may be seen in the young couple who comprise the main characters in Georges Bataille's *Story of the Eye*. Within this story most of the communication exists on an entirely non-linguistic level; the connections seemingly happen as if Simone and the narrator (who remains nameless) had no differentiation between them. Throughout the story are elements of inexpressibility ("I found it difficult to have things out"<sup>144</sup>; "her mute and absolute spasm"<sup>145</sup>; "almost wordlessly"<sup>146</sup>; "unable to explain"<sup>147</sup>) with the characters acting in harmony, not needing to speak but knowing each other's minds. Without language, without a connection to concrete existence, this young couple lives abstractly, driven by desire. Like Don Juan, Simone's desire for eyes, eggs and testicles are representative desires for totality within the particular.

The pursuit of desire leads the young couple (and note: it is desire which moves them, for as immediate aesthetes they are not yet in control of desire) through a series of events where undifferentiation and sensuous existence are fully lived out. Smells, sights, sounds, tastes, and touch mingle, but Bataille takes the physicality of the body a step further than Kierkegaard ever did and includes tears, blood, vomit, shit, and semen in the sensuous world. The heterogeneous and undifferentiating elements of the story are perhaps best brought together in the description of the end of an orgy:

Upon seeing me, [Marcelle] displayed a sickly but violent terror. After all, I was pale, smeared with blood, my clothes askew. Behind me, in unspeakable disorder, brazenly stripped bodies were sprawled about. During the orgy, splinters of glass had left deep bleeding cuts in two of us. A young girl was throwing up, and all of us had exploded in such wild fits of laughter at some point or other that we had wet our clothes, an armchair, or the floor. The resulting stench of blood, sperm, urine, and vomit made me almost recoil in horror, but the inhuman shriek from Marcelle's throat was far more terrifying. I must say, however, that Simone was deeply tranquil by

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<sup>144</sup> *Story of the Eye*, 10.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

now . . . her pacified face almost smiling.<sup>148</sup>

Here all flows into all, boundaries and separations all but non-existent, inside and outside move together, human and inhuman--realized in Marcelle's "inhuman shriek"--are barely distinguished, and even terror is quickly met with tranquility. Elsewhere the lack of differentiation brings another similarity to Kierkegaard's aesthetic, the indifference to death and life:

it struck me that [if] death was the sole outcome of my erection, and if Simone and I were killed, then the universe of our unbearable personal vision was certain to be replaced by the pure stars, fully unrelated to any external gazes and realizing in a cold state, without human delays or detours, something that strikes me as the goal of my sexual licentiousness: a geometric incandescence (among other things, the coinciding point of life and death, being and nothingness), perfectly fulgurating.<sup>149</sup>

This sort of pure presence, this absolutely immanent flow through bodies and stars and divisions may be a desirous aspect of the erotic, but this is to claim a paradox. And yet the paradox as described in *Story of the Eye* is one of which Bataille was aware. The paradox is between the unity and universality involved with the erotic orgy and the particularity of desire for an object. Bataille states, "The final aim of eroticism is fusion, all barriers gone, but its first stirrings are characterized by the presence of a desirable object."<sup>150</sup> The aporia involved here must be understood. The seamless unity of the life of the young man in *Either/Or I* and of the young couple in *Story of the Eye* can only be talked about (i.e., language used, distinction made) from outside that realm. In other words, total fusion is impossible; desire is the moving force which must be awake and, if it is, then there must be a split (however primitive) between subject and object. I quote Bataille at length here.

In the orgy continuity cannot be laid hold of; individuals lose themselves at the climax, but in mingled confusion. The orgy is necessarily disappointing. Theoretically it is the complete negation

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>150</sup> *Erotism*, 129-30.

of the individual quality. . . . Not only is individuality itself submerged in the tumult of the orgy, but each participant denies the individuality of the others. All limits are completely done away with, or so it seems, but it is impossible for nothing to remain of the differences between individuals and the sexual attraction connected with those differences.<sup>151</sup>

If eroticism in its pure form (total fusion, continuity, nakedness) were actualized, desire would not be possible. "The object of desire is different from eroticism itself; it is not eroticism in its completeness, but eroticism working through it."<sup>152</sup> Desire involves splitting and fragmentation. Eroticism involves the absence of splits. This is the aporia that works itself out in the aesthetic realm of Kierkegaard and, in varying ways, in Bataille.

And so, desire has awakened and we come to a place where the contradictions involved with erotic unity, harmony and undifferentiation reach a point of dissolution. The contradictions, having become more and more intense, push the subject onward. The mediatizations disrupt the borders, forcing the splits to a heightened level of instability. Then another break occurs...

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 130.

*Seduction*

There is another side to the aesthetic life, apart from the immediate. This side of the aesthetic consists of an individual (who can now be called a "seducer" even though she or he is not a fully acting subject in Kierkegaard's schema) separated from the world, but faced with the world as infinite possibility. The split caused by desire turns the individual to face the infinity she or he recently moved away from. That which she or he was a part of is now other. Distanced from that from which she or he came, the aesthete still lacks concrete action in the world, but stands across from the world in the realm of *reflection*.

The development of a "subject," in the view of Kierkegaard and others, is a gradual coming into use of concrete historical language (which, as will be seen, is to be distinguished from the entry into symbolic language for many of the psychoanalysts), with each step bringing a greater separation from the immediate and consequent greater use of language. The individual subject must make up for the absence that occurs upon the awakening of desire. In the confluent life of the immediate aesthetic, reflection is unknown, for "reflection is fatal to the immediate,"<sup>153</sup> but now language must make up for the split caused by the death of the immediate. The individual must prove mastery of the separation and it does this through mastery of language. In psychoanalytic lore, the final entry into subjectivity takes place as the individual I works through the Oedipal triangle. This will be discussed further in the chapter on the ethical.

The reason the entry into symbolic language is mentioned here is that the "reflective" side of the aesthetic may be seen as another step in the process on the way to the ethical, but it may also be seen as a digression. As I hope to show, the reflective side of the aesthetic life is a place where language is used fully, and therefore subjectivity is accomplished, yet it is used in ways which can ultimately not break out of infinite reflection on past and future. It will only be in the move to the

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<sup>153</sup> *Either/Or I*, 70.

ethical sphere where the individual becomes a concrete user (i.e., out of the abstract reflection on past and future into the present) and agent of language. It must be added again that these stages are not necessarily linear in their development, but that an individual subject can move in and out of these various "modes of existence."

*Diary of a Seducer*

Venturing into the reflective part of the aesthetic life according to Søren Kierkegaard we find a bundle of letters and diary entries under the provocative heading "The Seducer's Diary." This group of writings is found among the original collection of notes and papers of the "young man" as found by Victor Eremita. Briefly peeling apart the textual layers at this point it can be seen that the "seducer's diary" is written by a person named Johannes, found by the young man and included with his own writings which are then found and collected by Eremita. Over all of this is Søren Kierkegaard himself. These layerings may be seen as ways of writing out the various possibilities of the subject of Kierkegaard, contradiction and paradox all working within the same pen. The pseudonymity allows an experiment in writing which has rarely been equalled in western writing.

As presented within *Either/Or*, the reader is invited into a labyrinth of multiple authors and multiple genres. When the levels build up, and the maze wandered through, the reader loses orientation; there is an invitation to take a peek at another's personal diary, a "seducer's diary." As Victor Eremita makes an initial consideration as to "whether I might not become guilty of an indiscretion toward the unknown authors,"<sup>154</sup> the young man ponders similar thoughts when he comes upon the "diary." Eremita, ethically of course, decides he can publish these "unknown authors" papers because "they yielded no information" and "are silent."<sup>155</sup> The young man seems to struggle with the implicit voyeurism a bit more and,

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 12.

while he goes ahead and collects the loose papers of the diary off of a friend's desk, reflects on the implications.

The young man is, after all, an aesthete--and therefore caught up in the abstraction of the poetic life--but he is also reflective and knows his own movements within the poetic. He seems to have a sense as to what is right and wrong (i.e., ethical), but is unable to act concretely in an ethical manner. (Besides, as Johannes says, "The ethical is just as boring in scholarship as in life."<sup>156</sup>) And yet, what the reader learns from his reflective poetic musings on the found papers of the diary could not be learned from someone in the ethical realm. The young aesthete is all too aware of his complicity in the voyeuristic aspects of reading someone else's despicable writings. He is all too aware of watching a seduction take place and doing nothing about it. He reads on and is filled with anxiety over the affair.

I, too, am carried along into that kingdom of mist, into that dreamland where one is frightened by one's own shadow at every moment. Often I futilely try to tear myself away from it; I follow along like an ominous shape, like an accuser who cannot speak. How strange! He has spread the deepest secrecy over everything, and yet there is an even deeper secrecy, that I myself am in on the secret and that I came to know it in an unlawful way. . . . There is nothing that involves so much seduction and so much malediction as a secret.<sup>157</sup>

The poetic is seductive. It continually takes over the actual. Concrete historical living is poetically reflected on so much that lives are "bent into themselves"<sup>158</sup> and decision becomes impossible. Life for the poet exists wholly within the poet's own head and, it would seem, an author of a book is continually at risk of confusing fiction and life, possibility with actuality. As an author, there is the risk of seducing the reader as well, but perhaps this is the point . . .

Johannes is the poetic author out to seduce Cordelia, to disrupt her,

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 367.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 310.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 307.

"to confuse poetry and actuality, truth and fiction, to frolic in infinity."<sup>159</sup> Johannes may be said to use the paranoiac-critical method outlined by Dalí where "through a process of thought of a paranoiac and active character, it will be possible to systematize confusion and contribute to the total discrediting of the world of reality."<sup>160</sup> This not to make her fall in love with Johannes necessarily--though he seems to say this at times--but for the sake of seduction itself, for his own pathetic poetic life. While he thinks he is being an educator in his speech and writing, and leading her out to face the world of infinite possibility, he is finally only looking for his own reflection. Like Narcissus, Johannes is staring at the deep waters and finally takes the plunge and cannot swim; the seducer himself is faced with the impossibility of an infinity of possibility. This is the point of anxiety as "the dizziness of freedom."<sup>161</sup>

### *Seductive Theory*

The theme of seduction has been used by a contemporary theorist, Jean Baudrillard, to describe the simulacra of our mass culture. His beginning work in the late 1960's and early 1970's as a Marxian-oriented critic was abandoned because of its inability to analyze the current mass media culture. As Mark Poster comments,

Baudrillard found that the productivist metaphor in Marxism was inappropriate for comprehending the status of commodities in the post-war era. Only a semiological model, he argues, can decipher the meaning structure of the modern commodity. But the commodity embodies a communicational structure that is a departure from the traditional understanding of the sign. In a commodity the relation of word, image or meaning and referent is broken and restructured so that its force is directed, not to the referent of use value or utility, but to desire.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 392.

