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# **Losing Oneself**

**The enigmatic other and the will to  
know in François Ozon's cinema**

**Jonas Green**

PhD in Psychosocial Studies

2020

Birkbeck,

University of London

**I, Jonas Green, hereby declare that this thesis is entirely my own work  
and contributions from other persons are fully cited and referenced.**

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# Abstract

The formation of the self and the relationship between the psychosexual subject and normative power-relations have long been a contested field in both feminist and queer theory. *Losing Oneself* argues for a transitory model of the gendered psychosexual self; a model of the self as the effect of incorporating a separation *and* as a porous and negotiated entity. Traditional psychoanalysis, from Sigmund Freud to Jacques Lacan, has focused on loss and separation in the formation of the self. The self is subjugated to a law that both restricts and delimits that self as an imagined, complete figure. In two influential readings of this loss or incorporation of lack, Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler have both formulated melancholic models of the formation of the self. Driven by very different questions, these formulations attempt to explain the effects on the self by restrictive norms as well as explaining how the self enters the world as already a part and effect of that world. This thesis argues for a masochistic rather than melancholic incorporation of norms, emphasising the erotics and the pleasure as well as the pain and restriction at the centre of incorporation. At the core of this argumentation are challenges of the dualism of active/passive engagements with the world and the possibility to know oneself.

Ozon's cinema offers a unique challenge to the distinction between active and passive spectatorship. The films read in this thesis acts as active participants in the development of masochism as a model for affective response to an enigmatic world and its obfuscated demands on the self. Through readings of these films, the present thesis develops a model of the self that is simultaneously founded on lack, exclusion and subjugation but that also offers a pleasurable escape from subjugation and exclusion.

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1. From *Young and Beautiful* (2013), p. 160
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## Preface: Writing in the Psychosocial

The term ‘psychosocial studies,’ couples the terms ‘psychic’ and ‘social,’ suggesting a connection or a link between the two. The inner (psyche) and outer (social) are linked in the very term and, as a result, a question is posed about the nature of this link. If psychosocial studies are understood as an interdisciplinary field, the linkage would suggest a merger or a complementarity of the two fields of (for instance) psychology and sociology. This might offer a more holistic view of the individual. And indeed, there is a richness in literature using this perspective. A quick search for ‘psychosocial’ in the British Library’s main catalogue provides over 74,000 hits, most of which are concerned with the psychosocial situation of patients or students with special needs. The psychosocial is, in this perspective, concerned with the connection between the individual and society, in particular the impacts of the psychic and the social on a patient’s body and its possible treatment. The complementarity of the two fields has been both emphasised and problematised by Lynn Chancer and John Andrews, who have argued for a revitalisation of psychoanalytic terms in sociological studies.<sup>1</sup> Yet the *interdisciplinarity* of these models excludes, ignores or glosses over the potentially critical relation between the psychic and the social.

I suggest that we instead read ‘psychosocial’ as a *transdisciplinary* project. In this formulation, the two terms are placed on a different footing. The prefix ‘inter’ emphasises mutuality and a movement between two sides or aspects that are linked and related. By contrast, the prefix ‘trans’ connotes a movement across or beyond something; this particular prefix implies transcending, transgressing or translating something into something different or at least towards something different. Psychosocial studies if conceived of as transdisciplinary rather than interdisciplinary proposes a different relation between the two terms. A translation or transformation from one into the other opens up a space for a

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<sup>1</sup> See Lynn Chancer and John Andrews, ‘Introduction: The Unhappy Divorce: From Marginalization to Revitalization,’ in *The Unhappy Divorce of Sociology and Psychoanalysis: Diverse Perspectives on the Psychosocial*, 2014.

critical engagement between two disparate fields, and between the experiences of something inner and something outer. Moreover, 'trans' implies that the link between the two fields may not exist in a stable sense. Instead, it is there only to be opened up through engagements with and negotiations between; it is never quite here nor there.

Lisa Baraitser cautions against an "easy reference to 'trans'."<sup>2</sup> The psychosocial, she argues, should engage critically with the 'master texts' of the disciplines used, not to fill gaps in their respective formulations but instead to create something new. Baraitser uses Judith Butler's formulation of melancholic gender to argue for an understanding of transdisciplinarity that suggests a mixing of terminologies and, more importantly, a *practice* for creating something new. Baraitser argues that "what I have tried to do here is not just identify and trace key transdisciplinary concepts that are active in the field of psychosocial studies, but show how psychosocial studies is, itself, a transdisciplinary practice."<sup>3</sup>

In this thesis, the inner and the outer is central and I will argue for a different relation than the one suggested by the melancholic relation between the self and the world. To lose oneself connotes going astray, to become bewildered but also to become absorbed in something, to be lost in something external. To be absolutely clear: in this thesis, the self is a point of reference that is not necessarily yet a subject. It is the referral point or the first notion of an 'I,' but not through a solipsistic reading of Lacan's mirror phase; instead, this self is already addressed by the world and related to the world. The self is what we turn back to as already there, in a rediscovery of our selves. By choosing self instead of subject or ego, I am consciously moving away from a technical or psychoanalytical discussion, whilst turning simultaneously to Foucauldian terminology and to a quotidian vocabulary, with all the vagueness that this implies as this allows a discussion of the self-reflective 'I' across disciplinary vocabularies and epistemic orders. The self is both pre-subjective and post-subjective. It is the point of return in any introspection; it is neither a linguistic construction nor is it a body. To introduce a few metaphors that the present

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<sup>2</sup> Lisa Baraitser, 'Temporal Drag: Transdisciplinarity and the 'Case' of Psychosocial Studies' in *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol 32, Issue 5-6, 2015 pp. 207-231, p. 214.

<sup>3</sup> Baraitser, 2015, p. 226.

thesis will draw on: the self is a term that exists in-between and that allows for the negotiated translation of metonymic and metaphoric relationality, of the fluid and the distinct, of the phallic and the maternal. It is also a nodal point that demands translation, of the self to the world and of the world to the self.

*Translation* is a key concept throughout this thesis and it connects the transdisciplinarity as well as the focus on films and readings of films in this thesis. As a practice, translation links the possibility to read and to write about films as well as to read and write about gender and sexual difference. I will argue in subsequent chapters for a reading of sexual difference as a non-relation rather than as a specifically masculine/feminine divide. Gender will be used to describe a more fluid, mobile concept of difference that functions as a translation or a commentary on the assumed 'original difference.' As indicated above, in this thesis, translation is linked to my usage of transdisciplinarity and the placing together of disparate discourses in order to formulate a critical practice in the 'trans' of translation and transdisciplinarity. In 'The Task of the Translator', Walter Benjamin argues against the 'like for like' version of translation, where the translator tries to find the equivalent word, arguing instead that a translation is always a commentary rather than a re-writing of the original in a different language. Benjamin uses spatial and temporal arguments to emphasise the distance between the 'original' and the translation. In one of the spatial metaphors that Benjamin uses, the translator is standing outside a language forest, trying to find the right spot in the forest that will correspond to the reverberation or the echo of the original work.

Unlike a work of literature, translation finds itself not in the center of the language forest but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering, aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one.<sup>4</sup>

This metaphor highlights the distance Benjamin suggests between 'translation' and 'work of literature'. In a draft written more than a decade after 'The Task of the Translator', Benjamin emphasises the 'technique' of translation as opposed

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<sup>4</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator' included in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, 1996, p. 258-259

to an 'art form.' "The translation of important works will be less likely to succeed, the more it strives to elevate its subservient technical function into an autonomous art form."<sup>5</sup> Benjamin's model of translation includes references to a pure language as a pre-Babylonian reference point underlying the languages translated from and to as well as a romantic view of the original work of art. Benjamin's metaphor of the translator as standing outside of the language forrest that the translation is placed in provides a spatial image for the transplantation of something alien into something known. Benjamin was concerned with translations from one language to another, specifically of Baudelaire into German.<sup>6</sup> However, as Roman Jakobson has argued, translation takes place between languages but also within languages and between verbal and non-verbal sign systems.<sup>7</sup> In Benjamin's metaphor, the translation is the product of a technique and is placed in an environment that is foreign to the original but known to the translator. Yet, the translation resonates with its new environment and it is this resonance that determines if the translation is successful or not. This spatial image provides a model for the transdisciplinary praxis or technique of this thesis. In displacing concepts from different traditions in relation with other traditions as well as verbal and non-verbal filmic signifiers, this thesis aims to create new resonances between disparate fields of knowledge that will echo and resonate to create something new, a third space.

Benjamin is not only occupied with a spatial displacement of languages, but also the temporal displacement resulting from the translation coming after the original. Benjamin suggests that translations slips into the technique of commentary as the translation will always come after. This afterwardsness and otherworldliness of the translation is what produces the ideal image of a pure language and a work of art as opposed to technique and work in Benjamin's model. Some of the the translations that form the work of this thesis are implantations from affect theory into psychoanalytic theory, models of

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<sup>5</sup> Benjamin, 'Translation — For and Against' included in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 3, 1935-1938*, 2002, p. 250.

<sup>6</sup> 'The Task of the Translator' was published as a foreword to Benjamin's German translation of Charles Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens* — a section of *Les fleurs du mal*.

<sup>7</sup> See Roman Jakobson 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation' included in *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, 1992.

spectatorship into discussions of gender and sexuality in feminist theory, models of the feminine into discussions of queer praxis and discussions of masochism into models of melancholia. These are spatial displacements, but often temporal as well as spatial. In my discussion of melancholia as a model for the shaping of the self through an incorporation or translation of an external object and/or prohibition, I will not only implant psychoanalytic models for understanding loss and limitations to mourning (a spatial displacement) but also implant a previous usage of melancholia to understand the exclusion of the feminine from a male discourse (Irigaray) into a later usage of melancholia that deploys this model to understand the exclusion of same-sex desire in the formation of the self (Butler). Butler's later model is in part a critique of Irigaray's model as she argues that prior to any exclusion of the feminine, an exclusion that establishes the feminine must be achieved. In the temporal displacement of these models, however, the later will not be read as a commentary on the prior, but rather as two disparate fields, or as two disparate language forests to continue Benjamin's metaphor. And the question here is what different echos they produce when displaced with each other.

Emily Apter has written about the 'time wars' between women's time and queer time.<sup>8</sup> In this article she argues for the continued usages of 'women's time' as a model for the return of the outmoded, anachronistic or *démodé* in theory. In this thesis, I return to two models of exclusion of the other that are both *démodés*, I return to Irigaray's model for the exclusion of the feminine from a male imaginary and Butler's model for the exclusion of same-sex desire from a heterosexual imaginary. Both these models suggest how something external — demands of foreclosure — becomes the foundation of a gendered ego and both these models use Freud's concept of melancholia. On one level, these models are contrary and are competing for the same space, but through displacement and the practice of translation, this example of a time war will instead be mined for its potential to add to the central theme of this thesis — the relation between the self and the exterior and how we manage differences and how we are able to live with and be affected by others across these differences. Part of what makes these models anachronistic or *démodés* is their relation to a structural paradigm of included/excluded, norm/anti-norm dualisms. At the same time,

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<sup>8</sup> See Emily Apter, "'Women's Time' in Theory" in *difference: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol 21, number 1, 2010, pp. 1-18.

however, they both expand these dualisms by suggesting something boundless in their potential reach. Both models are grounded in attempts to understand lived experiences — Irigaray’s model suggests a model for understanding the imaginary exclusion that makes symbolic exclusion of women not only possible but inevitable, her model reveals the ontological impossibility at the heart of representational impossibility. Although this model uses the oppression of women as its starting point, the model that comes out of this can be used to understand the impossibility of a sustainable self and the impossibility of a stable — self identified — ego that opens up a field beyond the duality of male/female, metaphysic/physic, one/multitude, that Irigaray uses to start her discussion. Similarly, Butler’s model from the early days of queer theory uses dualities of hereto/homo, normative/non-normative, to formulate a model for the self as the result of foreclosed desire and to explain the hatred and indifference that the gay community was faced with during the early years of the AIDS epidemic. These displacements of theories outside of their context are explored as productive sites of translation in Chapter 1. In this chapter, translations between the non-verbal and the verbal will also be explored through Jean Laplanche’s enigmatic messages and a re-reading of Freud’s model of the uncanny, a reading that opens up a link between the translation of theories to the translation of the visual, haptic and auditorial that constitute non-verbal signifiers, all of which can be enigmatic.

In Chapter 2, translation as verbal/non-verbal displacement will be linked to the displacement of the self in relation to one of this thesis’s main foci: spectatorship and screen culture. Benjamin understood film as a development of representational art, from painting and sculpture, via photography, to the moving image of film. Benjamin argued that photography and film marked a move away from the cult of the original work of art, as “one can make any number of prints; to ask for the ‘authentic’ print makes no sense.”<sup>9</sup> This difference is further marked in relation to film. “Film is the first art form whose artistic character is entirely determined by its reproducibility.”<sup>10</sup> Film, according to Benjamin is dependent on its exhibition value rather than its cult value. Film

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<sup>9</sup> Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version’ in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 3, 1935-1938*, 2002 pp. 101-133, p. 106.

<sup>10</sup> Benjamin, 2002, p. 109.

is dependent on great numbers of paying viewers to pay for its high cost in production. If we link this with Benjamin's discussion of translation as practice or technique as opposed to the work of art, then film challenges the notion of an origin or original. The reproducibility of film means that there is no need for the manual labour of copying or reproducing an original, like the translation of Baudelaire's 'Tableaux Parisiennes'.<sup>11</sup> Films, and writing about films, at once enacts the work of translation, while also questioning the original and the distinction between technique and art form. Translating film and interpreting film is an example of transdisciplinary work where the two fields cannot be reduced to the other field. As an example of what Jakobson called 'intersemiotic translation' or 'transmutation', the interpretative translation of a film enacts the untranslatability of film that is part of any translation or any transdisciplinary work. Benjamin's notion of an original in a pre-Babylonian language functions as a horizon of perfectibility that translations aim towards but that also functions as the limit or the reminder of the failure of every attempt to translate perfectly. Chapter 2 will expand on the untranslatability of film and images while also discussing the affective effects of this untranslatability.

Benjamin compares film to representative art, placing it in a continuum with cave paintings, oil paintings and photography. This emphasis and its relation to depicting reality, rather than the narrative function of epic poetry and the novel, is echoed by both André Bazin and Roland Barthes.<sup>12</sup> Though these theorists of film and photography come from very different traditions, they both see the photographic image and its preservation of time as a reminder of our mortality. Bazin writes about a 'mummy complex' at the root of realistic art. "No one believes any longer in the ontological identity of model and image, but all are agreed that the image helps us to remember the subject and to preserve him from a second spiritual death."<sup>13</sup> Barthes, in *Camera Lucida* writes about finding a photograph of his mother as a young woman, and in this experience of a photograph, Barthes finds what drove him to photography. "The Winter Garden

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<sup>11</sup> Included in *Les fleurs du mal*, see Chales Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, Oxford World Classics, 1993. Benjamin's essay 'The Task of the Translator' was written as a foreword of his translation of this section of *The Flowers of Evil*.

<sup>12</sup> See André Bazin 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image' in *What Is Cinema? Essays Selected and Translated by Hugh Gray, Volume 1*, 2005 and Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, [1980] 1982.

<sup>13</sup> Bazin, 2005, p. 10.

Photograph [...] would tell me what constituted that thread which drew me toward Photography.”<sup>14</sup> Barthes goes on to describe this experience in relation to the time of the photograph, its preservation of a past, of something that has been, and therefore a reminder that it is no longer. A photograph, Barthes argues, “is *without future*”<sup>15</sup> and so refuses to become a memory. A photograph, according to Barthes refuses to be memory because it refuses to “transform grief into mourning.”<sup>16</sup> This formulation of photography as refused mourning links it with melancholia and the unmournability of the feminine in Irigaray and same sex desire in Butler. By juxtaposing these models or by translating these, not by changing the words but by changing the woods and the echos (to stretch Benjamin’s metaphor even further) of the same term in different context, the temporal aspect of melancholia becomes apparent. The photograph, like a lost identity or a lost desire points to an unresolved trauma that haunts the spectator. The photograph cannot, Barthes argues, be read: “despite its codes, I cannot *read* a photograph [...] the Photograph — my Photograph — is without culture: when it is painful, nothing in it can transform grief into mourning.”<sup>17</sup> The photograph is traumatic in that it cannot be read, cannot be understood in a culture, something in the photograph escapes translation and understanding. Barthes argues that film, through its use of moving images escapes the melancholic aspect of photography, “cinema is protensive, hence in no way melancholic [...] [i]t is then, simply ‘normal,’ like life”.<sup>18</sup> Laura Mulvey argues that new “moving image technologies, the electronic and the digital, paradoxically allow an easy return to the hidden stillness of the film frame.”<sup>19</sup> With the possibility to stop or slow down the flow into still images the hidden 24 deaths per second is revealed. This aspect of film that Mulvey points out has become accessible not only to artists and filmmakers themselves, but through accessible technology, to a great number of people, opens up for what she calls the ‘pensive spectator’. The pensive spectator, like Barthes looking at the

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<sup>14</sup> Barthes, [1980] 1982, p. 73.

<sup>15</sup> Barthes, [1980] 1982, p. 90.

<sup>16</sup> Barthes, [1980] 1982, p. 90.

<sup>17</sup> Barthes, [1980] 1982, p. 90.

<sup>18</sup> Barthes, [1980] 1982, p.90

<sup>19</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*, 2006, p. 66.



photograph of his mother, finds pleasure in contemplating and in what escapes comprehension. Mulvey argues that “the delayed cinema dissolves the imaginative power of the fiction, as well as the forward drive that, Barthes argues, obscures a cinematic *punctum*.”<sup>20</sup> This ‘pensive spectator’ points to a possible alternative to the sadistic, consuming, male gaze that Mulvey suggested in her early essay ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ that will be further discussed in Chapter 2. The temporality of film and the temporality of melancholia as well as the movement of normality that covers the trauma of loss resonates or echoes the meaning of these models and film is a medium that engages with melancholia and loss as well as the hiding of these puncta through spectatorial pleasure.

The deployment of models of melancholia, loss and punctum places these models in relation to psychoanalysis and a psychoanalytic concept of time. Lauren Berlant argues that these models focus on the spectacular and the unique event for its explanatory force: “trauma theory conventionally focuses on exceptional shock and data loss in the memory and experience of catastrophe”.<sup>21</sup> Berlant defines her project as an ongoing process of renegotiation in the face of the exceptional and the traumatic. “I prefer tracking the work of affect as it shapes new ordinaries to the logic of exception that necessarily accompanies the work of trauma.”<sup>22</sup> Following this argument, this thesis tracks the going astray, the continuous loss of self in something other, not as a unitary traumatic event, nor as a return to that event, but as a continual process of self discovery and self evasion. For this thesis, I have mined psychoanalytic models for the formation of the self where the event is not finalised. In terms of differences, I wanted to map both the formative, traumatic event that seems to exclude some others from the possibility of relatability on one hand, and the affective relatability that enables the going astray on the other. Further, I was looking for models that could contain both of these possibilities. For this purpose, I make the argument for using a model of masochism rather than melancholia. Both these models use the imagery of returning to the self, but where melancholia is founded on trauma and loss and

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<sup>20</sup> Mulvey, 2006, p. 183.

<sup>21</sup> Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 2011, p. 10.

<sup>22</sup> Berlant, 2011, p. 54.

supposes a defining event, masochism constitutes a continuous return to the self, and a return that is based on pleasure — albeit in pain — rather than the punctum rip in the intelligible of melancholic loss. Barthes's return to his mother's image can be read as a masochistic return to the painful memory of his loss. This loss, and the photograph without future that for Barthes becomes his experience of this loss that cannot be read or understood as it stands outside of the cultural becomes the punctum that he returns to and does not stop writing about. The photograph without future does not stop being interpreted and translated for the reader. Barthes argues that it has no culture, but it is clear that it creates culture, it creates interpretations. By focusing on the return to the sore spot, not just the creation of the sore spot, this thesis tries to map how the book about the photograph is written, how the pain is translated though it still remains outside the intelligible. The photograph invites a continuous return to the limits of our ability to relate to something or someone and this return questions the possibilities for translation of the affective. And it suggests a relation to an alterity and something unintelligible that does not reduce it to sameness. Film, as theorised in the legacy of Barthes, Bazin and Benjamin, opens up for this through its demand for an affective spectatorship model.

The pensive spectator suggested by Mulvey, challenges the spectator's passivity, it is through manipulation of the moving image, through slowing down, returning and repeating the images of the film, that the film opens up for this pensive gaze. This model brings us to the last key concept for this thesis: the *performative*. I have argued that the work of translation creates something new, using Benjamin's argument that translating is related to commentary, I have argued that translation is not merely copying an original into a different context, but an act of changing the original. Writing about film enacts this aspect of translation and points to the performative aspect of translating that is at the centre of this thesis. Performative speech-acts as defined by John L. Austin<sup>23</sup> focused on the legal production of truths by certain statements in certain contexts, it was then taken up by Jacques Derrida to argue that all statements perform their reality in relation to other statements.<sup>24</sup> Derrida asks if not all

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<sup>23</sup> See John L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, 1962.

<sup>24</sup> See Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 1988.

statements follow the logic of what Austin had defined as non-serious citations: “Isn’t it true that what Austin excludes as anomaly, exception, ‘non-serious’, citation (on stage, in a poem, or a soliloquy) is the determined modification of a general citationality[?]”<sup>25</sup> This ‘citationality’ is related to ‘translatability’ in that both refer back to a truth or an original that is assumed to have already been there. The logic of citationality is that the cited is assumed to have already been established, modelling the performative as having always already been established. This logic will be further investigated in relation to the notion of an author behind the text in Chapter 3 and again in Chapter 7. The temporal logic of ‘always already’ follows the same temporal logic as melancholia and trauma as mentioned above. In a sense, the ‘always already’ logic cancels history as the truth of the present haunts the past and collapses the moment of performativity with the history of the performative. Judith Butler took up this version of the performative in her early books about gender and sexuality and this model informs much of her thinking about the formation of norms as well as the subject.<sup>26</sup> Butler’s model of melancholic gender follows the temporal logic of having always already been achieved; the melancholic formation of gender negates not only the lost desire but the history of this desire. The negation of homosexuality as formative of the heterosexual, gendered subject excludes the memory of this desire, denying that it was ever there. In *Excitable Speech*, Butler discusses performativity in relation to hate speech and legal definitions of speech. This is perhaps where Butler comes closest to Austin’s and Derrida’s definitions of performative speech acts. James Loxley points out that Butler’s early usage of the term was indebted not only to Austin and Derrida but to performance theory and its specific usage in theatre and performance arts. “It is only in her subsequent books that the Austinian and Derridean heritage with which she is more commonly associated comes increasingly into view.”<sup>27</sup> Some of the examples of performativity in *Gender Trouble* are indeed from drag and performance, but these examples are used to argue for gender performativity as a form of citationality without original, in line with Derrida’s reading of Austin as mentioned above. However, by using acting as an example of speech act, the

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<sup>25</sup> Derrida, 1988, p. 17.

<sup>26</sup> See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 1990; *Bodies that Matter*, 1993; *Excitable Speech*, 1997; *The Psychic Life of Power*, 1997.

<sup>27</sup> James Loxley, *Performativity*, 2007, p. 141.

citatoriality is widened to include non-linguistic acts in the performance of gender. This opens Butler's notion of performativity to bodily performance on screen and on stage, this will be discussed further in Chapter 1.

If performativity relies on citatoriality, then the problem of change emerges. Derrida and Butler both emphasise that change is a result of the impossibility to perfectly cite or to perfectly copy, so there is an inbuilt subversiveness in the performative. However, as opposed to the translator, the copyist has limited ability to effect this change. Butler addresses this impasse from the perspective of the relation between the I who speaks and the norm in relation to Nietzsche and Foucault in *Giving an Account of Oneself*.<sup>28</sup> In this book, Butler renegotiates the moral implications of her previous work and the role of the self in relation to norms. She defines the problem as a negotiation of the self as a direct effect of the norm and the self as free to act. "The norm does not produce the subject as its necessary effect, nor is the subject fully free to disregard the norm that inaugurates its reflexivity",<sup>29</sup> and argues that this "struggle or primary dilemma is to be produced by a world, even as *one must produce oneself* in some way."<sup>30</sup> What does it mean to 'produce oneself in some way'? and how does this tally with Butler's earlier model of melancholic gender as the result of an incorporation of the norm that prohibits homosexual desire? Butler states that: "In *The Psychic Life of Power*, I perhaps too quickly accepted this punitive scene of inauguration for the subject."<sup>31</sup> And concludes that: "This view of subject formation depends upon an account of a subject who internalizes the law or, minimally, the causal tethering of the subject to the deed for which the institution of punishment seeks compensation."<sup>32</sup> This critique of her earlier line of argument is focused on her reading of Nietzsche, but it is also in *Psychic Life of Power* that she offers a full reading of melancholic gender as the formation of the self through incorporation that she had first suggested in *Gender Trouble*. This offers a hint of a critical reading of melancholic gender, and indeed, Butler turns to Laplanche and Melanie Klein rather than Freud and Lacan in her

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<sup>28</sup> See Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 2005.

<sup>29</sup> Butler, 2005, p. 19.

<sup>30</sup> Butler, 2005, p. 19, my emphasis.

<sup>31</sup> Butler, 2005, p. 15.

<sup>32</sup> Butler, 2005, p. 15.

readings of gender and self from *Undoing Gender*<sup>33</sup> and onwards. This allows for a more ambivalent reading of the implementation of gender. Possibly by choice, Butler does not, however, turn to psychoanalysis to reformulate a model for gender and self-formation after this turn in her thinking. Instead, she tends to use psychoanalysis to theorise aggression and fantasy, and to problematise the relation between the aggressive and fragile aspects of the self.<sup>34</sup> This reflects a move in Butler's thinking — away from ontological questions and towards ethical or relational questions. She instead develops her notion of a partially free subject in relation to Foucault and his notion of *The Use of Pleasure*<sup>35</sup> and critique, as a model of the subject in relation to itself and the world. This offers an explanation of what '*one must produce oneself* in some way' may mean. Subjectivation is not something that happens to 'one', but something that 'one' takes part in. The usage of the indefinite pronoun 'one', echoes the indefinite pronoun 'on' in Simone de Beauvoir's famous statement 'One is not born woman: one becomes woman.'<sup>36</sup> The indefinite pronoun hints at an origin that cannot be defined and a self that is not yet a subject. Butler develops this model of subject production in her reading of Foucault's late writings.

Whereas in his earlier work, he treats the subject as an "effect" of discourse, in his later writings he nuances and refines his position as follows: The subject forms itself in relation to a set of codes, prescriptions, or norms and does so in ways that not only (a) reveal self-constitution to be a kind of *poiesis* but (b) establish selfmaking as part of the broader operation of critique.<sup>37</sup>

Butler formulates — based on her reading of Foucault — a model of the self as not only the effect of discourse or norms that the self cites from, but through an act of selfmaking as critique. Together with the previously quoted argument

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<sup>33</sup> Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 2004.

<sup>34</sup> See Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence*, 2020; *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, 2015; *Frames of War*, 2009; *Precarious Life*, 2005.

<sup>35</sup> See Michael Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol 2: The Use of Pleasure*, [1983] 1990.

<sup>36</sup> See Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe*, 1949. The quote is: "On ne naît pas femme : on le devient."

<sup>37</sup> Butler, 2005, p. 17.

where ‘one must produce oneself in some way’, we can now form a model of the self being formed and forming itself in relation to itself and to the norms surrounding this self. Butler calls this relationality a struggle that in itself opens up for an understanding of freedom: “This struggle with the unchosen conditions of one’s life, a struggle — an agency — is also made possible, paradoxically, by the persistence of this primary condition of unfreedom.”<sup>38</sup> ‘One’ here faces unchosen conditions that make up an unfreedom — demanding norms — but in so doing, ‘one’ is not merely made woman, but becomes woman, not passively, but in co-creation and in critical struggle with the unchosen. So how are we to understand the unchosen? And the self that emerges in this encounter between the one and the unfreedom of the demands of the world? This lacunae by choice in Butler’s developed theory of the subject drives this thesis and is one of its key questions. I wish to answer the question of how we can comprehend a self that emerges in the encounter with differences in the world. A self that loses itself in the unfreedom and struggle, but also the pleasures in difference. In Chapter 1, I will map the impasses of melancholia in the formation of a gendered self, both as developed by Butler and by Irigaray. I will then suggest a reading of masochism via Laplanche and Freud, to suggest how the model of masochism suggests a return to the encounter with both the self and with the world as enigmatic and as strange. I will develop models of ‘masochism,’ ‘enigmatic messages’ and ‘the uncanny’ to formulate a model of self formation that emphasises the continuous formation of the self through translations of the enigmatic. I will place this discussion in relation to feminist and queer critique of male and heterosexual dominant cultures, not to essentialise the positions offered in these critiques but to maintain a reminder of the political origin of these models.

I agree with Rosi Braidotti’s argument that Irigaray’s feminism of sexual difference reflects a political will to be, to have an identity: “women, blacks, youth, postcolonial subjects, migrants, exiles and homeless may first need to go through a phase of ‘identity politics’ — of claiming a fixed location.”<sup>39</sup> Irigaray’s project and her vocabulary reflects an attempt to create a possible subject position for women and it thereby reflects a sense of not already having this

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<sup>38</sup> Butler, 2005, p. 19.

<sup>39</sup> Rosi Braidotti, ‘Becoming Woman: Or Sexual Difference Revisited’ in *Theory, Culture & Society* 2003, Vol. 20(3): pp43–64, p. 53.

position. Braidotti calls this “ontological desire, the desire to be, the tendency of the subject to be, the predisposition of the subject towards being.”<sup>40</sup> This political project is linked to Butler’s project of making gay lives count in her formulation of melancholic gender and in her formulations of mournability. The choice of melancholia and the refusal of mourning to describe the exclusion of women or of homosexuals from who matters and who counts is not incidental and by using vocabulary that may seem anachronistic I wish to maintain the political traces and struggles of the past that gave us these theories. I also want to avoid a theoretical model of *différance* or nomadism that treats any difference or any citation as equal. Toril Moi has argued that “it still remains *politically* essential for feminists to defend women as women” while cautioning against “an ‘undeconstructed’ [...] feminism, unaware of the metaphysical nature of gender identities”.<sup>41</sup> Following this argument, I maintain an uneasy duality throughout the thesis in discussing difference as a general term *and* the feminine and non-normative as terms with a political history. There are limitations to how far into the essentialisation of the outsider of normativity I am willing to go. Where Moi’s argument assumes a political or tactical essentialism that does not imply an assumption of gender difference as nothing but metaphysics, this thesis remains critical of the distinction between the essential and the ‘metaphysical nature of gender identities.’ Starting from the assumption that we translate complex messages and affective experiences of the self, the distinction between essence and metaphysical creation becomes less important. Diana Fuss has argued that essentialism sneaks in through the back door in its critiques. Using the ‘always already’ temporal logic, as discussed earlier, in Derrida’s (and Butler’s) formulation of the subject, Fuss argues that this trope contains the function of essentialism in a non-essential discourse: “Essence manifests itself in deconstruction in that most pervasive, most recognizable of Derridean phrases, ‘always already’ (*toujours déjà*).”<sup>42</sup> Fuss insists that this is “a point of refuge for essentialism which otherwise, in deconstruction, comes so consistently under attack.”<sup>43</sup> I have argued already that the ‘always already’ in

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<sup>40</sup> Braidotti, 2003, p. 44.

<sup>41</sup> Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, [1985] 2002, p13.

<sup>42</sup> Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature & Difference*, 1989, p. 15.

<sup>43</sup> Fuss, 1989, p. 15.

Butler's and Derrida's formulation of performativity and implicitly in Butler's formulation of melancholic gender, poses a problem for the possibility of agency and assumes an originary event that escapes deconstruction. I do not, however, agree that this equals a return of essentialism. As I will argue in Chapters 1 and 2, it is possible to model a formation of the self as something enigmatic and that escapes deconstruction while still being a part of a continuous process of translation that opens up for an affective engagement with the enigmatic self as well as with an enigmatic world. This does not mean that the world nor the self is an essence or something stable and monolithic. On the contrary, as I will argue with the help of Laplanche and an early mention of the uncanny in Freud's work, the enigmatic nature of the self or 'one' (as indefinite pronoun, not as unifying oneness) is not the effect of foreclosure as a process of compartmentalisation of unwanted desires, but of the conflicting and unintelligible demands and desires that the self is subject to and through which 'one' encounters oneself.

Irigaray has been accused of being an essentialist not for letting essentialism sneak in through the back door, but by embracing it as a means of constructing a female subjectivity, what Braidotti called a 'desire for ontology' above.<sup>44</sup> I agree with Braidotti's conclusion that there is a difference between Irigaray's earlier work and her later attempts at defining the origin or the pre-history of the feminine rather than theorise the feminine as excluded in a male-centred discourse that takes male imaginaries and male morphology as the foundation of the self and thereby excluding the feminine from the formation of a self. The desire for ontology in *Speculum* goes through the exclusion of the feminine in order to formulate the feminine as the desire for being.<sup>45</sup> This is why Irigaray's usage of melancholia is different from Butler's usage of it, not only because the two focus on different political projects of the excluded, but for Irigaray, it is the refused subject formation of the excluded that is her focus whereas Butler focuses on the formation of the normative subject that its incapacity to acknowledge subjects that are excluded from the norm as grievable subjects.

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<sup>44</sup> See Janet Syers. 1982 and 1986 for a critique of Irigaray as a biological essentialist; Moi, [1985] 2002 for a critique of Irigaray's attempt to define the feminine; Jacqueline Rose, 1982 and 1985 for a critique of Irigaray as embracing a problematic notion of origin.

<sup>45</sup> See Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, [1974] 1985.



This difference in focus means that Irigaray's formulation of the feminine as a melancholic non-subject contains something that is not able to *be* or even to *become*, bound to be divorced from herself and from the body that does not offer an imaginary identification. Irigaray's usage of melancholic identity is therefore more in line with my formulations of the enigmatic self and I use her theories to connect melancholic gender with the enigmatic self. In *Speculum* as well as in *This Sex Which Is Not One* Irigaray speculates about the language a feminine self that is excluded could produce.<sup>46</sup> In *This Sex*, Irigaray suggests the term 'parler-femme' to describe this language production based in both ontological and political desire.<sup>47</sup> Margaret Whitford has argued that Irigaray's term should be read as a suggestion of what a reading from a feminine perspective as a non-stable subject implies. The term should not be read, according to Whitford, as an effort to create a women's language, but to question the notion of language as unified.<sup>48</sup> Whitford's argument is based on her reading of transfers as opposed to interpretations, where interpretations should be understood as mastering discourse, defining the meaning of a text. Whitford argues that as Irigaray "suggests we should 'read as a woman', question 'male' writing [...] we could apply this to her own writing [...] for insofar as she desires to 'speak as a woman', it can only be from a position of non-mastery, and we have to read her transferentially as well as interpreting."<sup>49</sup> There is here an assumption of reading *This Sex* in the light of *Speculum*. Braidotti suggests drawing the line between the earlier and later Irigaray after *This Sex*. By contrast, my reading of 'parler-femme' bridges the theorisation of the feminine as denied subject position in *Speculum* and Irigaray's later attempts to formulate a positive subject position for the feminine. To 'read as a woman' — understood as to read from the position of denied subjectivity, a

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<sup>46</sup> See Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, [1977] 1985.

<sup>47</sup> 'Parler-femme' literally means 'talk-woman' or 'woman-talk' but it is also a homophone of 'par les femmes' 'by women' and excludes the preposition that would normally connect the verb and noun to make her the object of a discourse: 'parler de femme' 'to talk about women' or the object of an address: 'parler à femme' 'to talk to women.' This formulation thus hints at the impossibility — discourse by women as excluded from language, as well as the refusal of any objectification of women — of formulating a desire for woman-talk.

<sup>48</sup> See Margaret Whitford, 'Luce Irigaray: The Problem of Feminist Theory' in *Paragraph*, vol. 8, No. 1, 1986: pp. 102-105, p. 102.

<sup>49</sup> Whitford, 1986, p. 104.

subversive act that Butler has defined as an effort to “destroy this position, this masculinism, with a cutting edge, indeed, with a threatened castration,”<sup>50</sup> is something very different from trying to write from this position. Irigaray’s early style was one of extensive quotations, placing itself somewhere between reading and writing, between commentary and argumentation. This style in itself challenges the notion of the Author and what writing is, as well as highlight the contradictions in the source text. I do not agree with Braidotti’s or Butler’s stark distinction of a line that separates the early and the late Irigaray. However, the Irigaray that I will use in this thesis, is the Irigaray that speculates on the feminine as impossible subject position, rather than a possible subject position for the female writer.

### **Masochistic spectatorship**

In this thesis, I will suggest reading the formation of the self through a masochistic model — a process of going astray and re-finding oneself. This return is both formative of the self and of the turn towards the self as the practice of re-finding the self. Through a re-reading of Freud’s concept of masochism via Laplanche, I will suggest that the self is formed through a state of being-with or being-alongside an alterity that the self is trying to comprehend — to translate — and this even before we have words or any notion of another self. Laplanche calls these untranslatable codes *enigmatic messages* and they form both the conscious self (what can be translated) and the unconscious self (what remains untranslatable) through an implantation of an alterity into the self, or rather as the self.<sup>51</sup> The message of the other contains something that is not reducible to its material reality, nor to any fantasy we can form of it. This third reality is what demands translation. It contains an intention and, as Laplanche’s third reality is always another human, it contains the unconscious of the other, therefore always escaping complete translation. In relation to the above discussion of translation, this emphasises the unfinished aspect of translation and self-formation. Laplanche’s model does contain an original or Ur-insertion of an enigmatic other as the self, opening his model to translation with Butler’s

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<sup>50</sup> Butler, *Senses of the Subject*, 2015, p. 155.

<sup>51</sup> See Jean Laplanche, *Essays on Otherness*, 1999, p. 110.

and Irigaray's usage of melancholia, while opening up this process to a continuous, open-ended process. After spending the Introduction and Chapters 1-3 mapping this perspective of spectatorship, self-formation and difference, I will then draw on Ozon's films to analyse the spectator that these films produce. What this thesis will focus on is how film, and the enigmatic messages that we are left to translate, affects and displaces the spectator. I am not, however, concerned here with the perception of a film; instead, what I am after is what spectatorship can teach us about the formation of the self. Films presuppose a spectator and it is this ideal spectator that is the focus of this thesis, rather than a lived experience of watching a film.

As already noted, psychosocial studies raise the question of how the psyche and the social are related. Baraitser argues that in "what we could claim as a foundational text for psychosocial studies,"<sup>52</sup> Butler's *The Psychic Life of Power*, "creates a 'new passage' out of the reading of Freud and Foucault, to offer us a story of the tenuous, always strained, but productive relation between psychic and social spheres."<sup>53</sup> This 'new passage' is the result of Butler's thinking about how norms function to create an ontology — through the incorporation of objects and the prohibition against desiring them as foundational of the subject — developed in her model of melancholic gender. Butler's move represents, in Baraitser's argument, a way of conceptualising the psychic and the social in order to generate a model of the formation of the subject that can explain a subsequent subjectification. "Butler mines psychoanalysis for a response to the ontological question of 'who' is there to make attachments prior to subjectivation, that could lead to subject formation."<sup>54</sup> In my vocabulary, this 'who' is the self — a turning point that does not presuppose the subjectivation and insertion in a normative or symbolic order.

Butler makes careful usage of melancholia and its role in forming the ego. Through this, she formulates a twofold model. On the one hand, she accounts for the specific incorporation of the lost homosexual object in the formation of the heterosexual, gendered subject. At the same time, she offers a general model for the internalisation of attachments *and* the prohibition against these

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<sup>52</sup> Lisa Baraitser, *Enduring Time*, 2017, p. 40.

<sup>53</sup> Baraitser, 2017, p. 40-41.

<sup>54</sup> Baraitser, 2017, p. 42.

attachments. The internalisation of an attachment *and* its prohibition therefore becomes the formation of the internal, an entity that is founded through a turning back onto the self. This self is thus already an object with attachments and prohibitions, already a nexus of desire and denial. In this account, the self is a productive nexus that is already both an inner object and a nexus and agent of the norms that formed the internalisation in the first place. This internalisation shapes the self as that 'who' who is there to make attachments and thereby link desire with the continuous incorporation and co-creation of normative systems.

Butler's model of melancholic gender offers a model of the self as internalised through regulatory norms. It thereby opens up the possibility of psychosocial negotiation, a negotiation of the self as displaced and as formed through internalisation of societal norms. As I have argued and as I have shown Butler to later recognise, the self in this model is the effect of and reflection of a prohibition against specific attachments. This model contradicts the notion of a productive power as developed by Foucault.<sup>55</sup> The melancholic event of Butler's model is the result of a pre-subjective prohibition of homosexual desire, a prohibition that enables the continued regulation of the remaining, heterosexual, desire. In my reading, this places Butler's model on the side of stark differentiation — of sexual difference in psychoanalytic vocabulary — as this model forecloses the potential link between the two. In this thesis I turn to Irigaray's notion of the feminine and Laplanche's notion of seduction to theorise a self that is the result of continuous encounters with alterities *and* exclusions, with what can only be mourned with the greatest difficulty because it cannot be symbolised. These alterities and exclusions may per definition be part of the normative systems that have defined them as such and as Butler would define them in later texts:

The question of what it is to be outside the norm poses a paradox for thinking, for if the norm renders the social field intelligible and normalizes that field for us, then being outside the norm is in some sense being defined still in relation to it.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> See Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol 1: The Will to Knowledge*, 1998 [1976].

<sup>56</sup> Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 2004, p. 42.

This model for the normative as inclusive of all that is intelligible in the social is in a sense contradicted by Butler's model of melancholic gender, as this works to explain a foreclosure of homosexuality from the intelligible on a psychological level, barring the ability to mourn these attachments. Yet, these attachments are, arguably both intelligible and mournable, though not to the same extent as what the normative grants as mainstream. In order to make this distinction, it can be helpful to use Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's notion of the periperformative — a performative that functions on the outskirts of what it performs — as Sedgwick makes clear, the spatial model of the periperformative offers a different view of what a performative can do and what it can support: "the localness of the periperformative is lodged in a metaphoric of space."<sup>57</sup> Rather than the temporal metaphor of Butler's and Derrida's citationality, the periperformative does not cite what was always already there, but instead acts on the centre from the periphery. Not necessarily outside the normative, but also not at its centre, or its mainstream. This metaphor includes the possibility of gradation, of gradually increasing distance from the centre, rather than Butler's either foreclosed or not, or logic of sexual difference as I define it here. By contrast to Butler's usage of Freud's model of melancholia in the formation of the ego, Laplanche offers a different model for the formation of the self. This model does not rely on prohibition, but on the unintelligibility of the adult world, the alien nature of the world around us. "The enigmatic signifier is Laplanche's term for an adult world infiltrated with unconscious and sexual significations and messages by which the child is seduced but which the child can't understand."<sup>58</sup> These enigmatic messages or signifiers can be prohibitions, but the incomprehensible world is not only restricting, but also enticing and seductive. Laplanche suggests a masochistic pre-sexual phase that inaugurates the sexual. In this pre-sexual phase, the self is first receptive and passive in relation to the alterity of the other, a passivity that suggests a turning back to what becomes the interior, the self, of which melancholy is one aspect, but not the only one.

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<sup>57</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, 2003, p. 68.

<sup>58</sup> Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Forms of Being: Cinema, Aesthetics, Subjectivity*, 2004, p. 37, Laplanche uses enigmatic signifier and enigmatic message as synonyms. My preference for message over signifier is due to the linguistic connotations of signifier. Message emphasises the directedness of the enigmatic, that it comes from someone, and opens up the enigmatic to non-verbal, non-linguistic communication.

In this thesis I will move 'beyond' the melancholic and sexual difference. But this is not in the sense of leaving sexual difference and melancholic identification behind. Instead, the aim is to explore a parallel mode of being that allows for a fluidity and an affective response to the world, one that is not bound in a binary or founded on difference, but rather functioning through a being-with. The event of the melancholy formation of the self is contrasted by a continuous going astray and turning back. 'Being-with' is understood in this thesis as affective responses to the alterity of the other, an other that is not quite separate from the self. This aspect of being is intercepted by prohibitive events as described by a melancholic response to loss.

The usage of 'feminine' in this essay may seem like an anachronistic oversight, a harking back to a version of feminist theory not yet critical of the essentialism of the second wave. However, as I have argued already and to further underscore this point — by translating this term to make use of it in a queer context, my aim is to reanimate it, enabling it to create new meaning. This also guides my return to theories of subjugation that are contemporary though often oppositional to Irigaray's early formulations of the feminine. My return to debates of the 70s and the 90s reflects a return to a setting in which essence and difference was argued in relation to two different ideas about subjugation. The feminine also links identity with sexuality and the model for masochism that I will suggest in this thesis. As I will argue in Chapter 1, Freud often conflated the feminine with masochism and Irigaray's citational model of Freudian theory builds on this conflation, though she argues that the exclusion of female morphology follows the path of melancholia rather than masochism. By linking this with a debate of the exclusion of desire in the 90s, the feminine and masochism is uncoupled with anatomy and feminine representations, enabling a reading of the feminine as decoupled but also linked historically from/with the subjugation of women. I suggest reading 'feminine' as a placeholder for both the passivity in the masochistic turning back on the self *and* what is excluded in psychoanalytic discourse of the development of the psychosexual self. In this reading, any reference to morphology or biology becomes secondary.

In her foreword to *Psychosocial Imaginaries*, Butler discusses “metaphorical transpositions”<sup>59</sup> to negotiate the different fields of the psychic and the social or the historical that refuse “an overlapping relation with one another.”<sup>60</sup> Nor do they “have to remain in a binary framework”<sup>61</sup> that does not overlap. Butler’s suggestion is that the different spheres always impinge and overlap on each other and that their distinction is ever only precarious. This may be true, and I will point out several links and connections between the feminine and queer in the course of this thesis. Yet I believe something else is happening when a term from a different time or a different place goes astray and appears in the wrong time or place. An anachronistic appearance of a term long since left on the theoretical dustheap, assumed not to be needed again, does something when brought back, something more than pointing out the precarious borders between different fields of study.

Like ‘queer,’ the ‘feminine’ is a redeployment of a term of exclusion and subjugation, but their different histories and their different contexts give them different values and offer different solutions. By its anachronistic status as well as through the theoretical context in which it was formulated by Irigaray, the ‘feminine’ does not offer a possible identification with the excluded. The ‘feminine’ is produced as passive simultaneously with its value as disruption to the discourses that excluded it. This allows for a different possibility, a possibility of thinking the exclusion and being-with on both sides of the excluded. As argued above, the ‘feminine’ in Irigaray’s usage that I will deploy here, quotes male discourses’ usage of this term. Irigaray uses the exclusionary discourse to explore the excluded, as opposed to inventing a discourse for the excluded. The ‘feminine’ thus connotes exclusion, silence and impossibility, even when it speaks. These are connotations or resonances that queer does not carry, as it has a very different history and a very different formulation.

Baraitser and Stephen Frosh have suggested that the psychosocial forms something new that is not reducible to its various ‘foundational disciplines.’

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<sup>59</sup> Judith Butler, ‘Foreword: Tracking the Mechanisms of the Psychosocial,’ in *Psychosocial Imaginaries: Perspectives on Temporality, Subjectivities and Activism*, 2015, p. xi.

<sup>60</sup> Butler, 2015, p. vii.

<sup>61</sup> Butler, 2015, p. vii.

Instead, the psychosocial as an ongoing negotiation of disparate terms becomes its foundation. Indeed, the psychosocial:

[...] needs to constitute itself in such a way as to constantly unsettle its own activities and assumptions, and to aspire to a kind of critical politics that tests itself through negation, querying its own premises and always seeking to renew its engagement with a space that is neither 'psycho' nor 'social', and is definitely not both, but is something else again.<sup>62</sup>

This definition or anti-definition of the psychosocial suggests a negotiation of terms and spheres that is not merely questioning the boundaries of 'foundational disciplines' but forms something new. This vagueness risks becoming empty if it is not attached to a practice, to a work aimed at producing something new. In this preface, I have tried to argue for a model of translation and performative practice as a means to fill this void with a method or a practice that reflects the materials worked with as well as the theoretical starting points. Through Benjamin's concept of translation as a practice, the psychosocial is here grounded in a practice and in a work process rather than in theoretical speculations of the psychosocial. In *Parting Ways*, Butler suggest an ethical translation where concepts, meanings and terms are not assimilated or removed from their origin. The act of translating terms that are worlds apart is necessary for these worlds to communicate, but the otherworldly or the anachronistic should not be reduced, consumed or assimilated into the contemporary or into the acceptable.<sup>63</sup> My usage of 'feminine,' 'queer,' 'self,' 'enigmatic message' and 'alterity' in this thesis constitute such acts of translation. They represent attempts to bring several spheres of thought together while striving not to collapse these spheres. Instead, the aim is to make something new, a psychosocial of the present project. The work of this thesis is to find a new foundation for the psychosocial by going astray in old models of the self and audio-visual representations of the enigmatic.

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<sup>62</sup> Stephen Frosh and Lisa Baraitser, 'Psychoanalysis and Psychosocial Studies,' in *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* Vol13, 2008, pp. 346–365, p. 350.

<sup>63</sup> Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*, 2012, see pp. 7-9.



## Thesis Structure

The Introduction maps out what is at stake in this thesis by introducing its key elements. I start with a reading of Stanley Kubrick's film *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) in order to introduce some models of reading films that I engage with in this thesis, and that I depart from. Starting with a critique of a Lacanian, interpretative reading of film and the spectator, I open up a critical account of the master discourse of the reader/analyst of films and the reductive tendencies in this approach to film. This leads to a critique of the psychoanalytic model of difference as derivation from 'sexual difference' and its assumption of duality as the original difference. This critique leads to the introduction of a Lacanian feminist critique by Laura Mulvey in an early formulation of the male gaze as a sadistic, consuming gaze that is assumed in the structure of mainstream narrative film. The interpretative voice of the feminist critic is then problematised through contemporary spectatorship models that move away from difference as duality and its explanatory effects, while also building on the differentiation of spectatorship as at least two and the more diverse models that this initial critique of Lacanian film theory enabled. This chapter also introduces affective spectatorship models and their critiques of psychoanalytic models. The untranslatability or enigmatic aspect of François Ozon's cinema is also introduced in this chapter. This untranslatability, is not merely a representation of the enigmatic nature of film in general, but the specific enigmatic refusal to reach conclusions with themes related to this thesis, such as sexual difference, spectatorial pleasure and egoic formations of the self in Ozon's films. Ozon's films, I argue, engages with these themes and refuse definitive interpretations and their materiality therefore offers an open-ended engagement with the theoretical approaches in this thesis.

Chapter 1 offers an alternative reading of sexual difference and gender from within psychoanalytic theories. Starting with a critique of the phallic and of anatomical metaphors within Freud's and Lacan's models for sexual difference, this chapter then turns to the feminine as an impossible subject position as developed in Irigaray's *Speculum*. This chapter then maps out a reading of Freud via Laplanche that focuses on the self as an ongoing, open-ended project, against a phallic closure and against a reading of the self as self-identical. This chapter bridges the gap between psychoanalytic theory and

affective spectatorship by arguing for a reading of psychoanalytic texts that points to a subject in the making, one that is affectively open to the world rather than melancholically foreclosed in its egoic identity. Building on the model of the self in chapter 1, chapter 2 constructs a methodology for reading films that does not suggest a closed interpretation but rather spectatorship as an affective experience that invites translations as an impossible project. In this chapter, I discuss what an affective spectator means and how a translating spectator can be developed in relation to an affective spectatorship model.

Following these chapters focusing on the self and its relation to differences and to itself, chapter 3 introduces Ozon's films and the the question of the origin of films. This chapter discusses *auteur* theory and turns the focus from the spectator as the self assumed to be produced by a film, to the auteur as the supposed self behind the film. Arguing with Barthes's declaration that the Author is dead and the temporal impasse of Butler's and Derrida's subject formation as having already taken place and the exclusion of any doer behind the deed; this chapter suggests a doer that might not comprehend the deed. Following the previous models of self-formation and self-estrangement, this chapter negotiates the demonic, all-seeing Author that still haunts much auteurship theory in general as well as specific discussions of Ozon as an auteur. Building a notion of Ozon as a somewhat estranged reader of his own films and his own intentions, this chapter suggests Ozon as a reader of films and as one interlocutor of his own films amongst others, not as a final analyst of the films, but as a commentator. Ozon as commentator rather than as Author, also opens up for the possibility to read Ozon's films as dealing with the notion of a demonic Author. A point that I will return to throughout the remaining chapters.

Chapter 4 is the first chapter that offers a close reading of one of Ozon's films. This chapter looks closely at a sibling relationship depicted in *Young and Beautiful* (2013). The depiction of this relationship and how these two siblings negotiate their differences and similarities open up for a direct engagement with the core questions of this thesis by one of Ozon's films. To help bridge the gap between the sibling relation and the previous discussions of sexual difference and gender, I turn to Juliet Mitchell's recent development of the sibling complex and its relation to the Oedipus complex. In juxtaposing these three fields: the film; the previously developed model for self formation; and Mitchell's

theorisation of siblings as the first social relation, this chapter offers a renegotiation of difference in specific settings, but also suggests how translatability and untranslatability between disparate fields and languages function to create new meaning.

After this initial reading of Ozon and a film about difference that explicitly deals with gender and sexual difference, chapter 5 returns to the feminine and female subjectivity. This chapter focuses on a close reading of *8 Women* (2002), a film that excludes sexual difference through its usage of an all female cast. The plot, and the women, are, however, haunted by the absence of the man who is found murdered at the beginning of the film. This film is read in relation to the feminine as a denied subjectivity and as other. Asking the question what happens when the other is only put in relation to another other and what the feminine is in relation, not to the one, to the phallic, but in relation to seven other denied subjects. Difference is here negotiated through class, race and generational difference, diluting the duality of sexual difference into multitudes of differentiations and multitudes of resistance to the stagnation of these differences. This chapter also asks the question of pleasure, not only for the spectator, but for the reader/auteur and their relation to the demonic Auteur. The following chapter builds on the question of pleasure and the relation between the auteur and the audience. In chapter 6, the focus is on the sadistic tendencies in film, directed not only at the depicted characters, but also at the audience. Based on the affective model, the spectator becomes sensitive to the film in a way that a disconnected spectator does not imply. In this chapter, I focus on *Sitcom* (1998) and *See the Sea* (1997) as examples where Ozon is exploring the limits of spectatorial pleasure and the power of images to affect a spectator. These films are also read as attempts to subvert film language and filmic norms. As such, the content and film language is read in relation to the so called New French Extreme and the development of queer models beyond a norm/anti-norm duality.

Chapter 7 returns to the question of the auteur and the intention behind the film, reading the auteur — like the spectator — as ultimately a masochist in the formation of the self and the projected notion of a self as creator/writer, this last chapter takes a broader look at Ozon's work and some of the comments on Ozon, in order to defend Ozon as an explorative director rather than an

obsessive, compulsive director, a director who lets his films run amok and become something he seems to not be quite sure about. This again returns to the question of who can interpret a film and the enigmatic nature of the self and what the self has done. This concluding chapter suggests that there is an open-ended aspect to Ozon's films that render them interesting to the specific project for this thesis and for its contribution to contemporary French cinema. In a climate where french film has become more genre defined, Ozon's cinema continues to defy categorisation.

I have added a filmography after the bibliography. There is also a list of illustrations after the table of contents. All translations from French are mine unless otherwise stated and any italics in quotations are original unless otherwise stated.

## Introduction: Setting the Scene

Stanley Kubrick's last film, *Eyes Wide Shut*, tells the story of Bill Harford's (Tom Cruise) search for a secret society centred on obscure sexual rituals and anonymity. The narrative is propelled by Bill's fantasy of his wife's infidelity. This fantasy causes him to search for another fantasy; a fantasy he wants to look at without being implicated. This is the fantasy of the pleasure available for someone else. Hearing about the secret society, Bill disguises himself, with cloak and mask, as is the custom in this group. This allows Bill to enter undetected as an observer, into a fantasy of pleasure and lawlessness that we are normally denied but that is assumed to exist somewhere else, for someone else. Hidden behind his costume and mask, and the anonymity of the crowd, Bill is able to gaze the nudity on display. Like a cinema-goer, Bill can remain somewhat passive in the crowd; he is looking without being seen — or so he thinks until he is recognised and found out. Bill is warned that he is in great danger, breaking the one-way direction of his spectator's point of view and implicating him in the scene and in the monstrosity of the pleasure of others. In this turn of events, the spectator becomes the looked at.

Kubrick's film offers a narrative of someone becoming a spectator of obscene pleasure and the disruptive effect of the returning gaze, a gaze that reveals the passive pleasure of the spectator. I shall use *Eyes Wide Shut* to map out a number of traditions of film theory as well as to suggest how film itself can construct an argument about spectatorship. My interest here is the formation of the self in relation to the world and my argument is that the assumed spectator of a film can tell us something about the formation of the self as both passive and active, as both the effect of ruptures and foreclosures and of a being-with or being alongside in a relation that involves care and similarity as well as rupture and lack.

The pleasure of the spectator has been theorised as the pleasure of passivity and absence by early Lacanian film theorists such as Christian Metz,<sup>64</sup> and by Laura Mulvey as pleasure through displacement of identification with an active (male) character in order to desire the passive (female) object of desire.<sup>65</sup> These early psychoanalytic examinations of pleasure in film focused on the meaning of film and the visual pleasure that films can offer a spectator. Todd McGowan argues that this 'first wave' of Lacanian film theory read Lacan and films via Louis Althusser's notion of ideology and for this reason, these readings were limited to the imaginary and the symbolic in Lacanian vocabulary.<sup>66</sup> McGowan contrasts this focus on the imaginary and the symbolic with film theory based on Lacan's concept of the gaze. He points to Joan Copjec and Slavoj Žižek as the origin of this 'second wave' in the late 80s and early 90s.<sup>67</sup> McGowan uses this critique of early adaptations of Lacan to film theories to theorise the excluded and the excessive within films. "The gaze is a disturbance in the normal functioning of reality because it indicates that our social reality is not simply there as a neutral field."<sup>68</sup> This aspect of film or, rather, this aspect of the spectator's experience of film is contrasted with McGowan's usage of fantasy as "an imaginary scenario that fills in the gaps within ideology. In other words, it serves as a way for the individual subject to imagine a path out of the dissatisfaction produced by the demands of social existence."<sup>69</sup> Fantasy functions on the level of the imaginary and fills the gaps or the causes of dissatisfaction within the symbolic order. In Mulvey's terminology, the threat of dissatisfaction and castration in desiring the idealised female object is covered by an imaginary identification with the male, omnipotent protagonist. Fantasy

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<sup>64</sup> Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier*, 1982 [1977].

<sup>65</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' in *Screen* Vol 16 Issue 3, Autumn 1975 pp. 6-18. Here quoted from *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, Oxford University Press, 2016.

<sup>66</sup> Todd McGowan, *The Real Gaze: Film Theory after Lacan*, 2007. See also Louis Althusser, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, 2014 [1970].

<sup>67</sup> See Joan Copjec, 'The Orthopsychic Subject: Film Theory and the Reception of Lacan' in *October*, vol 49, 1989, pp. 53-71 for her critique of the what she argues is a Foucauldian "panoptic gaze" that "defines *perfectly* the situation of the woman under patriarchy", p. 54. She opposes this Foucauldian reading of the gaze to Lacan's notion of the gaze as always failing to see (and therefore define) the self in the mirror screen.

<sup>68</sup> McGowan, 2007, p. 25.

<sup>69</sup> McGowan, 2007, p. 23.

functions, for both Mulvey and McGowan, to uphold the symbolic ideology that promises pleasure but is unable to deliver on this promise. Mulvey's solution is to break down the pleasure of looking: "the voyeuristic-scopophilic look that is a crucial part of traditional filmic pleasure can itself be broken down."<sup>70</sup> The means of breaking filmic pleasure suggested by Mulvey is based on what she defines as the "three different looks associated with cinema: that of the camera as it records the pro-filmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion."<sup>71</sup> For Mulvey, the pleasure of looking at film is augmented by the prioritising of the last look, that of the characters looking at each other. This last look allows the spectator to identify with an object, and desire its object, from an insulated distance that removes the threat of castration from the experience of pleasure. As I have shown, Mulvey later develops the concept of a 'pensive spectator' as an alternative to the ideological look suggested by the films analysed in this early essay, for now, however, I wish to focus on this early essay because it deals with the subjugation of women and the fantasy of the perfect gaze and the pleasure this offer. It should be pointed out, however, that both the 'pensive' and the analytic spectator in this early essay focus on the trauma implicit in the filmic, though in this early essay the trauma is the result of the female's phallic lack and in her later essay, it is the trauma of finitude and unmournable loss that serves as a generalised punctum. Arguably, there is therefore already a grain of her later argument in this earlier essay. Corresponding to Mulvey's early model of spectatorial pleasure, Bill Harford's desire is not to partake, but to observe the excessive pleasure of other men. His distance from pleasure allows his fantasy of a pleasure available to someone else to be maintained.

Mulvey suggests breaking this fantasy by inserting the other two looks: the look of the camera and the look of the spectator. These two looks create a discrepancy in our identification with the film's characters. This disruption produces conscious, detached spectators that are less likely to be absorbed in the pleasure of film.

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<sup>70</sup> Mulvey, 2016 [1975], p. 721.

<sup>71</sup> Mulvey, 2016 [1975], p. 721.

The first blow against the monolithic accumulation of traditional film conventions (already undertaken by radical filmmakers) is to free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics, passionate detachment. There is no doubt that this destroys the satisfaction, pleasure and privilege of the 'invisible guest,' and highlights how film has depended on voyeuristic active/passive mechanisms.<sup>72</sup>

Mulvey's solution to the active/passive impasse is in line with the introduction of the camera and spectator characteristic of the *Nouvelle Vague*, present in films such as *2 or 3 Things I Know About Her* (1967) or *Tout va bien* (1972) by Jean-Luc Godard. These solutions are technical, however, and as such tend to be dated and follow trends rather than offer lasting solutions. By contrast, in Kubrick's film the discrepancy of identification takes place within the narrative, without inserting the camera. The reversal of the look in *Eyes Wide Shut*, that exposes the anonymous Bill as the spectator, can be read as a challenge to the 'invisible guest,' as suggested by Mulvey. Bill's pleasure is destroyed and his passivity is challenged as he becomes the centre of his drama rather than the onlooker onto others' drama. This reading also challenges Copjec's critique of the gaze as a Foucauldian or panoptic gaze in Mulvey's argument. Mulvey may rely on technical instruments for revealing the fragility of the seemingly stable gaze confirming the patriarchal ideology in which it is constructed, but as Kubrick's staging shows, ideology and fantasy is always threatened by a reversal or a collapse of the naturalised order and Mulvey attaching this to the lack in women and the traumatic display of this lack is not so much a panoptic assumption of a pan-ideological apparatus as a quotation from Freudian and Lacanian source, sources that we can read differently, but Mulvey's early argument is not directly contradicted by the source-texts that she deploys in order to theorise the subjugation and objectification of women in Hollywood films. It is not only Bill who is paranoid of the reversal of his gaze, but the society in which he finds himself is as paranoid as he is and upon discovery of the external gaze must cleanse itself in order to maintain the fantasy of a stable gaze.

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<sup>72</sup> Mulvey, 2016 [1975], p. 722.



## Questioning dualities

Mulvey's model of scopophilic pleasure is steeped in the model of patriarchy and the subjugation/exclusion of women that this thesis takes as one of its theoretical starting points. In this model, male scopophilic pleasure is assumed to be heterosexual and the passive female is the object of his pleasure. This model is grounded in an assumption of lack and rupture where women lack something and the two genders are stable and kept apart. Mulvey's proposal is to move away from the pleasure of fantasy that covers this lack and as we have seen, she later suggests the 'pensive spectator' as an alternative to the impasse between male scopophilic pleasure and detached theorising. The pensive spectator offers pleasure in critical engagement. However, for now I wish to remain in the gender dichotomy of this early essay and explore possible pleasures within this model that offers a subversive possibility.

Gaylyn Studlar has pointed out that Mulvey operates within the "castration fear and a polarized account of sexual difference"<sup>73</sup> that she sets out to criticise. Studlar argues that the divisions of active/passive, sadist/masochist, male/female are an inherent part of the psychoanalytic theories that Mulvey deploys and suggest a turn towards Gilles Deleuze's reformulation of masochistic pleasure instead.<sup>74</sup> This allows Studlar to formulate a model of spectatorship that is not based on the sadistic, male scopophilia within Mulvey's model but rather on a masochistic idealisation of the female object. "Unlike the sadist, the masochist does not seek to destroy the female or to fuck her, as one of a countless entourage of degraded, discarded objects, but to cling to her as an ideal and to make her the fantasy subject of an almost desexualized contemplation."<sup>75</sup> Studlar therefore moves away from a sadistic objectification of the female on screen, but it is hard to see how any real female character can be developed between the madonna and the whore of this duality, or between the sadist and the masochist. Studlar's theorisation of masochism remains anchored in dualism, even though it sets out to explore the other side of it. Studlar suggests a reading of Deleuze in relation to Jean Laplanche, but she

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<sup>73</sup> Gaylyn Studlar, *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich, and the Masochist Aesthetic*, 1988, p. 29.

<sup>74</sup> Gilles Deleuze, 'Coldness and Cruelty' [1967], in *Masochism*, 1991.

<sup>75</sup> Studlar, 1988, p. 22.

does not explore the differences between Deleuze's and Laplanche's models of masochism. The primary passivity of the child in Laplanche's theory of seduction does not entail wooing the mother as an idealised object; this primary passivity emphasises the external source of sexuality and desire, it does not value or define the form this sexuality takes.

As mentioned, McGowan suggests introducing the gaze as related to Lacan's real in order to escape the excessive reliance on the symbolic or the imaginary to understand film and the spectator. The real in the gaze, McGowan argues, reminds the viewer of the failure in the symbolic order and of the failure of ideology to uphold its own foundations. By analysing film as a form of fantasy, films are able to either fill the gaps or to reveal the gaps of ideology. "The political valence of fantasy in a film depends on how the film depicts excess: if it uses excess to fill in ideological gaps and pacify the spectator, then it functions as an ideological supplement; but if it allows excess to stand out and distort the spectator's look, then it functions as a challenge to ideology."<sup>76</sup>

Excess is defined by McGowan as a means to challenge or pacify the spectator and the spectator's relation to ideology. In McGowan's analysis of *Eyes Wide Shut*, Kubrick is able to reveal the excess enjoyment in capitalist ideology by revealing how the perverse pleasure of the rich is not a result of individual enjoyment, but functions as a built-in aspect of the capitalist system. "The radicality of Stanley Kubrick as a filmmaker consists in his ability to use film's fantasmatic quality to bring to light the hidden obscene dimension of symbolic authority."<sup>77</sup> Specifically, McGowan argues that *Eyes Wide Shut* reveals the link between wealth and obscenity. "We see that wealth does not simply buy security and luxury; it buys an obscene enjoyment. In this way, the film demands that we acknowledge the link between wealth and obscenity, which is a link that capitalist ideology continually works to disavow."<sup>78</sup> McGowan's analysis of *Eyes Wide Shut* centres on ideology and the usage of excess in order to break down the meaning or the symbolic foundation of ideology. McGowan's analysis operates in the field between the symbolism or the semantics of the film and the spectator as invested in this meaning.

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<sup>76</sup> McGowan, 2007, p. 37-38.

<sup>77</sup> McGowan, 2007, p. 44.

<sup>78</sup> McGowan, 2007, p. 46.

McGowan understands the spectator's investment via the excess or the real, which functions as a potentially disruptive supplement to the ideology of capitalism. This excessive pleasure is the real that cannot be approached but that pulls spectators in at the same time as it distances them from the ideology that is being revealed.

Through each of these characters, Kubrick indicates that the stain of enjoyment resides in the structure of symbolic authority rather than in the particular subject that inhabits the position. Kubrick uses the fantasmatic dimension of cinema to expose this stain and allow us to see its disruption of the image and the narrative in his films.<sup>79</sup>

In McGowan's argument, it is not the subject but the structure that causes the enjoyment; the excess is not individual but structural and the ideology that tries to hide this structure is revealed by exposing this excess to the spectator. If we replace capitalist ideology with patriarchal ideology, it would be equally possible to submit Kubrick's film to an updated version of Mulvey's argument. Just as Kubrick is using inter-narrative devices rather than the introduction of the camera, excess and the real in the gaze could be used to disrupt the fantasy and the scopophilic pleasure of the male gaze by challenging this sadistic gaze with the return of the anonymous gaze of the object, actualising the stain in patriarchal ideology. In other words, McGowan's argument could be used to develop Mulvey's analysis of the male gaze. McGowan argues that Studlar's turn from psychoanalysis to Deleuze's model for masochistic pleasure is a turning away, not from Lacan, but from interpretations of Lacan that have been prevalent in film theory. "Studlar rejects the idea that the spectator's desire is a desire for mastery, which is exactly what Lacan rejects as well."<sup>80</sup>

The difference is, however, that Studlar is trying to move away from a male — sadist — position of mastery, to formulate a position in relation to the maternal where one is able to desire without consuming or being consumed. In McGowan's theorisation of the spectator's passivity, the maternal remains a threat. The Lacanian fear of the maternal is inherited in McGowan's model.

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<sup>79</sup> McGowan, 2007, p. 47.

<sup>80</sup> McGowan, 2007, p. 9.

Fantasy proper has nothing to do with affect; it concerns, instead, our relationship to the ineffable and unapproachable maternal Thing that appears to embody the ultimate enjoyment, which is, as Lacan says, 'something that is far beyond the domain of affectivity.'<sup>81</sup>

The maternal Thing must be kept at a distance by ideology or it threatens to break down the order of things. McGowan here reveals an ambivalence, where a little excess can help dismantle the ideology, but too much excess will threaten the fabric of human society. This ambivalence becomes even more problematic when the too-muchness of excess is linked to the maternal Thing, linking the maternal with dissolution of reason as well as ideology. Studlar deploys the pre-Oedipal maternal object in order to explore a relation to the desired object that is founded on passivity rather than activity. A relation that escapes the maternal Thing and instead remains an object that may be threatening, but that the child is able to live with. McGowan's critique of Studlar thus misreads her attempt to explore masochism as a mode of spectatorial desire by comparing it to Lacan's theory of denied mastery. For this reason, McGowan is unable to address the critical introduction of the maternal in Studlar's theory.

For Studlar, the introduction of the maternal as active, through Deleuze's reformulation of masochism, offers an opportunity to think about cinematic pleasure in ways that are not subordinated to castration, control or a paternal figure. "Deleuze's theory of masochism calls into question psychoanalysis's preoccupation with the castration complex, the genital 'supremacy' of the male as interpreted by the patriarchy, and the overwhelming influence and authority of the father in the psychosexual development of the child."<sup>82</sup> This allows Studlar to explore the fluidity and mobility of sexual desire and identification in spectatorship. "Through the mobility of multiple, fluid identifications, the cinematic apparatus allows the spectator to experience the pleasure of satisfying 'the drive to be both sexes' that is repressed in everyday life

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<sup>81</sup> McGowan, 2007, p. 43.

<sup>82</sup> Gaylyn Studlar, 'Visual Pleasure and the Masochistic Aesthetics,' in *Journal of Film and Video*, Vol. 37, No. 2, Sexual Difference (Spring 1985), pp. 5-26, p. 11.

dominated by secondary process.”<sup>83</sup> The disavowal of the maternal as a threat that needs to be kept at bay, allows McGowan to formulate a complete and closed analysis of *Eyes Wide Shut* and Kubrick’s cinema in general, an analysis that masters the meaning of these films.

The films compel the spectator to examine the motivations driving the exercise of this authority. Of course, not every spectator—and perhaps no spectator—reacts in this way, but this is the response that the logic of Kubrick’s films demands. When we answer this demand and recognize the obscenity at work in this process, we free ourselves from our investment in this authority. In this sense, Kubrick’s fantasmatic depictions of the obscenity of symbolic authority are in the service of the subject’s freedom. Recognizing authority’s obscenity is the path to freedom from it.<sup>84</sup>

This quote reveals an inherent problem with the interpretative model in psychoanalytic theory in general and in Lacanian film theory specifically. McGowan tells us the right interpretation of this film, even if not every spectator reacts to it in this way. In this semantic reading of the effects of excess in film, McGowan performs a symbolic meta-analysis of the film itself and of the spectator seeing the film. In this manner, McGowan’s claim that Lacan’s real undermines the symbolic/imaginary readings of traditional Lacanian film theory is contradicted by his deployment of a master discourse to define ‘the logic of Kubrick’s films.’

## **Phallic adventures**

As pointed out in the preface, this thesis aims at formulating a model of spectatorship and self formation that negotiates the affective responses to the other. The following excursus will focus on the function of the phallus in Lacanian and Freudian theory. This will help us to map out the function of difference and the always failing desire for oneness that is at the core in Lacanian theory and that McGowan and Copjec theorise through their concepts of the real in the gaze. By focusing this following reading on the phallus, I will go

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<sup>83</sup> Studlar, 1985, p. 13.

<sup>84</sup> McGowan, 2007, p. 48

to the heart of sexual difference and the effects of sexual difference in Lacan's and Freud's theories of the self as lacking wholeness. This will help us translate between these theories and the theories of the gaze and spectatorship so far introduced and to map out the reading of sexual difference that lies at the heart of the subsequent critical readings of sexual difference as well as the masochistic readings of the self that will emerge from these critiques.

In Lacanian logic, the phallic signifier defines the separation of the sexes and engages the self in a process of sexualization, where the phallic signifier pulls the subject to approximate an ideal relation to this signifier. In 'The Signification of the Phallus', Lacan argues that the phallus functions as a signifier in that it attracts the signified subject in a relation of desire.<sup>85</sup> Desire is defined by Lacan as the difference between "the appetite for satisfaction" and "the demand for love", desire is thus the lack between an appetite and the formulation of a demand; desire is the "phenomenon of their splitting (*Spaltung*)".<sup>86</sup> Splitting or *Spaltung* was used by Freud to describe either the different agencies in his distinction between the id, ego and superego or as the phenomenon of two disparate notions existing simultaneously. In 'Fetishism', Freud uses splitting to describe the simultaneous notion that woman lacks the penis and the disavowal of this notion in the same ego.<sup>87</sup> In Lacan's theory of the mirror phase, the splitting takes place in the identification with the image of the self that gives rise to "an alienating identity" with the self.<sup>88</sup> By linking desire of/for the signifier with the splitting of the self in its alienating relation to its image as self, Lacan instates the desire of/for the phallic signifier on a bodily plane as well as a symbolic. By following the trace of *Spaltung* through these texts, it is possible to trace the linkage between the splitting of the self in its relation to its bodily self, sexual difference and the fantasy of similarity this results in and the phallus as signifier.

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<sup>85</sup> Jacques Lacan, 'The Signification of the Phallus', in *Écrits, The First Complete Edition in English*, 2006 [1966].

<sup>86</sup> Lacan, 'The Signification of the Phallus', p. 580.

<sup>87</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Fetishism,' (1927) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXI (1927-1931): The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and its Discontents, and Other Works*, pp. 147-158. Citations from this series will hereafter be referred to as SE followed by volume in Arabic numerals (in this case: SE 11)

<sup>88</sup> Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function,' 2006 [1966], p. 78.

The phallic signifier embodies — a metaphor that consciously cuts through the levels of meaning here — the splitting between the demand for love and the appetite for satisfaction. As a result, the phallic signifier occupies a space that the demand can never articulate, or, more precisely, a space that is occupied by a misrecognition between the image of the self and the gaze. The phallic signifier is therefore not a part of language, nor is it a part of an imaginary, alienating identification. Instead, the phallic signifier is a representation of desire at the same time as it is working through desire to interpellate the subject in its function as signifier. The phallic signifier is the impossible articulation of its own desire. It represents the desire to live up to a demand that cannot be articulated.

The phallic signifier as a signifier of desire can be used to describe the discrepancy between an appetite for satisfaction and the possibility of articulating this as a demand for love. It can also be described as the interpellation of the subject by the phallic signifier; in this latter sense, it functions as a demand to satisfy the desire of the Other. This can be used to theorise the displacement of the self in a linguistic order and the alienation of the self in this order, and it also echoes the alienation of the self in relation to the self as an image to identify with. However, Lacan sets out in ‘The Signification of the Phallus’ to explain both why the mother is primordially considered to “be endowed with a phallus, that is to be a phallic mother,”<sup>89</sup> and why the “girl considers herself, even for a moment, to be castrated,”<sup>90</sup> as well as to explain the purpose of the phallic phase and the function of the realisation of the mother’s castration. In other words, Lacan sets out to explain the rupture of the phallic phase by castration *and* sexual difference. Sexual difference via the notion of castration is a first instalment that will create the conditions for sexualisation as the desired approximation to one of the poles in sexual differentiation.

Lacan’s explanation of sexual differentiation reverts back to Freud’s description of the feminine as the result of the inversion of her active, sadistic desire into a passive, masochistic one as a result of her identification with the mother, who is perceived as castrated. In Lacan’s version, this drama comes about by the realisation that the phallic mother is lacking and is therefore desiring something.

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<sup>89</sup> Lacan, ‘Signification of the Phallus,’ 2006 [1966], p. 576.

<sup>90</sup> Lacan, ‘Signification of the Phallus,’ 2006 [1966], p. 576.

This first incarnation of the Other, the mother, is revealed as lacking, as this lack is “experienced in the Other’s desire”. Lacan explains that if “the mother’s desire *is* for the phallus, the child wants to be the phallus in order to satisfy her desire.”<sup>91</sup> This desire to be the phallus is contrasted by a division by desire that “stands in the way of the subject being satisfied with presenting to the Other the real [organ] he may *have* that corresponds to the phallus”: this renders it impossible both to be and to have the phallus. The subject thus discovers, not that the phallus is to be had or is lacking for the self, “but in the sense that he learns that his mother does not have one.” And further: “This seals the conjuncture of desire, insofar as the phallic signifier is its mark, with the threat of or nostalgia based on not-having.”<sup>92</sup> In Lacan’s account, the phallic signifier is thus linked with *not having* in its signification of desire and is then linked to the realisation that the mother is desiring and therefore *lacking* something. This is then connected to the penis and the realisation that the mother does not have this organ. In this manner, body image becomes linked with the signifier of a desire to endow this bodily mark with a meaning that represents lack and alienation in general. Lacan emphasises that it is not the penis itself that is desired, “for what he has is no better than what he does not have, from the point of view of his demand for love, which would like him to be the phallus.”<sup>93</sup> As the boy can imagine himself as having something that his mother lacks, he will desire to fulfil the desire of the Other (the phallic signifier) by what he has, while the little girl will desire to be what the Other desires. Lacan argues that this desire — for ‘having’ or ‘being’ what is in fact impossible to have or to be — leads the boy to a symbolic castration as his thing will never live up to the desire of the Other, while for the girl it leads to a masquerade or pretence to be what is desired by the Other.

Paradoxical as this formulation may seem, I am saying that it is in order to be the phallus — that is, the signifier of the Other’s desire — that woman rejects an essential part of femininity, namely, all its attributes, in the masquerade.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Lacan, ‘Signification of the Phallus,’ 2006 [1966], p. 582.

<sup>92</sup> Lacan, ‘Signification of the Phallus,’ 2006 [1966], p. 582.

<sup>93</sup> Lacan, ‘Signification of the Phallus,’ 2006 [1966], p. 582.

<sup>94</sup> Lacan, ‘Signification of the Phallus,’ 2006 [1966], p. 583.



Lacan does not specify the exact nature of this essential yet rejected part of femininity. The attempt to be the phallus is a first response to the realisation of the lack in the mother/Other. It is only as a secondary response to bodily difference that the young boy is assumed to be displacing this phallic signifier onto a body-part. This description of sexual difference centres on the metonymic split of two disparate reactions to lack and the subsequent desire of the Other. The assumed and undefined essence behind or before this split is not defined or explored. Instead, Lacan's interest is in the signifier that initiates the split.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler proposes two different readings of Lacan's masquerading women. The first of these emphasises the elusive essence that is rejected through her masquerade. In this reading, "masquerade may be understood as the performative production of a sexual ontology."<sup>95</sup> Here, masquerade is not understood as hiding an essence, but rather as the act that produces the very idea of an essence that has been lost. In contrast, in her second reading, Butler suggests that masquerade hides a lost femininity: "masquerade can be read as a denial of a feminine desire that presupposes some prior ontological femininity regularly unrepresented by the phallic economy."<sup>96</sup> Butler's argument is that in order to make the first reading possible, Lacan's "Law [must be read] as prohibitive and generative at once."<sup>97</sup> However, Butler concludes that for Lacan, there is something that pre-exists the introduction of the law or the division of the sexes.

Although one can argue that for Lacan repression creates the repressed through the prohibitive and paternal law, that argument does not account for the pervasive nostalgia for the lost fullness of *jouissance* in his work.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 1990, p. 60.

<sup>96</sup> Butler, 1990, p. 60.