<sup>160</sup> From "L'Ane Pourri," [The Rotten Donkey] *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution*. (1930) no.1. Quoted in Ades, Dalí, 121.

<sup>161</sup> *The Concept of Anxiety*, 61.

<sup>162</sup> "Introduction," *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, 1.

So enter seduction.

When Baudrillard points to Kierkegaard's "Diary of a Seducer" in his own work *Seduction* he picks up on the notion of the secret. "The young girl [Cordelia] is an enigma, and in order to seduce her one must become an enigma for her; it is an *enigmatic duel*, and seduction resolves it *without disclosing the secret*."<sup>163</sup> Beneath the secret, of course, is nothing. The secret itself is the secret, it is the surface appearance of having a secret that seduces. When Kierkegaard's young aesthete finds the "diary" he states, "He has spread the deepest secrecy over everything, and yet there is an even deeper secrecy, that I myself am in on the secret and that I came to know it in an unlawful way."<sup>164</sup> What the deeper secret is is that there is no secret. If there is a depth, it is merely a depth spread over surface. "[T]he intensity between the two is simply the secret of the secret."<sup>165</sup> Life in this schema is a masquerade in which the same face exists beneath the masks, but it is still a masquerade.

Against interpretation and all "masters of suspicion," (as Paul Ricoeur has called them; Marx and Freud especially<sup>166</sup>) Baudrillard gives attention to the "surface texture" of discourse. No one is finally interested in the interpretation of texts, he considers, it is the method involved, the "rhetoric" we may say, that is interesting and that catches our attention and seduces. As U2's Bono echoes, "We're all sliding on the surface of things. Sometimes its kind of nice."<sup>167</sup> And maybe this is the secret, the

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<sup>163</sup> "On Seduction," 159. Italics in original.

<sup>164</sup> *Either/Or I*, 310.

<sup>165</sup> "On Seduction," 159.

<sup>166</sup> See *Freud and Philosophy*.

<sup>167</sup> "Behind the Fly: Bono, the Rolling Stone Interview," Interviewed by Alan Light. Bono seems to have read Baudrillard in some of his comments in this interview: "We used to have this thing about our image: 'What image? We don't have an image. We're playing with images, like the desert or whatever, and we dress in a way that is sympathetic with the music, but it's not an image.' And finally, I just said, 'Fuck it, maybe it is.' In fact, if it is, let's play with it, and let's distort it and manipulate it and lose ourselves in the process of it. But let's write about losing ourselves in the process of it, cause that's what's happening to everybody



secret that secrets are not wanted, that interpreting for depth is a drag and the surface has a certain glimmer to it. The narcissistic subject here liquifies as "the age of simulation thus begins with a liquidation of referentials."<sup>168</sup>

Without referentials, there are only signs; signs referring to one another in endless play with nothing to point to save more signs. To put it in light of the study underway here, subjectivity dissolves, leaving only objects. At the end of the modern subject which relied on the split between subject and object, the subject has been overtaken by the object, the subject is now one more object in the transparent society. "Nothing (not even God) now disappears by coming to an end, by dying. Instead things disappear through proliferation or contamination, by becoming saturated or transparent."<sup>169</sup>

The secret sign that has no secret in this present age is the image:

These would be the successive phases of the image:

- 1) It is the reflection of a basic reality.
- 2) It masks and perverts a basic reality.
- 3) It masks an absence of a basic reality.
- 4) It bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum.<sup>170</sup>

While images used to represent the "real," they have now imploded reality and become reality. There is nothing below, behind or beyond them.

In the study on seduction, Baudrillard considers *trompe-l'oeil* painting to show how images "represent" the limits of the representation of reality, and thereby, the limits of reality itself. These paintings are "[p]ure appearances, the irony is their excess of reality."<sup>171</sup> By "tricking the eye" in their referring to real objects, *trompe-l'oeil* paintings subvert the perspective of the viewer, showing that what is seen is other than it

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else on a smaller scale anyway."

<sup>168</sup> "Simulacra and Simulations," 167.

<sup>169</sup> *The Transparency of Evil*, 4.

<sup>170</sup> "Simulacra and Simulations," 170.

<sup>171</sup> "On Seduction," 155.

first appeared. In what must be a nod toward Lacan, Baudrillard states, "[T]he objects of the *trompe-l'oeil* have the same remarkable vivacity as when the child discovers his or her own image, like an instant hallucination prior to perception."<sup>172</sup>

Making a comparison of *trompe-l'oeil* to surrealism in the twentieth-century Baudrillard considers of both that "[t]hey disrupt at the very point of impact with reality or functionality, and therefore with consciousness. . . . They undermine the world's certainty."<sup>173</sup> Perhaps then, it should be no secret that René Magritte's *Le Séducteur* may be a pertinent illustration here.

*Le Séducteur* is the painting of a ship in the water. Quite literally this is so. The water is the ship, or rather, the water rises from the sea in the form of a ship. What the viewer "sees" are the sails of the ship, which are water, above the water. The hull of the ship is the sea itself, melted, in a sense, into the sea.

And yet, the water is not the ship, the water is the water. And the ship is not water, the ship is the ship. What the viewer produces (interprets) for her or his self is a ship, and water. Because the viewer has seen drawings of ships in the water or seen "real" ships and "real" water, they remember the shape of a ship with its sails and when confronted with this painting of water in the outline of a ship, a ship is what is seen. The water "resembles" a ship. But the ship "resembles" water.

The hierarchy of resemblance--whereby one image "represents" another--is negated. By upsetting "resemblance," the painting becomes concerned with "similitudes." Michel Foucault points out the differences:

Resemblance serves representation, which rules over it; similitude serves repetition, which ranges across it. Resemblance predicates itself upon a model it must return to and reveal; similitude circulates the simulacrum as an indefinite and reversible relation of the similar

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 157.

to the similar.<sup>174</sup>

While Kandinsky upsets the notion of representation in painting by painting abstractly, Magritte hyperrealizes resemblance to the point where the resemblances become absurd and finally deconstructive of the viewer's typical image/reality structuring. As Foucault states, "Kandinsky's is a naked affirmation clutching at no resemblance, and which, when asked 'what it is,' can reply only by referring itself to the gesture that formed it: an 'improvisation,' a 'composition.'"<sup>175</sup> Magritte, contrarily, paints "exact resemblances, to the point where they willfully multiply as if to assert themselves."<sup>176</sup>

It will also be recalled that, like Magritte, Dalí's paintings can be described using the term 'similitude.' Indeed *The Metamorphosis of Narcissus* similarly lacks a hierarchical structure of resemblance, i.e., there is no "first cause" of the metamorphosis. The result is an endless play of readings, each one pushing the viewer to go back and think again from a new perspective. Similitude works within a painting, circulating "the simulacrum as an indefinite and reversible relation of the similar to the similar," but also may function between paintings, opening the readings still further.

We may see this especially in a comparison of Dalí's *Narcissus* and Magritte's *Séducteur* which could compel a re-reading from the perspective of liquefaction. As Narcissus liquefies he is transformed into a hand, flower, snow god, etc., and yet we only know of his watery experience through the mythological language which has been passed on to us. Likewise, Magritte's ship is liquefied, literally figuring the ship as water, but here, apart from Narcissus, the entire scene occurs on the surface in front of the viewer. Or, in another comparative rereading, we may take

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<sup>174</sup> *This Is Not a Pipe*, 44. The use of these two terms has been debated and Silvano Levy argues that Foucault gets them wrong, or, they are not used in a way Magritte would agree with. The terms seem to me to be adequately clarified by Foucault and I do not push the debate any further. See Levy, "Foucault on Magritte on Resemblance."

<sup>175</sup> *This Is Not a Pipe*, 34.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

the view of 'petrification' with the ship being what David Sylvester calls a "variant to petrification because it not only involves an analogous metamorphosis but because it results in grisaille."<sup>177</sup> The grey petrified form of the ship is met with the rhythmic flowing of the sea whereas Narcissus is petrified into a hand holding the color and rebirth of the flower and egg.

These brief suggestions are given to show the necessarily 'inter-textual' readings of a painting. When similitude moves between paintings, it may be thus considered inter-textual. More than a simple "borrowing" or "study of sources," Kristeva's notion of inter-textuality is a "transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another . . . [demanding] a new articulation of the thetic."<sup>178</sup> The first position of the thetic is disrupted upon the im-position from another sign-system which "pluralizes the thetic doxy,"<sup>179</sup> opening the way for more readings. Within the brief re-readings of Dalí's *Narcissus* and Magritte's *Le Séducteur*, it is seen how one painting im-poses upon another, how mythological language im-poses upon a painting and, finally, how an image such as a painting may disrupt a language-based "reading," breaking down the signifying process and halting it in its tracks. Inter-textuality provides us with yet another perspective--another tactic--from which to see the word/image relationship, but ultimately shows the shortcomings of inter-textuality composed with word and image as two separate but transgressable "sign-systems." The viewer skims the surface of paintings like Magritte's trying to establish themselves in the depths and finding only surface. Readings may still proliferate and "new articulations of the thetic" forever possible, yet the image challenges the thetic ability from within an inter-textual economy. That is, the "demand" for a "new articulation" may be frustrated as soon as it begins, and the viewer may be left floating, seduced into the pulsions of the semiotic.

Each painter (Magritte and Dalí, as well as Kandinsky) is

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<sup>177</sup> Magritte, 284.