<sup>97</sup> Butler, 1990, p. 71.

<sup>98</sup> Butler, 1990, p. 71.

This nostalgia, as Butler puts it, is not necessarily for something lost but could equally be something imagined as lost through the limitation of the law. The law imposed would then function to generate the very notion of an essence or a feminine jouissance that has been lost. By linking sexual difference with splitting or *Spaltung*, Lacan links the imposition of the phallic signifier with a split that was already there, namely the split within the self through the alienated identification with a self as mirror image. This split identification with the self presumes an ontological identity with the self that has been thus alienated. In sum, jouissance before the law is nothing but nostalgia after the law has been imposed. My reading here of Lacan therefore contradicts Butler's conclusion. She prioritises the symbolic order and the law in the creation of splits. "Within Lacanian terms, it appears that division is always the *effect* of the law, and not a preexisting condition on which the law acts."<sup>99</sup> By contrast, my argument is that Lacan's splitting of sexes becomes a transposition of a split into the symbolic, rather than a split as the effect of law and the symbolic, this is in line with Copjec's critique of a 'Foucauldian reading' of the gaze mentioned earlier. I do this by linking the splitting of the sexes with the split self as the result of an alienated identification in the mirror phase. Sexual difference, in my argument, becomes the displacement of a split of the self onto the world. Sexual difference offers an intelligible difference or splitting that is at once external and internal, and — importantly — *that can be controlled or mastered*. The law that metonymically splits the two sexes replaces the split with the self as failed identification, and thereby symbolises a primordial split with the self as a split with an other. Read this way, Lacan's theorisation of sexual difference becomes a means to control the disentangling force of desire that reveals the split with the self. If we read this along with masquerade according to Butler's first suggestion; "masquerade may be understood as the performative production of a sexual ontology, an appearing that makes itself convincing as a 'being,'"<sup>100</sup> then we are able to read sexual difference as the fictive creation of a being before the law. I would like to point out two important aspects of my argument at this point: first, that my reading of sexual difference as a symbolic representation of a split with the self implies that the markers of male/female distinctions are arbitrary and can be displaced/symbolised by other markers,

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<sup>99</sup> Butler, 1990, p. 70.

<sup>100</sup> Butler, 1990, p. 60.

such as skin tone, facial or bodily features, language use or any other form of difference which becomes 'naturalised' after the fact of symbolisation/displacement of difference. The second point I would like to highlight is the difference between my argument and Butler's suggested reading where the law is a productive regulation that creates the assumed origin as its effect. In my reading of Lacan here, there is a split that precedes the law, a split that the law attaches itself to. This is in line with the psychoanalytic assumption that sexual difference is pre-symbolic and the bedrock of the symbolic. However, in combination with my assertion that the 'sexual' in 'sexual difference' is arbitrary, my argument is that there is a split/difference with the self that is amalgamated with sexual difference in much of psychoanalytic literature on the topic. The reason why I still maintain this vocabulary is because I find the theoretical model of sexual difference productive and as I mentioned in the preface, I wish to reflect the political history of these terms in this thesis. By avoiding a nomadisation of difference I do not wish to ossify the terminology, but rather to maintain the political and an embodied history of these terms and their relation to debates of the subjugation/exclusion of women and the subjugation/exclusion of what has been considered as 'sexual minorities'.

Jay Prosser has offered a different ground of critique of Butler's reading of sexual difference and the body in Freud's and Lacan's models. Prosser's critique comes from his attempt to negotiate the trans experience and the specific questions of embodiment that he raises. The below discussion of Prosser's reading of the Freudian body as opposed to the the Lacanian body will offer an opportunity to highlight some of the problems that occurs when the body is discussed between masquerade and ontological production/origin.<sup>101</sup> Prosser argues that Butler's focus on gender as performative, and on the body as the secondary effect of this performative action, produces the transgender body as the primary example of how gender functions as already fake, as always already an act that only secondarily produces the body as sexed. In Prosser's study of the transsexual experience, this transformation is focused on the body defined not as a set of external attributes or as a screen, but as something 'real.' Taking issue with Butler's reading of the Freudian bodily ego, Prosser argues that this bodily ego should be understood not as the

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<sup>101</sup> Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narrative of Transsexuality*, 1998.

subordination of the body to the image or fantasy of a body, but rather that the bodily ego is a materialisation of the ego. “Freud's bodily ego is designed not to dematerialize the body into phantasmatic effect but to materialize the psyche, to argue its corporeal dependence.”<sup>102</sup> Prosser contrasts this with a Lacanian model where the body is the specular image that enables an identification. “If in Lacan's mirror stage the body is the ego's misconception, in Freud's *The Ego and the Id* the body is the site of the ego's conception.”<sup>103</sup> In essence, Prosser argues that Butler's reading of Freud is overly guided by Lacan. However, as we have seen in the reading of Lacan above, the alienated relation to the body — and the splitting that this gives rise to — places the body and the projection of the body as an ideal I in a desiring relation. The ontology of the image or the body as the origin therefore misses the point of the tension field between the two. In my reading of Lacan, it is this splitting that is then re-actualised in relation to the desire of the Other in the formation of sexual difference and the process of sexualisation. However, I do agree with Prosser that there is a move away from this incorporated body, into the meta-analytic language of the real, symbolic and the imaginary in Lacan's metapsychology. This is one of the reasons why I will suggest a turn to Laplanche and his concept of reality as something that escapes both translation and understanding.

In terms of sexual difference, both Freud and Lacan rely on the visual discovery of bodily difference for the child to conceptualise lack as a physical marker. In Freud's description there is an assumption that the lacking penis is the cause of the notion of lack, whereas in Lacan, the missing limb becomes a marker that takes on meaning rather than the root cause of this meaning. This misrecognition of lack in Lacan's theory is visual and fantasmatic, giving rise to the masquerade that Butler explores as a potential opening of Lacan to a productive and performative power. Prosser instead suggests a materialisation of the ego, where the construction of the self is dependent on bodily materiality. Arguing that Butler turns gender into mere surface, Prosser suggests that this leaves a blindspot for the internal materiality of sex as a ‘real gender.’ By using the term ‘real gender,’ Prosser is able to argue for a materiality that is at once biological and narrative. The body presents a materiality that is not merely a

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<sup>102</sup> Prosser, 1998, p. 42.

<sup>103</sup> Prosser, 1998, p. 42.

surface. Prosser suggests that the transsexual's "*narrative* of becoming a biological man or a biological woman" reveals "the materiality of the sexed body."<sup>104</sup> The materiality of the sexed body is not only the projection of an image but the transition that predates the surgical alteration of the body. This transition includes assessments by medical professionals — the creation of a narrative to support the claim to be a transsexual, hormonal therapy, all of which goes 'deeper' than the scalpel and the surface appearance of a body. Prosser's materiality focuses on biology as a cause of the self, as opposed to a the Lacanian visual identification with an image and a surface. Visual identification in the transsexual experience — according to Prosser — does not constitute an identification with an ideal I, but rather a traumatic rupture between the I of the spectator and the image in the mirror.

The mirror misrepresents who I know myself *really* to be: at an angle to Lacan's mirror phase, the look in the mirror enables in the transsexual only disidentification, not a jubilant integration of body but an anguishing shattering of the felt already formed imaginary body — that sensory body of the body 'image.'<sup>105</sup>

In this quote, Prosser distinguishes between a felt (already formed) body (or self), and the mirror image that causes a disidentification. The mirror image and the disidentification with this image splits the self rather than unites the self as an ideal I. This 'angle to Lacan's mirror phase' does not in itself contradict Lacan's concept of the mirror phase. As we have seen in our reading of Lacan, the mirroring is not only a jubilant identification. It is also a failure, a splitting of the self and a misrecognition that lays the foundation for the alienation that is then displaced in sexual difference. It is this alienation that leads either to an impossible overvaluation of the penis or to a masquerade to pretend to be what the other is lacking and is therefore the foundation of sexuation as understood by Lacan.

Instead, it is Prosser's notion of a sensory self before the mirror phase that contradicts Lacan. For Lacan, it is the misidentification with a whole self as a reflection that leads to the formation of an I. In contrast, for Prosser the I has

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<sup>104</sup> Prosser, 1998, p. 32.

<sup>105</sup> Prosser, 1998, p. 100.

already been formed when the mirror image is contradicting the felt self. The felt self is the real self in Prosser's argument, the material self that discovers itself through tactile experiences. It is not clear how this sensory or felt self is gendered in the first place, but this model allows Prosser to suggest a split of the self, through a misrecognition of the self, a disidentification with what the I knows itself to be. It is important to note that the transsexual in Prosser's mirror image is not in the mirror phase. Gender has already been established and the subject's misrecognition of the mirror image reveals the parallel existence of the phallic signifier as well as the corporeal misrecognition that is the splitting of the self in the mirror phase. Prosser's reading of the scene highlights the split between the bodily, felt, self and the visual self in terms of gender and the difference between what Prosser calls 'real gender' and body image. It is interesting to note that Prosser's critique of Lacan ends up being very Lacanian. Like Lacan, Prosser argues for a 'real gender' that is not biological, instead this 'real gender' is rooted in a bodily experience that is actualised in the alienation of the seen body and the felt body. These models of 'real gender' or sexuation lead to difficulties with defining *how* this alienation becomes linked to sexual difference or 'real gender.' For Prosser, the bodily self takes on a different ontology to the perceived self and, accordingly, the transsexual project becomes a project to narrativise bodily ontology into imaginary being. It is important to acknowledge, however, that Lacan's model does not aim to describe gender dysphoria. What Lacan is trying to do is to find an explanation of how the psychic idea of sex is formed without a biological referent.

This discussion highlights some of the tensions between Butler's attempt, on the one hand, to formulate an ontology of the psychosexual self in psychoanalytic theory that allows for a notion of power rather than law, and, on the other, Prosser's attempt to formulate a concept of 'real gender' that is at once material or physical and possible to alter. Both Prosser and Butler suggest a limit to the formative self, either in the melancholic incorporation of a foreclosed other (Butler) or in the materiality of the body (Prosser) in order to formulate limitations to the fluidity of gender. One problem with these formulations is that they both use overlapping terminology when they discuss the fluidity of gender and its limits. I am suggesting a separation in terms, aimed at clarifying what I see as a conflation of different modes of difference and identity into one term — gender. In order to distinguish the two strata I suggest

making a distinction between sexual difference, based on a model of loss, foreclosure and splitting on the one hand, and gender, based on cohabitation, porousness and fluidity on the other.

## **Difference beyond duality**

The above excursus was intended to offer a broad outline of what is at stake in my discussion and my reformulation of sexual difference in this thesis. I will return to this question throughout this thesis, for now, however, I would like to link this back to Mulvey's early essay that introduced the male gaze in Lacanian film theory to track a development of sexual difference and gender in the field of film theory. I have shown a critique of Mulvey's position from the perspective of McGowan and Copjec already, now I will instead turn to a critique of the duality of male/female, sadist/masochist in Mulvey's essay. Michele Aaron argues that Mulvey's theorisation of the male gaze introduced gender and difference into the field of film theory and that this, by extension, led to the demise of psychoanalytic influence on this field.

As the female spectator emerged as a contradictory figure grounded in the complexities of her social formation which were articulated on-screen and lived off-screen, the psychoanalytic model of spectatorship ceased to be an adequate or accurate means of understanding her.<sup>106</sup>

Once the spectator became gendered — according to this argument — Pandora's box was opened and the multiplication of differences outgrew the duality of psychoanalytic theory. Like Studlar, Aaron turns to Deleuze's model of masochistic pleasure in order to open up spectatorship theory to a theory of desire and pleasure that allows for greater diversity and fluidity, while still maintaining an openness to "illicit or unspoken or unconscious responses to film."<sup>107</sup> Aaron makes the distinction between an emotive, moral response to film and a conscious, ethical response. "So the spectator is most definitely moved and even implicated in the scene, but being moved, I want to argue, marks the

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<sup>106</sup> Michele Aaron, *Spectatorship: The Power of Looking on*, 2007, p. 43.

<sup>107</sup> Aaron, 2007, p. 48.

experience as moral but not ethical: involuntary emotion is the opposite of reflection and implication.”<sup>108</sup> Aaron relates this distinction to Freud’s model of masochistic pleasure as taking pleasure in delayed pleasure. “The unpleasure is temporary and necessary for the greater pleasure to be experienced; it is an essential part of the achievement of joy.”<sup>109</sup> And further that this delay of pleasure constitutes a conservatism in masochism. “This is a crucial point, confirming a conservative paradigm for this behaviour: the indulgence in loss for the enhancement of the later gain.”<sup>110</sup> This reading of Freud is greatly influenced by Deleuze’s reformulation of masochism. For Deleuze, there is a centring of the delay of pleasure as opposed to the pleasure in pain itself as developed by Freud in *A Child is Being Beaten* and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where he proposes a primary masochism, a pleasure in the passivity itself, rather than in the delay of pleasure. The notion of a delay in pleasure, places masochism in line with narrative cinema and suspension. Aaron also deploys Deleuze’s notion of a contract between the masochist and the desired object in order to suggest a tacit but necessary agreement between the film and the spectator.

So the masochist agrees to — both desires and requires — the other party’s infliction of pain within a consensual dynamic. In other words, spectatorship is characterised by complicity even though it depends upon its suppression for its smooth running.<sup>111</sup>

Here Aaron uses Deleuze to theorise the tacit agreement between spectator and film as well as formulating a non-binary model of activity and passivity or male and female positions. This is done through a dismissal of the castration complex as a driving force in her spectatorship model. “Of increasing importance to my argument is how disavowal manages or contains the socially

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<sup>108</sup> Aaron, 2007, p. 116.

<sup>109</sup> Aaron, 2007, p. 55.

<sup>110</sup> Aaron, 2007, p. 55.

<sup>111</sup> Aaron, 2007, p. 91.



problematic, that is the 'perverse', implications of visual pleasure (rather than just the age-old anxieties of little boys)."<sup>112</sup>

The maternal object, both as desired and as source of identification, is key to theorising the masochistic position for both Freud and for Deleuze. As the maternal, pre-Oedipal object has still not been deprived of phallic pleasure, there is no lack to be displaced in a binary model. The maternal source of masochistic pleasure therefore offers an escape from binarism at the same time as it opens the opportunity for an ethical spectator who becomes aware of the masochistic process and therefore becomes an ethical, conscious spectator as per Mulvey's challenge to scopophilic pleasure. But one problem arises here. These Deleuzian reformulations of spectatorship ignore the function of the real as disruption in McGowan's theory. Is there a way of combining the fluidity and continuity of Deleuzian spectatorship theory *and* the disruptive aspect of desire in order to theorise both the disruptive and the continuous aspect of identification and desire? The real in Lacanian terms — and in McGowan's usage of this term in film theory — is interlinked with his system of the imaginary and the symbolic. In this tripartite model, the real functions as a disruption, as excess, as that which cannot fit in the other systems, but it is nevertheless intrinsic to the model and as such, it supports the functioning of the symbolic and imaginary. As we have seen, in McGowan's analysis of the excessive pleasures in Stanley Kubrick's films, the real was given symbolic value in the final analysis. The real functioned to produce a logic or an order that may or may not be correctly interpreted by the spectator.

### **The affective spectator**

Affective film studies constitute an alternative to the psychoanalytic models discussed so far. The focus here is on those cinematic messages that circumvent, bypass or contradict a more intellectual understanding of film. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth have developed a useful definition of affect:

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<sup>112</sup> Aaron, 2007, p. 50.

Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces — visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion — that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability.<sup>113</sup>

Affect in this definition marks the starting point of a movement that involves the body, emotions and consciousness, but that has not ossified into something intelligible. Instead affect exists both before and beyond this movement. Affect is a reaction of recoil or interest, movement towards or away from something, a movement that is not yet or no longer understood. In the passages discussed above, both McGowan and Aaron have moved away from affect as not-yet-ethical (Aaron) or as hiding the excessive disruption of the real (McGowan).

Gregg and Seigworth goes on to compare affectivity with a rhythmic response or relation with the world, emphasising the relatedness of our bodies with the world around them, challenging the distinctness of the two fields. In film theory, affective concepts have been developed further by Laura U. Marks to theorise the spectator's embodied relation to the screen.<sup>114</sup> Distinguishing haptic visuality from optic visuality, Marks develops a theory of a visuality, which does not allow for an understanding of what is seen but instead involves a multisensory relatedness to the visual. The haptic aspect of visuality involves memories, when an absence of understanding forces the spectator to make interpretations that are not confined to the visual itself or its coding.

In a similar vein, Vivian Sobchack has advocated an embodied theory of cinematic experience.<sup>115</sup> Focusing on pain, Sobchack argues its infliction cuts through the metaphysics and brings us back to our senses.

Indeed, there is nothing like a little pain to bring us back to our senses, nothing like a real (not imagined or written) mark or wound to counter the romanticism and

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<sup>113</sup> Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, 'An Inventory of Shimmers,' in *The Affect Theory Reader*, 2010, p. 1.

<sup>114</sup> Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, 2000, and *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, 2002.

<sup>115</sup> Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, 2004.

fantasies of technosexual transcendence that characterize so much of the current discourse on the techno-body that is thought to occupy the virtual cyberspaces of postmodernity.<sup>116</sup>

The double meaning of ‘back to our senses’ is here used to emphasise both the validity of our senses — the undeniable sense of pain — and the sensible return to something ‘real’ as opposed to ‘romanticism and fantasises.’ At the same time, Bettina Pappenburg and Marta Zarzycka argue that a carnal aesthetic “takes into account the (often fearful) collapse of distance between the viewer and the art object, fostering an immersive approach where the viewer is no longer only a viewer, but rather the subject of an embodied encounter.”<sup>117</sup> These challenges to spectatorship models — though formulated within different traditions — regard the seen as something *real*, as something outside that becomes a part of the self that sees. This concept of the real challenges the psychoanalytic emphasis on fantasy, as it externalises the real event rather than internalises it as fantasy. In Freud’s early writing there was a shift away from the real event that caused the symptom. He gave up his seduction theory to make way for a theory of infantile sexuality and thereby a greater focus on the inner workings of the child and on reality as fantasy.<sup>118</sup>

Here it is important to note that Marks has suggested that her phenomenologically formulated theory of haptic visuality could be understood in psychoanalytic terms, through the relation to the mother. “In this relationship, the subject (the infant) comes into being through the dynamic play between the

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<sup>116</sup> Sobchack, 2004, p. 167.

<sup>117</sup> Bettina Pappenburg and Marta Zarzycka, ‘Introduction,’ in *Carnal Aesthetics: Transgressive Imagery and Feminist Politics*, 2013, p. 3.

<sup>118</sup> Freud suggested early in his career that stories of sexual abuse or ‘seductions’ were truthful stories and were the cause of pathological states. This position was held in ‘Heredity and the Aetiology of the Neuroses,’ ‘Further Remarks on the Neuro-Psychoses of Defence,’ and ‘The Aetiology of Hysteria,’ all included in SE 3. Freud never published a refutation of this theory. However, in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess dated 21 September 1897, Freud abandons his seduction theory to explain pathological states and after this he develops his theory of infantile sexuality. The letter to Fliess is included in *The Complete Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, 1887-1904*. Laplanche later returned to Freud’s early seduction theory in order to formulate a theory of sexuality that does not suppose an innate, instinctual sexuality in the child, but rather a sexuality that is the result of unconscious messages from adults on whom the child is dependent in what Laplanche has called the ‘fundamental anthropological situation,’ see Laplanche, *Freud and the Sexual: Essays 2000-2006*. I will return to Laplanche’s development of a theory of seduction in later chapters.

appearance of wholeness with the other (the mother) and the awareness of being distinct.”<sup>119</sup> This suggested link between affect and the maternal in psychoanalytic theory is unfortunately left undeveloped by Marks. The maternal relation that Marks describes emphasises both the connectedness and the porousness of the mother/infant relationship and the subtle differentiation that this forms. Her formulation focuses on both the relation with and distinction from the mother, but there is no mention of sexuality. This may of course be a result of the brevity of the passage. It does, however, raise the question: How would this intriguing link look if we were to take into account a psychoanalytic theory of sexuality, as well as a theory of the object relation that is shaped between and with the mother? I will return to these questions in the following chapters, but for now, I would like to introduce Ozon’s cinema and its role in the writing of this thesis.

### **Ozon’s enigmatic cinema**

Kate Ince has pointed out that Ozon’s films “distinguish themselves clearly from earlier gay male filmic production in France through never having gay communities as their social setting, through their absence of reference to SIDA (AIDS), and through never having overtly politicised narratives.”<sup>120</sup> Ozon’s role as a post-gay director who is not tied to ‘gay issues’ allows his films to explore sexuality and identity in a way that is nonetheless informed by a queer critique of the stability of sexual identities. “One of the most provocative aspects of Ozon’s cinema, and one of the reasons for his early critical attention, concerns the audacious and candid ways in which his films tackle issues of gender, sexuality, and identity.”<sup>121</sup> In a sense, Ozon, by turning away from ‘gay issues’ and the domestication of something queer in these ‘gay issues,’ avoids what Leo Bersani has called de-gaying gayness. Instead he embraces the queer as challenging not only norms but the stability of anti-norms as well, and the

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<sup>119</sup> Marks, 2000, p. 188.

<sup>120</sup> Kate Ince, ‘François Ozon’s Cinema of Desire,’ in *Five Directors: Auteurism from Assayas to Ozon*, 2008, p. 113.

<sup>121</sup> Thibaut Schilt, *François Ozon*, 2011, p. 2.

stability of the self as a result.<sup>122</sup> Ozon's move away from the traditional issues of 'gay film' does not mean that his films are any less provocative or informed by issues of identity, fluidity and sexuality. "Ozon's oeuvre is decidedly consistent in its desire to blur the traditional frontiers between the masculine and the feminine, gay and straight, reality and fantasy, auteur and commercial cinema."<sup>123</sup> This fluidity and the boundlessness of sexuality characterises most of Ozon's films. "Sexual desire as represented by Ozon is almost always multidimensional and consistently astonishing (even to its own bearer) in its capacity for boundless reinvention."<sup>124</sup> The astonishing nature of sexuality and pleasure as explored by Ozon, makes his films an excellent partner in exploring the affective and enigmatic nature of film and the formation of the self through the encounter with the enigmatic other. "Ozon formally, as well as thematically, displaces, mocks or otherwise defamiliarizes the conventions of erotic narrative."<sup>125</sup> Ozon's cinema is queer in the sense that it defamiliarises the 'erotic narrative,' whether the protagonist is gay, straight or fluidly moving between expressions of desire. There is always some twist that challenges the assumed direction not only of the plot but also the characters' sources of pleasure.

Andrew Asibong points out that transgression of taboos are often revealed to be futile in Ozon's cinema. "Ozon's film — and indeed so much of his cinema — is constantly urging the spectator to look at how utterly superficial the (usually sexualised) acts that take place in the name of subversion and transformation really are."<sup>126</sup> The superficially subversive and sexual acts are instead incorporated in the family and the norm. Like an echo of the monitoring sciences in Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, the father/scientist in *Sitcom* (1998) is unfazed by the insurrection of his family members, laconically accepting the changing norms around him. The panopticon eye of the story, he is at once disinterested and eerily aware of everything that is happening around him.

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<sup>122</sup> See Leo Bersani, *Homos*, 1995. See also 'Gay Betrayals,' included in *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays*, 2010.

<sup>123</sup> Schilt, 2011, p. 5.

<sup>124</sup> Andrew Asibong, *François Ozon*, 2008, p. 12.

<sup>125</sup> Max Cavitch, 'Sex After Death: François Ozon's Libidinal Invasions,' in *Screen* Volume 48, Number 3, Autumn 2007, p. 313-326, p. 324.

<sup>126</sup> Asibong, 2008, p. 36.

The queer in Ozon's cinema is not so much in his taboo-breaking displays of sexuality and identities as in the evasiveness of these positions. Ozon, like many of his characters, follows his pleasure. "I follow my pleasure, that's all."<sup>127</sup> This hedonistic statement does not mean that Ozon's films ignore the melancholic, repressive functionings of norms, nor that they merely deploy the production of sexualities. Ozon's films stay clear of what Foucault called "a sergeant of sex, an accountant of the ass and its equivalents."<sup>128</sup> Rather than representing various deviations from the norm and reducing them into identitarian or definitional categories, Ozon's films stay elegantly clear of definitions of desire and pleasure. I argue that Ozon's films actualise various aspects of power, pleasure, desire and taboo, both between characters and in creating spectatorial pleasure.

These characteristics of Ozon's cinema both motivate and begin to explain my choice to work with his films in this thesis. I wish to explore spectatorial pleasures in relation to the formation of the self and its displacement through affective engagement with film. It is my argument that spectatorial pleasure is not in itself good or bad, it does not contradict a critical view or an ethical engagement with that which is viewed; spectatorial pleasure can be both disruptive and conformist with an ideology. By reading it through masochistic pleasure and enigmatic signifiers, the pleasure of the spectator can help us understand the psychosocial and the formation of the psyche, of an inner as both productive and oppressive, as dependent on both seduction and on prohibition. This opens onto a theory of how the normative functions to form the self and how the self can resist, enjoy and find pleasure in resisting norms.

My choice of Ozon, however, remains precarious, and a riddle even to me. I would not call myself a fan of Ozon, there are many aspects of his films that I do not appreciate. There is a preference for white, upper-class characters and environments that whitewash and simplify his films and that — with a few exceptions such as *See the Sea* and *Criminal Lovers* — tend to exclude working-class experiences of sexuality and identification. There is also the heavy-handedness with which Ozon uses filmic 'tricks' — the intention behind

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<sup>127</sup> Gilbey, 2002, p. 299.

<sup>128</sup> Michel Foucault, "'Sade: Sergeant of Sex,'" an interview with G. Dupont,' published in *Cinématographe* 16, Dec, 1975. Included in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, 1998, pp. 223-227, p. 227.

narrative and scenic choices can be rather obvious. This is also evident in what I would call Ozon's 'readiness for the gender-studies classroom.' The main narrative in his films can often feel obvious and his desire to undermine heterosexual couplings a bit too simple. What fascinates me in Ozon's cinema, however, is the side-stories and the peripheral relations that take place while the main narrative unfolds more or less predictably. I will come back to this aspect in chapter 3, a chapter dedicated to Ozon and his method of making films as well as the role of the *auteur*.

Ozon is somewhat a hostage to his hedonistic search for 'fairy-tales without guilt'. There is an anti-political celebration of pleasure that denies and excludes roughness and poverty from his films. In an interview where he talks about *Young and Beautiful* (2013) — a movie that tells the story of a young prostitute — he argues that for him it was important that the protagonist was from the upper-classes, that money was not a problem for her. Ozon did not want her prostitution to be caused by poverty. Instead, she is a youth trying to figure out her sexuality.<sup>129</sup> And though this removal of anything that could distract the spectator and the narrative can be explained, and is key to making this film into what it is, there is a recurring exclusion of what disturbs the idyllic and the purified in the form of a white upper class. This exclusion is problematic and deprives Ozon's cinema of a depth and breadth that I find unfortunate and problematic.

When I began working on Ozon, I intended to write only one chapter about *Young and Beautiful*. The other chapters were going to use other cultural objects to think through the formation of the self between gender and sexual difference. However, I found a pleasure in writing about Ozon's films that I did not find in the other objects I was using. This pleasure comes, paradoxically, in part from the aspects that I find problematic. Ozon's focus on pleasure and his recurring uncomplicated narratives — where the distracting world is relegated to a peripheral existence — allows for thematic readings and a concentration on idealised relations. In turn, this approach to storytelling allows for a focus on the issue that is being dealt with as well as an un-judgmental approach to

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<sup>129</sup> "Pour moi, c'était important de situer cette jeune fille dans un milieu bourgeois où l'argent est facile. Elle ne se prostitue pas par nécessité économique. Elle ne fait pas ça pour survivre." 'Entretien avec François Ozon par Yves Alion' in *Dossier Jeune et Jolie*, L'avant scène Cinéma numero 605, septembre 2013, p. 6-12, p. 8.

characters — as in *Young and Beautiful* — or a complete focus on scenery and narrative — as in *Water Drops on Burning Rocks* — when it works. But it is this same focus that becomes problematic when it excludes the gritty and complicated questions of race in France — as in *8 Women* (more on this in chapter 5). In sum, my choice to work with Ozon is as much about my own pleasure as it is about his exploration of pleasure and its vicissitudes. I treat the seduction of Ozon's films with suspicion as it is the very pleasure of looking on that can remove us from sympathising with the characters and from being implicated in these films.

## Conclusion

I opened this introduction with a brief reading of Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*. The themes and the filmic language of this work helped me to map out a number of different models of analysing films. In the process, there emerged a critique of the limitations of a phallic, foreclosing formulation of loss in the formation of the subject, not so that we can move on to something else, but so that we can find a way to supplement such foreclosure with something else. This something else was pinpointed through affective spectatorship theory and the maternal in psychoanalytic theory, a maternal that is not reducible to the maternal Thing that must be given up to give way for language and social bonds.

In the next chapter, I will continue to investigate the maternal and the feminine to explore a type of relationality that is not based on foreclosure. In this chapter, I defined the phallic in relation to Lacan as well as Butler's and Prosser's critiques of him. I suggested that the split that the phallic and sexual difference refers back to was an experience of a split of the self and an alienation from the self as the formation of the self. By formulating a critique of McGowan, I have suggested that the maternal can be something other than the maternal Thing that must be excluded to give way for the symbolic and the possibility of stable relations. In this critique, there is also an opening for the kind of critique of meta-languages or master discourses that the feminine may offer.



# 1 Freud and Femininity

In the previous chapter, I mapped out a connection between the maternal in psychoanalysis and affective spectatorship theory. These two entities both operate in the borderlands of language and visuality and between passivity and activity. In this chapter I will specifically develop ‘femininity,’ ‘passivity’ and ‘masochism’ in order to define them for the broader arguments offered in this thesis.

In their discussion of Jean-Luc Godard’s *Contempt* (*Le mépris*, 1963), Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit argue against a psychologisation of its characters.<sup>130</sup> *Contempt* tells the story of a French writer, Paul — played by Michel Piccoli — who is invited by an American producer to rewrite a film script. The film in the film tells the story of Ulysses and the producer is looking to make the film more commercial. In a key scene, the writer’s wife, Camille — played by Brigitte Bardot — gets a ride in the producer’s sports car. The writer himself is left behind and has to find his way to the producer’s mansion on his own. As spectators, we follow Paul, rather than Camille. Therefore we are left in the dark as to what happens between Camille and the producer during the ride and in the mansion before Paul arrives. When Paul finally gets to the mansion, his wife is angry and refuses to talk to him. For the remainder of the film, the couple are trapped in a vengeful dance of insinuations, distrust and contempt. Mixed up with this drama are scenes where the writer and the director are discussing the psychology of Ulysses and panoramic views of statues and actors from the film that they are making. Paul keeps returning to what happened during the time between his wife’s departure with the producer and his own arrival at the mansion. Camille dismisses his questions and refuses to talk about what happened. As spectators we share the writer’s lack of knowledge. We are left out of the scenes that could fill this gap with certainty. Along the lines of McGowan’s method of interpretation, we could follow the logic of the film and

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<sup>130</sup> Bersani and Dutoit, 2004.

conclude that nothing happened, that the assumed unlimited pleasures of the wealthy function to trigger the writer's fantasy. The lacuna is left to be filled by Paul, who obviously imagines the unlimited enjoyment of the rich producer. Like Bill in *Eyes Wide Shut*, Paul's fantasy of his wife's infidelity and of the pleasures accessible to the rich and successful drives the film's narrative.

As already noted, Bersani and Dutoit cautions against reading the logic of the film to fill in the gaps. They argue that "the only certain thing about all such speculations is that they remove us from the film. All this is in our heads, not on the screen; the characters' motivations, unarticulated by them and invented by us, are substitute for our only legitimate activity: the activity of looking and registering what we see."<sup>131</sup> Psychologisation of the characters amounts to playing "the game of the enigmatic signifier — that is, to be complicit with the anti-cinematic visuality it embodies."<sup>132</sup> Anti-cinematic visuality is here defined as a fantasy that fills the gaps of cinematic visuality. The gaps left for us to fill may not lend themselves to be filled with meaning, but the enigmatic signifier at least invites us to take part, to displace our selves in the visual and become a part of what is seen. The gaps could then be something else than the maternal Thing or the Lacanian real. Such gaps invite us and reveal the porous connection between the self and an other; this can then be conceptualised as an aspect of the maternal via seduction, and of the self as constituted as an effect of this seduction.

In Freud's narrative of sexual difference, of the separation of masculinity and femininity, it is the feminine that is created; the feminine position needs to be explained while the masculine is described as a continuation of the normal development of the child. In a lecture on femininity, Freud argues that the little boy and the little girl go through the same stages — until a certain point. "Both sexes seem to pass through the early phases of libidinal development in the same manner."<sup>133</sup> As Freud is interested in "how a woman develops out of a child with bisexual disposition,"<sup>134</sup> the problem for Freud is to explain how and

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<sup>131</sup> Bersani and Dutoit, 2004, p. 51.

<sup>132</sup> Bersani and Dutoit, 2004, p. 51.

<sup>133</sup> Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures On Psycho-Analysis*. (1933) in SE 22 Lecture XXXIII, Femininity, p. 117.

<sup>134</sup> Freud, 1933, p. 116.

when the young girl is separated from the young boy in her development towards being a woman. Freud's formulation of the problem implies that the child from which both sexes develop is a boy. "We are now obliged to recognize that the little girl is a little man."<sup>135</sup> This formulation where 'little man' and 'child' occupy the same position as the origin of the two sexes, implies that the little girl will later divert from this origin in order to become a woman. In the phallic phase, the two sexes are still equivalent in their search for pleasure.

In boys, as we know, this phase is marked by the fact that they have learnt how to derive pleasurable sensations from their small penis and connect its excited state with their ideas of sexual intercourse. Little girls do the same thing with their still smaller clitoris. It seems that with them all their masturbatory acts are carried out on this penis-equivalent, and that the truly feminine vagina is still undiscovered by both sexes.<sup>136</sup>

Freud describes the masturbatory acts of the phallic phase as equivalent for both boys and girls, though Freud points out the difference in size between the penis and the clitoris, the pleasure the child can derive from the two are similar. This phallic phase is distinguished, in this quote, from the 'truly feminine vagina'. The feminine is defined as a departure from the phallic, from the clitoral pleasure of the phallic phase. This definition of the feminine requires a transfer of erotogenic zones from the clitoris to the vagina, "the clitoris should wholly or in part hand over its sensitivity, and at the same time its importance, to the vagina."<sup>137</sup> The boy, on the other hand, does not suffer from this need to transfer erotogenic zones, "the more fortunate man has only to continue at the time of his sexual maturity the activity that he has previously carried out at the period of the early efflorescence of his sexuality."<sup>138</sup> This transfer of erotogenic zone is only part of the transformation from child to woman. The transfer to vaginal pleasure is "one of the two tasks which woman has to perform in the course of her development"<sup>139</sup> to become separate from man. For both the little girl and

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<sup>135</sup> Freud, 1933, p. 118.

<sup>136</sup> Freud, 1933, p. 118.

<sup>137</sup> Freud, 1933, p. 118.

<sup>138</sup> Freud, 1933, p. 118.

<sup>139</sup> Freud, 1933, p. 118.

the boy, the “mother (and the figures of wet-nurses and foster-mothers that merge into her)”<sup>140</sup> is the first object choice and like the penis, the boy can hold on to his first choice until the incest prohibition finally forces him to give up on this choice and later replace this first object with similar objects. The girl’s position is different; the girl needs to replace her object choice as well as her erotogenic zone, “in the Oedipus situation the girl’s father has become her love-object”<sup>141</sup> and it is this love object that is then given up through the incest taboo and later returns as “her final choice of object.”<sup>142</sup> The achievement of femininity is here described as the effect and accomplishment of a process that precedes the Oedipus complex. The sexual division is a *fait accompli* by the time the child enters the Oedipal situation. Freud asks “how does she pass from her masculine phase to the feminine one to which she is biologically destined?”<sup>143</sup> The masculine, phallic phase is here defined as the joint origin of both sexes, the phase when the girl is ‘a little man’. The feminine is acquired and is the result of a break from the pleasure and object choice that the Oedipus complex is supposed to prohibit. This prohibition before prohibition shapes femininity as separate from masculinity. How, then, does Freud explain this departure from the masculine origin?

According to Freud, the transformation of the young girl and the formation of femininity is the result of the anatomical difference between her and boys. “The castration complex of girls is also started by the sight of the genitals of the other sex. They at once notice the difference and, it must be admitted, its significance too.”<sup>144</sup> The sight of male genitals leads to the “discovery that she is castrated”<sup>145</sup> and this “is a turning-point in a girl’s growth.”<sup>146</sup> Freud explains that “the little girl has hitherto lived in a masculine way, has been able to get pleasure by the excitation of her clitoris and has brought this activity into relation with her sexual wishes directed towards her mother, which are often active

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<sup>140</sup> Freud, 1933, p. 118.

<sup>141</sup> Freud, 1933, p. 118.

<sup>142</sup> Freud, 1933, p. 119.

<sup>143</sup> Freud, 1933, p. 119.

<sup>144</sup> Freud, 1933, p. 125.

<sup>145</sup> Freud, 1933, p. 126.

<sup>146</sup> Freud, 1933, p. 126.

ones”<sup>147</sup>. This masculine expression is blocked by “the influence of her penis-envy”<sup>148</sup> and she gives up on her active sexuality.

Her self-love is mortified by the comparison with the boy’s far superior equipment and in consequence she renounces her masturbatory satisfaction from her clitoris, repudiates her love for her mother and at the same time not infrequently represses a good part of her sexual trends in general.<sup>149</sup>

The phallic phase comes to an end through narcissistic pain caused by her comparison with ‘the boy’s far superior equipment’ and as a result she gives up her love object as well as the active, phallic, clitoral pleasure. The move away from the mother and from the active, clitoral masturbatory pleasure happens in tandem and the reversal of the active phallic pleasure follows the withdrawal from the maternal object. “Her love was directed to her *phallic* mother; with the discovery that her mother is castrated it becomes possible to drop her as an object, so that the motives for hostility, which have long been accumulating, gain the upper hand.”<sup>150</sup> The love object was a phallic mother, a mother who could satisfy her own needs, but as the girl discovers that the mother, like herself, lacks the ‘far superior equipment’ of the boy, the phallic mother is castrated just like the girl herself. The girl gives up on her active pleasure, not because her clitoris could not provide this pleasure, but because the mother, and herself, was discovered to lack the penis. This lack inverts narcissistic pleasure and withdraws her love of the mother in order to create a female position.

Freud argues that there are two levels of identification with the mother. On one level, the pre-Oedipal is an identification based on love, while the secondary level is based on the wish to take her mother’s place in the Oedipus complex. This secondary identification functions through the turning inward of the previous love for the mother. Envy of the missing anatomic marker forces the girl to give up on her mother as her object of identification. As a result, she will

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<sup>147</sup> Freud, 1933, p. 126.

<sup>148</sup> Freud, 1933, p. 126.

<sup>149</sup> Freud, 1933, p. 126.

<sup>150</sup> Freud, 1933, pp. 126-127.

revert already ambiguous feelings towards the mother into the self as passive. Through this move, feminine pleasure is made passive and reversed back onto the self, in marked contrast with the active, phallic pleasure that the little girl who was a boy had felt before this moment.

A woman's identification with her mother allows us to distinguish two strata: the pre-Oedipus one which rests on her affectionate attachment to her mother and takes her as a model, and the later one from the Oedipus complex which seeks to get rid of her mother and take her place with her father.<sup>151</sup>

The aggressive feeling of the Oedipus complex, and the will to take the mother's place, had already been achieved in the girl prior to the Oedipus complex. And as the introjection of these ambiguous feelings are based on the pre-existing identification with the mother, this introjection of the mother as no-longer-phallic, contains the prohibition against the active, phallic pleasure. As the mother was excluded, the daughter must also be excluded. This narrative hints at a sexual identity and identification in the girl that precedes the loss of the phallic self and the phallic mother. Freud acknowledges this in the distinction he makes between pre-Oedipal play with dolls and Oedipal play. Before the loss of the identification with the phallic mother, the dolls play "served as an identification with her mother with the intention of substituting activity for passivity."<sup>152</sup> In her relation with the phallic mother, the girl had been passive, and playing with dolls "was not in fact an expression of her femininity"<sup>153</sup> but instead an ambition to be phallic (as the mother was still perceived to be). When the pre-Oedipal girl plays with dolls, she pretends to be the active mother who "could do with the baby everything that her mother used to do with her."<sup>154</sup> It is only when the mother and the self is revealed to be passive, that the girl uses dolls to practice passivity by displacing the wish for a penis into the wish for a child.

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<sup>151</sup> Freud, 1933, p. 134.

<sup>152</sup> Freud, 1933, p. 128.

<sup>153</sup> Freud, 1933, p. 128.

<sup>154</sup> Freud, 1933, p. 128.

## The phallic and the phallus

Juliet Mitchell has argued in her introduction to *Feminine Sexuality* that Freud's concept of the castration complex is key to his understanding of the difference between the masculine and feminine. "For Freud, identification with the appropriate parent is a *result* of the castration complex which has already given the mark of sexual distinction."<sup>155</sup> In the presentation of Freud's model for the feminine above, this model corresponds to the castration complex, and the penis envy that this complex leads to, in the preparation of a feminine position as a function of the internalisation of the first love object as a passive, no-longer-phallic object. There is, however, a prior identification in Freud's presentation, as evident in the play with dolls. Freud distinguishes two levels or 'strata' of identification. One was an identification with the phallic — active — mother and the other was the internalisation of the passive, no-longer-phallic mother and, with it, the internalisation of the absence of the phallus. It is this second strata — the castration complex and its two different outcomes — that constitutes Mitchell's concept of sexual difference in Freud's model. Mitchell argues that it is the phallus that marks the difference between the sexes in Freud's model. "Freud always insisted that it was the presence or absence of the phallus and *nothing else* that marked the distinction between the sexes."<sup>156</sup> But in Freud's version, the phallic was a phase of activity and auto-eroticism. This signifies an access to pleasure rather than anatomical difference.

How do we move from the phallic as an adjective to describe an attitude to pleasure towards discussing the phallus as a noun, as something that can be present or absent — had or no-longer-had? In Mitchell's argument the phallus as noun is the result of a child's fantasy of what the mother wants. "In fantasy this means having the phallus which is the object of the mother's desire (the phallic phase). This position is forbidden (the castration complex) and the differentiation of the sexes occurs."<sup>157</sup> Mitchell's subsequent reading of Lacan is based on the pleasure the child could give himself (as the child was always a boy in this stage) in Freud's model. This pleasure becomes a fantasy that the

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<sup>155</sup> Juliet Mitchell, 'Introduction 1,' in *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne*, 1982, p. 22.

<sup>156</sup> Mitchell, 1982, p. 6.

<sup>157</sup> Mitchell, 1982, p. 7.

child *has* something to be desired — something that gives pleasure. However, this fantasy is forbidden and this leads to the two different solutions, or rather the two different outlooks on the castration complex; to ‘not yet having been castrated’ or to ‘having already been castrated.’ Prohibition is a part of the internalised loss of phallic pleasure for the girl, while prohibition becomes internalised as regulation for the boy.

In this early work by Mitchell, she refutes the distinction between gender and sex as incompatible with psychoanalysis. She argues that gender is a sociological concept that focuses, not on the creation of a self, but on the formation of a person that has already been created. “Psychoanalysis cannot make such a distinction: a person is formed *through* their sexuality, it could not be ‘added’ to him or her.”<sup>158</sup> Mitchell later holds on to her opinion that gender is a sociological term, but in her introduction to the reprint of *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* from 2000, she concedes a role for the term gender. Commenting on Nancy Chodorow’s work, Mitchell argues that gender should be understood as a sociological term, “the Anglo-Saxon feminist meaning of ‘gender’, as socially inscribed by learning and identification, both unconscious and conscious, is a term appropriate to a sociological use of Object Relations theory.”<sup>159</sup> Mitchell argues that this application of the term takes its origin in the mother/daughter relationship. “A girl identifying with her mother who in turn identified with her mother is one important aspect of the transmission of gender roles.”<sup>160</sup> Mitchell thus defines the term gender as an aspect of identification. This corresponds to the phase before the castration complex in Freud’s model. The young girl who was really a little boy, enjoyed playing with dolls as a way to identify with the phallic mother. This gender identity predates the castration complex’s two possible solutions. In a later work, Mitchell argues that the “minimal differences are between brothers and sisters, not between fathers and children.”<sup>161</sup> These minimal differences, become, for Mitchell, a means of exploring gender in a non-sociological way; “the ‘difference’ that marks ‘gender’ may be based not

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<sup>158</sup> Mitchell, 1982, p. 2.

<sup>159</sup> Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: A Radical Reassessment of Freudian Psychoanalysis*, 2000a [1974], from introduction added in 2000, p. xxiv.

<sup>160</sup> Mitchell, 2000a [1974], p. xxiv.

<sup>161</sup> Mitchell, 2000a [1974], p. xxxiv.



only on the differential effects of the castration complex but on the construction of a distinction between brother and sister.”<sup>162</sup> These minimal differences have been the theme of Mitchell’s two latest books.<sup>163</sup> In *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, Mitchell’s focus is on Freud’s theory of sexual difference and an attempt to use this theory to map out how sexes are made from a psychoanalytic perspective and therefore can be made differently. “To Freud society demands of the psychological bisexuality of both sexes that one sex attain a preponderance of femininity, the other of masculinity: man and woman are *made* in culture.”<sup>164</sup> In Mitchell’s argument from 1974, the mother has been excluded by Freud, due to his focus on the father and his negligence of the pre-Oedipal stage. This is the result, according to Mitchell, both of Freud’s cultural context and of Freud’s role as a male analyst. “The Oedipus complex which can almost be said to stand for the structure of patriarchal culture, hid the pre-Oedipal phase, as Freud, a male analyst, echoing in his way the ways of the culture, obscured the role of the mother for his women patients.”<sup>165</sup> In Mitchell’s argument, the Oedipus complex reflects and reprises the structure of patriarchal culture. As a result, this model works both to explain and reinforce or make normal the introduction to patriarchal culture. Mitchell argues against “the danger of reading Freud’s descriptions as prescriptions; it is often the fault of his method of presentation that makes us do so. It is far more the fault of the social status of women.”<sup>166</sup> The Oedipus complex as reflection of a patriarchal society is thus the effect both of Freud’s position within a patriarchal structure, and of our own positions — as readers — within patriarchal structures. Echoing Simone de Beauvoir’s postulation that one is made woman, Mitchell’s statement that ‘man and woman are *made* in culture’ argues that Freud’s theories remain useful tools for the project of undermining patriarchal cultures.

In her argument from 1974, Mitchell concedes that it is necessary to maintain the father as the founding figure of culture. If culture is patriarchal, the father

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<sup>162</sup> Mitchell, 2000a [1974], p. xxxvii.

<sup>163</sup> See Juliet Mitchell, *Mad Men and Medusas: Reclaiming Hysteria*, 2000b and *Siblings: Sex and Violence*, 2003.

<sup>164</sup> Mitchell, 2000a [1974], p. 131.

<sup>165</sup> Mitchell, 2000a [1974], p. 109.

<sup>166</sup> Mitchell, 2000a [1974], p. 107.

must be foundational in the reproduction of patriarchy. “The new Oedipal identification contains the power of the authoritative father, which is the special characteristic of the superego... As he was soon to realize, it *is* the father and not the two parents who play this particular role.”<sup>167</sup> This position contrasts with Mitchell’s exploration of the minimal differences between siblings and the possibility of a maternal law that this enables in *Mad Men and Medusas*. “Inserting lateral relationships enables us to see the parthenogenetic complex, which reveals another axis of sexual differentiation, another prohibition and ‘law’.”<sup>168</sup> This other prohibition and law functions in a symmetric way with the paternal Oedipal law, in that its outcome is differentiated by the sex of the child. With the paternal law, based on the castration complex, Mitchell argued in 1974 that: “In both sexes, castration is the signal to give up the mother — but for the boy only so that he should wait for his turn and in good time get his own woman.”<sup>169</sup> Later, in 2000, Mitchell argues for a maternal law against parthenogenetic procreation — the ability to have a child of one’s own. “This Oedipalized mother then prohibits the child’s fantasy of parthenogenetic procreation: You cannot make babies.”<sup>170</sup> It is a prohibition that acts on both sexes but with different outcomes for the two sexes, “the girl will grow up to be in the position of the mother (in whatever way — actual or symbolic — she may use it), but the boy will not.”<sup>171</sup> The mother is no longer a mere pre-Oedipal identification that haunts the woman’s love object; instead, she becomes an Oedipal limitation to the fantasy of how babies are made. “This prohibition we might call ‘The Law of the Mother’, on a par in principle with ‘The Law of the Father’ in the castration complex.”<sup>172</sup> In both these arguments, the sex that is being made in culture relies on a biological or anatomical difference, with the psychological effects of these distinctions being made, reflecting a broader culture. The foundation that this — so to speak — is written on, comes from a reaction to the body as a ‘real’ outside. Thus we can see that gender as identity

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<sup>167</sup> Mitchell, 2000a [1974], pp. 71-72.

<sup>168</sup> Mitchell, 2000b p. 346.

<sup>169</sup> Mitchell, 2000a [1974], p. 111.

<sup>170</sup> Mitchell, 2000b, p. 344.

<sup>171</sup> Mitchell, 2000b, p. 344.

<sup>172</sup> Mitchell, 2000b, p. 344.

in the pre-Oedipal and the pre-castration complex, and gender as an effect of minimal difference between siblings, exists on a different level than sexual difference as an effect of the maternal or paternal law.

## **Anatomical impasses**

Mitchell's maternal law, as well as her reading of Freud's paternal law, relies on biological and anatomical differences between genders. The girl realises that she will never have a penis, and that this is not a personal punishment, but the mark of belonging to a group. And the boy realises that he cannot give birth to his own child, and that this lack marks his belonging to a group rather than a personal shortcoming. Mitchell links sexual difference to biology and to anatomy, but argues that the values that are inscribed on these differences are relative and depend on the culture in and through which they are inscribed. In doing so, Mitchell reinforces the importance of sexual difference in the formation of the self and the child's introduction to culture. Mitchell's arguments in *Mad Men and Medusas* hysterise the male position in a similar way that Freud's paternal law hysterise the young girl and forces her to give up on clitoral pleasure and to transfer this to a vaginal pleasure. The boy's development through the Oedipus complex was regarded as less problematic because he is able to hold on to the first love object, while the girl has to give up on hers. By introducing the maternal law, Mitchell hysterises the boy as well as the girl and show how both sexes are acquired or made, rather than using the male as the norm from which the female diverges. The anatomical and biological distinctions that mark sexual difference in these models contain the germ of a cultural importance that is ascribed and incorporated through the parthenogenic and castration complexes. Mitchell's argument would seem to reinforce the notion that a woman's function is to reproduce while man's function is to enjoy. However, her model at least enables a level of sexual difference that does not take female lack for granted. As opposed to Karen Horney's formulation of womb envy,<sup>173</sup> Mitchell's parthenogenic complex does not suggest a prior or more primary envy 'behind' penis envy, but instead posits two parallel introductions of laws that enforce sexual difference. This model is therefore

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<sup>173</sup> See Karen Horney, 'On the Genesis of the Castration Complex in Women' in *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 1924, Vol 5, pp. 50-65.

helpful for a formulation of sexual difference that does not rely solely on female lack, working on a plane parallel to a more porous, pre-Oedipal relationality.

In the same year that Mitchell published *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, Luce Irigaray published *Speculum of the Other Woman*, in which she argued for a move away from regarding anatomical or biological differences as the origin of sex. In Irigaray's argument, the biological or anatomical does not have any meaning on its own. On the contrary, these differences are ascribed meaning through their valuation and the significance that these are given. Irigaray thus turns Freud's (and Mitchell's) arguments upside-down, by arguing that biological or anatomical 'reality' is only given meaning retrospectively, through a valuation of male identity when perceived as the norm. "It is not that she lacks some 'master signifier' or that none is imposed upon her, but rather that access to a signifying economy, to the coining of signifiers, is difficult or even impossible for her because she remains an outsider, herself (a) subject to their norms."<sup>174</sup> Here woman as other, as outsider, is produced by and through exclusion from the creation of norms that are nevertheless applied to her. It is this exclusion that gives meaning to the categorisation of humans as male or female, and of their bodies, not what is applied to the anatomical or biological markers. These markers are already signifiers; they carry meaning already. "Every time Freud — and anyone else after him — falls back upon the unavoidable facts of anatomy, biology, or genetics, an important historical objective is thereby revealed and concealed."<sup>175</sup> In other words, the use of these already signifying differences as unavoidable facts of anatomy, biology or genetics, actually reveals a reliance on the normative that works to exclude and subjectivise woman. This is what is revealed in a rhetorical move, which seeks to hide them as already established facts, as the bare minimum of sexual difference. Irigaray deploys a mimetic strategy to specularise — to make visible — or rather tactilise — to make felt — the female body and its difference. Her strategy aims at revealing a phallic economy and its exclusions. Though it is not always clear in Irigaray's texts, I will suggest a reading where it is not, at this stage of her thinking, an effort to value the female body as a carrier of unique traits. It is

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<sup>174</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 1985a [1974], p. 71.

<sup>175</sup> Irigaray, 1985a [1974], p. 90.

instead an effort to make something intelligible that has been excluded; something that has been refused and barred from the signifying economy.

Perhaps it is time to return to that repressed entity, the female imaginary. So woman does not have a sex organ? She has at least two of them, but they are not identifiable as ones. Indeed she has many more. Her sexuality, always at least double, goes even further: it is *plural*.<sup>176</sup>

The move to the plurality of the excluded is not a move to the body as a pre-existing form of symbolisation. Rather, it is a return to the body as what has been excluded from and therefore produced by a specific symbolisation. For Lacan, woman was the excluded in discourse, yet about whom discourse never stops. Irigaray's turn to the excluded body poses the question: what does the excluded say of herself? As this excluded cannot speak, but is only spoken of, Irigaray turns to the body spoken of to find a different symbolism. However, the aim is not to find an original or essential truth about the excluded. Irigaray attempts to read the symbols of the excluded *as if* it symbolised something.

The little boy is narcissized, ego-ized by his penis — since the penis is valued on the sexual market and is overrated culturally because it can be seen, specularized, and fetishized — but this is not true for the little girl's sex organ(s).<sup>177</sup>

The boy is able to develop an ego because his penis is visual, but it is not the anatomy of the penis that produces this, nor is it the anatomy of the girl's sexual organ that gives the plurality of her sexuality. It is the valuation of the penis on the sexual market, in the exchanges that defines the two sexes. As the body is already a part of signification within the sexual economy, the body itself cannot be the origin of the sexual difference. Instead it is the exclusion from the norm or the coinage of signifiers that distinguishes the excluded female from the normative male.

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<sup>176</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is not One*, 1985b [1977], p. 28.

<sup>177</sup> Irigaray, 1985a [1974], p. 68.

Furthermore, Irigaray's model for understanding the differentiation of sexes entails reading Freud's castration complex as a melancholic process for the girl. In *Mourning and Melancholia*, Freud describes mourning as a process, an ability to redirect over time the libidinal attachment to an object onto other objects.<sup>178</sup> By contrast, in the melancholic reaction, this process is arrested for some reason, the object is not allowed to be mourned. If an object has to be given up before the mourning process can run its course, the lost object is instead internalised and becomes a part of the ego. Irigaray argues that "you will be struck by the way the libidinal economy of the little girl, after she finds out that both she and her mother are castrated, crosschecks with the symptoms of melancholia"<sup>179</sup>. The reason why the girl is unable to mourn her mother, as the boy is able to, is that the girl does not have another foundation for her ego. The boy has his penis that has a value on the sexual market, but the girl only has her identification with her mother. "What is more, mother, whom the little girl is identifying with and using to build her ego, suffers from the same misfortune."<sup>180</sup> Hence the melancholic process of internalising the lost object and making it a part of the ego, is doubly denied for the girl whose identifying object has suffered the same destiny as herself. For the internalised object that could shape her ego is an already castrated mother. "The economy of female narcissism and the fragility of the girl's or the woman's ego make it impossible for the melancholic syndrome to establish a firm and dominant foundation."<sup>181</sup> As opposed to the penis — a visual representation with a value in the sexual economy — the girl has to be content with an internalised maternal object already revealed as castrated. In Freud's model — as we have seen — this marks the difference in reactions to the castration complex for the two sexes. Yet, where Freud's presentation is ambivalent both in its relation to biology and about the origins of how we value genital organs, Irigaray is clear that this is not derived from actual anatomical difference but from the valuation of one anatomical marker. As she points out, the feminine has been devalorised from the outset. Therefore, woman, when made through a dysfunctional

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<sup>178</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia.' (1917) in SE 14, pp. 237-258.

<sup>179</sup> Irigaray, 1985a [1974], p. 66.

<sup>180</sup> Irigaray, 1985a [1974], p. 68.

<sup>181</sup> Irigaray, 1985a [1974], p. 71.

melancholisation of the maternal as a devalorised and already excluded origin, reproduces the exclusion that makes woman the same but less than man. As the boy develops his ego, “some ‘mirror’ is needed to reassure it and re-insure it of its value. Woman will be the foundation for this specular duplication, giving man back ‘his’ image and repeating it as the ‘same.’”<sup>182</sup> Woman is thus created in order to serve in relation to the (always male) ego, to the norm and to the symbolisable. She is not allowed to be an other, according to Irigaray. “If an *other* image, an *other* mirror were to intervene, this inevitability would entail the risk of mortal crisis. Woman will therefore be this sameness — or at least its mirror image — and, in her role of mother, she will facilitate the repetition of the same, in contempt for her difference. Her own sexual difference.”<sup>183</sup>

In Irigaray’s early texts, sexual difference is a rallying cry rather than a precondition for her political project. Her mimetic exploration — of those images or tactile experiences that are excluded in an economy where the penis and the one is valued above the vagina and the multitude — is a critical engagement with the internal contradictions in existing theories of sexual difference, rather than a formulation of a positive, existing femininity that *is* something. This early formulation of femininity as the excluded, and Irigaray’s method for making it speak through mimetic interventions in key texts that have defined her as excluded, provides a helpful tool. It allows for a use of femininity as that which has been excluded and pacified but that can still speak and be felt. The non-specular discovery of relationality with the self and the mother opens up for a theorisation of the porous fluidity that can exist on a parallel level to sexual difference, as I have formulated so far through Lacan, Freud and Mitchell.

## **Melancholia and gender**

Butler argues that Irigaray’s model of the feminine as excluded, and the sexing of materiality through the materialisation of the excluded, precludes the possibility of non-heterosexual relations. “As a consequence, then, without this heterosexual *matrix*, as it were, it appears that the stability of these gendered

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<sup>182</sup> Irigaray, 1985a [1974], p. 54.

<sup>183</sup> Irigaray, 1985a [1974], p. 54.

positions would be called into question.”<sup>184</sup> Instead, in Butler’s critical development of Irigaray’s reading of melancholia, the focus is on the achievement of masculine and feminine positions prior to entry into the Oedipus complex, and prior to any exclusion of the feminine.

The oedipal conflict presumes that heterosexual desire has already been *accomplished*, that the distinction between heterosexual and homosexual has been enforced (a distinction which, after all, has no necessity); in this sense, the prohibition on incest presupposes the prohibition on homosexuality, for it presumes the heterosexualization of desire.<sup>185</sup>

Homosexual desire needs to be precluded; without this, the prohibition of heterosexual incest cannot work as foundational. As we have seen, melancholia leads to an internalisation of the lost object. Butler uses this model in relation to Freud’s theories of the formation of the ego in *The Ego and the Id*,<sup>186</sup> where he speculates that a melancholic response to loss may be more common than he had previously assumed and that the ego may in fact be made up of the internalisation of the lost object. “Giving up the object becomes possible only on the condition of a melancholic internalization or, what might for our purposes turn out to be even more important, a melancholic *incorporation*.”<sup>187</sup> The ego as a bodily ego is thus formed by the incorporation of lost objects. This lost object is precisely that which has been foreclosed before the entry into the Oedipal situation. The object as well as the prohibition of this object is then the foundation of the ego as internalised or incorporated self.

Consider that gender is acquired at least in part through the repudiation of homosexual attachments; the girl becomes a girl through being subject to a prohibition which bars the mother as an object of desire and installs that barred object as a part of the ego, indeed, as a melancholic identification. Thus the

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<sup>184</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 2011 [1993], p. 23.

<sup>185</sup> Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, 1997, p. 135.

<sup>186</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*. (1923), in SE 19, pp. 1-66.

<sup>187</sup> Butler, 1997, p. 134.



identification contains within it both the prohibition and the desire, and so embodies the unrieved loss of the homosexual cathexis.<sup>188</sup>

Butler's usage of melancholia in the formation of gender differs from Irigaray's. Irigaray makes use of melancholia to understand the exclusion of the feminine as a failure to incorporate the lost object, or rather where the incorporated object is revealed as already lacking. This is contrasted with Butler's reformulation of melancholia to create a model for incorporating the lost object as the self. Irigaray argues that the girl is left to incorporate an already castrated mother, "is she not born of a castrated mother who could only give birth to a castrated child, even though she prefers (to herself) those who bear the penis?"<sup>189</sup> And it is this melancholia of never having lost, because the mother was always excluded, that refuses the girl a secure identification through an incorporation of her image. She is defined by the refused "desire for representation, for re-presenting oneself, and for representing oneself in desire is in some ways *taken away from woman at the outset* as a result of the radical devalorization of her 'beginning' that she is inculcated with,"<sup>190</sup> and therefore already lost. In Irigaray's version of melancholia and the loss of identification, the feminine is excluded and only the male is allowed a form. As a result, woman has been denied an identity, a separate body. "Now woman cannot mime, pretend, any relation to *her own* sex organ(s) because she has been cut off from any access to idea, ideality, specula(riza)tion, and indeed a certain organic 'reality.'"<sup>191</sup> In later essays, Irigaray argues that the feminine is something pre-existing though not something tangible. She relates this to

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<sup>188</sup> Butler, 1997, p. 136.

<sup>189</sup> Irigaray, 1985a [1974], p. 83.

<sup>190</sup> Irigaray, 1985a [1974], p. 83.

<sup>191</sup> Irigaray, 1985a [1974], p. 114.

divinities and angelic notions in order to argue for a theological and philosophical rupture where the feminine is excluded.<sup>192</sup>

As a whole, in her early formulation of the feminine, Irigaray links melancholic refusal of identification and specularisation of the self with the feminine as excluded. This usage is distinct from Butler's usage of melancholia as a model for the formation of the self through incorporating an object and its prohibition. Butler's usage sets up a model where norms are incorporated into the very formation of the self. In contrast, Irigaray's usage of melancholia explores the limitations of the self by exploring its failures of specularisation and identification. Nevertheless, these seemingly contradictory models actualise two layers of identification through loss and parental laws, as well as the fragility or porousness of the self. In Irigaray's formulation, the porousness of the self is explored through loss and the feminine as excluded. My question is whether it is possible to rethink this through a non-melancholic relation, and through tactile relationality with an other instead of a refused identification?

### **Feminine as sexuality or as gender?**

In Butler's critical reading of Freud, the masculine and feminine are dispositions, or positions of desire for the other in a heterosexual framework. The feminine and masculine are at once gender *and* sexuality. Butler's quarrel with this is that gender and sexuality are accomplished; they are the effects of a process in which these positions are created as already having been there — through the melancholic formation of the ego. "To accept this view we must begin by presupposing that masculine and feminine are not dispositions, as Freud sometimes argues, but indeed accomplishments, ones which emerge in tandem with the achievement of heterosexuality."<sup>193</sup> In Irigaray's reading of Freud, the feminine is excluded and the young girl is therefore unable to achieve an

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<sup>192</sup> See for example Irigaray, *In the Beginning, She Was*, 2013 "When feminine divinities even imperceptibly govern discourse, becoming still exists." (p. 23) "In the beginning, the sage still listens to her — nature, Goddess, muse. They are the master, for the philosopher who begins to speak. And his discourse still grows starting from the same depths as vegetal growth. It is not yet separated from them in order to constitute a logos parallel to the living world, which says this world while cutting it from the roots of life and its becoming, transforming it into signs so as to put it at the disposal of the works of man." (p. 27).

<sup>193</sup> Butler, 1997, p. 135.

independent ego formation based on the feminine. The feminine as already castrated, as foreclosed through melancholic loss forces the girl to become the reflection or negation of the masculine, which does allow for an ego formation. It is important to note here that Mitchell pointed out that the terms masculine and feminine underwent an evolution in Freud's theory. He began by understanding these terms as relating widely to male and female bodies and assumed dispositions. But, eventually, they became more technical. In Freud's later writings, the masculine and feminine relate to desire rather than identity. And this desire was defined by activity and passivity rather than choice of object. The bisexuality of the infant and the duality of masculine and feminine dispositions are therefore — in this reading — not signs of hetero- or homosexuality, but of a capacity for both active and passive desires in the infant. These capacities are cut off by the castration complex, which divides the capacity for active and passive *autoeroticism*.

The very young infant, auto-erotically satisfied. With a bisexual disposition, finding itself in an image given to it by another; this would seem the halcyon condition of human prehistory. Everything Freud writes confirms that there is no important psychological sexual differentiation in his pre-Oedipal situation. But this situation is not a stage, not an amount of time, but a level. At another level, the culturally determined implication of the sexual difference is always waiting.<sup>194</sup>

In Mitchell's reading, the bisexual prehistory has not been foreclosed, it exists on a different level than the achieved sexual difference and the cultural implications that this difference enforces on the two. As this implies, in Freud's attempts at explaining the development of femininity there is a confusion of terminology, a problematic slippage between femininity as an achieved disposition and femininity as the fundamental female disposition. In *New Introductory Lectures*, Freud warns against the presumption that femininity is linked with passivity or that masculinity is linked with activity.

Women can display great activity in various directions, men are not able to live in company with their own kind unless they develop a large amount of passive adaptability. If you now tell me that these facts go on to prove precisely that both

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<sup>194</sup> Mitchell, 2000a [1974], p. 52.

men and women are bisexual in the psychological sense, I shall conclude that you have decided in your own minds to make 'active' coincide with 'masculine' and 'passive' with 'feminine'. But I advise you against it. It seems to me to serve no useful purpose and adds nothing to our knowledge.<sup>195</sup>

The passivity of femininity as achieved disposition is instead the result of the girl's realisation that her mother is already castrated *and* that she shares this situation with her. This realisation turns the girl away from her mother and directs her desires for the lost phallic mother inwards, making her passive and active — bisexual in Freud's sense — desires for her mother into a passive desire to be loved by her father and to carry his child. The child also represents a replacement of the penis and the active autoerotic pleasure she might derive from this.

In Irigaray's reading of Freud, this inward turn of the already castrated mother and the already impossible ego formation, together with the already impossible morphological identification, results in a melancholic limitation of identification. This incorporation takes the loss and castration as its object to internalise rather than the maternal morphology. Femininity, in Irigaray's reading is therefore constituted as loss. Butler points out that this argument is problematic as a ground for feminist theory because it defines the excluded as feminine and the feminine as excluded. Irigaray therefore risks "idealizing and appropriating the 'elsewhere' as the feminine."<sup>196</sup> This reading of Irigaray, however, conflates 'feminine' with 'women.' If the feminine is instead read as a disposition — illustrated by the refusal of identification that Freud's narrativisation of sexual difference and castration implies — then a different meaning of 'feminine' becomes possible. The feminine as idealised 'elsewhere' does not have to be connected to this or that morphology, but rather to a failure of morphology to provide a secure identification. The feminine as 'elsewhere' then becomes a clear limitation within Freud's narrativisation of the formation of the self, not an embodied identification. The feminine is the *failure* of embodied identification.

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<sup>195</sup> Freud, *New Introductory Lectures*, 1933, p. 115.

<sup>196</sup> Butler, 1993, p. 22.

## Enigmatic gender

In 'Gender, Sex and the *Sexual*' Laplanche maps out his model of how the psychosexual self is formed as gendered and as sexed.<sup>197</sup> In Laplanche's model, gender is the name or category that is 'assigned' to the child. Prior to any sexual difference in Freud's or Lacan's sense, the child is being named through gender. "Assignment is a complex ensemble of acts that go on within language and within the meaningful behaviour of the family circle. One could speak of an ongoing assignment, of a veritable *prescription*."<sup>198</sup> This prescription of gender is the continuous communication of expectations that the child be a certain way. In Laplanche's argument, gender is not necessarily a duality — male or female, though it often is. "*It is ordinarily double, as in masculine-feminine, but it is not so by nature.*"<sup>199</sup>

Laplanche distinguishes between nature and gender, placing sex on the side of nature. But this distinction is not simply biological, though Laplanche's own vocabulary can be ambiguous when it comes to sexual difference. On one hand, he emphasises Freud's focus on the visual marker of sexual difference, thereby basing sexual difference on perceived anatomical difference rather than any underlying biological function. Laplanche then asks if this "perceptual anatomical difference" is "a language, a code?"<sup>200</sup> This suggests that the perceived either/or of sexual difference offers a rudimentary code of absence or presence. On the other hand, Laplanche emphasises that this symbolisation of sexual difference is only one aspect of the sexual, it is also related to reproductive functions. "*Sex is dual. It is so by virtue of sexual reproduction and also by virtue of its human symbolization, which sets and freezes the duality as presence/absence, phallic/castrated.*"<sup>201</sup> Laplanche's theorisation of sexual difference, like Freud and Lacan before him, seem to fall back onto something that is left undefined — the bedrock of biology. For there is no reason why a rudimentary code based on anatomical difference between having or not having

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<sup>197</sup> Jean Laplanche, 'Gender, Sex and the *Sexual*' included in *Freud and the Sexual: Essays 2000-2006*, 2011.

<sup>198</sup> Laplanche, 2011, p. 173.

<sup>199</sup> Laplanche, 2011, p. 159.

<sup>200</sup> Laplanche, 2011, p. 178.

<sup>201</sup> Laplanche, 2011, p. 159.

something should be linked to reproduction and biology. By juxtaposing ‘human symbolisation’ with ‘sexual reproduction,’ Laplanche mixes the rudimentary code of a perceived difference with biology. This muddles the term ‘sexual difference,’ leaving it to mean two different things. Accepting for now Laplanche’s insistence on sexual difference taking place on the side of perceived anatomical difference rather than having biological implications, I will focus the following discussion on the function of this rudimentary code as one of the meanings assigned to ‘sexual difference.’

Speaking anthropologically, I should like to insist again upon the following point: it is claimed that with castration we have reached the ‘biological bedrock’, and certain Freudian formulations suggest precisely this. But it is, in fact an *anatomical* bedrock of which we should speak, and what’s more a *false or deceptive anatomy*. The castration complex is based upon a perceived anatomy, one which is illusory and peculiar to the human species.<sup>202</sup>

In this manner the rudimentary code of sexual difference simplifies the plurality of gender into an either/or logic, “gender will be domesticated, symbolized by the oversimplified code of presence/absence, phallic/castrated, the 1/0 of computers.”<sup>203</sup> Sexual difference thus turns the complex messages of the prescription of gender into a rudimentary code of male and female. As gender originated from an other, rather than from the child’s fantasy based on the perception of an anatomical difference, the prescription of gender falls into what Laplanche calls enigmatic messages. In this model, the prescription of gender always contain a surplus or noise that comes from adults reactivating “their own *infantile sexuality*.”<sup>204</sup> This reactivation formulates something that the child cannot understand, something that the child has to try to translate to make it intelligible. Sexual difference is the rudimentary code that the child then uses to translate the prescription of gender given by the adult world. The failure to

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<sup>202</sup> Laplanche, 2011, p. 112, from the essay ‘Starting from the Fundamental Anthropological Situation’.

<sup>203</sup> Laplanche, 2011, p. 113.

<sup>204</sup> Laplanche, 2011, p. 176.

translate this enigmatic message in full results in the formation of an unconscious that is untranslatable, this is what Laplanche calls the *sexual*.<sup>205</sup>

Laplanche's model for gender and sexual difference is based on his generalised theory of seduction — or the fundamental anthropological situation — that sidesteps the Oedipal situation and instead argues that the most fundamental human experience is the “radical asymmetry”<sup>206</sup> between the child and the adult world. In this reformulation of the origins of sexuality, the primary instalment of sexuality is a result of the unbinding effect of the other's ‘seduction.’ Like prescriptive gender assignments, the adult other's communication contains something that the child cannot comprehend and is unable to translate. In an early text Laplanche used the image of the nursing mother to argue that the breast does not only turn into a sexual object for the child (as Freud emphasised) but that the breast is already a sexualised zone for the mother.<sup>207</sup> As a result, Laplanche argues that human sexuality is always traumatic and always masochistic. This is a result of both the passivity of child in relation to the mother (in the image of the nursing mother) and the traumatic event of the mother's messages that cannot be fully understood or translated. As a result, the other's messages are internalised as “an alien internal entity and with the drive as an internal attack, so that the paradox of masochism, far from deserving to be circumscribed as a specific ‘perversion,’ should be generalized, linked as it is to the *essentially traumatic nature of human sexuality*.”<sup>208</sup> Human sexuality is therefore unbinding in Laplanche's formulation, it is the result of a foreign implantation of a drive that cannot be understood. Laplanche argued in

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<sup>205</sup> *Sexual* is Laplanche's transposition of the German word *Sexual* as opposed to the French word *sexuel*. By making this distinction, Laplanche wishes to distinguish between genital sexuality (*le sexuel*) and Freud's concept of sexuality as something polymorphously perverted (*le sexual*) and not reducible to genital sexuality. This distinction is lost in translation and I have followed John Fletcher's suggestion of italicising *sexual* when used for this purpose in Laplanche's writings. “When Freud speaks of enlarged sexuality, the sexuality of the *Three Essays*, it is always the *sexual*. It would have been unthinkable for Freud to have entitled his inaugural work, ‘Three Essays on the Theory of the Sexed — or of Sexuation’. ‘*Sexualtheorie*’ is not a ‘*Geschlechtstheorie*’. It is a sexuality that has been called ‘non-procreative’ and even primarily non-sexed, as distinct from what is called precisely ‘sexed reproduction’. The *sexual*, then, is not the sexed; it is essentially perverse infantile sexuality.” (Laplanche, 2011, p. 161).

<sup>206</sup> Laplanche, 2011, p. 101.

<sup>207</sup> See Laplanche, *Life and Death In Psychoanalysis*, 1976 [1970].

<sup>208</sup> Laplanche, 1976 [1970], p. 105.

a later essay that the “unconscious is thus in no sense an other ‘myself’ in me, possibly more authentic than me,”<sup>209</sup> the unconscious is something other in me, something that cannot be comprehended. In the example of gender and sexual difference, it is a surplus that is created between the rudimentary model of sexual difference and the complex plurality of gender. This surplus is internalised as an other, as a traumatising and unbinding unconscious sexuality.

In my earlier reading of Lacan, a split occurred as the result of the alienating encounter with one’s mirror image. This split was then given symbolic form through the castration complex and its two possible outcomes. The split in sexual difference was therefore dependent on a split of the self, its value and meaning drew energy from this splitting. Laplanche’s reading of sexual difference turns this narrative on its head. Instead of a mirror phase where the self is alienated from the self, sexual difference is dependent on the visual discovery of an anatomical difference. As opposed to Lacan’s model, there is nothing in itself traumatic in the discovery of an anatomical difference, the value — like the value of the penis on the sexual market, in Irigaray’s argument — comes from the enigmatic gender that is ‘prescribed’ to the child. Laplanche’s model does not place any preexisting value on anatomical difference, the value given to this anatomical difference instead derives from adult gender messages. “Primary identification: far from being a primary identification ‘with’ (the adult), this is, I propose, a primary identification ‘by’ (the adult).”<sup>210</sup> In placing gender as prior to sexual difference, the child is prescribed conflicting and plural messages around gender before the discovery of sexual difference as anatomical difference. When anatomical difference is discovered, the child has already been implanted with an alien and alienating desire that is deployed to translate the visual discovery of difference.

Whereas Laplanche undermines any solipsistic (Lacan’s mirror phase as explanation) or biological (infantile sexuality as already there) foundation of the sexual (or *sexual* to follow Fletcher’s translation of Laplanche’s term), his model still falls back on Freud’s reification of anatomical difference. On the other hand it is significant that Laplanche explores this difference via imagery from zoology rather than a vocabulary based on drive theory. “The erect posture makes the

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<sup>209</sup> Laplanche, *Essays on Otherness*, 1999, p. 111.

<sup>210</sup> Laplanche, 2011, p. 180.



female organs perceptually inaccessible; but this contingency has been raised by many civilizations, and no doubt our own, to the rank of a major, universal, signifier of presence/absence.”<sup>211</sup> In this formulation, anatomical difference has been ‘raised to the rank of a universal signifier’ — making it unclear what comes first, the gendered civilisation, or the anatomical difference.

For my purposes, what matters here is a potential plurality in gender and the separation between this level on one side and the level of binary sexual difference on the other. In my argument, sexual difference is grounded in foreclosed desire; as in Butler’s melancholic gender, Mitchell’s maternal and paternal laws, and Irigaray’s theory of foreclosed imaginary identification. These all work around the formation of the ‘rudimentary code’ of ‘this, therefore not that’ in various forms. I am therefore positioning my argument between Laplanche’s critique of the symbolic order as unified and Lacan’s critique of anatomical difference as the origin of sexual difference.

Butler has argued that for “Laplanche, gender is resituated as part of the terrain of the enigmatic signifier itself. In other words, gender is not so much a singular message, but a surrounding and impinging discourse, already circulating, and mobilised for the purposes of address prior to the formation of any speaking and desiring subject.”<sup>212</sup> Gender as message comes before desire is formed. Prescriptions by adults are in fact the origin of a child’s desire in Laplanche’s model. The child, in this model, is first of all passive, or masochistic, in its relation to adults. Jacques André has argued that this places the child on par with the feminine in Freud’s terminology.<sup>213</sup> If Butler universalised Irigaray’s formulation of a melancholic response to the foreclosure of a visual marker with which to identify into a formulation of melancholic gender as the foreclosure of desire, then my suggestion is to universalise the feminine as an experience of foreclosure before the conceptualisation of homo- or heterosexuality. I do this

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<sup>211</sup> Laplanche, 2011, p. 178.

<sup>212</sup> Butler, ‘Seduction, Gender and the Drive,’ Included in *Seductions and Enigmas: Laplanche, Theory, Culture*, 2014 pp. 118-133, p. 128.

<sup>213</sup> Jacques André, *Aux origines féminines de la sexualité*, 2014 [1995], p. 3 “La question de l’angoisse, la perte d’amour où elle prend sa source, impose de penser ensemble la fémininité et l’infantile le plus précoce, le plus primitif, renouvelant par là même les termes de l’énigme.” “The question of anxiety, the loss of love in which it takes its source, makes it necessary to think femininity and the most precocious, most primitive infantile together, thereby renewing the terms of the enigma.” My translation.

by moving back to Irigaray — via Laplanche — and by such means I postulate the feminine as a masochistic turning back on the self and as an experience of foreclosure that is not yet understood, not yet translated into a foreclosure of something. Only the inscription of ‘this, therefore not that,’ enables a rereading of the feminine that is not dependent on anatomical difference for its functioning.

Here it is helpful to note that Bersani has used Laplanche’s reformulation of desire and the origin of sexuality to formulate a theory of sexuality that unbinds the self. “Sexuality would be that which is intolerable to the structured self.”<sup>214</sup> As this shows, in Bersani’s early formulation of sexuality and his reading of Freud and Laplanche, the sexual is opposed to structure and to intelligibility. Sexuality breaks up the self as a notion of a wholeness and as something that can be understood. In his reading of Freud, Bersani emphasises those aspects of passivity and dependency of the child that Laplanche also pointed out. “From this perspective, the distinguishing feature of infancy would be its *susceptibility to the sexual*. The polymorphously perverse nature of infantile sexuality would be a function of the child’s vulnerability to being shattered into sexuality.”<sup>215</sup> Bersani concludes that “sexuality — at least in the mode in which it is constituted — could be thought of as a tautology for masochism.”<sup>216</sup> In this early text, Bersani’s formulation of masochism is based on a shattering of the self that takes place as the result of the child’s ‘susceptibility to the sexual’ at the time of its inauguration. As I have discussed, Laplanche emphasised the child’s passivity and dependency on the adult world in the implantation of the unconscious and the *sexual* in the child. It is this aspect of sexuality and masochism that Bersani here uses to argue for an understanding of sexuality as something subversive and opposed to the structured self.

Significantly, this formulation of masochism differs from the function of masochism in my own model of the roles played by sexual difference and gender in the formation of the self and its relatedness to the world. My usage of masochism focuses on the aspect of *turning back*. Masochism inflicts pain or displeasure on the self, but it is also a turning back on the self as an introjection

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<sup>214</sup> Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art*, 1986, p. 38.

<sup>215</sup> Bersani, 1986, p. 38.