<sup>178</sup> *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 59-60.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

uninterested in the automatism of other surrealists like Miró, but a key difference between Dalí and Magritte seems to be that Magritte is a "conscious painter" and undermining of symbolism while Dalí finally is dealing with representation by painting the paranoiac associations of the unconscious. Magritte paints by inspiration, "the moment when one knows what is happening,"<sup>180</sup> with "the images obtained through voluntary and conscious research based on some object that has been taken as a 'question.'"<sup>181</sup> Magritte may believe in an unconscious, but the relationship of his painting to it is tenuous. He states, "I am not trying to express ideas or feelings in paintings, even if they strike me as outstanding (nor anything emanating from some so-called unconscious)."<sup>182</sup>

The difference between Magritte's "conscious" painting (if i may be allowed such a description) and the paranoiac unconscious painting of Dalí is especially interesting here because i think it shows one of the crucial divides between the immediate aesthetic and the reflective aesthetic and moves back into the discussion of seduction. At the level of seduction (and of the reflective aesthetic) language and reflection are available and used. As Suzi Gablik argues about Magritte's method, "Problems are solved, in the manner of philosophy, not by giving new information, but by rearranging what we have always known."<sup>183</sup> Along these lines Magritte says that "*Le Séducteur* was the response found to the 'question of water,' the research consisted of a kind of 'frenzied contemplation' . . . of the question."<sup>184</sup>

*La Séducteur* is seductive. Its secret is that it is a painting (which is no secret after all). It is not a ship. It is not the sea. It is a

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<sup>180</sup> Quoted in Suzi Gablik, *Magritte*, 15.

<sup>181</sup> Letter from Magritte to G. Puel, November 13, 1953. Quoted in Harry Torczyner, *Magritte*, 200.

<sup>182</sup> In an address upon accepting membership in the Académie Picard, April 5 1957. Quoted in Torczyner, *Magritte*, 200.

<sup>183</sup> *Magritte*, 10.

<sup>184</sup> In a letter to G. Buel, November 13, 1953. Quoted in Torczyner, *Magritte*, 200.

painting. Seductively, it challenges the viewer's conceptions. The viewer, thinking there is something there below the sea, within the ship, is brought into the space of the simulation. Magritte does not paint symbolically, but people

hunt around for a meaning to get themselves out of the quandary, and because they don't understand what they are supposed to think when they confront the painting. . . . They want something to lean on, so they can be comfortable. They want something secure to hang on to, so they can save themselves from the void. People who look for symbolic meanings fail to grasp the inherent poetry and mystery of the image. No doubt they sense this mystery, but they wish to get rid of it. They are afraid. By asking 'what does this mean?' they express a wish that everything be understandable. But if one does not reject the mystery, one has quite a different response. One asks other things.<sup>185</sup>

The secret mystery spread over Magritte's painting seduces, it leads away from the depths to the surface. His painting is a simulation. Returning to the breakdown mentioned above of word/image in an inter-textual relationship, Magritte's painting is, again in Foucault's words, a *heteropia*,

*Heteropias* are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy syntax in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things to "hang together." . . . [H]eteropias (such as those to be found so often in Borges) desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of language at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences.<sup>186</sup>

While Borges may be a heteropic writer, Magritte may be a heteropic painter. Indeed, images may function quite well as heteropia, standing beside verbal language and showing the frailty of it. The viewer is left speechless in trying to describe. Words approach it, but cannot comprehend, and the viewer knows it.

A similar seduction is seen through the writings of Baudrillard. Consciously, he faces the enigma of the *fin de millenium* culture and, like Johannes, "in order to seduce [Cordelia, or the culture] one must become

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<sup>185</sup> Magritte quoted in Gablik, *Magritte*, 11.

<sup>186</sup> *The Order of Things*, xviii.

an enigma."<sup>187</sup> The anxiety of the "dizziness of freedom" has crept up on Baudrillard and the critical thinking of differentiation seems to have vanished. He has become, as a recent collection of essays on him says, "perplexing."<sup>188</sup> In other words, *Baudrillard has become the enigma* in hopes of finding a way into the enigmatic culture of the simulacra. "We do in fact live among pure forms, in radical obscenity, which is to say visible and undifferentiated, among figures that were previously secret and distinct."<sup>189</sup> Certainly this is evident in his *Fatal Strategies* where he thinks from the point of view of the object. The social has imploded and there is no longer a Kantian or Cartesian subject to look at the world, only objects remain, objects continually referring to each other and nothing outside this play. This is precisely what the seductive is, "the reign of the object over that of the subject,"<sup>190</sup> the infinite possibilities facing the subject who has now entered into the simulacra themselves and become a sign.

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<sup>187</sup> "On Seduction," 159.

<sup>188</sup> "Introduction," *Forget Baudrillard?* ix.

<sup>189</sup> "On Seduction," 163.

<sup>190</sup> *L'Autre par lui-même* (Paris, 1987), 53-54. Quoted in Arthur Kroker, "Panic Value," 183.

*Concluding the Aesthetic*

With a variety of motivations, i have woven together several threads in this previous chapter. Generally speaking, i have tried to bring a new perspective to the movement through the aesthetic stage as conceived by Kierkegaard. Within such a "progression" there are a series of breaks, or splits, which occur, propelling the individual into the next phase. Over and against certain other theories of primary ego formation (most notably the Oedipal stage of Freudian-influenced analysis), i have considered, along with Lacan and Kristeva, the reflective vision of primary narcissism to be a constitutive place of identity formation. I have also placed primary narcissism mid-point in the three stages of the immediate aesthetic life in the Kierkegaardian framework, a place often overlooked. Not only am i drawing connections between Kierkegaardian subjectivity and poststructural-psychoanalytic analysis, but i am inserting the dimension of "seeing," or vision, into Kierkegaard's stages.

While many theories of the subject have relied on language, i have suggested a shift toward media-oriented analysis in a consideration of subjectivity. At this point aesthetics--and especially the "existentialized" aesthetics of Kierkegaard--becomes a crucial locus for such a re-view. Within an aesthetically-informed view of the subject we are compelled to take various media into account in the construction of the subject, further realizing the impossibility of a totalizing structure of knowledge. As language can only *approach* the semiotic or the aesthetic, perhaps it may be images which lend themselves to a new but non-final "theory" of the subject. Kristeva and Lacan have pointed out the element of visuality in early distinctions of subject and object, and i have put forward images as an aid to the "understanding" of the pre-subject. The shift from language to media gives weight to a disseminated subject, one not possessable and finally unanalyzable. As stated in the Prescript through Kristeva and Johnson, such a re-viewed subjectivity has political implications and staves off the systematizing attempts inherent in much of western philosophical-theological thought.

Also, through a media-oriented analysis we realize the impossibility of claiming one medium as more primary than another. As Derrida and others have continually stressed, the western philosophical tradition is full of phonocentric concepts which would



privilege the voice or music as "present" while other media are secondary and parasitic. Contrarily, Deconstruction shows how all media is mediation, and speech and music are not beyond being media. Beginning from the view that communication is always already mediated, we may come to see the disruptive possibilities when one medium works against another, unsettling and putting the subject in process. One medium *supplements* another, opening meaning and deferring a final interpretation.

Putting this view in light of Kierkegaard's aesthetic, we may move further away from a linear, narrativized reading of the stages; at the same time remembering that this essay presents the stages in such a linear progression. As brought forward in the Prescript via Blanchot and Newmark, an existential movement "is already a kind of rhetorical device or figure in the narrative form of an allegory."<sup>54</sup> But, as Kevin Hart points out, "classically understood, allegory is a trope of closure--it seeks to fix the meaning of a text. Irony, however, is always a trope of non-closure, forever indicating the difference between text and meaning and therefore calling allegorical closure into question."<sup>55</sup> Irony (a trope almost exhausted by Kierkegaard himself) is a way to read the stages in a non-narrative way, as opposed to the allegorical trope which leads to fixed meanings and stable subjects.

Indeed, it is an ironic view which will be developed further in the next section, "(Un)concluding postscript." Suffice it for here that what is of interest is a view of subjectivity which is "in process/on trial" (*sujet en procès*), without promised lands. In other words, by making a parallel between "modes of existence" and media--of communication, i am suggesting that no one mode or medium may be final. Rather, each disrupts the others, deferring the final meaning of the text which, in this case, would be the subject. The subject becomes an ironic subject--ironized through modes and media--which is a subject in process. Various media and modes show the frailty of other sign-systems' abilities to signify as well as show the tentative nature of particular ways of being. In turn, the subject remains open to change and resistant to totalizing forms of analysis. The image and the aesthetic are but two of these media and modes, but two i

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<sup>54</sup> Newmark, "Taking Kierkegaard Apart," 9.

<sup>55</sup> *The trespass of the sign*, 157.

have attempted to foster in this essay showing relationships which put the subject on a journey.

Tied to these views is the import of the material. Within visual and aesthetic theories there must also be attention paid to the materiality of the body. The aesthetic is that which "pertains to sense perception" and this necessarily includes, but is not limited to, the physical processes of sensory experience. As Kristeva has pointed out, the materiality of the body and the early-subject's connection to the mother's body provide a feminine (*mater*-ial) basis of the construction of the subject that is pre-Oedipal and, hence, pre-patriarchal. Kristeva's (and others') feminist critique is directed most especially toward Freud, but also toward Lacan's continuing emphasis (in spite of the early "mirror stage") on the Law of the Father. Obviously, if Deconstruction is taken into account, as it has been in feminist theorists such as Kristeva, Butler or Cixous, there can be no particular "sexed" basis for subjectivity or language either. These theorists continue to subvert a view of origins.

At the beginning of the Prescript i stated that i was working with three general fields of study: theology, theory and the visual arts. The chief theological concept i have been alluding to (though certainly not developing in any systematic way) is that of faith. Throughout the aesthetic stage, faith has been played with and against the relentless critiques which exist in poststructural theory and in the unsettling visual images of Rembrandt, Dali, Kandinsky and Magritte. Visually it is an image--however hallucinatory--that holds together the unified (pre)subject and gives the "armour of an alienating identity."<sup>56</sup> But it is also an image (as i have suggested in the initial viewing of Rembrandt's *Slaughtered Ox*) which may take the subject "back" to the point where identity is made and unmade, leaving the subject-as-viewer in an undifferentiated space.

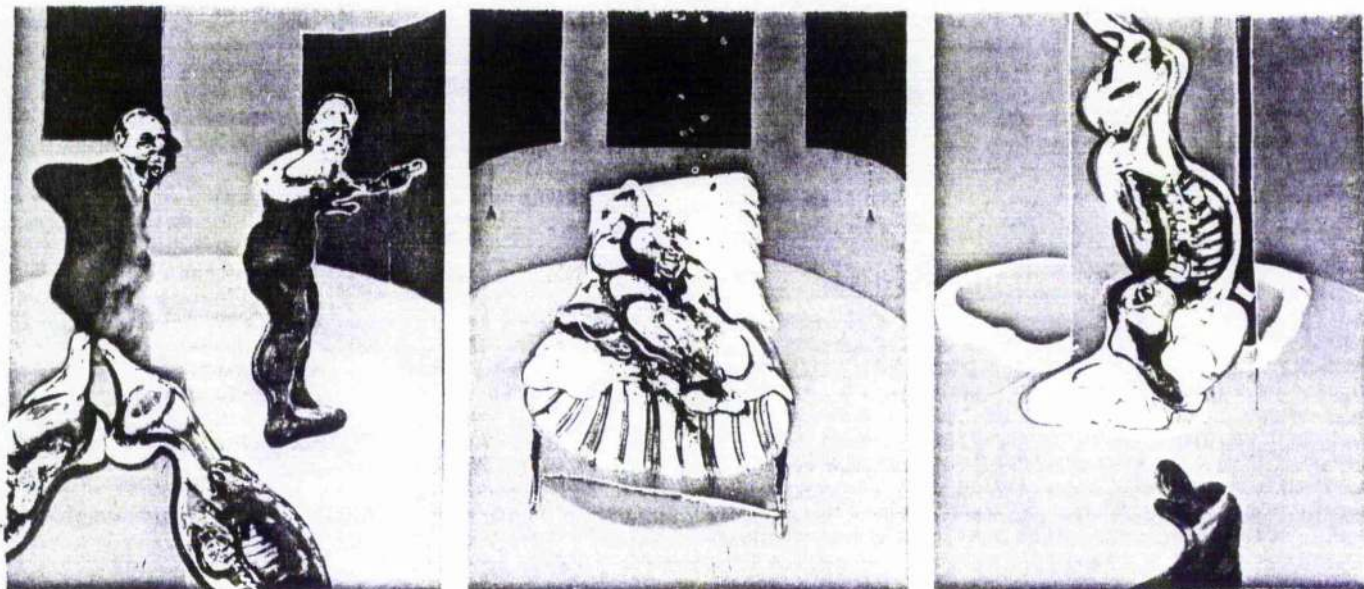
Faith is the question residing at the split (inside/outside, subject/object). Faith is 'desire,' in a chronological view, and founds the initial splitting. In a topographical view, faith is 'object,' the disrupting elements of poetic language and images which provoke a resituation of the splits. Faith in this sense is the "moving principle" of Kierkegaard

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<sup>56</sup> Lacan, "The mirror stage," 4.

which urges the subject to rework borders, and rework them continually so that the subject in process is a subject of faith. Such faith cannot be possessed by a subject, but the subject and faith enter into relationship. Faith is always excessive. It is not a faith in a final redemption, but includes the element of risk at every step ventured.

But i have left Johannes in the water, infusing into his reflection. The seducer uses language, but is caught up in the world of reflection and thus, cannot use *parole* in a concrete manner. And then the reader must take a step back, for when the seducer is himself seduced in the end of "Diary of the Seducer" (when he becomes the enigma), the reader must also reconsider her/his own subject in relation to seduction. The questions (the ironic questions of faith) at the end (which is also a beginning) are: "Have i too been seduced? Have i been drawn into the lure of another's privacy? Have i been captivated by an image? An image at once terrible and fascinating? Am i too a voyeur?" The answers to these questions, if one can give them, are part of the ethical stage.



Francis Bacon, *Three Studies for a Crucifixion* (1962) Oil on canvas; each panel 147.5x198 cm. Tate Gallery



Salvador Dalí, *Autumnal Cannibalism* (1936) Oil on canvas 65.1x65.1 cm. The Tate Gallery

## (Un)concluding Postscript

*Tremendous*

Terrific, dreadful; immense. rel. to *Tremor*, "involuntary shaking of the body"; Gk. *trémein*, tremble.<sup>1</sup>

I've always been very moved by pictures about slaughterhouses and meat, and to me they belong very much to the whole thing of the Crucifixion. There've been extraordinary photographs which have been done of animals just being taken up before they were slaughtered; and the smell of death. I think these pictures [*Three Studies for a Crucifixion*, 1962] were very much based on that kind of thing, which to me is very, very near this whole thing of the Crucifixion. I know, for religious people, for Christians, the Crucifixion has a totally different significance. But as a non-believer, it was just an act of man's behaviour, a way of behaviour to another.

-Francis Bacon<sup>2</sup>

... or dissect  
the recurrent image into preconscious terrors.

-T.S. Eliot<sup>3</sup>

It is November, *Slachtmaand*, "slaughtering month." The animal which was put into production by a scission (castration) and used to draw a plow, is now again put into production by yet more scissions and drawings. The life of this animal has been a continual sacrifice, cut to produce, and cut again to produce. Dying to its presence in life, the presence will now be disseminated and consumed. The end of the body and the beginning of writing, a writing and reading that are continuous.

I remember at the age of twelve or thirteen, reading the following sentence: "The flesh is sad, alas, and I have read all the books." I was struck with astonishment mingled with scorn and disgust. As if a tomb had spoken. What a lie! And

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<sup>1</sup> *Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Ades, *Francis Bacon*, 19.

<sup>3</sup> T.S. Eliot, "The Dry Salvages," V.192-3.

beyond, what truth: for the flesh is a book. A body "read," finished? A book--a decaying carcass? Stench and falsity. The flesh is writing, and writing is never read: it always remains to be read, studied, sought, invented.<sup>4</sup>

To be productive now--to be read, studied and finally consumed and incorporated--the ox, after having been drawn, will be quartered. The image of a whole animal is marked with "lines of fragilization," lines which make production possible; for, creation comes through splitting. Out of the undifferentiated *tohu bohu* divisions occur which mark the beginning of relationships and the beginning of social structure. If subjects and objects are not distinguished then there can be no interrelations, no otherness. Dividing the ox allows for consumption, a necessity of society.

As drawings have already taken place, the woman removes the stain of the drawn blood. The cuts take on a surgical quality: sterile, nothing defiling. By hiding the drawing, a killing is transformed into civility. "Of course we must eat!" Of course. But we eat right up to the boundaries--draining the drawn blood, severing the head, the genitalia, removing any recourse to the stench of mortality; life and positivity must be extolled and death (and any reminder of it) expunged and sponged from the floor. This is the order of civility.<sup>5</sup>

Corporal politics--making manifest the body in all its vulnerable, disarticulated, morbid aspects, in its apertures, curves, protuberances where the boundaries between self and the world are porous--is somehow indecent. "It is in keeping as far as possible out of sight, not only actual pain, but all that can be offensive or disagreeable to the most sensitive person, that refinement exists," writes the great liberal philosopher John Stuart Mill. In fact, it is a sign of the "high state of civilization," of the "perfection of mechanical arrangements," that so much can be kept hidden. . . . The infliction of pain, as Mill points out, is delegated "to the judge, the soldier, the surgeon, the butcher, the executioner."<sup>6</sup>

Once clean, the oxflesh must be shared. The French, *partager*, gets at the

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<sup>4</sup> Hélène Cixous, "Coming to Writing," 23.

<sup>5</sup> Thanks to J. Stephen Fountain for suggestions on this reading of *The Slaughtered Ox*.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Laquer, "Clio Looks at Corporal Politics," 14. No reference is given for J.S. Mill quote.

beginnings of production in its dual significations of 'dividing' and 'uniting.' Production entails moving back across the splits which have occurred, sharing between others. As Edmond Jabès pursues the question of sharing in *The Book of Shares*, he claims, "Whatever exists has no existence unless shared. Possessions under seal are lost possessions. At first sight, giving, offering yourself in order to receive an equivalent gift in return, would seem to be ideal sharing."<sup>7</sup> A reciprocity where all the divisions are smoothed out allows for a good society.

But what's that in the corner of the painting? The painter (and the woman) seem to have forgotten the excess of the hide and head. If hide and head could have been hidden then the sharing would have gone on neatly--everything divided into each person's share--, but there is no place to hide and the grotesque peripherals display themselves. Simply "meat" if the unedibles were covered and taken from view, the viewer is instead forced to see that meat is more than meat, that a certain otherness shows itself in the excess. A question of origins surfaces: At which point does subject, object, meat, animal, or human begin and end? When can consumption occur? What are the necessary preconditions for a splitting which is not violent? Or is it always violent?

The question itself is an excess. Without questions there would be pure exchange, "efficient" production. In Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*, the ship's doctor keeps the tight production going by exclaiming of the maggot-infested carcass intended for consumption: "The meat is good. No questions." Production must keep moving and not leave anything dangling, no questions, no rethinking borders.

Despite the best efforts of repression (and cleansing), there is an excess. Exchange is never complete. "[I]f we cannot share all, what remains and will always remain outside sharing? What has never, at the heart of our possessions, been ours?"<sup>8</sup> What is not ours, what can never be ours, is the other. The call of the other invokes responsibility which

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<sup>7</sup> From the back cover of *The Book of Shares*.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

"carries within it, and must do so, an essential excessiveness."<sup>9</sup> Rembrandt's *Slaughtered Ox* carries with it such an excessiveness, an excessiveness which challenges the viewer's conceptions of subject/object, food/consumption, human/animal, death/life. The effect of the framed and painted surface is a reordering of boundaries, a reordering which is without end.

The flesh is writing, and writing is never read: it always remains to be read, studied, sought, invented.

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<sup>9</sup> Derrida, "Eating Well," 108.



*Writing after the writing*

The South Sea King was Act-on-Your-Hunch.  
The North Sea King was Act-in-a-Flash.  
The King of the place between them was  
No-Form.

Now South Sea King  
And North Sea King  
Used to go together often  
To the land of No-Form:  
He treated them well.

So they consulted together  
They thought up a good turn,  
A pleasant surprise, for No-Form  
In token of appreciation.  
'Men,' they said, 'have seven openings  
For seeing, hearing, eating, breathing,  
And so on. But No-Form  
Has no openings. Let's make him  
A few holes.'  
So after that  
They put holes in No-Form,  
One a day, for seven days.  
And when they finished the seventh opening,  
Their friend lay dead.