<sup>216</sup> Bersani, 1986, p. 39.

or incorporation of the enigmatic messages from the other. To use Laplanche's model of gender and sexual difference, as discussed above, the prescription of gender does not have to be unbinding (though it certainly can be). Yet it will always be a return to the self through the assumptions or demands of someone else. It is helpful here to begin to gather together the threads of my argument so far. I am now in a position to redefine the specific form of masochism as a turning back, a turning back that is unbearable and therefore unintelligible. Melancholic turning back is a version of turning back that is unnameable and therefore unmournable. Melancholia as a limit and process of formation of the self as 'this, therefore not that' then becomes a subcategory of masochistic turning back as the process of turning back and of eroticising the asymmetrical relation with a world that cannot be fully understood. On the extreme end of melancholia and sexual difference, the self is the result of the collapse of a masochistic relationality that threatens the self. On the other end is the porous relationality of masochistic enjoyment of this asymmetrical relation.

Above, melancholic responses to loss were discussed in terms of lost desire (Butler) or lost identification (Irigaray) but were not yet linked to any subversive function. For Butler, melancholic gender is the incorporation of norms. Its subversive or non-conformist aspect is only actualised in the repeated impossibility of these norms to coincide with the lived experience of a gendered self. For Irigaray, on the other hand, the feminine that is the result of a foreclosed identity becomes subversive in itself. Her political project is to revert Lacan's postulation that the feminine is what discourse never stops talking *about* to making the feminine itself never stop talking. In Bersani's argument from 1986, the sexual itself — defined as masochism — is the subversive force. "Psychoanalysis is an unprecedented attempt to give a theoretical account of precisely those forces which obstruct, undermine, play havoc with theoretical accounts themselves."<sup>217</sup> This subversive aspect of the sexual is contrasted with what Bersani calls the narrative aspect of Freud's theoretical framework. Narration makes the disruptive intelligible. Laplanche calls this binding and unbinding and he has contrasted the therapeutic work of binding with the unbinding work of analysis:

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<sup>217</sup> Bersani, 1986, p. 4.

[...] the psychoanalytic *act* — sometimes quite rare — is something else. A work of unbinding, it tries to make new materials surface for a profoundly renewed narration; and of course, we shall not be surprised that the psychoanalyst is also cautious and sparing: for isn't his work of unbinding allied with that of the sexual death drive?<sup>218</sup>

Laplanche links the 'analytic act' with the sexual death drive and thereby with the masochistic pleasure in displeasure that this signifies. The sexual and the 'analytic act' are read as disruptive or as unbinding of the narrative. For Laplanche, the 'analytic act' is a source of renewed translation and renewed narrativisation of disruptive elements. Bersani, in this early text, instead valorises the disruptive for its ability to undermine the stable or structured self. In 'Is the Rectum a Grave?' Bersani argues that the sexual as passive and masochistic first of all explains the subversive potentiality of homosexual desire.<sup>219</sup> In this argument, male homosexual desire reveals the possibility of being both phallic and passive. "Phallicism is exactly that: not primarily the denial of power to women (although it has obviously also led to that, everywhere and at all times), but above all the denial of the *value* of powerlessness in both men and women."<sup>220</sup> The sexual as masochistic in the sense of passive is here used by Bersani to argue that the sexual as unbinding and as powerlessness becomes something threatening to the stability of the self and in this case, the stability of masculinity and of patriarchy at large.

Bersani's argument, however, is based on a conflation of the sexual as a whole (what Laplanche would call *le sexual*) with genital sexuality in its assumption that homosexual desire would automatically reveal the passivity inherent in the phallic subject. In Laplanche's model, as already discussed, the *sexual* is the surplus between the enigmatic prescriptive message of gender and the rudimentary code of sexual difference that the child use to translate adults' enigmatic messages. The *sexual*, in Laplanche's model, is therefore what cannot be fitted into sexual difference. The *sexual* would thus disrupt the rudimentary code, forcing a new narrative or a new translation to be formed. In

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<sup>218</sup> Laplanche, 2011, p. 282.

<sup>219</sup> Bersani, 'Is the Rectum a Grave?', first published in *October* 43, Winter 1987, pp. 197–222, included in *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays*, 2009.

<sup>220</sup> Bersani, 2009 [1987], p. 24.

Bersani's argument, however, genital sexuality is already sexed and is assumed to be in place. Phallogentrism as a denial of the value of passivity only becomes threatened by homosexuality if sexual difference and the coded link between the phallic and the male is established. "Male homosexuality advertises the risk of the sexual itself as the risk of self-dismissal, of *losing sight* of the self, and in so doing it proposes and dangerously represents *jouissance* as a mode of asceticism."<sup>221</sup> This line of argument follows Bersani's development of the subversive potentiality in his book *Homos*.<sup>222</sup> From this point onward, Bersani focuses his reading of the potentially subversive and liberating effect of homosexuality, not strictly on the sexual, but on the conflation of the object of desire and the object of identification. A sociality that does not distinguish between the same and the desired opens up for potentially new relations. "What is inconceivable in the Freudian scheme is identification as libidinal recognition. But this is not quite accurate; it is conceived of within the Freudian scheme, but only as a perversion. And it is of course the perversion of homosexuality."<sup>223</sup> In this later text Bersani opens up towards an ethical reading of homosexuality, which is presented as having a potential for a more 'authentic' living with an outside world not strictly separated as an external world. The merger of the object of desire and the object of identification displaces something of the self into the outer world and vice versa. This argument touches on the line of argument in the present thesis. But where Bersani seems to be driven by the question *why is homosexuality a threat to society?*, and *how can this be used to undermine the stable self as a constrictive and normating figure?* In contrast, in this thesis, the question is how sexual difference and gender are formed through and in the formation of the self. The questions addressed here are therefore more ontological than ethical, though this is a distinction that should not be ossified into too clear separations. The self is here assumed to be formed in relation to an outer world and in relation to other selves. However, as what I am interested in is what Laplanche calls the 'fundamental anthropological

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<sup>221</sup> Bersani, 2009 [1987], p. 30.

<sup>222</sup> Bersani, 1996.

<sup>223</sup> Bersani, 'Sociability and Cruising' first published in *Umbr(a): A Journal of the Unconscious* no. 1, 2002: *Sameness*, pp. 11–31, included in Bersani, 2009, p. 53.

situation,' or the relational formation of the self, sexual difference cannot be assumed as in Bersani's argument.<sup>224</sup>

Admittedly, in later essays, Bersani has moved away from his valuation of gay sociality as an exploration of relationality to the same, and has instead explored relationality to the world through a oneness that is prior to any separation into identities or differences. In *Thoughts and Things*, Bersani has explored the maternal relation as a relationality that opens up for a oneness with the world that does not exclude a differentiation of the self in relation to it. "Oneness in the world is not without spaces between the subject and the world. It is in those spaces that the subject discovers him- or herself replicated in or as otherness."<sup>225</sup>

## Enigmatic messages

In a final attempt to tie the strands of this chapter together, I will once again return to Freud. The focus is now on his usage of the term 'uncanny' in two different texts, with two different valences for the creation of meaning, and for relationships with the world. In *The Uncanny*, Freud argues that the uncanny is

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<sup>224</sup> In *Receptive Bodies* Bersani return to the ethic/ontological question of how we relate to the world, or rather how we are a part of the world already. In his 'Forewarning' Bersani links the relatedness with the world to intrauterine experiences. He also returns to his previous *The Freudian Body* to reemphasise the masochistic solution to sexualise the pain of the shattering of the self as a means to survive this shattering in the encounter with an enigmatic world. "I speculated in *The Freudian Body* that "the human organism survives the gap between the period of shattering stimuli and the development of resistant or defensive ego structures" that can manage or metabolize these stimuli only by masochistically sexualizing the influx of stimuli." (p. 38), These arguments come close to my argument here, but again, Bersani — rather than turning to Irigaray or Ettinger to theorise the intrauterine and the co-formation of selves as a being-with in intrauterine fantasies, Bersani turns to Peter Sloterdijk, and though critical, Bersani's argument seems to rely on a monadic reading of the self that though extended to some close external inputs that can affect us, leaves the dualism of self/other intact. "Our connections to an otherwise alien and indifferent outside can therefore be said to include opportunities for a sublimated repetition of our earliest experiences of being nourished and protected by the spherically encompassing objects of the placenta, the umbilical cord, intra- and extrauterine sonorous presences, and the air we breathe. Sloterdijk, like Foucault, proposes a "care of the self," a discipline of self-training that would make us receptive to the emergence of a welcoming With-Me, an occasion, within otherness, for self-augmentations." (p. 102) This partial non-phallic reading of being with still maintains the phallic rupture or the 'this therefore not that' of melancholic differentiation as I have suggested here. See *Receptive Bodies*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2018

<sup>225</sup> Bersani, *Thoughts and Things*, 2015, p. 113.

the repressed made present.<sup>226</sup> Freud describes a scene on a train, where he sees a reflection of an old man without realising that he is seeing his own reflection. This is given as an illustration of uncanny doubling; another is the notion of an eternal soul. Such a soul is at once an escape from mortality and a reminder of this mortality. Written in 1919, Freud was on the verge of describing the death drive as a compulsion to repeat traumatic memories. The haunting in *The Uncanny* is describing both a prototype for the compulsion of repetition and a doubling of the self. The haunting ghost is derived from a doubling of the self, a splitting where the ego is at once an object, giving way for primary narcissism, and a function of an inner or active self with a will and direction. Freud's essay focuses on the frightening that makes the alienated reappear and that challenges the continuity of the familiar. The uncanny is here anti-narrative in that it tears through the textures of normality and disrupts the order of things. But in an earlier text — *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, written in 1901 but first published in 1905, there is a brief mention of the uncanny with a different emphasis. This text was written before Freud's second topology; he had not started using the id, ego and superego yet, and he was not yet preoccupied with repetitions or doublings. In this earlier text, Freud is discussing his patient's recollection of hearing her parents having sex in the room next door. "Children, in such circumstances, divine something sexual in the uncanny sounds that reach their ears. Indeed, the movements expressive of sexual excitement lie within them ready to hand, as innate pieces of mechanism."<sup>227</sup>

In this passage, the uncanny is a sound that does not quite make sense. The child both recognises and does not recognise the noises from her parents' bedroom. In this text, the temporality of the knowing and not knowing is different from Freud's later version. Instead of disrupting a narrative, the uncanny forces the child to make up (or divine) a narrative. The doubling here is not between the self and the ego, but between the self and an unknown that resonates with something 'innate.' In this logic, the child's reaction to the uncanny makes of her a co-creator of the sound. Like the spectator, the child has to use something innate, already there, to understand the unknown; the child and spectator therefore both recognise something of their selves in the uncanny. The sounds

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<sup>226</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'The 'Uncanny'' (1919), in SE 17, pp. 217-256, p. 241.

<sup>227</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (1905 [1901]), in SE 7, pp. 1-122, p. 80.

correspond to something the child already knows, without knowing it. Through divination this unknown known is brought back and used to give meaning to the sound. This is done not just in relation to symbols, but through something innate, something mechanical that is not yet symbolised, that exceeds meaning in a strict sense. The sound is uncanny in that it is not known, it requires the child to divine something. It requires a giving of meaning to the sound. This opens up for an affective model of co-creation of a narrative that is already a part of hearing or seeing. The uncanny of Freud's early text contradicts the uncanny of his later years. In the earlier work, the uncanny sound requires meaning to be produced while the later text focuses on the breakdown of meaning. This is a difference in focus, as the production of meaning is actually a result of the breakdown of meaning. However, the earlier text helps us to see the uncanny as more than disrupting the narrative or the known. It is also a means to shape a narrative. In the early version of the uncanny, the child gives meaning by relating the noise to something already known without being understood. Through an act of divination, the child is not merely understanding what is going on in the parents' bedroom but the child is *creating* meaning to make sense of what is going on.

### **The mechanical within**

In the passage from 1905, Freud suggests that the uncanny sound reacts with something that 'lie within them ready to hand.' Here, the uncanny is given meaning through a connection with something that is already within, something innate, mechanical even. So what is this within, innate and mechanical in the child that the uncanny relates to and actualises? Innate and mechanical suggests that the child has an internal blueprint for comprehending the sexual meaning of the sounds. Nevertheless, the uncanny noise that the child has to translate is an excellent example of an enigmatic signifier. In Laplanche's model, the first uncanny message is implanted as a self and is only then able to function as this self. "The first, passive phase is, so to speak, the implanting, the first inscription of the enigmatic signifiers," and once this is achieved, the "second phase is bound to a reactualisation and reactivation of these signifiers, which are henceforth attacking internal ones," and causing the self to function



both as an object and as a subject with a will and direction.<sup>228</sup> This scene can be read along the lines of the distinction between gender and sexual difference developed in the present chapter. The child uses the rudimentary code of sexual difference to understand the gendered noise coming from next door. At once, this example illustrates the function of the encounter between a rudimentary code and a complex message with many layers, and undermines the neat separation into gender, sexual difference and *sexual* in the discussion above. The noise from next door must first of all be interpreted as having something to do with sexual difference before this code can even be used in an attempt to translate the complex message. In the neat model of anatomic difference as foundation for sexual difference, this connection is made logical, but in the quote from *Essays on Otherness*, there is no neat code to fall back on. Instead the original implantation was as enigmatic as any of the following. The distinction between gender and sexual difference can therefore not be based on an assumed codification of visual data, but must, as Butler has argued with her notion of melancholic gender, be installed through prohibition and foreclosure, with their origin in demands from the outside. This is then similar to the prescriptive gender in Laplanche's model and the distinction must perforce lie in the severity of prohibition rather than in any assumed model of sexual difference.

By contrast, Butler's model of melancholic foreclosure as the foundation of the gendered self contradicts her attempt to reformulate the psychoanalytical project by replacing Lacanian law with Foucauldian power. Foreclosure as a foundation of the self functions as an absolute prohibition rather than a regulating power. By using Laplanche's model of sexuality as the effect of a seduction, it is possible to theorise a sexuality that is initiated by both the norms and the unconscious desires of the surrounding world. While being wary of the anatomical narrative in Laplanche and Freud, Laplanche's model of an implanted self and an implanted unconscious allows for a sliding severity between the extremes of foreclosure and the fluid and contradictory enigmatic message from next door. The scene where the child hears noises from the bedroom is a version of this process as described by Laplanche. But as we have seen, the child (and the adults) is both active and passive in this

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<sup>228</sup> Laplanche, 1999, p. 132.

encounter with the enigmatic. The child is both having its self implanted and is deploying an already established self to interpret the enigmatic message. There is therefore an unbinding and a binding aspect to every encounter with an enigmatic message. The uncanny is both narrative and anti-narrative. The potentially traumatic effect of the message both threatens to destroy the stability of the self and to reinforce it, through the incorporation of the potentially traumatic into a narrative of the self.

As we have seen, in Marks's theorisation of haptic visuality, this visuality functions as a counter to the narrative aspect of visuality. The haptic disrupts or constructs an experience that is not narrative but nevertheless moves between the screen and the spectator, implementing the spectator and constructing a different temporality.

Bersani posited that the psychoanalytic notion of sexuality is disruptive of the narrativisation and thematisation of sexuality; at the same time, psychoanalysis is an attempt at narrativising and thematising this same sexuality. Reading Freud as an aesthetic text, Bersani argued that it hints at the disruptive while simultaneously covering it. "Freud's work is a special kind of esthetic text: it seeks to stabilize the perturbations of sexuality in a *theory about* the subversive, destabilizing effects of human sexuality on the human impulse to produce forms."<sup>229</sup> This splitting of the self makes sexuality possible. At the same time this origin of sexuality installs sexuality as a disruptive, splitting, shattering force, at least according to Bersani. Such a shattering works against narrativisation, thematisation and ultimately against the coherence of the ego. In Bersani's definition, art is the replication of the sexual as disruptive. "If the sexual is, at the most primitive level, the attempted replication of a shattering (or psychically traumatizing) pleasure, art ... is the attempted replication of that replication."<sup>230</sup> The enigmatic signifier is an effect of the erotisation that a child is unable to translate. As this process is not fully translated, Laplanche argues that the enigmatic signifier lies somewhere between the fantasy and the real, it is an undigestible nexus that forms the ego. Bersani formulates this as a process where the ego vampirises the world. "The ego is a collector who transports inert objects from the outside to the inside. Instead of desiring the world, the ego

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<sup>229</sup> Leo Bersani, 1986, p. 112.

<sup>230</sup> Bersani, 1986, p. 111.

vampirizes it.”<sup>231</sup> The ego is here the result of the shattering effect of sexuality, but it is also an attempt to narrativise, to contain this disruptiveness. The formation of a stable self and the porousness of this self are not mutually exclusive, but rather two aspects of the same process of making sense of the enigmatic, to create a narrative to give meaning to the unknown.

In an essay about the pleasure of pain and disgust, Avgi Saketopoulou recounts one of her patient’s experience of pleasure through disgust. Her patient had been approached in a bath house by a man the patient found repulsive, but the patient was also surprised to find that the abject stranger elicited his desire and the two ended up having sex, which gave the patient immense pleasure. To make sense of this story, Saketopoulou turns to Laplanche and Bersani to theorise pleasure and sexuality as an experience of shattering the ego. Saketopoulou suggests a reading of the formation of the ego as a function of the translation of enigmatic signifiers.

To this vast and unremitting array of uncanny transmissions that leak *out of the* caretaker and *into the* infant, Laplanche (1995) gave the name *implantation*. The infant is propelled to translate these implants in order to make sense of what radiates out toward her. The ego develops out of this translating process as an apparatus that constructs meaning and binds enigma.<sup>232</sup>

The ego in this quote is constructed as an ego of consciousness and rationality. By contrast, Laplanche’s concept of implantation accounts both for the translatable and the untranslatable. The ego that is the result of this process thus contains both conscious translations and unconscious failed translations — what Laplanche terms *das Andere*, or the alien thing inside us.<sup>233</sup> The enigma and the incomplete translation is crucial for Laplanche. The infant is unable to translate fully the messages from the adult, and they therefore remain as

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<sup>231</sup> Bersani, 1986, p. 95.

<sup>232</sup> Avgi Saketopoulou, ‘To Suffer Pleasure: The Shattering of the Ego as the Psychic Labor of Perverse Sexuality,’ in *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, Volume 15, 2015, Issue 4, pp. 254-268, p. 260.

<sup>233</sup> See Laplanche, 1999, p. 63, Laplanche distinguishes between *das Andere* as the thing in us (the unconscious) and the *der Andere* as the other that is the cause and origin of the alterity in our selves (see Laplanche, 1999, p. 72). This terminology is borrowed from Freud but I ascribe it to Laplanche as he adds a theoretical distinction between these terms that Freud does not.

enigmatic implantations. These implantations are the origin and the contents of the unconscious in Laplanche's theory. This notion of the unconscious is different from Lacan's unconscious, which is focused on language as a function of the big Other. "If, for my part, I speak rather of a 'message', this is for at least two well-defined reasons: *first*, the message can just as easily be non-verbal as verbal; for the baby it is principally non-verbal."<sup>234</sup>

Saketopoulou continues her explanation of her patient's pleasure by referring to Bersani's notion of a shattering of the ego.

When amplified, the interimplication of pleasure/pain can create an experience that leaves the subject "momentarily undone" (Bersani, 1986, p. 100). This unraveling of the self "disrupt[s] the ego's coherence and dissolve[s] its boundaries" (p. 101), an experience that Leo Bersani calls self-shattering. Bersani's arresting theoretical move parts ways with our traditional approach to productive psychic life as resting on integration and synthesis.<sup>235</sup>

This process was discussed above in terms of a binding and unbinding in relation to the difference between analytic work and therapeutic work in Laplanche's theory. As argued previously, it is a process that reveals the enigmatic other that had been implanted as well as the enigmatic nature of the message at hand. In itself, the message functions on the level of the symbolisable or understandable *and*, simultaneously, on a level that escapes meaning and forces us to grasp or divine the limitations of the self as a stable entity.

Gila Ashtor has argued against this conflation of the shattering encounter in the formation of the self and the experience of an encounter with the enigmatic. "Saketopoulou's grounding of 'excitement' in the early 'misalignment' confuses the *phenomenological*—that is, literal, felt, experience of 'excess' (pleasure/

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<sup>234</sup> Jean Laplanche, 'The Unfinished Copernican Revolution' in *Essays on Otherness*, 1999, p. 74, Laplanche here defines his difference from Lacan and Lacan's priority of language. The quote continues: "*Second*, emphasizing 'language' effaces the alterity of the other in favour of trans-individual structures." Laplanche's focus on message instead of language therefore emphasises a move away from meta-language to the reality of encounters with others.

<sup>235</sup> Saketopoulou, 2015, p. 262.

pain)—with the *structural*, psychic event of how drive-based sexuality develops.”<sup>236</sup>

I have argued, however, that for Laplanche, the ego is never finished. As we encounter enigmatic signifiers, or messages, we are forced to return to the translation process, to a turning back towards the self that founded the inner and the ego. By opening up for a non-melancholic formation of the self through a foreclosure/incorporation of a lost object, towards a masochistic formation of the self — as suggested by Laplanche — we can also account for an unfinished, uncontained self able to experience the shattering reformation of the itself in encounters with others, with *der Andere*. In short, Ashtor’s critique misses the point, where the self can still be undone by the phenomenological experience of an alterity.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have mapped out some discussions of the ‘feminine’ within psychoanalytic theory as well as some discussions within feminist and queer critiques of the ‘feminine’ within psychoanalytic theory. I have also pointed to some contradictory positions in Freud’s writing that cannot be explained as development of his theoretical or metapsychological apparatus, but rather the result of the enigmatic nature of sexual difference and its connection to the formation of the ego that he kept returning to without being able to give a final answer to. This navel of the dream of a stable sexual difference lead to productive moments that I have been working through, not in order to solve its enigmatic nature, but rather to reveal this enigmatic core. In my discussion of Irigaray’s and Butler’s usage of melancholia to understand ego formation and gender formation (or lack thereof), I have pointed out the productive aspects of Irigaray’s model of feminine melancholia as a model of gender incorporation that is open-ended and enigmatic in its formation. This has been contrasted with Butler’s model of melancholic heterosexuality and ensuing gender as a model of foreclosure and an attempt to explain or interpret rather than to leave the enigma of sexual difference open. However, my argument has been that melancholia by its nature acts as an ‘always already’ achieved identity and I

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<sup>236</sup> Gila Ashtor, ‘The Ideology of Transference: Laplanche and Affect Theory,’ in *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, Volume 9, 2018, Issue 2.

have argued for a return to the feminine and to the masochistic model of the feminine in order to model the failure of ego-formation and the failures to achieve stable gendered formations. In returning to the feminine, I do not wish to return to the notion of woman-as-passive — but rather to masochism as a method to deal with the overwhelming demands and the obfuscate nature of those demands on the self. Through a reading of Laplanche, I have challenged the Freudian narrative of development from a phallic to either a feminine/masochistic reversal of the sadist/phallic phase, or a continuation of the phallic/sadistic direction of sexuality. Laplanche instead emphasises the masochistic phase as prior to the sadistic/phallic phase, this is important to my argument that ego formation and the gendered self that the self is relating to has a universal masochistic aspect. The overwhelming and enigmatic demands on the child that does not yet know what is going on is a profound human experience and an experience that forms the porous relation between self and world and this is the foundation of the affective model of spectatorship that I will propose throughout this thesis as an alternative to the closed ego of melancholia and phallic *or* feminine ego formations.

## 2 Methodology: How to Read a Film?

*There can be no spectacle  
without an element of cruelty as  
the basis of every show.*

Antonin Artaud

*Theatre of Cruelty*

*[T]here is nothing like a little  
pain to bring us back to our  
senses*

Vivian Sobchack

*Carnal Thoughts*

François Ozon's film *A Summer Dress* (1996), is set in a lush landscape in the summer. Two young men are staying together in a cabin and as we encounter them, they are sunbathing wearing only speedo-style swimwear. After a brief argument, one of the young men leaves with his bike for the beach. The setting suggests summer holiday, simple lazy days and we follow young people in their physical prime. The scenes are limited in view, suggesting an intimacy and ignorance of the surrounding world and the problems the characters may face in their day to day lives outside of this idyllic setting. The only reference to the outside world is when one of the characters asks his lover to mind the neighbours. But we never see these neighbours. As spectators, we remain within the intimate world between the three characters of this film. The protagonist, Luc (Frédéric Mogenot) shares a summer house with the camp Sébastien. Their simple cabin is set in a green and lush surrounding, with a beach and a harbour within cycling distance. At the start of the film, Luc is annoyed by Sébastien's impromptu performance of a singalong to Sheila's *Bang Bang*. Luc tells Sébastien that he should stop playing his shit song and think of the neighbours. As Sébastien refuses to stop, Luc puts on some clothes and cycles to the beach where he goes for a swim. He is then approached by a young Spanish girl and he follows her to a wooded part of the beach to have

sex. On noticing that someone has taken his clothes, the Spanish girl offers him her dress, an offer he reluctantly accepts. We then see him cycling home, wind in his new dress, with a big smile. Once home, Luc passionately lets Sébastien fuck him on the kitchen counter. When Luc cycles to the harbour the following day to return the dress, he apologises for the tear in it and says he tried to fix it. Instead of taking the dress, the girl tells him to keep it, saying that he will probably have more use of it.

This fifteen-minute short film is told with a straight narrative, one event after the other, and with few clues about the reasoning behind the actions we see. The lack of back-story and contexts tempts the viewer to interpret the film, especially Luc's behaviour. It would be possible to see the smiling Luc on his way home in a dress as experiencing a liberating, cathartic, moment where the involuntary cross-dressing forces him to listen to Sébastien's words before he left — 'I don't give a shit about the neighbours.' And after this he can finally enjoy being fucked by his lover. The dress then becomes a symbol and it is true that Luc might need it more than the Spanish girl. In light of previous discussions, the crossdressing could be interpreted as an embrace of feminine/masochistic sexuality, Luc is markedly passive in both sexual encounters. He lets himself be seduced by the girl on the beach, and then by his lover once back in the cabin. The fluidity of Luc's sexuality is pointed out by Kate Ince (who seems to have mixed up the names of the characters in this quote), "in the course of a day, Sèbastien [sic] goes from 'gay', to 'straight', to 'gay' again."<sup>237</sup> I have previously mentioned Bersani and Dutoit's caution against what they call "to play the game of the enigmatic signifier."<sup>238</sup> Though I do not share their concern, and I have instead argued for an introduction of the enigmatic or the uncanny as a method to affectively experience a film and to become co-creator of the narrative of a film. However, I do share their reluctance to psychologise and to fill the gaps in a narrative with fixed meaning. As I made clear in my critique of McGowan, I wish to avoid what Vicky LeBeau has argued is one of the dangers of psychoanalytic theory when applied to cinema. "The same meaning and for everyone? The very idea of a typical dream, it seems is going to confirm the

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<sup>237</sup> Kate Ince, 'François Ozon's Cinema of Desire,' in *Five Directors: Auteurism from Assayas to Ozon*, 2008, p. 114.

<sup>238</sup> Bersani and Dutoit, 2004, p. 51.



suspicion that psychoanalysis imposes a master plot on its various subjects.”<sup>239</sup> However, while cautious of the risk of ossifying the enigmatic into specific meanings, I do not share Bersani and Dutoit’s reluctance to engage in speculative translation work on films. As I have argued, this continuous translation of works of art as a form of commentary does not necessarily close off meanings but can instead multiply meanings and my performative translations will aim to preserve the enigmatic navel of the dream rather than to cover it with set explanations. *A Summer Dress* is full of enigmatic signifiers, the dress being one of them. Thibaut Schilt points out that “[f]abrics in movement, like that undulating dress, occupy Ozon’s cinema nearly as much as characters themselves, fluttering in the light summer breeze, twirling to the sound of music, or brushing against luxurious marble floors.”<sup>240</sup> Schilt uses the example of the dress to paint a picture of a weave of desires and often contradictory themes in Ozon’s cinema, but also to argue for a non-metaphorical usage of textures and fabrics as a theme in his films.

*A Summer Dress* also uses dance and music — Sébastien’s performance at the beginning of the film is the catalyst of the ensuing narrative. He dances to *Bang Bang*, using his fingers to shoot Luc as he leaves for the beach. He sings along with Sheila about lost love and a childhood friend who left her love unrequited. Sébastien uses these words at once to chase away and perhaps to tell his lover that he is unable to receive his love because he cares too much about what the neighbours think. Even when reduced to what we see and what we hear, the enigmatic signifiers are there, demanding to be interpreted and, in the process, involving us in the film. The enigmatic is not only present in the assumed intent of characters or directors, but in the very fabric of the film.

When we engage with a film, we involve multiple registers; the associations from images, soundtrack, dialogue, background noise, clothes, the tonality and quality of the film stock or sensor used, and the editing, angles and quality of voices all pull us in different directions. A film must be experienced; a scene can be picked apart, its techniques can be analysed and described, but it cannot be re-presented to the reader through a text such as this, a reader has to experience the film directly. I have argued for the translatability of film, using

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<sup>239</sup> Vicky LeBeau, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Play of Shadows*, 2001, p. 74

<sup>240</sup> Thibaut Schilt, *François Ozon*, 2011, p. 2.

Benjamin's and Jakobson's models for translation as a form of commentary, yet at the centre of 'translatability' is the 'untranslatability' of any text or image. The punctum in Barthes's reading of photography escapes meaning. Yet it also produces meaning, and my ambition is to follow the meaning generated without laying claim to any truth about the film. My argument here is that even on the representational level, there is a selection and an interpretation at play. So the act of just seeing the film that Bersani and Dutoit suggest, is an evasive ideal that like the punctum exists outside culture, outside the text about a film. As a reader of this text, you are at least temporarily dependent on my description. It is not possible for me to quote a film the way I can quote another text. I can present still images, locutions from characters and I can tell you about the sound or the camera movements, but these are already interpretations, already translations. As I have argued, however, this act of translation is not merely an unfortunate aspect of this project, but it actualises the discrepancy and the escape from intelligibility that forces us to interpret, to translate and to move away from any fixed meanings. My limited descriptions, failures and misinterpretations, actualise the enigmatic signifier at play and the translation work that a film demands. At the same time, I am driven if not haunted by a demand to let the films speak in these texts, to let the language of the film transpire through my descriptions and I will try to give them voices that are distinct from my own argumentative voice throughout this thesis.

As noted in the introduction, Mulvey's early essay 'Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema' uses the distance between film and its commentary as a political tool, a means of destroying the pleasure that is made possible by a narcissistic, ego-centred enjoyment of cinema. "It is said that analysing pleasure, or beauty, destroys it. That is the intention of this article. The satisfaction and reinforcement of the ego that represent the high point of film history hitherto must be attacked."<sup>241</sup> Mulvey used the translation from film to text, and her analytical dissection of film, as a tool to undermine the ego-supporting pleasure that it may produce. Mulvey bases her argument on Lacan's early distinction between the imaginary and the symbolic and the valuation of the symbolic over the imaginary. In his seminars from the early 1950s, as well as in his essay 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function,' Lacan emphasises that it is

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<sup>241</sup> Mulvey, 2016 [1975], p. 713.

important for the analyst to move away from a narcissistic, ego-focused therapy by introducing the big Other as the incomplete symbolic order.<sup>242</sup> In *Seminar I*, Lacan distinguishes between empty speech (imaginary, narcissistic) and full speech (symbolic, introducing the lack of the Other). This focus on the gaze as a function of identification grounds Mulvey's model of the male gaze in an early usage of the gaze in Lacan's terminological development. In the early formulation of the mirror stage, the gaze functions to establish identification with the ideal image of the self. Later, this ideal self and the misrecognition with the image of the self (as we have seen in the section on the phallic above) leads Lacan to formulate the real as that failure to be whole around which the subject compulsively turns. The gaze in his later formulations becomes the reminder that the subject is on its own. "The horrible truth," according to Copjec's critique of early Lacanian film theory, "is that *the gaze does not see you*. So if you are looking for confirmation of the truth of your being or the clarity of your vision, you are on your own".<sup>243</sup> The gaze in this later formulation is thus not a sadistic, controlling look, but rather the reminder of the self's helplessness and its lostness in the world. The female object of heterosexual desire is not the reminder of lack and potential castration in Copjec's reading of Lacan, instead it is the gaze itself that reveals the self to be lacking. Mulvey's model of visual pleasure and the gaze as desiring and identification led to a number of critiques, from Judith Mayne's critique of the focus on the male gaze<sup>244</sup> and Mary Ann Doane's critique of the assumption of identity in Mulvey's model<sup>245</sup> to critiques of assumptions around female passivity in Mulvey's essay<sup>246</sup> as well as the

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<sup>242</sup> 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the / Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,' in *Écrits*, pp. 75-82. Dominiek Hoens and Ed Pluth divides Lacan's work into three periods: the imaginary (1936-1952), the symbolic (1953-1962) and the real (1963-1981) all dealing with the problem of closing off the symbolic, this closing off needs another register in order not to stop sliding and be locked into a determined meaning. See Dominiek Hoens and Ed Pluth 'The *Sinthome*: A New Way of Writing an Old Problem?' in *Re-inventing the Symptom: Essays on the Final Lacan*, 2002 pp. 1-18.

<sup>243</sup> Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists*, 1994 [2015], p. 36

<sup>244</sup> see Judith Mayne. 'The Woman at the Keyhole; Women's Cinema and Feminist Cinema,' in *New German Critique*. 1981 pp. 27-43.

<sup>245</sup> See Mary Ann Doane, 'Misrecognition and Identity,' in *Cine-Tracts*, 1980, pp. 25-32

<sup>246</sup> See Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory*, New York: Methuen, 1988

equation of pleasure and active gaze.<sup>247</sup> In a response to some of this critique. Mulvey has written that: "At the time," she "was interested in the relationship between the image of woman on the screen and the 'masculinisation' of the spectator position, regardless of the actual sex (or possible deviance) of any real live moviegoer."<sup>248</sup> In this defence, Mulvey focuses on Freud's metaphoric language of masculine libido in order to explain the assumption of a male gaze as the generalised spectator. In her 'Afterthoughts' essay, Mulvey addresses what she calls the "trans-sex identification" of the female spectator assuming the male pleasure of scopophilia<sup>249</sup> as well as the identification with a female protagonist who "temporarily accepts 'masculinisation' in memory of her 'active' phase."<sup>250</sup> These readings of the female spectator and the female protagonist, though they purport to separate the sex of the spectator from the Freudian metaphors of sexual desire, reinforce the sex of the spectator/protagonist by assigning qualitative difference to the male/female spectator and protagonist. Copjec's critique on the other hand ignores the consequences of the gendered metaphors in play in Freud's and Lacan's vocabulary. As I have shown already, while introducing the phallic and feminine metaphors, the alienation of the self from itself is given gendered meaning through the instalment of an ostensibly stable gender separation. I have also previously stated my intention to ground the vocabulary of this thesis in debates of exclusion/subjugation of women/the feminine as well as the queer/non-heterosexual. This is why I remain with the vocabulary of Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure' essay rather than her later attempt to undermine the binary structure of her argument in this early essay. Clifford T. Manlove has argued for a return to a Lacan closer to Copjec's reading in order to open up film readings to a potential for female agency in film.<sup>251</sup> Manlove, though critical of Mulvey's reading of Lacan and scopophilia, argues that her "thesis — that the pleasure found in one person gazing at another can be used

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<sup>247</sup> See Kaja Silverman, 'Masochism and Subjectivity' in *Framework*, 1980, pp. 2-9

<sup>248</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1946)' published in *Framework* in 1981, here quoted from *Visual and Other Pleasures*, 1989 [2009], p. 29

<sup>249</sup> Mulvey, 1989 [2009], p. 33

<sup>250</sup> Mulvey, 1989 [2009], p. 37

<sup>251</sup> See Clifford T. Manlove, 'Visual "Drive" and Cinematic Narrative: Reading Gaze Theory in Lacan, Hitchcock, and Mulvey' in *Cinema Journal*, 2007.

for power — has the potential for broad application despite the steady criticism and revision by many of her colleagues in feminist and film studies.”<sup>252</sup> I would like to extend this to take Mulvey’s as well as Irigaray’s challenge to the implicit and often explicit reference to gender difference and morphological differences in both Lacan and Freud very seriously.

My solution — rather than to gloss over the gendered metaphors of Lacan’s and Freud’s vocabulary — will be to explore a different source of pleasure in film, a pleasure that leaves the self open to affective engagements and goings astray. I have already discussed the masochistic model of returning to the self and of eroticising the discomfort of helplessness in the face of enigmatic demands. I also briefly discussed Studlar’s critique of Mulvey’s sadistic, scopophilic model and her own formulation of a masochistic spectatorship model. I mentioned that her model is heavily indebted to Deleuze and his male-centred reading of masochism. In response to this, Studlar has tried to develop a specific model for female masochism.<sup>253</sup> In this essay, Studlar points out a common problematic in the analysis of ‘women’s film’ and female masochistic characters: “Part of the confusion in film studies regarding female masochism may be the result of the feminine stereotypes that the perversion puts into play.” Studlar concludes that a “performance of dramatized powerlessness allows the masochistic female subject to use suffering and, in particular, suffering attached to ‘sacred’ aspects of femininity such as sexual purity as the deceptive cover for the exercise of forbidden powers — and pleasures.”<sup>254</sup> And indeed it becomes hard to distinguish between the masochistic woman character as performance with supposedly subversive effects and the submissive woman character who reenacts the subjugation of women. Kaja Silverman has argued that “it does seem to me that *pathological* masochism is almost by [its] very definition a male rather than a female phenomenon.”<sup>255</sup> Concluding that it “is an accepted — indeed a requisite — element of ‘normal’ female subjectivity, providing a crucial

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<sup>252</sup> Manlove, 2007, p. 103.

<sup>253</sup> See Studlar, ‘Masochistic Performance and Female Subjectivity in *Letter from an Unknown Woman*’ in *Cinema Journal*, 1994

<sup>254</sup> Studlar, 1994, p. 44

<sup>255</sup> Kaja Silverman, ‘Masochism and Male Subjectivity’ in *Camera Obscura*, 1988, p. 36

mechanism for eroticizing lack and subordination.”<sup>256</sup> So how are we to use masochism without falling into the trap of reproducing the feminine/perverse as subjugated/excluded? Silverman argues that her project is to bring “the male subject face to face with his desire for the father, as well as with the passivity and masochism that are both a part of this ‘normalcy,’ and a path leading elsewhere.”<sup>257</sup> After having assumed at the start of the essay that there is a “double nature of perversion, that we understand it as simultaneously a capitulation and a revolt.”<sup>258</sup> Male masochism thus has something of a revolt inherent in its perverse nature, despite being a passive perversion, submissive to the father by its very nature. However, while Silverman concludes that the gender reversal of masochism does not offer an escape from the symbolic order they are part of, she proposes that her essay is “less concerned with articulating new forms of male subjectivity than with complicating our understanding of the forms which it presently takes.”<sup>259</sup> In this thesis, my focus is not so much on the gender troubles of the late 1980s and their potentially subversive effects on the symbolic order. Instead, what I am concerned with is the affectability of the self, the possibility of going astray and what ultimately blocks this affectability and set limits to what can affect our selves. So rather than the subversive effects of gender displacements or the gender conformity of masochistic submissiveness, I am more interested in the porous nature of a self modelled on the masochistic return to self as opposed to the sadistic/phallic defence of self.

In Mulvey’s early model of scopophilic pleasure, narrative film functions on an imaginary level, offering pleasure through identification between the viewer and the characters. Through this identification, the object of desire (woman) becomes desirable through a narcissistic insulation through identification with the desiring position (man). In this logic, the man is the active, desiring subject, while woman remains the passive, desired object. For Mulvey, the way out of this deadlock — as for Lacan of the 1950s — is to introduce the Other. The act of analysis or interpretation introduces full speech as a step away from narcissistic pleasure, and the male/female, active/passive dichotomy that this

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<sup>256</sup> Silverman, 1988, p. 36

<sup>257</sup> Silverman, 1988, p. 59

<sup>258</sup> Silverman, 1988, p. 32

<sup>259</sup> Silverman, 1998, p. 62

relies on. Mulvey's understanding of film as imaginary, and as offering identification and narcissistic pleasure, follows an early focus on the visual aspect of cinema, as I have showed, André Bazin, Walter Benjamin and Roland Barthes all regarded films as the continuation of visual art and the preservation of time. Compared to texts, radio, records, even theatre, film offers moving images for consumption. Another early Lacanian film theorist, Christian Metz, focused his studies on the semiotics of film rather than its pleasures. Like Mulvey, he sees a tendency for film to lend itself to narcissistic pleasure rather than symbolic meaning, but rather than destroying this pleasure through analysing it, Metz is interested in transforming the method of seeing film. "Reduced to its most fundamental procedures, any psychoanalytic reflection on the cinema might be defined in Lacanian terms as an attempt to disengage the cinema-object from the imaginary and to win it for the symbolic, in the hope of extending the latter by a new province."<sup>260</sup> Metz's project is to open film to the study of meaning, semiotics, and to analyse film as a language or as a set of signifiers. This model is also grounded in a reading of early Lacan that focuses on a dialectics between the imaginary and the symbolic, and the importance of analytic work to interpret and translate to the symbolic to full speech. Though Metz articulates this in early Lacanian terminology, it is significant that he suggests *extending* the symbolic to a new province. Metz's proposed move is not one-directional but expands the symbolic towards the imaginary. Cinema is part of the imaginary, and Metz's project is to pull it towards the symbolic, but as an effect of this it is also a project to extend the symbolic. What Metz suggests is not a translation from imaginary to symbolic, but rather an exploration of a meeting point, a semiotic field, that is both symbolic and imaginary.