Lao Tan said, 'To organize is to destroy.'<sup>10</sup>

As I write this, President Clinton is preparing to send troops to Bosnia [and as I edit this, preparation is underway for troops to go to Haiti], imagining this to be some solution to the crisis there, a crisis which is unapproachable, a crisis which shows the postmodern condition in all its sickness. Poison and cure are both part of the pharmakon,<sup>11</sup> leaving the entry into the postmodern era a mixed blessing. A new openness and plurivocal culture may certainly be called blessings, but the ambiguity which

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas Merton, *The Way of Chuang Tzu*, 95-96.

<sup>11</sup> See Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Dissemination*.

comes along with the openness is dangerous with lives and war at stake. There is no longer a simple opposition to take place in the European (or other) regional theater:

There is no longer an avant-garde, political, sexual or artistic, embodying a capacity for anticipation; hence the possibility of any radical critique--whether in the name of desire, or revolution, or of the liberation of forms--no longer exists. The days of that revolutionary movement are gone. The glorious march of modernity has not led to the transformation of all values, as we once dreamed it would, but instead to a dispersal and involution of value whose upshot for us is total confusion--the impossibility of apprehending any determining principle, whether of an aesthetic, a sexual or a political kind.<sup>12</sup>

Opposition is over, and we are left fumbling with the inadequacies of discourse to find an answer. Peace talks break down, the calls for cease-fire go unheeded. The signifier and the signified seem to have split for good.

And i remember a book of poems for Bosnia i purchased last year. And i remember the title was *Klaonica*, which is Croat-Serbian for "slaughterhouse, abattoir, butchery, shambles." The editors state, "Poetry may be only words. And politics too may be only words, words less truthful, less direct, less meaningful. War is another agenda."<sup>13</sup> This other agenda may have something to do with words, with the discrepancy between what is said and what is meant, and the discrepancy between what is said and what is acted on.

In a previous "civil" war, oppositions were more prominent and the good and sensitive artists and intellectuals could respond within reason in the name of emancipation and freedom. But as the Spanish civil war broke out in 1936, Dalí responded with the painting, *Autumn Cannibalism*, and commented in his typical less-than-politically-oriented way: "These Iberian beings, eating each other in autumn, express the pathos of the Civil War considered (by me) as a phenomenon of natural history as opposed to Picasso who considered it as a political phenomenon."<sup>14</sup> The movement of history is a movement of

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<sup>12</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil*, 10.

<sup>13</sup> *Klaonica: Poems for Bosnia*.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Ades, *Dalí*, 112.

consumption, production put into practice, which is a violent act. Perhaps what Dalí saw was the inevitability of violence and consumption that many in a post-Liberal society are seeing in the 1990's. The evil demon is here to stay and we are at pains to make sense of (or acquaintances with) the demon; exorcism is over.

The cannibalistic consumption portrayed by Dalí is not without its erotic and desirous connotations, for Dalí elsewhere considers this same painting in relation to his future-spouse, Gala:

And this first kiss mixed with tears and saliva, punctuated by the audible contact of our teeth and furiously working tongues, touched only the fringe of the libidinous famine that made us bite and eat everything to the last!<sup>15</sup>

The awakening of desire--and subsequent scission--creates the necessary subjectivity for living with others. The split becomes the basis for a society, a "libidinal economy" (Lyotard), in which an unresolvable paradox exists. The paradox has to do with the desire for bodies to meld into each other (as in Dalí's painting), for eroticism in its pure form to manifest itself leaving no distinctions. The desire is to "get back" to a pure state of harmony and rhythm: the early aesthetic. But, as we have seen, such a feat would be the implosion of desire, the end of movement, and the end of society, something unlikely to occur.

So, while Baudrillard's "transaesthetics," "transpolitics" and "transsexuality" (see quote above) are seductively simplistic and ring true to postmodern ears, the paradox is that borders have not gone away, we have not found the way back to our primordial undifferentiated origins. Baudrillard is more of a pessimist than the Romantics or Liberals, and the above quote points to a sense of regret for where we have come, or what we have "come back to." By contrast, the utopian dreams of modernity (which seem to include both temporal directions with the Romantics recovering something lost and the Liberals progressing toward an end) were overly optimistic in their *telos*. We have reached utopia, Baudrillard claims, and it ain't all that its cracked up to be; or, in his more

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<sup>15</sup> From *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, quoted in Wilson, *Salvador Dalí*, 19.

famous quote, "What do we do now the orgy is over?"<sup>16</sup> While one can empathize with Baudrillard's strategies (that of "becoming the object," the enigma) there must (also) be a continued desire to paradoxically keep thinking at the borders, to transform critical theory into a "philosophy of the limit."<sup>17</sup>

Thinkers such as Edith Wyschogrod in her *Saints and Postmodernism* see two sides to postmodernism. One would seem to include the likes of Baudrillard (though she does not deal with him much) where difference is eliminated. Her main targets here (for she argues against such thinking) are Deleuze and Guattari and Kristeva. On the other side are Blanchot, Derrida and Levinas who are thinkers of difference. Her arguments against Deleuze, Guattari and Kristeva leave something to be desired,<sup>18</sup> but statements like the following provide a way into the ethical:

The singularity of the Other speaks from the non-place of difference between the saint's desire and the Other's own suffering so that the Other's singularity is always an excess, more than can be encompassed by saintly intention. What is absolutely Other gives itself to the saint as this excess.<sup>19</sup>

Suffering inevitably entails that all borders are not so easily crossable and eliminated. People are killed, and death is a limit. Liminal thinking ("philosophy of the limit," difference) is bound up with eroticism, sacrifice and subjectivity. Each of these, I am arguing, must not be analyzed through (binary) oppositions or systematic structures, but reviewed by thinking at the limit, the threshold, the locus of the split which ruptures and

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<sup>16</sup> See, among other places, the introduction to *The Transparency of Evil*.

<sup>17</sup> The title of a book by Drucilla Cornell, a phrase that is a rephrasing of Deconstruction.

<sup>18</sup> It would seem that Deleuze, Guattari and Kristeva are not so dismissive of difference and the reading of Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* seems to miss the mark. See Deleuze and Guattari's chief translator, Brian Massumi's *User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia* and Kristeva's own response to Wyschogrod in "The Speaking Subject is not Innocent," especially p.166. I am indebted to Pamela Anderson for making the connection between Wyschogrod's reading and Kristeva's response in a paper given at the 1994 Women and Religion conference, University of Glasgow.

<sup>19</sup> *Saints and Postmodernism*, 256.

reorders and does so continually.

The practice of eroticism would then be not the end of distinction, but as Bataille defines it as the "assenting to life up to the point of death."<sup>20</sup> Erotic (and, with it, desire) still has boundaries with life and death, subject and object distinguished.

The ethical becomes a re-viewing of the limits, with the questions existing at the thresholds of language and subjectivity. The ethical is the call for a response. It is the calling of an other that stirs in one, response-ability. Separations have taken place, borders established, crossed, identities are born. Violent ripping away, tears, necessary positing of a subject. Language is born as immediacy dies. And yet, it is so imperfect, as Bosnia perfectly shows.

So enter writing.

### *Writing the Ethical*

This essay leaves little space for a full query into the ethical stage of Kierkegaard and to do so would make it impossible not to touch on the religious stage as well. A full study on modes of existence (the stages) in Kierkegaard's thought would have to include all three stages and their interrelations, a complex and involved study. As my chief concern in this essay has been to read through the aesthetic stage, considering the role of images in the aesthetic construction of the subject, i will here, by way of conclusion, give a brief foray into the ethical stage, reading for the role of writing in considerations of subjectivity. The following final section is then a reflective and doubly-reflective (a 'repetition') look back on the aesthetic stage and, consequently, my writing on the aesthetic stage.

As has been shown, the reflective aesthetic is a place where language is used, yet it is not used in an ethical and concrete manner; it remains "suspended above" existence. "The seducer of *Either/Or* is preoccupied with his own erotic strategies, not with the

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<sup>20</sup> *Eroticism*, 11.

hapless object of them; his reflectiveness, so to speak, has become his immediacy."<sup>21</sup> The language used does not take the Other into account. Similarly, in Lacan's reading of Freud's grandson's *fort-da* game,<sup>22</sup> Freud's account is taken one step further. As the mother leaves, the wooden reel does not become a "representation" of the mother, but "a small part of the subject that detaches itself from him [the child] while still remaining his, still retained."<sup>23</sup> This is a reflective language which can finally only see the speaking subject her or his self. The child does not yet know the other, its language merely an extension of its self.

The accounting of the other in language requires the entry into the symbolic realm, a place where subjects and objects have split. Because of the split, a medium of communication becomes necessary to re-establish a relationship between self and other. Here we harken back to the discussion of Kristeva's symbolic which was prefigured alongside the description of the semiotic. The symbolic is "a sign of recognition: an 'object' split in two and the parts separated, but . . . brings together the two edges of that fissure. As a result, the 'symbol' is any joining, any bringing together that is a contract."<sup>24</sup> The contract is social, and the entry into the symbolic is the place where the individual is given full status as a subject, one who enters into the symbolic exchange of language.

Against the Freudian psychoanalytic tradition's reliance on language as primary entry into subjectivity (the result of the final split from the mother due to the "third term" that is the father), i have previously pointed out where certain thinkers have suggested other primary splits, and i want to argue further *with* Kierkegaard that a more important

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<sup>21</sup> Terry Eagleton, "Absolute Ironies," 181.

<sup>22</sup> See *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 13-17. In this game, Freud observed, the child would throw a wooden reel with a string tied to it over the side of his cot saying, "o-o-o-o" which the adults took for *fort* (gone). Then the child pulled the reel back, exclaiming "*da*" (there). This was done when the mother was absent, and Freud interpreted it as the child's mastery over the disappearance and appearance.

<sup>23</sup> *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, 62.

<sup>24</sup> *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 49.

shift is the individual's ability to use language in a historical (i.e., ethical, considering the Other) manner. This shift may be paralleled to the difference between *langue* and *parole*, from symbolic, culturally-constructed language to the individual's ability to use speech. But more than this, which many of the psychoanalysts do not pick up on, the move for Kierkegaard is the responsibility (response-ability) which comes with speech. As William Blake puts it, "He who desires but acts not, breeds pestilence."<sup>25</sup> That is, an individual's language has concrete consequences. Language and subject enter into a dialogic space for Kierkegaard, *parole* is ruptured by the Other and, of course, the other way around. While psychoanalysis may stress entry into subjectivity is an entry into language, Kierkegaard's conception stresses the two-way process of an entry into language, but a responsible use of language.

Upon reaching the ethical stage, it is fairly quickly realized that this stage is not the paradigmatic "mode of existence," according to Kierkegaard, and his Judge Wilhelm who writes from an ethical standpoint in *Either/Or II* regarding the ethical validity of marriage is finally a bland and bourgeois character. Marriage, for Wilhelm, becomes an ideal place of reconciliation and Hegelian synthesis of opposites, a place where individuality and inwardness are brought into harmonious relation with universals and outwardness. In such a conception, the ethical would be a return to the harmony of the beginnings of the immediate aesthetic stage, a place Kandinsky hoped his paintings would inhabit. In Kristevan terms, the semiotic and the symbolic would be brought together without the possibility of fissure, and therefore, without the possibility of signification. Ethical existence for Kierkegaard (and certainly for Kristeva as well) would be a place of stagnation, a place where growth, process and significance are not possible. Still, growth and process are not possible *without* the ethical stage, for without the ethical the "subject" would remain completely inward and abstracted from socio-political life.

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<sup>25</sup> "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," "Proverbs of Hell," line 5. Interestingly enough, Bataille (mis)quotes (or is it mis-translated?) this line as, "To speak without acting is to breed pestilence" ("Letter to René Char on the Incompatibilities of the Writer," *Yale French Studies* 78 (1990): 33). "Speaking" and "desire" seem to be bound on an unconscious level for this psychoanalytically-oriented writer.

From the standpoint of the ethical then, we must here go back and re-view the possibilities of writing ethically. But first we must review the possibilities of writing the aesthetic. In this place we stumble on irony.

*Ironing out differences*

The Hegelian definition of irony, following Socrates, is an "infinite absolute negativity."<sup>26</sup> Kierkegaard, however, shows that Hegel contradicts himself by moving to resolve all the dilemmas involved; Hegel's negativity is only momentary. The Socratic method of irony, argues Kierkegaard, is a place of perpetual questions with the result being to raise "the individual up and out of immediate existence."<sup>27</sup> Irony is always already in existence, ready to surface at the slightest settlement of resolution or synthesis.

As literary trope, irony is that which forever indicates the difference between text and meaning. This ironic deferral of a text's meaning establishes the need for more reading. The reader must go back and read again, producing a thesis (the *thetic*), but only to be followed by a compulsion for more reading and writing.

Going back to Kevin Newmark's statement given in the Prescript, it will be recalled that within

a nonnarrative structure, the *form* of communication (which is partly, though not entirely, a question of *aesthetics* since it is concerned with the outward form or sensuous appearance of the communication) and the *meaning* of the communication (which would at some point become *religious* truth as inwardness) are maintained indissolubly in a relationship of nonadequation as the result of a *philosophical* theory of indirect communication or, better, as the result of a purely *linguistic* predicament (that the communication of truth is by necessity indirect).<sup>28</sup>

The indirect communication (the relationship between *form* and *meaning* of

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<sup>26</sup> See Taylor, *Journeys to Selfhood*, 95-97.

<sup>27</sup> *The Concept of Irony*, 48n.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.



communication) is here that of irony.<sup>29</sup> As i write from the ethical stage--the place of the symbolic, of academic writing--i formulate theory on irony.

Also, the context in which Newmark's above quote was given in the Prescript was that of logocentricity. I relate this context in order to pull irony in as a subverter of a logocentric view of the subject. The *logos* was considered to have a two-fold nature: the medium of the word (language), and the guarantee of final fullness, wholeness and redemption. By relating irony to subjectivity and relating this relationship to ~~media~~ of communication and "modes of existence" (stages), i am suggesting that the *logos* breaks down in both its manifestations. The medium of language is ruptured and supplemented by the medium of the visual image, and the final resting point is continually deferred in the constant questioning provoked by irony. Thus, a subject in process.

What irony provokes is a questioning of all that has gone down in writing in the preceding essay (and all that is written in these and the following pages). To put it simply and directly, writing the immediate aesthetic is ironic. As i stated throughout the previous chapter, the immediate aesthetic is a place of rhythms, music, images, bodily pulsions, etc. It is a place uninhabited by language. And yet Kristeva, Lacan, Bataille, Kierkegaard and myself have written on it. We have attempted theses on that which is pre-thetic. Does this mean everything i have written is simply wrong? No, it shows that it is ironic, that what is said is not fully congruent with the "reality" of the immediate aesthetic. To make such a recognition while at the same time proceeding to write has its uses, as we will see shortly. Here i turn to some comments Kristeva, Bataille and Kierkegaard have given for their acknowledgement of ironic writing.

I would have liked to include Lacan as well, as his discourse on the Imaginary would also fit here. But Lacan would seem less concerned about the impossibility of his

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<sup>29</sup> Irony is not the only method of indirect communication. Roger Poole argues that before 1846 indirect communication and irony for Kierkegaard are co-extensive, but not after. The argument in this book is that Kierkegaard's *body* became the element of his indirect communication after the famed Corsair affair. (See especially "The Text of the Body" and "The Body of the Text" in *The Indirect Communication*.)

For my purposes i am looking at irony itself and not directly the broader questions of indirect communication.

writing and seems to choose images, algebraic charts and references to painting as supplements to language's inadequacy to describe events such as the mirror stage. Even if he is famed for the statement, "the unconscious is structured like a language,"<sup>30</sup> he makes no haste in referring to Bosch or Dalí in descriptions of the infant's psychological experience.<sup>31</sup> Such a rhetorical move would encourage my suggestion of various media showing themselves to be ironic elements. Images too indicate the distance between what is said and what is meant. Images surface in Lacan's language when the split between description and meaning is too great for linguistic mediation.

Kristeva, by contrast, realizes in writing that the articulation of the *chora* is contradictory. Academic writing and Kristeva's symbolic order exist in the ethical stage and to de-scribe the semiotic is ultimately an impossible task. "[O]nce it has been named, that functioning, even if it is pre-symbolic, is brought back into a symbolic position. All discourse can do is differentiate, by means of a "bastard reasoning."<sup>32</sup> According to Plato, since "Reason" is divine and therefore unchanging and stable, any reasoning and naming about the unstable and innominable is "bastard reasoning." Yet, because the semiotic is indispensable for "signification" within Kristeva's structure, the impossible becomes necessary--"the *chora* is governed by a necessity that is not God's law."<sup>33</sup>

Beyond necessity, Bataille opens language up to a wholly different possibility of expression. The erotic, of course, is unmentionable. How then pretend to write? One might further be compelled to ask: How are these two writers, Kierkegaard and Bataille, who each react so strongly to Hegel and the "identity of opposites" which are such a part of the Hegelian structure, to get away with the contradictions involved with writing the erotic? Understanding that they are writing a contradiction, can they be taken seriously?

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<sup>30</sup> *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 20.

<sup>31</sup> Perhaps he would mean to include such images as part of language. This would be a further study.

<sup>32</sup> See *Revolution*, 239-240 n.13; cf. Plato, *Timaeus*, 52a-52b.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 240 n.13.

Perhaps it is through language, through an understanding of the malleability of language in ways radically precursory to the poststructuralists that both Kierkegaard and Bataille are able to play with the opposites involved through use of fictional narratives and pseudonyms.<sup>34</sup> Denis Hollier suggests of Bataille that there is a particular "practice of writing" employed which, because it

is constituted by language, there is the double, contradictory possibility of both affirming and refusing the identity of opposites. . . . Language is, simultaneously, as a code, theoretical space (dominated by the signified) that, to protect its homogeneity, implies the identity of opposites, and, as writing, the space of a practice that on the one hand valorizes themes of rupture and on the other itself unfurls according to a rhythm of rupture, of destruction of sublimating unity.<sup>35</sup>

This is the practice also employed by Kierkegaard and it is recalled that in the final description of Don Juan, "[h]e dissolves, as it were, in music for us; he unfurls in a world of sounds."<sup>36</sup>

Writing--in certain practices--becomes an approach to the description of the immediate aesthetic erotic life. It allows for the impossible. The impossible within Kierkegaard would be the production of meaning at the level of the aesthetic, the level of the pre-symbolic. (As Victor Eremita says, "A coherent aesthetic view of life can hardly be presented."<sup>37</sup>) The impossible is the use of historical language in the service of a-historical writing, a place in which it is described that music (or, as I have included, abstract art and the material drives and pulsions of the body), not language, is the immediate. Kierkegaard's young man paradoxically realizes this and is rhetorically self-reflective: "when I have brought the reader to the point of being so musically receptive that he seems to hear the music although he hears nothing, then I shall have finished my

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<sup>34</sup> Bataille's *Histoire de l'oeil* was originally published in 1928 under the name, Lord Auch.

<sup>35</sup> *Against Architecture* 90.

<sup>36</sup> *Either/Or I* 134.

<sup>37</sup> In his "Preface" (13) to the collection of writings which make up *Either/Or*.

task, then I shall fall silent, then I shall say to the reader, as I say to myself: Listen."<sup>38</sup> With language Kierkegaard (via the young man) writes to make language disappear.

In this current essay, "impossible writing" translates as my writing from the ethical sphere (the sphere where language and critical distance are possible, the sphere out of which academic writing comes) about the aesthetic. Again, language itself cannot *re*-present this sphere, it can only suggest and lead away from itself. In this way, the use of painting as abstract as Kandinsky's may be justified. While commentaries on painting use words of judgement from the ethical sphere (the *thetic*), painting itself comments on the aesthetic from somewhere other than the place which necessarily posits a thesis. Painting "comments" on the aesthetic from within the aesthetic. In other words, the painting of Dalí, Rembrandt and Kandinsky, or the music of Mozart are as much a valid commentary in the present discussion of the aesthetic as are the writings of Lacan, Kristeva or Bataille.