*A Summer Dress*, offers an abundance of pleasure for the spectator: from that of looking at two beautiful young men and a woman, to the joy of the main character as he is liberated by a dress, or the delight of a camp dance-show to the tune of *Bang Bang*. All set in a lush, summery environment that connotes summer holiday, lazy days by the beach and guilt-free sexual encounters. In line with Silverman's argument, the pleasures that this film offers to the spectator is not exclusively supportive or disruptive of an order, but is both disruptive *and* supportive. The question then becomes what is disrupted and

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<sup>260</sup> Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier*, 1982 [1977] p. 3.

what is supported in Ozon's cinema? And what methods are used to create these effects? This chapter will focus on models of spectatorship that will enable further explorations of these fields of tension, and to explore pleasure in film in a manner that is not reduced to the narcissistic pleasure of the ego in relation to the desired passive object. In this chapter I will investigate filmic pleasure along masochistic lines that blur, diffuse and expose passive/active dichotomies. I will also propose a reading of the meaning of film, or the language of film, through an exploration of Laplanche's seduction theory and translation of enigmatic signifiers. This theory sidesteps the hard lines in Lacan's model and returns to Freud, to explore the border spaces between language and the body. The methodology suggested for reading films is closely related to translation rather than textual analysis. These readings are suggested as a means of exploring Metz's extension of the symbolic without being hampered by Lacan's restrictive distinction between the symbolic, the imaginary and the real. They also constitute an attempt to discover the pleasure of film through a different path than the patriarchal model pointed out by Mulvey as well as the masochism suggested by Studlar. Sexuality and pleasure is not the prerogative of patriarchy or heterosexuality, and this exploration of pleasure as disruptive and as healing points to an aspect of queer theory that has opened up for sexual politics as embrace of pleasure. Third, this is also an attempt to explore the irreducibility of film to semiotics. Film as a medium is not only symbolic, it is also affective, involving emotions and sensations that are corporeal and not directly related to the multitudes of media being deployed. In order to discuss this aspect of film, I will turn to notions of haptic and corporeal cinema as further explorations of the body/language boundary.

### **The pleasure of the gaze**

In 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' Mulvey analyses the specific pleasures that narrative cinema offers for the viewer. She defines her subject of study only vaguely as "the Hollywood style ... (and of all the cinema which fell within its sphere of influence)"<sup>261</sup> On this basis Mulvey makes a number of claims and assumptions. These can be summed up as follows: (1) narrative

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<sup>261</sup> Mulvey, 2016 [1975], p. 713.



cinema relies on the same socially established interpretations of sexual difference as the subject looking at the film; (2) cinema is a system of representation and as such it reflects the unconscious as formed by the dominant order; (3) this dominant order is a heterosexual, patriarchal order whose language mainstream film adopts as a means of providing visual pleasure. Against this, Mulvey suggests using psychoanalytic theory to analyse this visual pleasure and the dominant order that has shaped the unconscious. "Psychoanalytic theory is thus appropriated here as a political weapon, demonstrating the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form."<sup>262</sup> In spite of this, Mulvey's arguments are not restricted to patriarchal forms or representations that are conveyed through mainstream film; she takes issue with all the "ease and plenitude of the narrative fiction film."<sup>263</sup> The simple pleasures that narrative, mainstream film offer are detrimental, according to Mulvey, not only because of their patriarchal forms, but also because of the simple plenitude of representations that feeds the ego of the viewer. "The satisfaction and reinforcement of the ego that represent the high point of film history hitherto must be attacked."<sup>264</sup> Mulvey's model of a straight, male gaze is complicated by a film such as *A Summer Dress*, where the male body is objectified and aestheticised as something pleasurable to the viewer. The Spanish woman's body is not used to the same extent to entice the viewer. Further, Luc is both the object of pleasure *and* the protagonist, both a source of identification and a source of desire.

This is reminiscent of Bersani's argument in 'Gay Betrayals,' where, as shown earlier, it is suggested that gay sociality questions the distinction between an object of desire and an object of identification, further undermining the stable self that was suggested in *The Freudian Body* and in 'Is the Rectum a Grave?'<sup>265</sup> This argument was first formulated by Bersani in *Homos* where he warns against a de-gaying of gayness.<sup>266</sup> In 'Gay Betrayals,' however, the focus is on a critique of identity politics that links back to Bersani's earlier readings of

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<sup>262</sup> Mulvey, 2016 [1975], p. 711.

<sup>263</sup> Mulvey, 2016 [1975], p. 713.

<sup>264</sup> Mulvey, 2016 [1975], p. 713.

<sup>265</sup> Both 'Is the Rectum a Grave?' and 'Gay Betrayals' are included in Bersani, 2009.

<sup>266</sup> See Bersani, 1996.

Freud and Laplanche to undermine the stability of the ego through readings of sexuality as a self-shattering experience. In 'Is the Rectum a Grave,' Bersani argues for a valuation of powerlessness as a means of moving away from phallogentrism, defined as pleasure derived from power.<sup>267</sup> Bersani links this argument with his postulate in *The Freudian Body*, namely that masochism is tautological to sexuality and that sexuality is inherently shattering because the masochistic aspect of turning away from a phallic position of power undermines the stability of the ego. By focusing on the shattering aspect of sexuality, Bersani formulates a critique of the kind of phallic pleasure identified by Mulvey. He suggests that scopophilic pleasure may not be sadistic or consuming of the female object, but that the pleasure derived come from undermining the phallic — in the sense of powerful and stable — self.

In this context, *A Summer Dress* can be read as a contradiction of Mulvey's structural assumptions, using similar tools to Bersani in order to undermine the stability of scopophilic pleasure and the object of this pleasure. This film offers different pleasures to the 'Hollywood style ... (and of all the cinema which fell within its sphere of influence).' Of course, this kind of exemption might lead to an argument, where any film that does not conform to the theory is simply not a part of the category under discussion. This would then fail to acknowledge *A Summer Dress* as a valid critique of Mulvey's assumptions about narrative cinema. I will instead argue that the pleasure available to the viewer in *A Summer Dress* does not contradict the pleasure in Mulvey's model, even if the objects and directions of the gaze are altered. *A Summer Dress* is not only a queer intervention against heterosexual assumptions, but the very embrace of spectatorial pleasure in this film challenges Mulvey's claim that spectatorial pleasure is necessarily supportive of a sadistic egoic formation. Luc's position is not only at once one of identification and desire for the spectator, but he is also markedly passive in his sexual encounters. Sébastien's initial performance of *Bang Bang* can be read as a failed attempt at seduction, on the beach, it is the Spanish girl who initiates the sexual encounter and finally, back in the cabin, it is Sébastien who is the active part. The masochistic pleasure on display, however, does not exclude agency, Luc decides with whom and when to have sex, contradicting not only Mulvey's model of sadistic/phallic desire, but also

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<sup>267</sup> See Bersani 'Is the Rectum a Grave?' included in Bersani 2009, p. 24.

Studlar's assumption of absolute passivity and submission in the masochistic position. *A Summer Dress* therefore offers a reading against the grain of the theoretical models so far presented.

## The spectatorship model

Mulvey's theory of the male gaze came out of a feminism that was critical of the ideological positioning of women as passive. At the same time, it was a theorisation of the pleasures of spectatorship as well as the insertion of sexual difference into film theory. As mentioned previously, this opens up for further differentiations as well as a problematisation of the pleasure and the active/passive dualism of her polemic essay.<sup>268</sup> Spectatorship-studies have taken up these aspects and developed more refined theories and models for understanding our pleasures and engagements with film, as well as the question of what a spectator actually is. Patrick Fuery points out that "the relationship between film and the spectator has become increasingly more complex in recent years."<sup>269</sup> This complexity is, according to Fuery, due to the "development of certain theoretical approaches which emphasise the role of the spectator as an active agent in the construction of the text, as well as a development of those theories that focus on positions of subjectivity and intersubjective processes."<sup>270</sup> Spectatorship models have become more complex as a result of the development of theories relating to the spectator as active *and* passive. The question raised by spectatorship theory is thus: what is the role of the spectator in *relation* to the film and its characters as well as in relation to the narrative arch, soundtrack, cinematography and the auteur — the (often invisible) presumed origin of the film. This is a move away from thinking about cinema as an ideological apparatus where the screen functions as a mirror for the viewer. This complexity has been described by Judith Mayne as the negotiation between an ideological subject and a viewer that is not engaged

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<sup>268</sup> See Michele Aaron, *Spectatorship: The Power of Looking on*, 2007, p. 24. An earlier formulation of a critique of sexual difference in Mulvey's approach to film theory was written by D. N Rodowick: 'The Difficulty of Difference' in *Wide Angle*, 1982, and further developed in *The Difficulty of Difference: Psychoanalysis, Sexual Difference, and Film Theory*, 1991.

<sup>269</sup> Patrick Fuery, *New Developments in Film Theory*, 2000, p. 24.

<sup>270</sup> Fuery, 2000, p. 24.

with the cinematic material on an ideological level. “I am opposing, in other words, the cinematic *subject* and the film *viewer* so as better to situate the *spectator* as a viewer who is and is not the cinematic subject, and as a subject who is and is not a film viewer.”<sup>271</sup> Mayne defines the purpose of her spectatorship model: “to understand the complicated ways in which meanings are both assigned and created.”<sup>272</sup> This model helps us to move away from Mulvey’s deterministic views of narrative cinema and the male gaze, and to develop a more critical engagement with her notions of the pleasure that narrative cinema offers and the productive and problematic usage of such pleasure.

In trying to define the spectator (as a function), Aaron re-reads cinematic theory to argue that the spectator “is born in the vanishing point generated by perspective, is summoned into hypothetical existence by the visual structure. What comes into being is the transcendent yet absent spectator — an illusion of agency indeed.”<sup>273</sup> The spectator is here assumed in the visual structure of the film. The spectator is not only the assumed point of view at the screen at any given moment, but it is the ‘visual structure’ that assumes the spectator. This visual structure consists of the combined scenes, their relation and the symbols that they contain and communicate to the hypothetical viewer. The spectator is thus not only the empirical viewer, but it becomes possible to analyse the spectator by attending to the ‘visual structure.’ Thus the spectator is in a hypothetical position. The abstraction of the spectator as a hypothetical position does not mean that the spectator becomes void of difference. In Aaron’s model, the spectator’s differentiation is a key aspect in a move away from a focus on the ultimate meaning or ideology of a film towards an interest in the various ways of seeing a film.

A major problem with the classical model and its assertion of a hypothetical all-inclusive spectator-subject, was its failure to address difference: how differences between spectators meant that there were different ways of experiencing film.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Judith Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship*, 1993, p. 36.

<sup>272</sup> Mayne, 1993, p. 81.

<sup>273</sup> Aaron, 2007, p. 10.

<sup>274</sup> Aaron, 2007, p. 24.

The spectator is a subject with an involvement, distance and critical engagement with various ideologies that the film may or may not engage with. Aaron argues that it is 'difference' that enables spectatorship theory to develop into a theory that does not predetermine the spectator or the effect the film will have on the spectator. Furthermore, Aaron states that the notion of difference became a part of spectatorship theory via Mulvey's insistence on "gender as primary theme within the debate on spectatorship, thereby prioritising the discussion of difference within the evolution of film studies."<sup>275</sup> Gender is therefore used as a tool or a vehicle for thinking about difference and this difference is the seed that breaks the monolithic aspect of apparatus theory. According to Aaron, this seed of difference is also what prompted a move away from psychoanalytic theory in spectator theory. Aaron's focus here is on the link between passivity and femininity that is inherent in some psychoanalytic work. Mulvey uses this link to analyse the activity and passivity of female and male characters and the activity of the male gaze. In her model, this gaze requires the male character in a film to serve as a mirror to desire the female, passive, object that are assumed in psychoanalytic theory. Aaron's point is that once these theories were opened to difference, they outgrew the reductionist readings rooted in psychoanalytic theory.

As the female spectator emerged as a contradictory figure grounded in the complexities of her social formation which were articulated on-screen and lived off-screen, the psychoanalytic model of spectatorship ceased to be an adequate or accurate means of understanding her.<sup>276</sup>

Aaron suggests a reading of Mulvey (and of psychoanalysis in general) as a dual, either/or, model of two sexes. The problems of this model are brought out by the complexity of the female gaze that is active as well as passive, together with passive or active female and male characters on screen.

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<sup>275</sup> Aaron, 2007, p. 24.

<sup>276</sup> Aaron, 2007, p. 43.

## The pleasure of the spectator

Where Mulvey was openly critical of the pleasures of looking, Aaron argues that pleasure can be a disruptive force. “Spectatorial pleasure, or rather the passion, desires and fantasies that underpin it, evidences the prevalence and pull of illicit or unspoken or unconscious responses to film.”<sup>277</sup> This difference is related to the ways Aaron and Mulvey assign pleasure. For Mulvey, the pleasure of the male gaze is problematic as it reinforces the active, desiring male subject while the female object is the passive cause of pleasure. Aaron, instead, sees pleasure as a complex result of both passivity and activity. To make this argument, Aaron refers to Deleuze’s critique of Freud’s theories of masochism and sadism. The masochist, in Aaron’s argument, is not passive, but is instead a part of the creation of pleasure; the masochistic spectator is willingly entering a masochistic relation with the film. The delay of pleasure is enhancing the pleasure of the spectator and as such Aaron is complicating the model of the passive, masochistic, female object of the sadistic, male, active protagonist and spectator.

What Freud suggests is that the pleasure of recovery is not only experienced through the pain of loss, but is actually *increased* by it. The unpleasure is temporary and necessary for the greater pleasure to be experienced; it is an essential part of the achievement of joy. This is a crucial point, confirming a conservative paradigm for this behaviour: the indulgence in loss for the enhancement of the later gain.<sup>278</sup>

In this reading of masochist pleasure, the delay of pleasure is key, rather than the pain that may be caused by what is seen. The pleasure of delay is expanded to any form of suspense, becoming a key ingredient in any narrative. “Suspense, then, further normalises or popularises masochism; it gives masochism a (narrative) method.”<sup>279</sup> This narrative method engages the viewer in a consensual relation with the film, where a certain level of pain is assumed and required. “In other words, spectatorship is characterised by complicity even

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<sup>277</sup> Aaron, 2007, p. 48.

<sup>278</sup> Aaron, 2007, p. 54f.

<sup>279</sup> Aaron, 2007, p. 71.

though it depends upon its suppression for its smooth running.”<sup>280</sup> This Deleuzian notion of masochism as delayed pleasure and its relation to the idealised mother stands in contrast to the notion of masochistic pleasure developed by Laplanche as a result of the ‘fundamental anthropological situation’ that assumes the not-yet-consensual relation. “With the philosophers, we remain stuck in the adult-adult relation,”<sup>281</sup> a relation that assumes reciprocity and at least potential equality. Aaron’s attempt to destabilise the male/female and active/passive dualities through the use of pleasure in opposition to Mulvey opens up a reading of the pleasures of narrative film as a critical device. This also allows for a reading of pleasure and the denial of pleasure through narrative devices as critical engagements with notions of sex, gender and sexual difference. In Mulvey’s account of visual pleasure, the spectator identifies with the active protagonist in order to desire the passive object. Aaron’s move is to complicate these positions and the assumed active/passive positions both on and off screen, as well as the male/female divide on and off screen.

In both these theories, the spectator is presumed to identify and desire objects on screen, yet Aaron adds a separate desire to know in relation to the narration and the displacement of pleasure as a function of suspense. Aaron suggests the possibility of unspoken or unconscious responses to film as aligned with her notion of a pleasure that is not necessarily reproductive of the ideological order within which a film has been produced.

## **The body and the screen**

Laura U. Marks argues that there are aspects of images that cannot be understood purely visually. These aspects encourage viewers to engage through memory and as embodied beings in the world. An image can be more corporeal than optic. Accordingly, Marks defines two categories of vision: the optical and the haptic. Haptic visuality can be caused by the quality of an image as well as by the state of the viewer. A haptic image is an image that does not

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<sup>280</sup> Aaron, 2007, p. 91.

<sup>281</sup> Laplanche, ‘Starting from the Fundamental Anthropological Situation’ included in *Freud and the Sexual*, 2011, p. 101.

allow for identification. This can be because we are too close to perceive an object, or the image is blurred or has some other qualities that refuses a visual understanding of what is seen. “Haptic cinema does not invite identification with a figure — a sensory-motor reaction — so much as it encourages a bodily relationship between the viewer and the image.”<sup>282</sup> This closeness to the perceived is not a function of the narrative, but of visual itself. “The haptic image forces the viewer to contemplate the image itself instead of being pulled into narrative.”<sup>283</sup> This haptic aspect is thus at once a closeness of the viewer and the viewed *and* a distance from the message of the cinematic. Viewers are pulled in close, but also left to their viewer’s own references for understanding. “Haptic visuality requires the viewer to work to constitute the image, to bring it forth from latency.”<sup>284</sup> Such a bringing forth from latency requires a process of decoding or translation. “Objects, bodies, and intangible things hold histories within them that can be translated only imperfectly.”<sup>285</sup> Therefore, Marks’s embodied optics cannot be reduced to a straightforward identification with one of the objects on the screen. Instead this model includes the body in a process of interpreting an object that is not simply reducible to an object. Marks argues that “it is not proper to speak of the *object* of a haptic look as to speak of a dynamic subjectivity between looker and image.”<sup>286</sup> The haptic relation does not allow for the distance required for a subject-object relation, instead the subject is displaced in the image and the image becomes a part of a tactile being of the body.

The haptic image as a carrier of meaning, yet simultaneously as an impression without meaning, is reminiscent of Laplanche’s notion of the message and the translation of the enigmatic signifier. The affective response does not entail identification or symbolisation, but a process of translating, of divining meaning. The image that is too close, that cannot be understood, is taken in and attached to the affect it evokes. As such the image/message carries something un-translated and un-translatable into the self. Here then, is a link between

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<sup>282</sup> Marks, 2000, p. 164.

<sup>283</sup> Marks, 2000, p. 163.

<sup>284</sup> Marks, 2000, p. 183.

<sup>285</sup> Marks, 2000, p. 131.

<sup>286</sup> Marks, 2000, p. 164.



phenomenological affect theory and psychoanalytic theory of how the self is constructed.

## Feeling the screen

Haptic cinema has been posited as a means of achieving an embodiment of the spectator and of the screen. Lucy Bolton argues that “by factoring the body into the cinematic experience one can mimic the specular spectator, but highlight the realm of embodiment.”<sup>287</sup> By mimicking the specular spectator, Bolton argues that haptic cinema can deploy a strategy both imitating *and* subverting the spectatorial pleasures identified and criticised by Mulvey. Bolton argues that “mimesis is a strategic way of operating outside of patriarchal discourse in order to render the feminine visible”<sup>288</sup> by inserting an embodied identification between spectator and screen. Bolton’s suggestion include using silence and pauses to enable an embodied identification between spectator and character.

So, silence and pauses, as opposed to dialogue, could convey interiority without perhaps requiring obvious articulation or representation: just as the spectator watches in silence, so they witness the woman on-screen experiencing self-reflection and repose.<sup>289</sup>

Another means of making the audience feel is through a more brutal, infliction of pain. As already noted, Sobchack argues that “there is nothing like a little pain to bring us back to our senses,”<sup>290</sup> and away from metaphysical arguments. It is also a turn toward the affective, or what Ashtor called the phenomenological direct experience. In a similar vein, Martine Beugnet defines the haptic return of and to the senses as a move away from a detached gaze towards a feeling gaze that engages with the object as a body.

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<sup>287</sup> Lucy Bolton, *Film and Female Consciousness: Irigaray, Cinema and Thinking Women*, 2011, p. 42.

<sup>288</sup> Bolton, 2011, p. 42.

<sup>289</sup> Bolton, 2011, p. 51.

<sup>290</sup> Sobchack, 2004, p. 167.

A haptic regime of visuality implies a process of acquiring knowledge that is not synonymous with a detached, scientific gaze, but, on the contrary, is rooted in a sensual engagement with its object: a process of understanding that calls for a yielding into the object.<sup>291</sup>

Beugnet describes a displacement that takes place between the viewer and the character in haptic cinema. This implies not only an embodied identification, but also a slippage or a disruption of the division between these two sides. In *Cinema and Sensation*, Beugnet has further argued for a return to the materiality of films and the thinking of films in their own medium and away from methodologies that seek only to confirm the theories they are based on. “Indeed, the analysis of the films proper (all questions pertaining to the materiality and the aesthetic dimension of the works), left out of the main agenda, often appears as a mere by-product and process of verification of these chief methodologies.”<sup>292</sup> By returning to the materiality and the haptic aspect of film, there is an attempt to place focus on the filmic rather than on film theory as theory about film.

In Bettina Papenburg’s contribution to *Carnal Aesthetics*, she argues for the grotesque as a means of breaking down the divide between spectator and character, by breaking down the unity of the character:

In my adaptation of Mikhail Bakhtin’s work, the concept of ‘the grotesque’ refers to the subversive use of the body to pose a challenge to existing power constellations by drawing on tropes of excess, inversion and transgression as well as by resisting fixed form, completion and closure.<sup>293</sup>

This is further echoed by Patricia MacCormack’s development of mucosal spectatorship, where the un-contained offers the possibility of transformation and a limitless identification. “Mucosal spectatorship implies the spectator’s

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<sup>291</sup> Martine Beugnet, ‘Tactile Visions: From Embodied to Encoded Love,’ in *Carnal Aesthetics: Transgressive Imagery and Feminist Politics*, 2013, p. 181.

<sup>292</sup> Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression*, 2007, p. 28

<sup>293</sup> Bettina Papenburg, ‘Grotesque Sensations: Carnivalising the Sensorium in the Art of Wangechi Mutu,’ in *Carnal Aesthetics*, 2013, p. 158.

ethical responsibility is to be open to the creative intimacy of mucosal relations, that is open to transformation without intent.”<sup>294</sup> These developments of an incorporated spectatorship that defies the split or duality between the spectator and the screen borrow from, but are not confined to, Marks’s interest in a cinematic language that transcends cultural and linguistic confines. Both Sobchack’s essays on carnal aesthetics and Marks’s essay on haptic cinema tend to use a terminology from phenomenology and they focus on the limitations of the body and the interconnections of our senses without developing a notion of the self or an inner. How can we translate the affective, phenomenological concepts of haptic visuality and mimesis to a psychoanalytic context?

As mentioned before, Marks hints at a possible usage of the mother-infant relation to understand haptic concepts in a psychoanalytic vocabulary. This suggestion is developed by Griselda Pollock via Ettinger’s concept of the matrixial to understand dynamic differentiations that does not follow a phallic either/or logic. On this basis she argues that difference of/from the feminine is distinct from a phallic differentiation.

We need to imagine a non-derivative, originary *sexual difference of/from the feminine*, a possibility which Lacan intuited when he acknowledged a psycho-symbolic dimension ‘beyond the phallus’, that is a psychic dimension not organised by the unique phallic signifier tracing the signifying field by means of a binary logic plus/minus, presence/absence.<sup>295</sup>

Pollock here bridges the gap between phenomenology as informed by Merleau-Ponty and a phallogocentric psychoanalysis. This development of a ‘psycho-symbolic’ that is not under the sway of phallic logic is then deployed to understand carnal or mucosal aesthetics as “a *being with* the others whose traces are so delicately retrieved without repossession. The ‘being with’ of co-eventing is sustained without phallic closure.”<sup>296</sup> This bridge enables a

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<sup>294</sup> Patricia MacCormack, ‘Mucosal Monsters,’ in *Carnal Aesthetics*, 2013, p. 227.

<sup>295</sup> Griselda Pollock, ‘Trauma, Time and Painting: Bracha Ettinger and the Matrixial Aesthetics,’ in *Carnal Aesthetics*, 2013, p. 23.

<sup>296</sup> Pollock, 2013, p. 33.

psychoanalytic reading of the haptic in terms of identification and 'being with' as opposed to a phallic 'being through loss'.

## **The masochistic spectator**

In *A Child Is Being Beaten*, Freud defines the masochist position and the fantasy of being beaten as both the replacement for a denied genital relation and as an expression of the prohibition against this genital relation.

*It is not only the punishment for the forbidden genital relation, but also the regressive substitute for that relation, and from this latter source it derives the libidinal excitation which is from this time forward attached to it, and which finds its outlet in masturbatory acts. Here for the first time we have the essence of masochism.<sup>297</sup>*

The fantasy of being beaten by the father that has been displaced onto a generic father figure and a generic child, reveals, according to Freud, an underlying fantasy of having a genital relation with the father that is at the same time accepted as prohibited. This form of disavowal is reminiscent of the functioning of melancholia in Butler's model of the acquisition of gender and a self. There the loss of the object is denied through a process of incorporation as a part of or the foundation of the ego. A return to Freud's definition of masochism returns us to the father and away from the maternal relation. This contradicts Aaron's challenge of the male/sadistic gaze. It would also make it problematic to use masochism in relation to Pollock's usage of the matrixial and Marks's suggestion of the mother-infant relation as a model for haptic cinema. By linking masochistic fantasy with prohibition and punishment, Freud links it to the paternal law rather than a maternal function. However, in a later essay, *The Economic Problem of Masochism*, Freud returns to a definition of masochism as an inversion of sadism.

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<sup>297</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'A Child is Being Beaten' A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversions,' (1919) in SE 17, pp. 175-204, p. 189.

The libido has the task of making the destroying instinct innocuous, and it fulfils the task by diverting that instinct to a great extent outwards — soon with the help of a special organic system, the muscular apparatus — towards objects in the external world. The instinct is then called the destructive instinct, the instinct for mastery, or the will to power. A portion of the instinct is placed directly in the service of the sexual function, where it has an important part to play. This is sadism proper. Another portion does not share in this transposition outwards; it remains inside the organism and, with the help of the accompanying sexual excitation described above, becomes libidinally bound there. It is in this portion that we have to recognize the original, erotogenic masochism.<sup>298</sup>

Sadism is here defined as that part of the libido that is a destructive force used sexually as a means for domination and destruction. The masochistic function is a result of this destructive force not being directed outward, to an object, but instead being reverted inward, within the organism. Combined with the previous definition, this understanding of the masochistic function internalises the forbidden genital relation as a sadistic relation. The reversal of sadism onto the own self is the result of the sadistic relation with the object that is then internalised. Sadism is therefore directed against the self as an object in this version of masochism.

Laplanche's theory of seduction and of enigmatic messages reverses Freud's sequential description of sadism and masochism. For Laplanche, sexuality is always masochistic in its primary form as it is a result of a primary seduction or what he calls 'the fundamental anthropological situation' of being cared for and therefore being dependent on another.<sup>299</sup> The child does not divine the meaning of the sounds from the parents' bedroom based on a scripted instinct but as the result of a drive that has already been scripted through the introduction of enigmatic signifiers as already there. The child was first passive, being seduced, before becoming active. Laplanche offers us a means of connecting the strands of this chapter, the affective aspect of the divined that is not quite known but felt. This is like the message from the screen that makes us passive

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<sup>298</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'The Economic Problem of Masochism,' (1924) in SE 19, pp. 155-170, pp. 163-164.

<sup>299</sup> See Laplanche, 'Starting from the Fundamental Anthropological Situation' in *Freud and the Sexual: Essays 2000-2006*.

and active at the same time. Laplanche's model also offers us a way out of the narrow connotations of Lacan's usage of the symbolic and imaginary.<sup>300</sup>

To explain this *category of the message* I have often stressed the expression Freud uses to describe the primal data offered to the infant: i.e. that part of its experience which it has to master straight away, to order, to 'translate', so as to assimilate it to its own system.<sup>301</sup>

The message has to be translated into its own system, and it is the failures to do so that constitutes the unconscious in Laplanche's view. This perspective enables us to use a Freudian concept of masochism and sadism without giving up on the intimate and fluid differentiations that occur in the relation to the maternal or the parental before a symbolisation or a full development of the super-ego at the end of the Oedipal period.

The shattering of the self as argued for by Bersani and Saketopoulou can then be understood in line with this multitude of imagos. They entail identification and potential mimetic failures, as well as the potential for these to fall apart from time to time, a process that is linked to the structural aspect (to use Ashtor's terminology) of the formation of the self in Laplanche's theory. This would then allow us to understand the carnal or haptic cinematic experience as both affective and as formative and re-formative of the spectator. Such a work of translation is also applicable to the process of viewing a film that contains an excess of image, sound, meaning, symbolism and so forth, moving from the textuality of the film and its colouring via music and body language to verbal communication. These messages cannot ever be fully understood and should not be reduced to symbols with lexical meaning.

## Conclusion

In short, this chapter has been a defence of the pleasures of looking at films. Through theories of masochism it is possible to explore the potential pleasure of

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<sup>300</sup> I say connotations as I agree with Pollock's and Ettinger's suggestion that there is a hint at a symbolic that is not phallic in Lacan's later seminars, especially in his seminar on the *sinthome*.

<sup>301</sup> Laplanche, 1999, pp. 74-75.

spectatorship without the dualism of active/passive, male/female. Here pleasure, if not subversive in itself, is at least not suspicious in itself. I have also argued for an embodied and affective understanding of the spectator. In order to merge this with psychoanalytic theory, I have used Laplanche to develop Freudian and Lacanian concepts in relation to readings of films that are open to corporal and affective aspects. I have further argued that this pleasurable and embodied displacement of the 'I' can be analysed as masochistic pleasure. This is not only to be found in the delay of pleasure as a narrative device but through the displeasure of the bodily displacement of the self through carnal aesthetics, as well as through silences inviting an identification that is nevertheless not complete, opening up for tentative reflections about the inner lives of characters.

The pleasure through pain that I have discussed is the pain on display, but also the pain of losing oneself (or loosening the self?) in a story and becoming a part of something we do not control. Antonin Artaud argued that there "can be no spectacle without an element of cruelty as the basis of every show. In our present degenerative state, metaphysics must be made to enter the mind through the body."<sup>302</sup> The transformative aspect of Bersani and Saketopoulou's notion of the shattering ego relies on a shattered construction of the ego, as a mix of untranslated messages, imagos and failed identifications. Film, like other forms of art, can stir up this conglomeration and shatter the sense of a whole self. Bersani contrasts the effects of shattering the self with the effects of narrativisation and the systematisation of the knowledge about this shattering aspect. In this chapter I have argued that narrative is not opposed to shattering, but instead an aspect of the shattering. As spectators we are all the child in the room next door, trying to divine what is going on. As spectators we make meaning of the potentially shattering images or sounds, we produce the narrative that connects and makes sense of the enigmatic messages. To be a spectator is to be a translator, and this is the method of looking at films deployed in this thesis, to translate and to suggest what kind of spectator is produced through the work of translation initiated by films. As Freud mentioned, the uncanny message responds to something innate and mechanical, this innate and mechanical can be affective responses, but also translations into

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<sup>302</sup> Antonin Artaud, 'The Theatre of Cruelty - First Manifesto,' in *The Theatre and Its Double*, 2010 [1978], p. 70.

ideas. And these translations can shatter not only the self but the ideas that the self holds dear. And this is the method of enquiry that this thesis will deploy in its readings of films.

So far in this thesis, I have mapped out and engaged with theoretical debates around gender and sexual difference. These constitute the driving questions behind this thesis. I have argued for a reading of the feminine, of masochism and of melancholia as various ways of 'turning back' into and onto the self and thereby various ways for this self to be related to and formed through the implantation of something outer as something inner. This has been done under the title 'psychosocial' as defined in the preface. It has also been an attempt at defining the psychosocial as the various relations to a 'real' that is not reducible to the material effects of an outer world, but that exists in the often unconscious prescriptions of and by this outer world.

With the help of Laplanche and Bersani I have tied together models of foreclosure of desire (Butler) and of identification (Irigaray) into a model of masochism as a general turning back and as the formation of the self as well as a loss of self that forces the self to be reshaped. I have also used Mitchell to explore a model of foreclosure that is not necessarily phallic, but that can be the result of a prohibition against giving birth. I have pointed out and argued against the anatomical or biological leaps in Freud, Lacan and Laplanche; these leaps actually presume the sexed body that they set out to explain.

In the following chapters, the model of self-formation through implantations of gender and sexual difference developed so far will be brought to bear on a series of works of art. Films by Ozon will be analysed along lines of self-formation and dissolution in relation to gender and sexual difference. It should be pointed out, however, that this neat separation does not reflect the working process of this thesis. Ozon's films have been instrumental in reformulating my theoretical position on gender and sexual difference. This should be evident in the chapters to come, where the theories presented so far will be engaged with and reformulated by often unruly cinematic explorations of gender, desire, difference and similarities, often seducing the spectator into the passive position of the child hearing strange noises from another room. The thesis is divided in two parts, one theoretical and one where theory is put to work to understand not only theoretical notions of gender, but 'real' narratives, characters and images.



These resist, diversify and take the theory in other directions. Lebeau has pointed out the similarity of origins of psychoanalysis and cinema,<sup>303</sup> in the following chapters, the objective is not only to put psychoanalytic theory to work on film. The following chapters make psychoanalysis attend to what is on display. If psychoanalysis was born out of Freud's attempt to listen to the hysterics on display in Charcot's theatre, Ozon's films offer a means of unbinding the theoretical framework in which we try to understand them. If Freud "seeks to stabilize the perturbations of sexuality in a *theory about* the subversive,"<sup>304</sup> then the following readings are attempts at destabilising and highlighting the precarious aspects of expressions of gender and desire, whether these are found in works of art or in everyday life.

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<sup>303</sup> See Lebeau, 2001.

<sup>304</sup> Bersani, 1986, p. 112.

### 3 Ozon Behind the Scene: Origin of the Films

*[T]he birth of the reader must be ransomed by the death of the Author.*

Roland Barthes

*The Death of the Author*

The remainder of this thesis will focus on films by Ozon. In this chapter I will introduce Ozon's cinema as well as different voices on it, it will also introduce some of Ozon's own comments on his cinema, presenting Ozon as one of the interlocutors of his films. I will also raise the question of the *auteur* behind the film, both as a general question about who is behind a film and the more specific one about any subject behind or before a statement or message. To avoid what Metz calls the 'nosography' of the filmmaker,<sup>305</sup> this chapter will not focus on the biographical data of Ozon's life, and his own interpretations of the films under discussion will not be presented as truths or revealing intentions behind the films. The following readings of Ozon will focus on the films, on what they communicate and how they shape a potential viewer, rather than what might have been the intention behind the films and Ozon's own commentary will be one of the interpreters or translators of his films. I will start with an account and a discussion of some of Ozon's statements with regards to his work process and his method of making films as well as statements about his place in his generation of French directors. I will then go on to a more broad discussion of the *auteur* and the subject that speaks in order to link this to the underlying questions of self and masochism.

Films by Ozon have their own language and represent something unique both in French cinema and in world cinema. Ozon has been heralded as a gay

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<sup>305</sup> See Metz, 1982 [1977], pp. 24-27.

director amongst others in his generation.<sup>306</sup> Ozon also displays a characteristic refusal to remain within the confines of genres typical of French cinema.<sup>307</sup> It has even been posited that Ozon represents “France’s first mainstream queer *auteur*.”<sup>308</sup> From one perspective, therefore, Ozon can be understood as a very typical French director. His films are placed in the *auteur* tradition of artfully expressive films that resist genre restrictions — a category of films that tends to be premiered through state-sponsored funding in France. At the same time, however, Ozon’s films break with the mainstream French art house films of “either knowing cynicism or else saccharine, apolitical romanticism,”<sup>309</sup> a break that early on placed him within the so called ‘New French Extreme’.<sup>310</sup> This is another category that is both typically French and a departure from such typicality. Ozon has acknowledged links with some of his contemporary directors, a group lumped together as the ‘New French Extreme’. Saying that “It was in the U.S. that people made the connection between us,” conceding that “for all of us it was a way to show sexuality differently from the way that French cinema had done before. It was a way to break something.” And then he defines this new as: “We were able to mix pornography, in the case of Catherine Breillat, in very intellectual movies, and for Gaspar [No  ] and me, to make gore movies or B movies. It was something new in French cinema.”<sup>311</sup> Ozon here speculates on possible connections between his own cinema and those of his contemporary, after they had been lumped together. Ozon’s voice on his own cinema is reactive and interpretative of his own cinema, but also of the reason why his cinema might have been compared to that of Breillat and No  .

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<sup>306</sup> See Alex Hughes and James S. Williams, ‘Introduction’ in *Gender and French Cinema*, 2001, p. 7.

<sup>307</sup> See Colin Crisp, *Genre, Myth, and Convention in the French Cinema 1929–1939*, 2002.

<sup>308</sup> Ince, 2008, p. 113.

<sup>309</sup> Andrew Asibong, ‘Meat, Murder, Metamorphosis: The Transformational Ethics of Fran  ois Ozon’, in *French Studies*, 2005, Vol. LIX, No. 2, 203–215, p. 204.

<sup>310</sup> See James Quandt, ‘Flesh and Blood: Sex and Violence in Recent French Cinema’ included in *The New Extremism in Cinema: From France to Europe*, ed. Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall, 2011, pp. 18-25, first published in *Artforum*, 2004.

<sup>311</sup> From an interview with Robert Sklar, ‘Sex, Violence, and Power in the Family: An Interview with Fran  ois Ozon’ in *Cineaste*, Fall 2005, pp. 48-50, p. 49.

Ozon expands on his dismissal of what is considered good in the same interview: "I make a film a year. I need to follow my instincts, or my desire. If it's a failure, if it doesn't work, if it's a bad film, I don't really care about it. I'm in the tradition of [Rainer Werner] Fassbinder, of directors who like to work. If it's good, it's good. If it's not good, the next one will be good."<sup>312</sup> Ozon expresses a desire for work rather than for the result of his work. This attempt to follow his desire and his 'instincts' is grounded both in a love of working and not getting too distracted by the great narratives. "It's not good when, as a director, as an artist, you are thinking all the time, 'I should do that.'"<sup>313</sup> If we read 'instinct' and 'desire' along the lines of the discussion of Freud's uncanny and Laplanche's enigmatic signifier, Ozon's productivity and focus on work rather than perfection can be read as an attempt to express something that he is not able to verbalise or think through in any other form than film-making, through the work or technique of producing films. Though Ozon does not make this leap, I would like to suggest that we can read something into this description of his method and his attitude to work. If we return to Benjamin's distinction between work of art and translation as technical labour in line with commentary, then Ozon's approach to his work seems to be closer to that of commentator, implying a distance to his work. This distance is also implicit in his acceptance that not every film will be good. If we take this leap from Ozon's self-commentary, a commentary that, like Benjamin's translator is a statement after the fact, after the work has been done, then we can discern an attempt to dislodge the judgment of taste from the work of making a film. It should also be pointed out that much of Ozon's production functions as a commentary on previous film makers or previous film traditions, placing his films as comments or translations of previous work into his own specific views of cinema. In later chapters, I will argue that Ozon's characters are often trying to make sense of something enigmatic, either an outer event or loss, or their own desire. If we see this as more than a clever filmic trick to entice our interest, then his willingness to make 'B movies' can be read as an attempt to find something that is not yet articulated, something that will vanish once articulated.

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<sup>312</sup> Interview with Sklar, *Cineaste*, 2005, p. 49.

<sup>313</sup> Interview with Sklar, *Cineaste*, 2005, p. 49.