But if we stay here, interested in the irony, we have gone no further than the seduction. We remain in reflection. Kierkegaard warns:

just as there is something deterring about irony, it likewise has something extraordinarily seductive and fascinating. Its masquerading and mysteriousness, the telegraphic communication it prompts because an ironist always has to be understood at a distance . . . the fleeting but indescribable instant of understanding that is immediately superseded by the anxiety of misunderstanding--all this holds one prisoner in inextricable bonds.<sup>39</sup>

'Reflection' lets us look back to Narcissus. We look again at the water's surface and ask whether reflection is a "mirror-image," a perfect image of the thing itself. Does the mirror (the water's surface) give a true view of what we think it does? Here i am moving away from the material description of mirror--though it is entirely important that the example *is* that of a mirror, and hence, is visual--and into reflective philosophical endeavors which attempt to find one's self mirrored in an other, whether that other is a person, a system of thought, a painting, or what have you.

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<sup>38</sup> *Either/Or I*, 86.

<sup>39</sup> *The Concept of Irony*, 48-49.

Here I turn to Paul Ricoeur's reading of Freud in his mammoth, *Freud and Philosophy*. In trying to place Freud, Ricoeur brings out the importance of reflection in philosophical enquiry, linking it to the psychoanalytic tradition spawned by Freud himself. By reading Freud as a philosopher concerned with reflection, Ricoeur states, "reflection is the effort to recapture the Ego of the Ego Cogito in the mirror of its objects, its works, its acts."<sup>40</sup> This leads to a definition of reflection as a whole: "Reflection is the appropriation of our effort to exist and of our desire to be, through the works which bear witness to that effort and desire."<sup>41</sup> In this way, quite truly, he moves away from a radical split between subject and object which leads to a detached objective scientific view of life, but also from a purely subjective view which gives the subjective agent the sole power of critique (whose far end would be solipsism). Ricoeur is interested in a relationship with the world ('world' in a general sense), a world allowing for intersubjectivity to occur, a world where the individual subject can be changed by her or his environment as well as change his or her environment.

What I want to call attention to though, is the use of the term 'appropriation' (a translation granted, but the English phrase brings out the sense given in this context). Reflection as appropriation brings the other into itself (*fort-da*). The subject sees itself in the other and takes the other, or part of the other, as a part of the subject's own existence (and existence does seem to be what Ricoeur is interested in). This is what is labeled 'interpretation,' it is a "recollection of meaning"<sup>42</sup> which finally helps to establish the self.

It must also be shown that recollection of meaning not only takes place in a philosophical setting, but works theologically as well. When Ricoeur deals with the "recollection of meaning" he states, "The contrary of suspicion, I will say bluntly, is

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<sup>40</sup> *Freud*, 43

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>42</sup> "Interpretation as Recollection of Meaning," *Freud*, 28-32.

faith."<sup>43</sup> Ricoeur's faith is a "postcritical faith," one that "seeks, through interpretation, a second naïveté."<sup>44</sup> There are two sides to this faith (which wind up constituting the "hermeneutic circle"): that of believing (i.e., interpreting) and that of understanding. "Understanding" becomes the end of faith. It is not a final place but the next stage of the circle which turns back into itself for more seeking.

There are many parallels here to the scattered musings of faith that i have alluded to throughout this essay, and the continual moving of faith that is the hermeneutic circle would seem to be a faith Kierkegaard may be "comfortable" with. All of this i would agree with save for one key element: the *logos*. In the interpretive philosophy (which is also ultimately a theology) of Ricoeur there is an overriding logocentricity, a belief in language, a belief "that men [sic] are born into language, into the light of the logos 'who enlightens every man who comes into the world.'"<sup>45</sup> As long as faith has this resting point which finally guarantees understanding, the "suspicious" element of interpretation can continue because it is always assumed that understanding will eventually meet suspicion.

But what happens when the comforts of the *logos* are taken away? What are the implications towards subjectivity when translation breaks down, when the other resists appropriation? An appropriation-resisting otherness is what i began this section on the ethical with (see especially the quote of Wyschogrod's), and what i have considered the aesthetic to be. Quite simply, if we allow for an aesthetic element in the construction of subjectivity, then we must allow for the inappropriable, the excess, to reside within the subject itself. Totality cannot be shared and the aesthetic is not equivocal with language. Description of the aesthetic via language is an ironic act; that is, there is a continual discrepancy between the medium and the meaning. The "recollection of meaning" of interpretation remains within language, indeed is bound by it. The aesthetic, contrarily, resists reflection.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

This Hegelian urge to appropriate, to bring the world into a coherent system understandable by the subject, is the move Kierkegaard argues must be met with repetition. As with Kierkegaard's view of Hegel, reflection and recollection are not bad, but one cannot remain bound there. "[T]he fleeting but indescribable instant of understanding that is immediately superseded by the anxiety of misunderstanding--all this holds one prisoner in inextricable bonds."<sup>46</sup> There are limits to a *logos*-based view of subjectivity. The movement to be made is that of a repetition.

Repetition in Kierkegaard is to be distinguished from the Greek and Hegelian notion of 'recollection' and its connected term, 'reflection.' In recollection is speculation, a "looking backwards," but, warns Kierkegaard's *Frater Taciturnus*, "the spectator must not confuse theatre and actuality, or himself with a spectator who is nothing more than a spectator at a comedy."<sup>47</sup> Though recollection is not wrong it cannot be an end in itself; it must move into concrete action. The possible must become actual: "If one does not have the category of recollection or of repetition, all life dissolves into an empty, meaningless noise."<sup>48</sup> Hegel never made the move to repetition, according to Kierkegaard, and the "seducer" whose diary was read earlier is the warning established against too much recollection.

Perhaps it would be possible to see the idea of repetition as a sort of unstable combination of the third immediate stage (the culmination of the immediate aesthetic) and the seducer (the reflective aesthetic). The third stage of the immediate aesthetic--as seen in *Don Juan*--is where, still stuck in im-mediacy, there are a series of actions which take place but there is no ability to pull out of the immediacy. *Don Juan* goes on by "continually finishing and continually being able to begin all over again,"<sup>49</sup> but has no ability to choose. On the other hand, the reflective aesthete--as seen in Baudrillard and

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<sup>46</sup> *The Concept of Irony*, 48-49.

<sup>47</sup> *Stages on Life's Way*, 461.

<sup>48</sup> *Repetition*, 149.

<sup>49</sup> *Either/Or I*, 96.

the "seducer"--is able to see the possibilities available and therefore has unlimited freedom, but cannot act on any of them. The seducer winds up dizzy from the possibilities. Repetition then, occurs through "in-corporation" of the possibilities, the particularity of the immediate returns after reflection on the world of possibility. One acts, but now it is an action out of freedom. Repetition is a "double reflection." When faced with any number of possibilities--infinite or not--the reflective person must begin by reflecting, but then, through the free act of the will, attempt to exist and make actual what was only possible.

In this place it is important to recognize the diachronic element of repetition. "Repetition and recollection are the same movement, except in opposite directions, for what is recollected has been, is repeated backward, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forward."<sup>50</sup> There is a re-turn involved, but the return is not a going back (to an Ego Cogito), the re-turn is moving ahead to what is unknown. The return of repetition is a return with excess, an excess that cannot be assimilated. "Repetition is the return of absolute Difference."<sup>51</sup>

As a forward recollecting movement, repetition brings out the function of the artist/writer. This is especially true in Lyotard's writing on the particularity of the postmodern artist.

A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what *will have been done*. Hence the fact that work and text have the characters of an *event*; hence also, they always come too late for their author, or, what amounts to the same thing, their being put into work, their realization (*mise en oeuvre*) always begin too soon. *Post modern* would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (*post*) anterior (*modo*).<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> *Repetition*, 131.

<sup>51</sup> Taylor, *Altarity*, 351.

<sup>52</sup> "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" 81.



I am not interested in making an argument for the advancement of postmodern art (if there could be such a thing), but rather for the role of the artist/writer in the individual subject and, by extension, in the broader culture.

The artist/writer is one who plays with possibilities. The poet, as the painter, displays possibility, allowing a viewing. As has been stated, Kierkegaard uses pseudonyms as part of his literary production, making it possible to experiment with possibilities (modes) of existence. Mark C. Taylor describes this literary device thus:

By insisting upon the disparity between his ideas and his life, the poet directs the reader away from his person and toward his poetic creation. Kierkegaard's pseudonymity is the curtain separating him from the drama he stages. His multiple literary devices seek to focus the reader's attention on the play his personae enact rather than on the complex behind-the-scenes manoeuvres necessary to mount the production.<sup>53</sup>

The artist/writer is one who plays with possibility, who imag(in)es what-could-be, but the artist/writer's role is not necessarily to live out the possibilities. Rather, Kierkegaard urges the move beyond the first viewing towards a "re-viewing," a repetition. It is the viewer who is responsible to confront the creation, to deal with it in her own life. The possibilities given by the artist-writer are not--and this is a crucial point in the whole of Kierkegaard's corpus--a prescriptive writing telling what-should-be, but rather an indirect means of giving the reader a number of choices by which she or he must then decide how to proceed on their own. "When in reflection upon the communication the receiver is reflected upon, then we have ethical communication. The maieutic. The communicator disappears, as it were, makes himself serve only to help the other to become."<sup>54</sup> The task is that of a translator (*trans-latus*, "carry across").

Trans-lation occurs at the splits, the places of division and connection. The artist/writer as translator thus plays a crucial role as she or he stands at a point of (dis)solution of two othernesses. By using indirect communication (the maieutic; Gk

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<sup>53</sup> *Journeys to Selfhood*, 102.

<sup>54</sup> *Journals and Papers*, 654; 8-2: B 89. Quoted in Taylor, *Journeys to Selfhood*, 101-2.

*maieuomai*, act as midwife), the translator works at the birthing (splitting) and then disappears.

As translator, the artist/writer uses irony, but in a knowing way: "The poet him[her]self must be master over the irony."<sup>55</sup> Kierkegaard ends his Doctoral dissertation with a six-page section entitled, "Irony as a Controlled Element, the Truth in Irony," in which the writer-reader relationship is explored. Within this relationship, irony plays a crucial role as "what could be called the absolute beginning of personal life."<sup>56</sup> Yet, even with a master ironist, irony maintains a sense of independence and continues to shake itself free, remaining perpetually uncontrollable.