I will argue that, in line with the earlier chapters in this thesis, ‘instinctual’ and ‘desire’ can be brought to bear on Ozon in a very distinct way. As noted above, Asibong has argued that Ozon’s value comes from his refusal to pander to the saccharine, apolitical romanticism of French intellectual and cultural climate. Asibong argues that Ozon’s cinema “challenges — with a seriousness that is easy to miss beneath an often garish surface — the impasse of sheer indifference often claimed, or indeed championed, as an ineluctable consequence of the postmodern era.”<sup>314</sup> Asibong therefore regrets “that Ozon is not a ‘committed’ filmmaker.”<sup>315</sup> However, as I have implied so far in this chapter, and in line with my focus on the enigmatic aspect of the self, one of the values and the specific style of Ozon’s cinema, are the direct result of his lack of commitment. Ozon’s films are explorations without answers. Read along his refusal of the big narratives and his resistance towards seeing his film as a gay film, this reluctance against taking his films seriously, even at the level of them being good or bad, opens up for a work process that aims to dislocate the judgemental aspect of his work, opening up his work to a stream-of-consciousness method. Yet, it is obvious — as Asibong points out — that underneath the garish surface, these films do care for some of these great narratives and refuse the ‘sheer indifference’ of ‘the postmodern era’. It bears pointing out again that Ozon in no way should have the final say on his films, and though Ozon as interviewee and public persona may take on a role of camp irony in regards to his own films, I think it is a grave mistake to reduce his films to this posturing. My suggestion is instead to read these films as very serious attempts to achieve something that may not fit perfectly into the great narratives of gay or even queer film, to follow one’s desire and one’s instincts is a serious attempt to discover something through the work of cinema. When Ozon talked about his film *Young and Beautiful*, and the protagonist’s search for her own desire, he stated that he thinks and hopes that the film has asked more questions than it has answered.<sup>316</sup> My argument is that this is not merely a platitude or a selling point, but as a statement of intent. This is further evident in

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<sup>314</sup> Asibong, 2005, p. 204.

<sup>315</sup> Asibong, 2005, p. 215.

<sup>316</sup> See ‘Entretien avec François Ozon’ par Yves Alion, in *Dossier Jeune et Jolie*, *L’avant scène Cinéma* numero 605, septembre 2013, pp. 6-12, p. 9 “Je pense et je souhaite que *Jeune & Jolie* pose plus de questions qu’il n’apporte de réponses...”

Ozon's experimentation with the process of making films, inviting actors to take part in the creation of the narrative. This all hints at a seemingly lax attitude toward the end product, but I argue that it can also be read as a very serious attempt to bring out something that a strict, intellectual or preconceived idea would miss. Ozon's uncommittedness paired with a deep care for the work and pleasure of his films, is what makes them interesting and distinct from the traditions, genres and generations that he works in relation with. This reflects a will to articulate something that is inarticulable, to give voice and visibility to something that is not reducible to identity or sexual difference in the sense of 'this, therefore not that,' but to something that stirs the wonder of the child listening to the noise next door. By their form they also question if the parents know what they are doing in that room. The openness of his films invites the spectator to think but without giving clear answers. Ozon's cinema offers a unique opportunity not only to illustrate and merge the theories discussed so far, but they formulate a critical development of key problems within these theories.

It must be made absolutely clear here that Ozon's films have been instrumental in the development of my arguments. As mentioned in a previous chapter, at first I intended to use one of Ozon's films — *Young and Beautiful* — as a means of discussing gender in relation to Mitchell's model of the sibling relationship and the smallest of difference as a mode of relationality. But as I started working on Ozon's film, I found that it did more than to illustrate or make an argument more lucid. Instead, it resisted my initial argument and drove my model in a different and unexpected direction. In a sense, this resistance and productive engagement with a film is what has driven this chapter and so much of this thesis. Surprised to have been affected to such a degree, not only emotionally, but on the level of my text and my thinking about gender, I wanted to figure out how this had happened. This then led me to spectatorship theory and to questions of authorship and subjectivity that is so central to this chapter and that has informed so much of my thinking around gender and sexual difference. Ozon's films have enabled me to work through an initially muddled idea of the duality between rigid and mouldable aspects of gender. This has led me to reformulate sexual difference and gender as aspects of the formation of the self in the encounter with an other, together with a reformulation of passivity and activity as well as a means of thinking about femininity and the limitation of the specularisable self. These films have therefore had a key role in the production

and development of my theoretical bearings and my overall argument. It was in the meeting between theory and art that this thesis really took shape.

## The Father of the film

*8 Women* (2002) — further analysed in chapter 5 of this thesis — centres around a murder mystery where eight women find themselves isolated in a French mansion (the phone line is cut and the only car available is not working — faithful to the whodunnit genre). The only man in the house is found murdered early in the film, and the murderer is one of the women. Ozon had first wanted to remake George Cukor's *The Women* (1939) before finding the script for *8 Women* by Robert Thomas. Still, Ozon kept the glamorous, chaotic and staged form of Cukor's original film. As the women accuse each other, pry on and expose their inner secrets, their love for the dead man is revealed as built on sinister calculations and material needs. Meanwhile, desires between the women bloom. The full title of Cukor's film is *The Women (and it's all about men)*. In Ozon's hands this statement becomes a question. Even if the love of the one man in the script is put under scrutiny, in his absence he remains the driving force of the story. In an interview published the same year that *8 Women* was released, Ryan Gilbey asked Ozon about the absence of fathers in his films: "I think one day I will have to make a film about a father in which he is there for the whole film. But not for the moment. For the moment, I prefer the father away. Or dead."<sup>317</sup> In general, there is an absence of fathers in Ozon's works, but still fathers or father-figures tend to dominate the narrative and the characters of many of his films. Leading up to *8 Women*, feature films like *Sitcom* (1998), *Criminal Lovers* (1999) and *Water Drops on Burning Rocks* (2000) all feature dominating father figures. Of his feature-films it is only *See the Sea* (1997) and *Under the Sand* (2000) that do not have father figures as central narrative devices. *Under the Sand* revolves around a woman's denial of the loss of her husband who is markedly older than her, so it could be argued that he is a father-figure as well. Schilt talks about 'monstrous fathers' in some of these films. "At first glance these monstrous father figures might seem to

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<sup>317</sup> Gilbey, 'An Interview with François Ozon,' in *Projections 12*, 2002.

comprise a critique of the role of the patriarch within the Ozonian family.”<sup>318</sup> The father in *8 Women* is then described as a sadist who is tormenting his family. “Marcel, the unseen paterfamilias in *8 femmes*, though first assumed to be a victim of one of the eight women’s murderous scheme, is later revealed to be a sadistic manipulator and possibly incestuous father.”<sup>319</sup> This description of the paternal figure in *8 Women* is extended to Ozon himself by Asibong. Quoting an interview with Ozon where he discusses the project that will become *8 Women*, Asibong states that:

When discussing his early feelings about the projects that would become his film of *8 femmes*, Ozon mentions his childhood love of dolls and doll’s houses. The remark is potentially far more interesting than an amusingly camp gesture. It captures what is at stake in so many of Ozon’s films and happens merely to be exemplified in *8 femmes*: Ozon’s characters, along with the actors that play them, are so often puppet-like creatures in his doll-loving hands, sadistically prodded and pulled — rather like the dead parents of *Victor* [1993] — to perform whatever function the grown-up boy director wants to see enacted.<sup>320</sup>

Asibong’s conclusion here is a case of “to play the game of the enigmatic signifier.”<sup>321</sup> He psychologises not only the characters beyond what is actually present in the film but extends this psychologisation to the director behind the film. In contrast, in my critique of this reading of Ozon’s role in the film, I will avoid any speculations about Ozon’s psychology or intention behind the film. *8 Women* is full of references to film history as well as to the careers of the actors in the film, references that entice the viewer to speculate on meanings within and outside the film.<sup>322</sup> In the French New Wave, film-makers did not try to hide their background as film critics or their knowledge of film history. As such they often had characters comment on the filmic language used; they made films about the making of films and would often include cameras in specific shots.

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<sup>318</sup> Thibaut Schilt, *François Ozon*, 2011, p. 38.

<sup>319</sup> Schilt, 2011, p. 39.

<sup>320</sup> Asibong, 2008, p. 74.

<sup>321</sup> Bersani and Dutoit, *Forms of Being*, 2004, p. 51.

<sup>322</sup> For a collection of fan readings and discussions of *8 Women*, see Darren Waldron, “Une mine d’or inépuisable’: the queer pleasures of François Ozon’s *8 femmes/8 Women* (2002)’ in *Studies in French Cinema*, Volume 10 Number 1, 2010, pp. 69-82.



This dissolves the fiction of the film and reveals the construction of filmic pleasure and the fictitiousness of the story. Admittedly, Ozon is not as blatant as Jean-Luc Godard in his meta-commentary. Yet, there is a clear exposure of the filmic illusion in the form of borrowed scenes, theatrical sets, references to previous roles and actors looking directly into the camera, seemingly talking directly to us.

Ozon moves freely between genres, themes, settings and epochs, but some themes keep coming back. There is a recurrent fascination with families, both as violent structures and as porous and disintegrating constellations. Another theme is sensualism; Ozon's cinema often pursues pleasure, both between characters on screen and as a seduction of the spectator. Physical beauty is explored and dwelt upon through long shots of semi-nude, young bodies. This can be contrasted with a reluctance to dwell on scenes of ecstasy and sexual acts. The latter are often brief and quite uninteresting, something that is enforced by the lack of mutuality in scenes of sexual excitement. The failure or terror of families is contrasted by explorations of kinship relations outside the nuclear family. These relations are often transient, intergenerational and based on mutual hedonism. Kinship is not based on group belongings or political positionings, and do not offer any permanent escape from the haunting families to which they stand in contrast.

In films like *Swimming Pool* (2003), *Water Drops on Burning Rocks*, *Criminal Lovers* or *Victor*, Ozon explores intergenerational seductions where unequal relations are the ground for the possibility of liberating and/or consuming pleasures. By contrast, films such as *Angel* (2007) and *5x2* (2004) depict oppressive marriages that show the limitations of this pleasure in inequality. These last two films focus on heterosexual, passive-aggressive relations, while the films exploring pleasure in inequality are markedly non-heterosexual and openly non-monogamous. This does suggest a critique of the heterosexual couple trying but failing to conform to a monogamous ideal, spilling over into the micro-terror of the heterosexual family. Even if there is a critique of the heterosexual family in Ozon's cinema, obvious in films such as *Sitcom*, *8 Women* or *In the House* (2012), he does not offer any alternative to this constellation. Asibong argues that this is a development in Ozon's cinema of the

2000s,<sup>323</sup> however, Ozon's films never offered any stable alternative to the family. As I showed at the beginning of this chapter, when Ozon was speaking about *A Summer Dress*, he divulged an unwillingness to categorise his work as gay or as dealing with only gay themes. This reveals a reluctance to have his films used as political narratives with a solution. Ozon does not seem to be out to show an alternative to the heterosexual, bourgeoisie family or the micro violence and terror in this constellation. Instead, his films reveal lustful fairy-tale stories of pleasures without guilt. In an interview with Robert Sklar, Ozon explains that "[i]t's difficult to generalize from all of the characters, but I think that very often my characters are seeking the principle of pleasure, and they have to accept the principle of reality."<sup>324</sup> This reference to Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is, on one level, clear evidence of Ozon's engagement with psychoanalytic theory but also an endorsement of pleasure in his films. In contrasting the category of gay film and gay politics with the fairy-tale without guilt, Ozon implies that guilt-free pleasure is the ethical position of his films.

The pleasure pursued in *A Summer Dress* is remarkably fluid and refuses categorisations such as gay or straight. As mentioned earlier, Ince points out that the main character in *A Summer Dress* defies any stable definition of sexuality. The encounters in this film can be read as gay and straight, but this film is also about escaping self-imposed prohibitions from assumed neighbours, about crossdressing and the escapism made possible through a public display of traversing assumed norms. There is also an identification that is developed through the exchange of the dress between the protagonist and his female lover. All of these themes are present without becoming the main theme of the film. The moral of this story is not to be found in any of these interpretations or readings, but in the liberating joy of pleasure. Pleasure finds many different expressions and its forms are not what matters. There is no specific norm that is challenged, though a number are touched upon. Ince argues that Ozon is a queer film maker, quoting Butler and Tim Dean to argue that queer should be understood as a deconstruction of or critical distance from a heterosexual norm.

This is indeed a possible reading of Ozon's films. But based on my argument above, Ozon's film is not focusing on the norms that Luc is ascribing to his

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<sup>323</sup> See Asibong, 2008, p. 82.

<sup>324</sup> Sklar, 'An Interview with François Ozon' 2005, p. 50.

neighbours in order to justify his self-imposed prohibitions. This film can instead be read using a different definition of queer — one formulated by Teresa de Lauretis; in this, queer signifies a step away from social formations of lifestyle.<sup>325</sup> In this definition, queer is not only a critique of a norm, but an exploration of sexuality that is not defined by the social formations of gay, lesbian, bi- or heterosexual, but by an exploration of the cracks in the joints between these categories. As such, the category of queer, she suggests, names and enacts the dysfunctionality of these categories. This echoes Bersani's focus on sociality within gay communities as the critical aspect of these gay communities. By challenging the distinction between object of desire and object of identification, this sociality undermines the phallic, stable formation of self and identity, therefore undermining these in their formations. 'Queer' then becomes less of a maintaining a distance or a critical view of the norms, and more about exploring those norms for the surplus pleasures that they might produce. Read from this perspective, Ozon's short film is a queer celebration of the pleasure of transgression and the transgression of pleasure, enacting norms as tools rather than suggesting an escape from them. Luc is not freed through a coming out process or through finding a new community, but by finding the joy and pleasure of transgression. This transgression is dependent on the norms but does not cancel them. To use Ozon's statement above, Luc escapes the reality principle that has hindered his pleasure and finds the transgression as a further source of pleasure.

## **And the Author of the film**

What does it mean that a film is *by* Ozon? The beginning of an answer may be based on André Bazin and Alexandre Astruc's theorisation of what distinguishes films from other media, and their search for an origin or an auteur of the film. In the process, Astruc coined the expression *caméra-stylo* to describe the notion of a hand and an auteur that stands behind the narrative, like the author behind the book. Bazin and Astruc argued that this origin is not the writer of the script, as this is only the bare structure from which a film is made. The cinematic work comes after the writing of dialogue. The director was instead hailed as the

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<sup>325</sup> Teresa de Lauretis, 'Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities' in *differences*, Vol 3, no. 2, 1991, p. iii.

origin, as the *auteur* with the overall view. Using the French term *auteur*, Andrew Sarris introduced these theories to the American context through his recurrent movie reviews in the *Village Voice* from the 1960s. This terminology has given rise to *auteur theory*. In French, *auteur* is the equivalent to author, but it also has a wider meaning of origin and intent behind any act. An *auteur* can be the *auteur* of theft or the *auteur* of a discovery.<sup>326</sup> This wider meaning is lost if we translate *auteur* to author, an *auteur* can be the origin and intent in a way that does not imply origin like we assume origin in the author of a text. The *auteur* is not in charge of every aspect of the process of making a film, but the idea and the end product is influenced by the *auteur* to a degree that we can say that the director intentions the film. From this perspective, the phrase *films by Ozon* makes sense and this is often how we regard films; we talk about the development of this or that director. Even when we deal with directors who change genre for every film they make, we look for and we often find links, techniques, angles, colour palettes, choice of music, of actors or subtle aspects such as textures, tonality or a feeling invoked by their various films.

Not long after the invention of the *auteur* to describe a director, the notion of the author came into question in contemporary literary and linguistic theory. Barthes famously declared the author dead in an essay from 1967. His argument was that the author was “the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology, which has attached the greatest importance to the 'person' of the author.”<sup>327</sup> This interest in the author’s person is challenged by Barthes’s claim that “it is language which speaks, not the author”.<sup>328</sup> This claim has become a shorthand for many different schools of thought around this time. Influenced by “Russian Formalism and the New Criticism, anti-authorialism appeared as a reaction to biographical positivism.”<sup>329</sup> The aim — according to Burke — was not removing the author, the author was simply overlooked in favour of the text. “The *death* or

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<sup>326</sup> These examples are borrowed from *Larousse Dictionnaire*: “*L’auteur d’une découverte* (= découvreur). *La police recherche les auteurs du vol* (= les voleurs)” “The *auteur* of a discovery (=discoverer). The police are looking for the *auteurs* of the theft (= the thieves).

<sup>327</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author,’ first published in *Aspen* 1967 here quoted from *Image Music Text*, 1977. p. 143.

<sup>328</sup> Barthes, 1977 [1967], p. 143.

<sup>329</sup> Seán Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*, 1992, p. 15.

*disappearance* of the author was not at issue but rather the incompatibility of authorial categories with immanent analyses.”<sup>330</sup> Lacan often repeated that it is language that speaks us, the subject being the effect of language, not the other way around. In contemporary feminist and queer theory, this notion is notably maintained through Butler, in her theories of the performative. Butler argues that “[c]onsidered grammatically, it will seem that there must first be a subject who turns back on itself, yet I will argue that there is no subject except as a consequence of this very reflexivity.”<sup>331</sup> Aspects of this has been discussed in earlier chapters and I have linked this with Butler’s model of melancholia and the problem of agency in general. As neither Lacan, nor Butler approaches the subject from a literary or filmic perspective, I will return to Barthes to explore his critique of the author as the origin of the message.

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author- God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.<sup>332</sup>

Barthes argues that the author is displaced through the complexity of the text that is written, as the text does not have one single origin or preexisting purpose. Instead the text consists of a multitude of different sources and purposes. These are not original, they do not originate in the author, but rather in the language that the author uses. How does this translate to a director as auteur? A film clearly does not have one single origin, there is the script writer, the cinematographer, the actors, the colourists, the set designers, the costume designers, the light technicians, the producers, and so forth. The auteur of a film is not just producing a tissue of citations or relying on a capitalist ideology that raises the importance of the individual behind the text. Behind a film there are a number of subjects that are created by their actions. Rather than a single origin, the director instead functions as a coordinator, a point where individual performances are organised to enable an end product. The director is no longer

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<sup>330</sup> Burke, 1992, p. 16.

<sup>331</sup> Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 1997, p. 68.

<sup>332</sup> Barthes, 1977 [1967], p. 146.

an absolute origin, the author as coordinator is not the same as the 'Author-God' whom Barthes rallies against, the coordinator/manager is a part of a different capitalist ideology. One that is perhaps more capitalist than the Author-God, who can be read as a reminiscence of an aristocratic or *ancien régime* focus on the king or God, rather than the capitalist coordination of labour forces. Barthes suggests that the reader should take the place of the author as the object of study. This is of course in line with the spectatorship model that was developed in the previous chapter. In Barthes's defence of the spectator/reader, there is a focus on the reader and reading but also on the author as a reader. Barthes argues that "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" and this destination "is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted."<sup>333</sup> Here, the reader is not a person, the reader does not have a biography, a psychology or history. Instead, the reader emerges as an ideal and idealised receiver, the empty placeholder that the text is directed towards and who is assumed as its recipient.

Barthes concludes his essay with the statement that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author."<sup>334</sup> The abstract reader, when defined as the ideal point at which 'all the paths of the texts' is 'constituted,' resembles the Author who has been pronounced dead in that they are both ideal positions that constitute the text. The notion of an origin, of an intent behind the act of writing seems necessary in order to give meaning to a text. To reverse this and let the notion of a reader give meaning to a text may solve the temporal problem of the subject as a result of the text, but the idealised reader is no longer a subject. Deprived of history, biography or psychology, there is no subject left, only an empty placeholder to give meaning to a text. As already noted, Aaron defines this in relation to film and spectatorship as the spectator being the result of an implicit point of perspective assumed by the film. "The spectator is born in the vanishing point generated by perspective, is summoned into hypothetical existence by the visual structure."<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Barthes, 1977 [1967], p. 148.

<sup>334</sup> Barthes, 1977 [1967], p. 148.

<sup>335</sup> Aaron, 2007, p. 10.

Returning to the phrase *films by Ozon*, the films are here given meaning in relation to the name — Ozon — and the *by* links the films to a subject, or is it rather an empty placeholder? Like Barthes's reader, does the name Ozon have a history, biography or psychology? Or is Ozon in this sentence just a construction or a sum of the various readings by readers? Metz warns against psychoanalytic interest in the maker behind the film as psychoanalytic nosography, where the maker is analysed either for a pathology or for a psychology.<sup>336</sup> This is what Bersani and Dutoit calls psychologisation of either characters in the film or the auteur behind the film. In order to avoid this pitfall and recognising that the reasons 'behind' actions, whether by fictive characters, auteurs or writers, will remain enigmatic and outside our reach, I argue that we instead reverse the notion of the spectator. In this definition, the spectator is the sum of perspectives that merge into an assumed spectatorial position, which include the assumed origins of the narrative. Just as this perspective assumes a hypothetical reader/spectator, it also assumes a maker/author.

The phrase *films by Ozon*, does not, then, serve only to delineate and define a subcategory of the category 'film', but also to define the name on the other side of the 'by'. The 'by' is thus turned to define the assumed and hypothetical origin or maker behind the film. Just like the reader in Barthes's essay, the maker here lacks history, biography and psychology. History only exists between films; bibliography replaces biography; psychology is replaced by meaning within and between films or texts. Any meaning that is assigned to Ozon in the following discussion is thus only tentative, hypothetical and most importantly, has no claims as to the wishes, wills or ambitions of the actual person Ozon, even when Ozon's own readings of his films are presented, these are read as readings after the fact with no absolute knowledge. Like the father in *8 Women*, Ozon is at once absent and present in his films, but unlike Asibong, I read the father's haunting absence not as an incarnation of Ozon as the master manipulator but instead as a comment on the haunting absence/centrality of the auteur as an empty placeholder assumed to be 'behind' the film.

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<sup>336</sup> See Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, 1982 [1977], pp. 24-27.

## Voices on Ozon

To date there are three published monographs on Ozon, one by Asibong from 2008, one by Schilt from 2011 and a third by Boyd van Hoeij that had been scheduled to be released in March 2019.<sup>337</sup> Alice Stanley has also written an unpublished doctoral thesis about Ozon's cinema.<sup>338</sup> Notable articles relating to his development or genre placement are James Quandt's 'Flesh and Blood' and Frédéric Bonnaud's 'François Ozon: Wannabe Auteur Makes Good.'<sup>339</sup> In Quandt's essay on what he names the French Extreme, Ozon's films are briefly mentioned. Quandt argues that "[t]he critic truffle-snuffing for trends might call it the New French Extremity,"<sup>340</sup> thus grouping a number of French directors together to point out a trend towards the violent and extreme in their films. "Ozon's first feature, the suspense thriller *See the Sea* (1997), alternates oblique terror with shock shots — of a toothbrush dipped in a shit-filled toilet or the subliminal suggestion of a sutured vagina."<sup>341</sup> After this judgement, Quandt goes on to point out a development of Ozon's cinema, away from the shocking and gory, to a more mature expression.

Ozon has since matured — e.g., the classical, contained *Under the Sand* (2000), starring an exquisitely anguished Charlotte Rampling — but on the nascent enfant terrible whose every kink was calculated (especially in the screeching satire of *Sitcom*), morality seemed a canard, a pretext for provocation.<sup>342</sup>

Quandt values this difference as a development from a childish, nascent, *enfant terrible*, who was calculating provocations to a mature, classical, contained,

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<sup>337</sup> Andrew Asibong, *François Ozon*, 2008; Thibaut Schilt, *François Ozon*, 2011; Boyd van Hoeij, *The Cinema of Francois Ozon: Exquisite Transgressions* (Directors' Cuts), forthcoming.

<sup>338</sup> Alice Stanley, *Representations of Sexuality in the Films of François Ozon*, University of Warwick, Department of French Studies, 2009.

<sup>339</sup> James Quandt, 'Flesh and Blood: Sex and Violence in Recent French Cinema' first published in *Artforum*, 2004, included in *The New Extremism in Cinema: From France to Europe*, Ed. Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall, 2011, pp 18-25; Frédéric Bonnaud 'François Ozon: Wannabe Auteur Makes Good,' *Film Comment*, 37:4, 2001, pp. 52-55.

<sup>340</sup> Quandt, 2011 [2004], p. 18.

<sup>341</sup> Quandt, 2011 [2004], p. 19.

<sup>342</sup> Quandt, 2011 [2004], p. 19.



exquisitely anguished cinema. This valuation of Ozon's different expressions as a development from infancy and provocation to a mature and withheld implies that this development is a move in one direction, that the attempts to provoke a viewer were expressions of a childishness that Ozon — and the rest of the French Extremity — should hurry up and grow out of. There is a refusal to understand the purpose or the effect of the provocations in films like *See the Sea* or *Sitcom*. Bonnaud's short article agrees with this valuation of Ozon's development and maturation. And he blames Ozon's heavy-handedness in his early films for his own inability to see their sublime qualities. This point is also made by Bert Cardullo in his review of *Under the Sand*. He argues that Ozon's earlier production was full of "mannerisms" that "disappear in *Under the Sand*," but that Ozon's "desire to reveal the fragility and vulnerability that underlie seemingly secure or solid bourgeois appearances" still remains.<sup>343</sup> This opinion has been challenged by Asibong, who argues that "both the dismissal of Ozon's early work and the banal approval accorded to his recent offerings founder on a fundamental misunderstanding of his cinematic project as a whole."<sup>344</sup> As mentioned earlier, Asibong argues that Ozon's value as a director lies in his uncompromising critical stance towards contemporary French culture.

Far from pandering to a French artistic and intellectual climate that increasingly celebrates expressions of either knowing cynicism or else saccharine, apolitical romanticism, Ozon's work challenges — with a seriousness that is easy to miss beneath an often garish surface — the impasse of sheer indifference often claimed, or indeed championed, as an ineluctable consequence of the postmodern era.<sup>345</sup>

The problem with either of these positions is that they disregard a large number of Ozon's films. For Quandt, Bonnaud and Cardullo, Ozon's early production is dismissed rather than opened up to analysis of the purpose and function of the gruesome and shocking images and narratives. For Asibong, on the other hand, it becomes difficult to come to terms with Ozon's production after *Under the*

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<sup>343</sup> Bert Cardullo, 'The Space of Time, the Sound of Silence' in *The Hudson Review*, 2002. pp. 473-480, p. 473.

<sup>344</sup> Andrew Asibong, 'Meat, Murder, Metamorphosis: The Transformational Ethics of François Ozon' in *French Studies*, Vol. LIX, No. 2, 2005, pp. 203-215, p. 204.

<sup>345</sup> Asibong, 2005, p. 204.

*Sand*, and especially from *Angel* (2007), where Ozon takes a turn towards a more saccharine filmic language. This dilemma is present in Asibong's presentation of Ozon's later work in his monograph on Ozon.

In my readings of Ozon's films, I will avoid these dualisms and models of development/deterioration and instead see them as attempts to deal with specific stories, problematics and filmic methods that reflect each other. We can assume a development of skills and expression over time as any director becomes more familiar with the tools of the trade, but to understand this duality in Ozon's films as merely the expression of a maturation is to reduce the significance of these choices.

At the outset of her thesis, Stanley implicitly acknowledges this split in Ozon's cinema.

Although not as radical as queer theorists or film critics may wish, Ozon's films often use comedy and irony to illustrate the problems of a restrictive patriarchal society and the way it can harm individuals, thus unsettling the normative assumptions on which the majority of social structures are still based.<sup>346</sup>

This duality is also present in Ince's positing of Ozon as a mainstream, queer auteur.

In addressing Ozon's *oeuvre* up to *5 x 2* in this chapter, one of my aims is to show that the condemnation of Ozon's 'immaturity' typified by Bonnard's criticism has served to mask the depth and brilliance of Ozon's exploration of sexuality, and his originality as France's first mainstream queer *auteur*.<sup>347</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Ince also points out that "Ozon's films distinguish themselves clearly from earlier gay male filmic production in France"<sup>348</sup>, implying that her usage of the term queer is not merely a marker of homosexuality or non-straight sexuality in his films. Yet the comparison does

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<sup>346</sup> Stanley, 2009, p. 1.

<sup>347</sup> Kate Ince, 'François Ozon's Cinema of Desire,' in *Five Directors* Ed. Kate Ince, 2008, p. 113.

<sup>348</sup> Ince, 2008, p. 113.

imply a conflation of the identitarian and anti-identitarian strands of queer. As mentioned earlier, de Lauretis contrasted the usage of queer with the term gay and lesbian as a means of moving away and beyond that particular coupling.

“Queer Theory” was arrived at in the effort to avoid all of these fine distinctions in our discursive protocols, not to adhere to any one of the given terms, not to assume their ideological liabilities, but instead to both transgress and transcend them — or at the very least problematize them.<sup>349</sup>

Queer theory here becomes a short-hand, including but also to transcending the categories of identity-based politics of lesbian and gay. De Lauretis later suggested that this move might have gone too far, being removed from its roots in lesbian and gay studies. She notes that queer “has quickly become a conceptually vacuous creature of the publishing industry.”<sup>350</sup> The short-hand has taken on a life of its own and lost its purpose as a transgression of identity politics. In Michael Warner’s definition of queer, it still maintains its roots in gay and lesbian activism as well as studies, but as a group that is impossible to define. In this way, the queer and subsequent queer theory becomes a constantly anti-normative project that refuses the stability of identity as well as the comforts of institutional stability.

Nervous over the prospect of a well-sanctioned and compartmentalized academic version of “lesbian and gay studies,” people want to make theory queer, not just to have a theory about queers. For both academics and activists, “queer” gets a critical edge by defining itself against the normal rather than the heterosexual, and normal includes normal business in the academy.<sup>351</sup>

Adopting these early definitions of queer highlights the contradiction in Ince’s suggestion that Ozon is a mainstream queer auteur. But this duality also opens

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<sup>349</sup> Teresa de Lauretis, ‘Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities, An Introduction,’ in *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 1991.

<sup>350</sup> Teresa de Lauretis, ‘Habit Changes’ in *Figures of Resistance* pp. 199-216, first published in *differences*, 1994, pp. 296-313, p. 200.

<sup>351</sup> Michael Warner, ‘Introduction,’ in *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, 1993, p. xxvi.

up Ozon for readings that do not have to choose between one or the other, where the two aspects are part of a dynamics of exploring filmic forms unrestricted by the critic's need for queer positioning.

As a result of their setting in middle-class *bonne société* and the *haute bourgeoisie* respectively, and their high degree of theatricality, these three films have been assumed to lack any dimension of critique. But it is precisely in their theatricality that *Sitcom*, *8 Femmes* and *Gouttes d'eau* do contain a critique of patriarchy.<sup>352</sup>

This also contradicts a linear development of Ozon's films, the heavy-handed or immature aspect of a shocking or theatrical scene reveals a duality in the mind of the critic, rather than in the intention of the film maker. By not being shocking, although the material is disturbing in some of these films, the glamorous look of a glossy film with no content reveals the depth of the film. Ince points out this play with dualities in Ozon's films on various levels.

As might be expected of dramas about shifts in identity and sexual orientation, Ozon's films highlight oppositions of all kinds. One of the most prominent recurring binary oppositions is between cleanliness, associated with states of safety and stability and dirt, which is linked to conditions of danger and infections.<sup>353</sup>

The binary of dirt and cleanliness, as well as the shocking images that Quandt and Bonnard turned away from, can be seen as mirrors held up against the viewer, over-saturating the disgust that we feel for the intruder or the one that breaks the glossy image of middle-class stability. Schilt argues that Ozon is working in the midst of dualities, blurring and undermining categories, both in terms of genre and in terms of identities and sexualities as depicted on screen.

I want to propose that despite tremendous diversity in terms of cinematic choices (on generic, formal, and thematic levels), Ozon's oeuvre is decidedly consistent in

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<sup>352</sup> Ince, 2008, p. 123.

<sup>353</sup> Ince, 2008, p.127f.

its desire to blur the traditional frontiers between the masculine and the feminine, gay and straight, reality and fantasy, auteur and commercial cinema.<sup>354</sup>

Schilt's suggestion here is that there is an innate contradiction between the variations of genre, narrative and textual choices and the blurring of lines between the dualities of other categories. What I will argue, with the help of Ince, is that it is in the choice of genre as well as in choices of theme that dualities are not only questioned but inquisitively looked at. They are studied and exposed as arbitrary but also pregnant with meaning and burdened with structure.

Asibong points out another aspect of Ozon's cinema, a tendency to "revel in a more thoroughly generalised blurring of the very contours of desire"<sup>355</sup> and there is another, linked tendency in Ozon's film.

Ozon's film — and indeed so much of his cinema — is constantly urging the spectator to look at how utterly superficial the (usually sexualised) acts that take place in the name of subversion and transformation really are.<sup>356</sup>

The subversive, queer acts of non-straight and non-normative behaviour are revealed as not so queer after all. In the duality of mainstream and queer, of normal and subversive, Ozon's films refuse to offer an escape, to point to a ready-made solution to subvert and be free. In contrast with passing, listless shots of sexuality and nudity, Asibong points out how Ozon turns toward emotionally charged symbolisms:

Ozon's cinema turns instead, again and again, to the blood of horror, to the tears of melodrama and to the songs of musical to push his spectators towards an environment they really were not expecting, towards an improbable aesthetic register that truly does break with the terms of all that has proceeded it.<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> Schilt, 2011, p. 5.

<sup>355</sup> Asibong, 2008, p. 12.

<sup>356</sup> Asibong, 2008, p. 36.

<sup>357</sup> Asibong, 2008, p. 115.

This definition of Ozon's novelty seem to assume that the spectator already sees Ozon as a queer or even gay film maker, with the expectation of seeing a queer film. Without this assumption, the move to the melodrama, horror aesthetics or the musical loses its subversiveness. And with Ozon's films from *Angel* onwards, this becomes more and more difficult to assume. However, this points to an interesting aspect of the auteur model. When we are about to engage in a film by a director such as Ozon, it is difficult not to expect something subversive and something pleasurable; it is hard not to invent undertones and unspoken desires between characters. This is something that Ozon's films are constantly playing with — flirting with our expectations — holding back, giving us something else altogether, pulling us back in again with a hint, a promise of something lustful. As such, Ozon's films are constantly in conversation, not just with film history, but with the expectations of his faithful followers as well as with a wider public, a public charmed by sometimes saccharine French film and the sublime, mature exploration of the exquisitely anguished bourgeoisie.

## **Conclusion**

Is Ozon a queer director? Following Warner's definition, this becomes a difficult title to give to Ozon but, based on the above discussion, and in light of Laplanche's discussion of binding and unbinding, I would argue that there certainly are queer moments in Ozon's cinema, just as there are gay and lesbian moments, trans moments, straight moments and feminist moments. But none of this defines the oeuvre. Any one of these terms would over-simplify a cinematic production that is more complex and far-reaching. At the same time, Ozon is constantly in dialogue with these concepts and notions, not only through explicit themes and engagements, but through the implicit engagement of a spectator in a film by a gay cineast with a great interest in theory, both of film and in a wider sense.

The symbolism and the seductive method of much of Ozon's films tease out an interest from an audience that is not always met, and when met it is brushed aside, instead focusing on the interpersonal rather than on the great theory or

the great structure at issue. My argument is that this focus on specificity, and on relationships between characters rather than on the big subtending issue, does not constitute a lack of political analysis in Ozon's films. Instead it is a refusal of great theories and of reductions of problematics to standard solutions.

Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth A. Wilson have argued for a more fluid reading, not just of the identities and sexualities that are covered by the term 'queer,' but also of the mechanisms that are covered by the 'normative.' Their argument is that through a slippage into a theorisation of the normative as exclusive, oppressive and as unified, the queer as anti-normative divorces itself from a Foucauldian tradition, where there is no such thing as a static power that only operates through prohibitions.

Our hypothesis is this: antinormative stances project stability and immobility onto normativity. In so doing, they generate much of the political tyranny they claim belongs (over there) to regimes of normativity. For in taking a stand against normativity, antinormative analyses must reduce the intricate dynamics of norms to a set of rules and coercions that everyone ought, rightly, to contest.<sup>358</sup>

The separation of two different spheres at loggerheads with each other shapes both the analysis of the norm and of the position of the anti-norm. Using this definition of queer as an internal aspect of the normative rather than an external force against the normative, it would be possible to align Ozon's cinema as both mainstream and queer, and as both queer from within and as a part of the normative fabric that is being challenged. In Ozon's cinema, there is still the presence of the excluded and the oppressive, so it offers a unique opportunity to discuss aspects of queer debates as well as mechanisms of exclusion and foreclosures, not only as absences but as anti-formulations within the fabric of the mainstream and the normative. This critique of not only the norm but the anti-normative stance also highlights and speaks directly to the main argument of this thesis. That is, it is not enough to move 'beyond' in the sense of leaving behind notions of rigid sexual difference in favour of more fluid and porous models of gender, identity and sexuality. A more productive 'beyond' still includes the rigid aspect as well as the fluid and it is in this very tension that the

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<sup>358</sup> Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth A. Wilson, 'Introduction: Antinormativity's Queer Conventions,' *differences*, 2015, p. 13.

queer can be negotiated, not as a solution but as a critical project that remains critical of its own stagnation and presumptions.



## 4 The Smallest of Differences, Ozon's Siblings

*The distinction between them [brother and sister] is minimal and the prohibition on their union (the incest taboo) establishes that smallest of differences which is necessary to inaugurate society.*

Juliet Mitchell

*Psychoanalysis and Feminism*

This chapter will focus on sibling or sibling-like relations in Ozon's cinema. In his depictions of the bourgeois family, sibling relationships are both carriers of family values, as in *Time to Leave* (2005), and escape from these values, as in *8 Women*. Siblings can also be depicted as fragmented and isolated from each other, as in *Sitcom*, or as merging identifications in *Young and Beautiful*. Mitchell argues that the "sibling relationship is important because, unlike the parental relationship, it is our first *social* relationship."<sup>359</sup> The social or lateral relationship represents an alternative to the Oedipal relationship that parental relations offer. But this social relationship also poses different sets of challenges in the formation and displacement of the self. Mitchell argues, and we will return to her conceptualisation of the sibling relation throughout this chapter, that the sibling undermines the uniqueness of the self in ways that parental relations do not. This displacement of the self as unique interacts with the Oedipal lateral relations and the two axes are dependent in Mitchell's argument. By calling the sibling relation social, Mitchell relates this to her conceptualisation of gender as opposed to sexual difference. This issue was touched upon in the introduction and in this chapter we will use the sibling relation and Ozon's cinema to further

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<sup>359</sup> Juliet Mitchell, *Mad Men and Medusas*, 2000b, p. 20.

a discussion of the distinction and interlinkage between gender and sexual difference as modes of formations of the self. The aim is also to think through kinship relations that Ozon's films suggest inside and outside the sibling relation.

The distinction between gender and sexual difference can be read through Lacan's usage of Roman Jakobson's distinction between metonymy and metaphor. Gender as metaphoric relation focuses on the fluid linkage between various gender positions. Sexual difference, by contrast, enacts a metonymic logic of no linkage or no relation. This is exemplified by Lacan's declaration that 'there is no sexual relation' (*'Il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel'*). Unfortunately, the English translation of *rapport* as relation misses a wider meaning of *rapport* in French. '*Rapport sexuel*' can be translated as 'sexual relation,' but *rapport* also describes something like a common ground, a common understanding as well as similarities. This aspect is present in the English word rapport — to have a good rapport with someone — but in French, there is also a sense of similarity, a linkage of something. As an example, the French word allows for things, ideas or notions to have a rapport between each other. For instance, an example can be judged to have no rapport with the idea being presented. The sibling relationship functions as an alternative to the lack of rapport, as between siblings there is both difference and similarities. There is rapport between siblings. This distinction forms the ground for Mitchell's exploration of the sibling relation and the specific hysterisation that refutes the metonymy (or lack of rapport) between self and other.

The focus of this chapter is the sibling relationship in *Young and Beautiful*. This film depicts a sibling relation and it uses this relationship as a means for the spectator to enter the film. Ozon often plays with the link between theatre and film, creating distance through framing and theatre-like shots. Then he breaks this down through intimate shots, where the camera takes the place of one of the characters. This second aspect is developed in *Young and Beautiful* to depict the intimacy and distance between two siblings. The camerawork represents the relation or the rapport between the characters of the film, but also between the spectator and the film. As spectators we are implanted in this story through a lateral, social relation that allows for a link or rapport to develop. The analysis of this film enables a discussion of sibling relations, not only on

screen, but as an aspect of spectatorship. The identification of spectator and character is achieved through a series of scenes: the initial juxtaposition of the viewer's and one character's gaze, the gaze of a young boy who looks on as other lives unfold, and a scene where two characters are presented as copies through the filming of a mirror image. Ozon's choices of identification can be read as an ironic play with some traditional notions in spectatorship theory. By using phallic maternal characters (for example *Swimming Pool*) or a younger brother (*Young and Beautiful*), the sensualism on screen may be understood as a distanced expression of a fantasy life. Or, alternatively, it is the barely comprehended, enigmatic message of the child listening to the uncanny sounds from the parental bedroom, having to divine their meaning, grasping to translate and comprehend. This is a long way from Mulvey's notion of a phallic male figure for the male gaze to protect itself. Rather than insulation, Ozon's gaze makes the spectator more vulnerable. The ironic play with gazes in his films is not only a comment on film theory, but a device to include us in different ways.