Irony as the negative is the way; it is not the truth but the way. Anyone who has a result as such does not possess it, since [s]he does not have the way. When irony now lends a hand, it brings the way, but not the way whereby someone fancying him[her]self to have the achievement comes to possess it, but the way along which the achievement deserts [her] him.<sup>57</sup>

For Kierkegaard it is the Hegelian urge to contain, to cut out any excess, which prompts this quasi-apophatic view of irony. Irony is an excess, a repressed element surfacing when the waters are calm. Pure reflection is rippled, recognition is misrecognition.

#### *A Final Re-view*

We have seen the function of irony in the subject and the function of the artist/writer as a "master ironist," but we have still to get out of the seduction and allow repetition to occur. We have re-turned, but not recollected forward. To do this, and to put an end to this essay, we return via Lacan to Dalí's *Narcissus*.

Repetition, unlike irony, cannot have a master in control. Repetition comes upon us, unsuspected. In Kristeva's approach to abjection she quotes from Dostoyevsky's *The*

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<sup>55</sup> *The Concept of Irony*, 324.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 326.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 326-327.

*Possessed*, and here we come upon a repetition in the making:

There are seconds--they come five or six at a time--when you suddenly feel the presence of eternal harmony in all its fullness. It is nothing earthly. I don't mean that it is heavenly, but a man in his earthly semblance can't endure it. He has to undergo a physical change or die. . . . What is so terrifying about it is that it is so terribly clear and such gladness. If it went on for more than five seconds, the soul could not endure it and must perish. In those five seconds I live through a lifetime, and I am ready to give my life for them, for it's worth it.<sup>58</sup>

In Lacan's economy, repetition (*tuché*) is "the encounter with the real,"<sup>59</sup> and "[w]hat is repeated, in fact, is always something that occurs . . . *as if by chance*."<sup>60</sup> Repetition is an in-breaking of the real which is otherwise untouchable. Most of life is spent moving around within the symbolic realm from which there is no escape and no transgression. Bringing the point home Lacan states, "the true formula of atheism is not *God is dead* . . . the true formula of atheism is *God is unconscious*."<sup>61</sup>

This "chance" encounter in Lacan's scheme is self-admittedly informed by Kierkegaard who is closer to the correct view of repetition than is Freud. Freud's analysis deals with a return and recovery of some past while Kierkegaard's repetition "demands the new."<sup>62</sup> Freud was a Romantic and "[t]he romantic longing for something higher may well be genuine, but just as man must not separate what God has joined together, so man also must not join what God has separated, but a sickly longing such as this is simply a way of wanting to have the perfect prematurely."<sup>63</sup> Repetition is *wiederholung*, and Lacan

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<sup>58</sup> *The Devils*. Trans. David Magarshack. (London: Penguin Books, 1953) 586-587. Quoted in *Powers of Horror*, 19.

<sup>59</sup> *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 53.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>63</sup> *The Concept of Irony*, 329.

reminds us that *holen* means "to haul, to draw."<sup>64</sup> Repetition, therefore, is a re-drawing and drawings, we will recall, are separations.

Once Lacan has set up his notion of repetition, he begins to outline a structure of vision. Within his analysis (situated within the explanation of repetition<sup>65</sup>), there is a split between the 'eye' and the 'gaze.'<sup>66</sup> Just as there is no fixed and unitary subject in Lacan, neither can there be a fixed point for visual perspective. The eye and the gaze are related but split. The eye can never see reality (the Real); vision is always already mediated and in that mediation are blind spots (*méconnaissance*; *scotoma*). As Martin Jay considers in his overview of Lacan, "the eye is that of the specular, Cartesian subject desiring specular plenitude and phallic wholeness, and believing it can find it in a mirror of itself, whereas the gaze is that of an objective other in a field of pure monstrosity."<sup>67</sup>

The gaze is part of a web that the subject is but one (but not One) piece of: "We are beings who are looked at, in the spectacle of the world. . . . [the] gaze circumscribes us."<sup>68</sup> Confronted with a painting it may be said that the painting has eyes and looks back at the viewer. Within such a web of interconnectedness it becomes impossible to see one's self, there is no Cartesian *cogito* to apprehend one's own subjectivity. "Seeing myself seeing myself" is an illusion. I look, but not without being looked at, and I cannot separate out an eye which sees.

This illusory aspect is not as fatalistic as it may at first seem. There is no getting away from the mediated nature of all seeing, but one could see the split between eye and gaze as ironic and return to the elements of process in subjectivity which have been

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<sup>64</sup> *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 67.

<sup>65</sup> See *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>66</sup> In the end Lacan remains a "critic of ocularcentrism" and is suspicious of the element of vision in the construction of subjectivity, but his work on vision has remained crucial for many theories of images. See Martin Jay, "The Specular Subject of Ideology," in *Downcast Eyes*, 329-380.

<sup>67</sup> *Downcast Eyes*, 363-4.

<sup>68</sup> *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 75.

strongly stated by Kierkegaard. Seeing can be ironic, for what one wishes to see is other than what is seen: "The subject is presented as other than [s]he is, and what one shows [her] him is not what [s]he wishes to see."<sup>69</sup> As with irony, the eye can also be a guide,<sup>70</sup> moving the subject along by constantly revealing the split nature of relationships.

Here we come again to desire and its correlate, the Other. "Modifying the formula I have of desire as unconscious--[wo]man's desire is the desire of the Other--I would say that it is a question of a sort of desire *on the part of* the Other, at the end of which is the *showing*."<sup>71</sup> Jay comments on Lacan's relation of desire and vision: "the gaze can be thought of as brought about by the Other's desire to show itself, a desire that is matched only by the eye's desire to see."<sup>72</sup> A re-vealing occurs, however indecently or impure, and the subject, desire, and Other are caught into relationship. The desire is cannibalistic (Dalí paints this desire) wanting to see in a pure way. Yet, "When, in love, I solicit a look, what is profoundly unsatisfying and always missing is that--*You never look at me from the place from which I see you*."<sup>73</sup> Seeing is never perfect.

We are back to the paradox of desire and eroticism, the desire for pure correspondence and the inevitable splits which keep such communication mediated. Wanting to see the other in the subject's own terms and wanting to see one's self reflected in the other--to 'appropriate' the other--is finally an act of violence. Seen and seer do not correspond, never will. Boundaries are established and cannot be looked through without distortion, there is only a dim view. This is what maintains desire.

What Lacan seems to lament as the incongruity of self and other becomes, to repeat Wyschogrod, the place for the saint: "What is absolutely Other gives itself to the

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>70</sup> See Ibid., 71. Lacan brings out Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Le Visible et l'invisible* as recognizing the eye as guide.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>72</sup> *Downcast Eyes*, 366-7.

<sup>73</sup> *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 103.

saint as this excess."<sup>74</sup> Lacan is skeptical toward reflection, toward the full appropriation of otherness, yet his desire seems to be taken over by sorrow. To the contrary, a "vision of excess" is precisely what Bataille would see as the moment of ecstasy. It is a way of seeing that takes faith, that accepts the horror and does not shy. Or, as Cixous would state:

Everything that is (looked at justly) is good. Is exciting. Is 'terrible'. Life is terrible. Terribly beautiful, terribly cruel. Everything is marvelously terrible, to whoever looks at things as they are.<sup>75</sup>

Such is the faith of seeing, a faith that moves the subject in process, always unsettled and willing to move among modes of existence and various media. Within these moves one encounters the excess of the Other, the inappropriable Other. Seeing is ironic, there is a perpetual split between what one wishes to see and what one sees. In this way seeing is compelled to look again, to find another perspective, and to do so continually. And not only does the subject see, but she or he is also seen. The various views of the subject therefore enable the subject to exist in a variety of ways, in a diverse life.

### *Re-turning at the Tate*

I went back to The Tate Gallery to visit Dalí's *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* and to gaze again at Francis Bacon's Triptychs. Standing in front of *Narcissus*, wanting to look, to see, to see something new, another fragment to write down and capture about the painting. I know I did not come to find myself or to see myself reflected. I wanted something to say. I wanted to respond, to claim for myself the irony and therefore master it. But irony is slippery and slides away, it will not be controlled for long.

I looked, noting the interplay of surface and depth. I wondered, "Was this surface solid and did it allow no access to the deep waters? Or were there no deep waters?" And as I pondered I was drawn in, and just as I was drawn in I noticed a reflection. There,

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<sup>74</sup> *Saints and Postmodernism*, 256.

<sup>75</sup> Cixous, "The Last Painting," 120.

just to my right of Narcissus, within the "heterosexual group," i saw the blond male, second from the left. This figure had the same pose i had when i approached the painting: left leg out front, hand to face, staring. I saw my pose, reflected.

All of the figures within this group, wandering on a reflective surface, are staring and seemingly not seeing anything, at least, nothing that would be an Other. They do not seem to recognize each other. At the same time, they are being looked at, they are on display, stripped naked and given poses.

Aha! i thought. They are naked and i am not. While the pose is the same, the clothes are different. And yet, perhaps i too had been caught, shown my reflection and thereby exposed by the painting. I had been uncovered and looked at as well. The double reflection, seeing the other while the other saw me--however filled with blind spots--was a re-veal-ation. A revelation in an art gallery. The painting that has eyes looks back, resisting appropriation and objectification.

As i am drawn in, i am caught up in the metamorphosis, ossified, shown my nakedness and death. The painting sees my death and shows it to me. What is revealed? The tenuous nature of my life and death, the frailty of the subject/object difference. And if this is so frail, i wondered, do the others in the gallery see me looking? Do they know of my nakedness? My inescapable death?

And then the moment comes. The time, the very brief time, of living at the split, of having felt both sides, of seeing and being seen, of feeling a part of the interrelations around me, of understanding (not on any cerebral level). It all makes sense, if only for a moment . . . "What is so terrifying about it is that it is so terribly clear and such gladness. If it went on for more than five seconds, the soul could not endure it and must perish. In those five seconds I live through a lifetime, and I am ready to give my life for them, for it's worth it."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> See footnote 58.

There is irony in those efforts one makes to alter one's way of looking at things, to change the boundaries of what one knows and to venture out a ways from there. Did mine actually result in a different way of thinking? Perhaps at most they made it possible to go back through what I had done from a new vantage point and in a clearer light. Sure of having traveled far, one finds that one is looking down on oneself from above. The journey rejuvenates things, and ages the relationship with oneself.

-Michel Foucault<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> *The Use of Pleasure*, 11.



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