Ozon often incorporates a spectator within the narrative and uses this position to lure and seduce the spectator into the film. At the same time, this suggests a way of watching, a way of engaging with the material. The spectator is confronted with what is assumed to be the subject of the film and the uncanny feeling of not being identical to this subject. We here have two forms of uncanny. First, the process of a doubling/estrangement of the self and, second, the estrangement of the not quite understood. The first aspect relates to Freud's theorisation of the ego as both object and assumed origin of the inner, conscious self. The doubling/estrangement of this aspect of the self illustrates the formation of the ego in Freud's text *The Uncanny*.<sup>360</sup> The second aspect illustrates Laplanche's focus on the enigmatic message and that there is always something that escapes understanding and translation in the other's seduction. This duality relates to a notion of the self as fixed and ready, with sexual difference as a *fait accompli*, as well as a notion of gender formation as never stable, always open to a level of reinterpretation. The uncanny and the enigmatic connects these two layers of sexual difference and gender.

The two characters I shall focus on in this analysis are Victor (Fantin Ravat) and Isabelle (Marine Vacth). Isabelle is the main protagonist in the film and Victor is

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<sup>360</sup> Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny'" (1919) in SE 17 pp. 217-256.

her younger brother. Victor is not a central character in the main narrative, but I will argue that he is key in the relationship between the spectator and Isabelle. In this sibling relationship, desire and identity is dealt with in a fluid and unstable manner. As opposed to other relations in this narrative, the siblings are marked by fluctuation and instability. They have their own dynamic, opposed to the more stable relations between Isabelle and her customers and parents.

### **The brother's gaze**

Ozon's *Young and Beautiful* is a coming-of-age film about discovering one's pleasures and desires as well as getting to know one self. It is divided in four acts — the four seasons — starting with summer. In line with many of Ozon's films, the start of the film reveals an idyllic landscape in what looks like the south of France. Isabelle and her family are on holiday, spending their summer in a large summer house. The decor is comfortable and lush, but not luxurious. The house where they spend their time has nothing of chartered or mass holiday resort about it. Yet, they are not alone on the beach. All this implies a comfortable middle class existence, avoiding both extravagance and hardship. The scenes with Isabelle are split between her on the beach on her own, with her brother or with other teenagers and her spending time with her family in the house. Just before her 17th birthday, Isabelle decides to have sex with Felix, a young German whom she has met on the beach. The cute and adolescently awkward seduction ends in a sex-scene on the beach that leaves Isabelle as cold as the viewer. After this encounter, Isabelle ignores Felix's approaches and she eventually leaves by car with her family.

The film then moves into autumn, and the scenery is changes from summer and the seafront to Paris, the metro and hotel rooms. The colour and tone of the images goes from warm to cold and Isabelle dresses in jeans and a green army jacket. We then see Isabelle change into an evening dress as she meets up with an older man in a hotel room. It becomes clear that Isabelle has taken up work as a call-girl, meeting her customers in various hotel rooms. One key customer stands out: Georges (Johan Leysen) who displays a tenderness and an uncertainty that reveals empathy for Isabelle.

As autumn turns to winter, Isabelle's double life comes tumbling down. During one of their encounters, Georges has a cardiac arrest during intercourse. Isabelle runs away but is soon contacted by the police who have already spoken to her mother. This is a pivotal moment where Isabelle is confronted by her family's emotional reaction to her hidden life. Isabelle agrees to see a psychologist and she makes an effort to conform to her mother's expectations. She starts socialising with her classmates and eventually starts dating Alex, a boy her age. This period of normality turns out to be yet another temporary phase and this too comes tumbling down during an early morning love-making scene with Alex. Isabelle inserts her finger in his anus as he is struggling to get an erection. This seems to reveal the deep disconnection between the two and his childhood innocence is contrasted by her professional knowledge of bodily pleasures and the functioning of the male body. In the last episodes of the film, Isabelle meets with Alice, Georges's widow. Together they talk about sexual desire and the desire to be desired as a young girl. They then go to the room where Georges died. They lie down on the bed in a scene of reconciliation and intimacy. As Isabelle wakes up, there is a sense of closure despite the ambiguity of whether the scene with her lover's wife actually took place or not. As we leave her there, Françoise Hardy sings about finally becoming herself.

This film follows some of the themes in Ozon's cinema that I have already highlighted. Isabelle is at once passive and active throughout this film, and the meeting with Alice functions as a commentary on this theme, the wish to be desired as young and attractive — similar to the staging of the young bodies in *A Summer Dress*. A theme that is here given a melancholic tone as Alice reminisces on lost youth. Alice — played by Charlotte Rampling, one of Ozon's favourite actors — voices the loss of youthful beauty, but also a chance to reflect on the pleasures of being an object of desire, suggesting that Isabelle has lived out a fantasy. It is notable that the film contains no real consequences or any of the dark realism that is normally associated with the genre of films dealing with prostitution, nor the romanticised image of the happy prostitute as in *Pretty Woman* (1990), on the other side of the spectrum. This film can be said to avoid some of the gritty aesthetics of more realistic films about teenage prostitution, but Ozon does offer a non-judgmental portrayal of a young woman exploring her sexuality and the wish to be desired by others. The question is: How does this film achieve this? Apart from the exclusion of disturbing realism,

how does this film ask us to sympathise and empathise with Isabelle? There are several methods at play here. What I will focus on is the gaze of the younger brother and the porous relationality that this relationship suggests as a model for the spectator. It should be mentioned too, however, that another device that Ozon makes use of, and this is another method that he deploys throughout his cinema — is the use of soundtrack. Isabelle and her development is accompanied by songs by François Hardy, a well known singer — especially in France. Her lyrics offer a kind of meta-commentary on the narrative, but her voice also offers something familiar, something safe and intimate. Her songs are a part of a cultural heritage and by using her lyrics to comment on Isabelle's life events, these events become something familiar and safe, by association.

I will now make the argument that Victor, Isabelle's younger brother, functions as a bridge between the spectator and Isabelle. This bridge not only enables the spectator to view the narrative, but also interrupts and questions this narrative as well as the spectator's place within it. By referring to Victor and the identification between Victor and the spectator as Victor's gaze or the brother's gaze, I wish to put this relation into critical communication with Mulvey's theory of the male gaze. Victor does not simply allow an omnipotent identification so the male gaze is able to desire the young and beautiful Isabelle at a safe distance. Instead, the identification with Victor allows for an empathic intimacy with Isabelle, that eventually blurs the lines of identification and differentiation. Victor's positioning sometimes invades the angle of the spectator, making his position an uncanny presence in the sense of a doubling/estrangement in a place where we should be alone. At other times he functions as the curious viewer, the involved bystander who tries to understand the narrative taking place around him in the sense of the uncanny as something enigmatic. His naive questions are often contrasted by Isabelle's mother's and stepfather's assumption that they, the grown-ups, know what is going on. Victor plays the role of a spectator who is engaged and willing to know, something that is often contrasted by the adults' assumptions that they already know what is going on. Like the child divining what is going on next door, Victor is both active and passive in his interpretation/translation of what is happening.

The young girl who becomes a prostitute in this story is not treated like a victim, pervert or even a *femme fatale*. Instead she is portrayed as a teenager

exploring her sexuality. She is not the victim of abuse, either at home or from her clients to any significant extent. There is a marked absence of attempts to moralise her choices. As mentioned, songs by François Hardy are used to accompany the story: a song about being lonely whilst among others is heard while we watch a montage of Isabelle having sex with various clients. Phil Powrie has argued that Ozon's usage of music "creates an interlude, a metaspace, where the listener is unable to identify only with the male or the female on screen, but shuttles between both ludically."<sup>361</sup> In the specific interlude where we see Isabelle and her customers accompanied by Hardy's melancholic voice, the effect is not so much a haptic hearing as Powrie argues for in his reading of *5x2*, but rather an effect of distancing from the acts. This distance from the acts, interestingly, functions to make a proximation to Isabelle possible. By creating a sense of loneliness in the spectator by the choice of music and juxtaposing this with images of a young girl having multiple partners, the potential shock value of the montage is deflated into associations of being disconnected from the world and a general sense of loneliness. Ozon thus turns us away from the possible sadistic gaze consuming the young woman *and* the sympathetic gaze that would take pleasure in Isabelle's victimhood. Instead we are made to see the hollowness of the sexual act, both for Isabelle and for us as spectators. As a result, there is nothing shocking in the actual sex she is having. Ozon thus constructs a type of gaze that is neither the male scopophilia of Mulvey's theory nor the masochistic, idealising look posited by Studlar. Instead we are invited into an empathetic, caring gaze where Isabelle is not fetishised to represent anything but herself. Oddly, the spectator is both left outside these scenes and invited to feel with them. This duality refuses simple explanations or psychologisations of Isabelle and instead leaves the enigmatic at the centre. We are left to 'deal' with it.

## **Siblings and desire**

When asked if Victor is his alter-ego within the narrative, Ozon responded that Victor is an incorporation of the spectator. "The younger brother is not me, it's the spectator. The spectator who, for an hour and a half, will try to understand

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<sup>361</sup> Phil Powrie, 'The Haptic Moment: Sparring with Paolo Conte in Ozon's *5x2*' in *Paragraph*, 2008, pp. 206-222, p. 219.

this young girl.”<sup>362</sup> Ozon uses the view of the younger brother to guide the spectator. The film opens with a scene where we see a young girl on a beach through the binoculars of an unknown voyeur (see image 1). The image of a woman seen through binoculars connotes notions of a peeping Tom and the scopophilic pleasure of Mulvey’s male gaze. We are immediately confronted with this unknown gaze that occupies the point of the spectator. At this point, as we are not yet aware of the protagonist whose position we share, this uncanny merger seems to split our gaze and confront us at once with an other as the origin of our gaze. And we are confronted not only with an other occupying the place of our gaze, but with the dubious intentions of this other who is looking at a beautiful girl on a beach. While we look at the girl, and the uncanny feeling of not knowing the intention or the meaning of the gaze that we see through, the sound of crickets is taking over, further emphasising a sense of eeriness in the scene. This first shot actualises an unnerving displacement of the self with a self that we are not yet sure if we can trust. Should we distance ourselves from the gaze that is enforced upon us? Or should we follow in the pleasurable voyeurism of the gaze that is lingering over the young woman’s body? We are here dealing with a playful renegotiation of the assumed male gaze and the pleasures and perils of spectatorship in general. This playfulness does not shy away from inflicting uneasiness on the spectator.

In the next scene, we see the back of an adolescent boy with binoculars in his hands, the beach in front of him. The sound of crickets is toned down and the scene has lost its eeriness. In the next scene, we are closer to the woman on the beach, the hand of the boy is hanging over the woman’s body, forming a shadow on her back. Even if we at this stage are aware that the gaze belongs to an adolescent boy, this rupture of the assumed male gaze is only partial. The gaze may not be predatory, but it is still a gaze understood within a heterosexual setting. It is still a male gazing upon a young woman. His hands are lingering over the young woman’s body, casting a shadow as a projection of

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<sup>362</sup> Asked if Victor is Ozon, he replies: “Le petit frère, ce n’est pas moi, c’est le spectateur. Le spectateur qui va pendant une heure et demie essayer de comprendre cette jeune fille. Et puis, de toute façon, un spectateur est toujours comme un enfant quand il va au cinéma. C’était pour moi évident de commencer le film de son point de vue à lui. Ce que je trouvais beau, c’est que la complicité entre le frère et la soeur s’arrête quand elle couche avec son amant allemand. Dès lors, Isabelle ne veut plus parler à son petit frère. Parce qu’elle veut le protéger, qu’elle sait qu’elle va traverser des moments compliqués, que son petit frère ne peut pas comprendre. À ceci près que l’on voit bien qu’il a quand même tout compris.” *Dossier Jeune et Jolie*, p. 12.





**Image 1:** in the opening shot in *Young and Beautiful*, we see Isabelle on the beach through binoculars. This oversaturated version of the male gaze invites a mockery of the scopophilic pleasures of the spectator.

a fantasy. This scene brings back some of the eeriness that we just experienced not least because the looming hand is reminiscent of horror films. The shadow who attacks Marion in *Psycho* (1960) seems to be present in this scene. But instead of killing the young woman, the hand wakes her up and the suspension is released by the co-occupier of our gaze entering the screen. This is the first time we see Victor from the front and his gaze no longer occupies ours. The two immediately start a conversation about Felix. As Isabelle asks questions about Felix, Victor turns away from the scene and starts throwing pebbles into the water. As Victor exits our gaze and enters the film as a character, he tells Isabelle that Felix was looking for her.

Isabelle: Tu l'as vu ?(Did you see him?)

Victor: Oui, il est passé à la maison. (Yes, he came by the house)

Isabelle: Et maman l'a vu? (And mum saw him?)

Victor: Ben, ouais. (Well, yeah.)

Isabelle: Qu'est-ce qu'elle a dit ? (What did she say?)

Victor: Ben, qu'il était super beau. Tu viens déjeuner ? (Well, that he's really hot. You coming for lunch?)

In this exchange, Isabelle asks about her mother's opinion as well as whether Victor has seen him. Victor on his side, plays along, tells her that their mother found him beautiful, all the while he throws pebbles into the water. He seems to have an ambivalence to the conversation, after waking her up and clearly knowing what she wants to hear, he turns away from her, looking out to the ocean and his bouncing pebbles rather than at her. When he is close up, the intimacy seems to prompt him to look away, as opposed to when he looked at her through binoculars. Isabelle on her side is asking for her mother's opinion rather than her brother's. In her eyes, Victor might remain too young to understand, an assumption that is partly contradicted by his responses that reveal an understanding for what she wants to hear. Before moving on to the next scene, let us consider what has happened in terms of displacements. The boy who is placed in our gaze is separated from us, as the film reveals itself to pose less of a threat to the spectator. At this stage, the boy no longer occupies our gaze, the identification with the boy is no longer uncanny in the sense that he doubles our gaze and inserts an intimacy with an unknown and enigmatic presence. The boy still functions as a viewer of the drama and the identification between the spectator and the boy remains, but it becomes less threatening. We discover Isabelle's thoughts and reactions through the boy's queries. He embodies our will to understand and also our frustration of not getting the answers we want.

As the two are walking up the stairs from the beach, they are yet again engaged in a conversation that leaves more questions than answers.

Isabelle: Tu me promets de rien dire à Maman ? (Do you promise not to say anything to mum?)

Victor: Ouais, mais pourquoi tu lui dis pas ? (Yeah, but why don't you tell her?)

The two of them share a secret, something that mother should not know about. As they approach the stairs, Victor continues his inquisition. This of course engages the will to know in the spectator. We want to know, but we are also on some level aware that what we want to know is most likely going to be a banal fact; so the pleasure of not knowing becomes a goal in itself. We are happy to be manipulated in this way, to be pulled in to the narrative through a subtle

withholding as suspension. The masochistic but tacit contract that Aaron and Deleuze identified is not breached here and the uncanny is replaced with familiarity with filmic form and its pleasures. The looming threat of the male gaze occupying our field of vision is replaced with a safe spectatorial pleasure and the narrative has been given a first plot, a first driving force. The tension created before has been gently nudged into the will to know. If at first we were disconcerted by the doubling of our gaze and the troubling scopophilic peeping Tom look at the start of the film, this tension has been given a narrative function; we now want to see, to pry and to find out what secret the two are keeping from mother, and from the spectator. This staging also creates a bubble of trust and intimacy between the two siblings.

Victor: Allez, Isabelle dis-moi, t'es amoureuse ? (C'mon, Isabelle, tell me, are you in love?)

Isabelle stops to look at him.

Isabelle: Et toi, tu le trouve comment ? (And you, what do you think about him?)

Victor, clearly shy and surprised by the question, answers: Je sais pas... Je suis un garçon. (I don't know... I'm a boy.) And then he runs up the stairs.

When Isabelle directs the question directly at Victor, instead of asking him what mother thinks, Victor is clearly embarrassed and runs away. His will to know was turned back on him and his response is to walk away, after asserting that he is a boy. In this scene we get to know Isabelle and the power she has over her younger brother as well as the limits to Victor's ability to challenge his sister. In this scene a contract between the two is broken, the desire to know is confronted with a mirror and a question rather than seductive suspense. This is a subtle form of the breach that set up the association of Ozon's earlier films with the French Extreme, it reveals a will to challenge the spectator and to stage a bourgeois turning away from the uncomfortable.

On one level, Isabelle is here redirecting the desire she is displacing on others back to those others. By directing the question to her brother, she de-centres her desire by revealing the displacement that Victor formed part of. Up until the point when Isabelle returns the question, Victor can safely displace his desire for Felix and for his sister into his curiosity about their relationship. But when

she turns the question around, his desire and its potentially non-normative nature are both revealed. When their desires were able to intermingle and mix, they were occupying a space that relates them as similar-yet-not-same. Their desire (as well as our desire) created a porous interlinking where the distance/difference is negotiated and fluid. This, however, is broken by Isabelle's naming (by asking) of Victor's desire; the identification is interrupted by the requested symbolisation of desire. By this process of nomination, the desire becomes a part of the ideological/subjective level and thus threatens to displace and undermine the subject. In other words, Isabelle's question brings Victor's displaced desire into the open. We are confronted with the uncanny, unspoken desire as this is transformed into something that could be said.

If Victor's questions hint at his desire, then this desire should not simply be understood as a desire for Felix, but also as a mixture of desires between himself and his sister. In an analysis of normativity on the level of ideology, we can understand why Isabelle's question breaks the contract of desire within a heterosexual ideology. Isabelle destroys the contract of not asking and makes it possible to reveal non-heterosexual desire by demanding that Victor responds. Isabelle invites Victor to introduce his desire so as to displace hers, in an attempt to validate it. By engaging in this identification, Victor is now invested in the desires of her sister towards Felix, but also her desire for Victor's desire for Felix, and her mother's desire for Felix that he is asked to narrate. Like our gaze in the opening of the film, both are seeing themselves and their objects of desire through the gaze of an other. In this interplay, there is a threat of a loss of self both when these gazes mingle and when they separate. And what does Victor do? He defends himself by inserting his sexual difference from his sister. Faced with the displacing threat of the other's gaze and desire, he inserts his sex to find footing before running away from his sister. If we read their intermingling of desires in terms of gender until this point, opening up for a fluidity and renegotiation between the two, Victor's assertion that he is a boy is a defence on the level of sexual difference. Sexual difference and the lack of rapport implies that there is no common ground here. Victor splits off from the lateral, potentially fluid relation/identification by breaking this off with sexual difference as foreclosure. If we view Victor as the representative or the incorporation of the viewer in the narrative, this confronts us with a defensive reaction to the protagonist and the film. Confronted with our prying will to know what the two

are talking about, our proxy leaves the scene as Isabelle confronts our desires. It is also an enactment of one possible response, that coming from a spectator whose gaze is informed by normative views on sexuality. In effect, the scene is a mini-drama of our potential turning away from Isabelle's sexuality later in the film.

## Desiring siblings

In *Mad Men and Medusas*, Mitchell argues for a rearticulation of the sibling relationship to understand the creation of and function of gender as well as sexual difference. It is in this relationship that the child is forced to develop a self as a notion of something separate and unique.

The sibling relationship is important because, unlike the parental relationship, it is our first *social* relationship. The mode of psychoanalytic treatment obscures this and the theory ignores it. On the advent of a younger sibling (or sibling substitute), the subject is displaced, deposed and without the place that was hers or his: she/he must change utterly in relation to both the rest of the family and the outside world.<sup>363</sup>

The introduction of another self in a lateral relation displaces the uniqueness of the I. The I is therefore forced to develop its separateness from this other, more equal self. This relation, according to Mitchell, introduces hysteria into the centre of the self. Hysteria should here be understood as a displacement of the I as a general condition or as an aspect of the formation of the self rather than a strict pathology. This displacement of the self can lead to hysterical reactions that are pathological, but there are also non-pathological aspects of hysteria in Mitchell's argument. The hysterical condition is one where our self is struggling to define its boundaries. The self becomes porous and dislodged, as exemplified through the sibling relation. In the scene between Isabelle and Victor, this takes the form of a displacement of desire in the other, a displacement that then reaches its limit when Isabelle asks Victor to name his desire, his interest in her relation with Felix. Between Isabelle and Victor, the escape from the porous exchange of desires thus takes the form of sexual

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<sup>363</sup> Mitchell, 2000b, p. 20.

difference. It is this difference that protects Victor from merging with and having his desires confused with Isabelle's.

[...] hysteria involves a desperate and exiting degree of mental and bodily identification whereby one thinks and feels through another person who, though all-important, is not experienced as a separate being; not, in other words, as another person in an 'object relationship'.<sup>364</sup>

We can easily draw links between Mitchell's model of sibling relations as a floating together, and haptic spectatorship. The relation to the screen in haptic visuality (or sound in Powrie's argument) is not one of object relationship. It is not an other, separate from the self that is encountered. Instead, it is the dissolution of the self through intimacy with the other. Mitchell develops a model of sexual difference that offers an escape from this hysteric state, in line with Freud's narrative of the child's sexual theories. In Freud's developmental rhetoric, the progression of these sexual theories takes as its starting point the discovery of sexual difference in a visual field. According to Freud, the child sets out with a "neglect of the difference between the sexes"<sup>365</sup>. This 'neglect of the difference' takes the form of attributing to everyone, including women, the possession of a penis. This neglect is in line with the phallic phase as discussed above and follows the same logic of placing the male position as the norm and the feminine as the deviation. Following on from this assumption and the continued ignorance of female genitalia prompts the child, at least according to Freud, to assume that if the child "grows in the mother's body and is then removed from it, this can only happen along one possible pathway — the anal aperture."<sup>366</sup> At this stage sexual difference is still negligible, the absence of a penis, if seen in a sibling, is excused as being small but still there. The third stage in the development of children's sexual theories is caused, as Freud sees it, by the child seeing the parents having intercourse. At this third stage, the difference is given a qualitative interpretation, a "*sadistic view of coition*"<sup>367</sup>. This

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<sup>364</sup> Mitchell, 2000b, p. 75.

<sup>365</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'On the Sexual Theories of Children.' (1908) in SE 9 pp. 205-226, p. 215.

<sup>366</sup> Freud, 1908, p. 219.

<sup>367</sup> Freud, 1908, p. 220.

primal scene further underscores the link between passivity and masochism with the female position in Freud's thinking. His narrative of sexual difference emphasises the child's notion of self and separation in relation to the parental world. It therefore links the formation of the self through a turning back on the self through masochism. Here, the feminine or maternal is a fantasy that gives meaning to this primal scene as well as to the returned desire for a self that is different or unique.

In her return to Freud, Mitchell rereads Freud's analysis of sexual theories in children through his own narrative of the child's development. At the same time, she includes what Freud omitted: the development of the *girl's* sexual theories. Mitchell's version of the child's sexual theories emphasises a path that Freud hints at but never develops, namely the repressed womb as origin and the ability to produce babies. In his essay on the uncanny, Freud mentions intrauterine fantasies but does not develop them as separate from castration fantasies. Castration is instead allowed to represent any separation, loss or absence. Castration, of course, re-inaugurates the phallus as the assumed universal. Mitchell points out that "men must also submit to a prohibition on their parthenogenetic fantasies — they have to become 'those who cannot give birth'. Castration introduces only *one* mode of symbolization."<sup>368</sup> The theory that babies are born from the anus does not exclude anyone from the possibility of bearing children. As sexual difference is asserted, however, this does not only take place through the lack of a penis, but also through the ability or inability to bear children. This reading comes with the potential of defining sexual difference in a non-phallic manner. Mitchell inserts a maternal signifier, a prohibition on becoming a mother that can generate a symbolic not only based on the phallic, but also on a prohibition of the fantasy that has the anus as the gender-neutral origin of children.

Mitchell's project is guided by a de-gendering of hysteria and a re-insertion of sexuation in dual terms. Both the phallic *and* the maternal limitation of the ability to give birth are prohibitions and, as such, introduce two forms of symbolisation. These two levels of sexual difference offer an escape from girls' exclusion from the symbolic and the imaginary, as problematised by Irigaray. Earlier in this thesis, it was argued that Mitchell's maternal law offers a model for sexual

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<sup>368</sup> Mitchell, 2000b. p. 332.

difference that does not depend on the girl or the mother lacking something. The hysterisation and dissolution of difference between the siblings can help us understand the scene between Victor and Isabelle. But Ozon seems to show an introduction of sexual difference that is less dependent on a paternal or maternal law and more of a defence against the hysterical merger of their desires. The clash that causes Victor to hold up his sexual difference towards his sister seems to refer to a heterosexual logic of 'I'm a boy, therefore I can't desire another boy,' rather than their different functions in the reproductive order. Here, Ozon shows that sexual difference is not dependent on the Oedipal situation but is the direct result of two siblings separating their uniqueness from each other at the level that Mitchell calls gender. This would allow for a greater fluidity. Victor and Isabelle seem to show how these two levels are coexisting and respond to a threatening dissolution of the self rather than any falling back on sexual theories of reproduction.

In Mitchell's discussion of hysteria in relation to the sibling relationship and the formation of sexual difference, there is an emphasis on being and potential loss of being that is actualised through the sibling. The displacement threatens the very existence of the self. "The hysteric feels catastrophically displaced, non-existent, because another stands in his place."<sup>369</sup> The desire of both Victor and Isabelle are intermingled. As mentioned, Isabelle needs the confirmation of others in order to validate her desire. Her desire can only be sustained if it is based on someone else's desire. This also fits with the general narrative of the film, where Isabelle apparently displaces her own desire in order to discover those of others so that she can discover her own in turn.

Victor, on his side, being too young to explore himself, lives vicariously through his sister, exploring his desire through hers. The sibling relation is a microcosm of the film's narrative. But it also actualises the uncanny aspect of adult or genital sexuality seen from the eyes of someone who is not yet there. By following their coming of age in their own relationship, but at different stages, we can interpret the central narrative of Isabelle exploring her desire through the exploration of others. Victor is both displaying our desire for knowing what is happening and being a part of what is happening. He wants to know as a way to experience, just like we as spectators want to know but struggle to understand

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<sup>369</sup> Mitchell, 2000b, p. 107.



Isabelle's actions. When Isabelle asks Victor if he likes Felix, the entanglement of their desires is revealed. The displacement of their selves in the other is articulated and in the open, this breaks with the contract of suspense, of being close but not the same, of living through her but at a safe distance. To get away from the hysterical potential of this, Victor asserts his being as opposed to hers. He exists by being separate from her; the insertion of sexual difference between the two asserts his being by being as distinct. Sexual difference defends itself against the fluid and the hysterical potential, but this fluid space is not excluded. It is still there as a part of how we relate to the screen and how Victor relates to Isabelle. Sexual difference is inserted to define his separateness, to try to salvage it and with it, his uniqueness, his existence. The desire for Felix is not the root cause of Victor's shying away from this intermingling of desires. Heterosexuality, as well as sexual belonging, is used as a defence to avoid the potential of a hysteric collapse of the difference between Victor and Isabelle. This point opens up for sexual difference taking the form of various differences to create order.

### **The ego as defence**

Victor asserts himself as unique and whole, by asserting that he belongs to one side of sexual difference. When challenged by Isabelle, Victor defends himself by inserting his symbolic being as his absolute being. He is a boy; therefore he is not her, he cannot experience the desire that he developed through Isabelle. Paul Verheaghe argues in his presentation of Lacan's four discourses that it "is the master-signifier which aims at obliterating the lack, posing as the guarantee for the process of covering that lack. The best and shortest example is the signifier 'I' which gives us the illusion of having an identity in our own right."<sup>370</sup> Victor uses 'I am a boy' as a master signifier to a similar effect. By inserting this master signifier into the discourse, he asserts himself as a master in the sense of 'master of his own house' — Victor is the master of himself, his I is his and he knows it is. Sexual difference offers meaning to this I. The I is this and not that and therefore the I is unique and separate. This asserts him as being beyond doubt; it defends him from the hysterisation of desires that was taking place

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<sup>370</sup> Verheaghe, *Does the Woman Exist?: From Freud's Hysteric to Lacan's Feminine*, 1999 [1996]. pp. 104-105.

between himself and his sister. By placing this 'I' in relation to the noun 'boy,' the master signifier is already placed in relation to a series, as the noun can signify many people. Victor asserts his distinctness by nominating himself as a boy in contrast to Isabelle, but this contrast simultaneously places him in relation to a series or a chain of signifiers that are not unique. Even though this argument focuses on the symbolic aspects of the scene, the act of separation is not only taking place on a symbolic level. Victor physically walks away after he has uttered his defence. This gesture can, of course, be interpreted as a failure to uphold the uttered difference, a failure that risks hysterisation. The master is not a strictly symbolic entity. It originates in the imaginary relation to the self as an ideal image that we try and fail to identify with.

Lacan recognised the first encounter with the master in the mirror stage, where the child meets the other as an alienating totality. The confrontation with this total master results in the depressive position, from which the child flees through an identification with the master, that is, the specular 'Urbild' or primary image which is a basis for the ulterior Ego-ideal.<sup>371</sup>

Mitchell's notion of hysterisation through the sibling relationship together with Ozon's depiction of Isabelle and Victor, reveal or emphasise that sexual difference or the master signifier is not stable, nor is it a phase or a stage that is left behind. Rather, it is a coexisting, contemporary aspect of the self that can be actualised in relation to the almost same. As mentioned in relation to McGowan's model of the Lacanian gaze and spectatorship, this substratum is still treated as a threatening underbelly to the established self. In contrast, Ozon's depiction of Victor and Isabelle reveals a non-threatening aspect of this porous relationality. It is only when this clashes with the ideology of 'I'm a boy, therefore I cannot desire boys' that this relationality collapses and sexual difference is resorted to in order to prop up the self.

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<sup>371</sup> Verheaghe, 1999 [1996], p. 60.

## **The empathic gaze**

In the first scene, our gaze was intruded on by a gaze that we could not yet place. This placed us in a hysterical position. Our selves were positioned at a point occupied by a different self rather than the distanced, anonymous gaze that we are accustomed to in cinema. The scene where Victor inserts sexual difference to create distance between himself and his sister can be viewed as the catharsis of this hysterical position. Victor separates himself from his sister so that we do not have to. After this initial scene, Victor's function changes. This is illustrated by two key scenes. In the first, Victor is once again doubling our gaze but this time by illustrating a different version of the spectator. Victor walks through the summerhouse, silently looking through open doors, at the different scenes taking place. He looks without taking part in any of the scenes. In the first room his mother and stepfather are sleeping, in the second, there is a family. The mother plays with the youngest infant while the other children sleep. The father is on the bed, using his laptop. In the third room, Victor sees his sister, masturbating by lying on top of the pillow and thrusting her pelvis against it. Victor's role in this scene is the silent spectator. He does not intervene in the scenes, he is merely observing from a distance. Like us, he consumes the visuals of the film without adding to them. We, like Victor remain passive.

However, there is another way to read this scene. Rather than being the distanced, objective viewer, Victor has already been identified as the son/brother/child in relation to these scenes. He is not looking at strangers. This makes his distance all the more interesting. It enacts our distance/intimacy with the characters and it also enacts the contract between spectator and film. We act as if we know these people and we fill the film's gaps with our desire to take part, thus co-creating the film. The distance/intimacy is an illustration of the masochistic relation to the film, but also of the vicarious living-through-the-brother as spectator. For the rest of the time spend in the holiday home, Victor plays the one wanting to know. After Isabelle sleeps with Felix, Victor is waiting in Isabelle's room, eager to find out how it was. Isabelle dismisses him. After the dispassionate sex-scene, Isabelle is more and more dismissive of Felix as well as Victor who is no longer a part of the bubble of intimacy. He is no longer included in the secret kept from their mother. This distance introduces another difference that functions like sexual difference in the first instance. This

difference is based on experience, and as well shall see, perhaps a will to protect her younger brother who Isabelle might assume is too young to understand. But also too close and too able to understand. As they leave to go back to Paris Isabelle does not even look as the family drives past Felix who is on his bike. Victor points out that it was Felix, expecting a reaction from Isabelle, but she remains unmoved. Her mother and stepfather are shown giving each other a look, as if they know what is going on. But, in fact, Victor is the only one trying to understand what is going on with his sister. Victor is clearly surprised by his sister's dismissal of her former lover. Like us, Victor divines that there is something going on that we are still unable to grasp. The secret between the two siblings were only the first layer of the onion, this new secret is excluding the spectator as well as the brother. The parents' reaction, like the insertion of sexual difference, is another defence, a means of not engaging with Isabelle.

When they return to Paris, and the narrative focuses on Isabelle's experiences as a prostitute, Victor all but disappears. This changes after Isabelle's secret is revealed to her family. Her mother displays an emotional response; her stepfather tries to downplay the whole thing; and the psychologist tries to get answers from her and to rationalise her behaviour, giving meaning to its enigmatic aspects. Her brother reveals that he knows, but from a distance. This distance does not equal disinterest, instead it is through this distance that he reveals concern and intimacy.

Victor: Qui c'est qu'est mort ? (Who died?)

Isabelle: Un vieux que j'ai rencontré... (An old man that I met...)

Victor: Et t'as fais quoi avec lui ? (And what did you do with him?)

Isabelle: J'ai couché avec lui. (I slept with him.)

Victor: C'était comment ? (How was that?)

Isabelle: Ça dépendait des fois... En général, ça se passait bien. (It was different from time to time... most of the time, it was ok.)

Victor: Et pourquoi tu l'as fait ? (And why did you do it?)

Isabelle: Parce que j'aimais ça. (Because I liked that.)

In this dialogue, Victor is the one person close to Isabelle who is not judging her. When comparing this exchange to the scene analysed above, it is clear that we are no longer in the master discourse. The I that speaks is no longer asserting itself as a complete entity. Isabelle speaks from an insecure position: she is trying to understand herself. Through the naive and simple questions that Victor poses, Isabelle is able to renegotiate herself and it is made clear that she does not know the answers. The self has become enigmatic, its split has become obvious. Victor, on his side, functions as the desire with no clear object. His desire to know is not directed at an object. His desire is not to know who his sister *is* nor who the old man *is*. Instead, his desire is to know his sister's desire; he wants to know why. He wants to understand his sister and himself. Isabelle is — in the dialogue analysed here — faced with herself through the eyes of Victor. It is through this will to know that Victor's and Isabelle's desires can once again return to the fluidity prior to the cathartic scene, where Victor inserted his sexual difference as master signifier to distance himself. This lack of protection is once more explored in a scene where the identification/difference between Victor and Isabelle is illustrated. In this scene Isabelle is preparing to go to a party. She is getting dressed while Victor is watching from bed.

Victor: Et y aura qui ? (And who will be there?)

Isabelle: Des gens de ma classe. (People from class.)

Isabelle: Ça va ? Je suis pas trop moche ? (How's that? I'm not too ugly?)

Victor: Non, ça va. Tu te maquilles pas ? (No, it's ok. No makeup?)

Isabelle: Tu crois ? (You think?)

Victor: Ben ouais, un peu quand même... (Well yeah, at least a little...)

Victor gets up and stands behind her as she is applying eyeliner by the mirror. Their faces are parallel, looking into the mirror, hers being better lit than his.

Victor: Y a une fille dans ma classe, tu sais qu'elle fait ? (There's a girl in my class, you know what she does?)

Isabelle: Quoi ? (What?)

Victor: Elle roule une pelle pour 5 euros. (She offers kisses for 5 euros.)

Isabelle: C'est pas cher. T'as payé, toi ? (That's cheap. Did you pay?)

Victor: T'es folle ! J'ai pas besoin, moi ! (You're crazy! I don't need it!)

Isabelle: Y a pas de honte, c'est bien pour s'exercer. (There's nothing to be ashamed of. It's good for practice.)

Victor shrugs his shoulders and returns to the bed.

Victor: Tu vois mon pote Marco ? (You know my friend Marco?)

Isabelle: Euh oui, je crois... (Eh yeah, I think so...)

Victor: Il voudrait coucher avec une fille... (He want's to sleep with a girl...)

Isabelle: Laisse tomber, il a pas des moyens ! (Drop it, he can't afford it!)

Victor: T'as pas arrête ? (You haven't stopped?)

Isabelle: Mais si ! Je déconne... (Of course! I'm messing with you...)

The siblings have once again returned to an open conversation where Isabelle is not trying to hide. There is a lightness in the bantering dialogue. As they speak, Victor moves in and out of the mirror image in front of Isabelle. This underscores their similarity, their co-occupation of the same space and potentially the same self. Victor suggest that Isabelle should use at least some makeup, revealing an interest in living through her again. As she puts on her makeup, his face is a double of hers in the mirror and in the frame that we are presented with.

Bersani and Dutoit have pointed out in their reading of *Todo Sobre Mi Madre* (1999) that Almodóvar 'codes' the son as gay even though his sexuality is kept out of the narrative.<sup>372</sup> A similar point could be made about Victor here. His identification with his sister, his interest in her appearance could be interpreted as coding him as gay. But this would miss the point of Victor's relation to the enigmatic message and Isabelle as devoid of knowledge, his position is to want to know, a want that opens a void in the narrative. Isabelle needs the confirmation that makeup is all right before she can apply it, and Victor identifies with her as she applies it. The distance between them seems to be erased, but as in Lacan's mirror stage and as in Prosser's trans mirror-scene, this merger reveals an alienation and a distance. The usage of a mirror in this scene can be understood as an insertion of a critique of a traditional analysis of film based on spectatorship as identification on an imaginary level. This identification/alienation is not the only thing going on in this scene. As opposed to the mirror reflection of their faces, there is the framing of these faces as a mini-seriality of

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<sup>372</sup> See Bersani and Dutoit, 2004.

selves. They work as copies, one weaker than the other as the gaze is on Isabelle, whose face is well lit. Victor is secondary, his face behind Isabelle, his gaze on her. This serialisation of their faces does not only imply a mirroring but a displacement, a hysterisation of both. In this temporary space, the master signifiers of gender and sexuality do not seem to matter, they are displaced by this double hysterisation of their desires. In Mitchell's theorisation of hysterisation as propelled by the displacement of the self through the serialisation of this self by the introduction of a sibling, this process is described as catastrophic. This catastrophe in turn pushes the child back to a fantasy of being the mother's only love. This position and this intimacy, however, is refused by the threat of castration.

In itself the sibling situation is catastrophic, not traumatic. Entering the Oedipus complex seems the solution to the catastrophe of the displacement by the sibling, but this incestuous hope of being the mother's only love is vanquished by the trauma of possible castration.<sup>373</sup>

The Oedipus complex is here secondary to the sibling situation and receives its meaning as a result of the sibling displacement. The sibling as repetition is a catastrophe that pushes the child to regress into a fantasy of unity with the mother. But in the scene between Victor and Isabelle, none of this seems to take place. The displacement is not catastrophic; Victor and Isabelle seem to enjoy living through each other. As opposed to the initial scene, where Victor turns away from the displacement, the hysterisation here is not depicted as catastrophic. Instead of turning away, Victor moves out of the scene and starts telling his own story, related to Isabelle's but still about others' desires. The two of them are existing in a mutual hysterisation that is not catastrophic, that does not revert them to traumatic symbolisation through castration but to a temporary co-existence. This can be compared to Ettinger's theory of matrixial fantasies — the fantasy of intrauterine co-existence — something that is not in itself frightening. These matrixial fantasies offer a non-traumatic possibility for the feminine non-subject in Irigaray's model. Ettinger makes use of the porousness of the melancholic self as a denied stable self as a possible relationality that is

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<sup>373</sup> Mitchell, 2000b, p. 332.

liveable. The merger through multiple surfaces that she names borderlinks that hold both difference and similarity does not in itself constitute a catastrophic event.

*While castration phantasy is frightening at the point of the emergence of the original experience before its repression, the matrixial phantasy (from matrice, for womb) is not frightening at the point of its original emergence, but becomes frightening when the experience is repressed.*<sup>374</sup>

Victor and Isabelle seem to exist in this not-yet-frightening fantasy, but their borderlinks are taking place in a sibling relationship, not in the maternal fantasy that Mitchell suggests that this relation would push them back into. Victor and Isabell do not return to the Oedipal situation for comfort, instead they coexist in a caring merger and porous relationality where the borders are not lines, but rather spaces that allows for cohabitation and being-withness.

I would like to deepen the analysis of the phallic gaze and briefly delineate the difference, *within the phallic scope*, between the post-Oedipal “active” gaze emanating from the “armed eyes” and linked to lost archaic part-objects. Thus at least three kinds of gaze should be differentiated: (a) a phallic, post-Oedipal gaze, which recuperates the object in an imaginary way, through domination and control; (b) a phallic *objet a* tracing loss or archaic lack through castration; and (c) a matrixial object/*objet a*.<sup>375</sup>

So what is this matrixial gaze? And how is it different from the phallic gazes? Ettinger describes it as an incarnation of the feminine; that which eludes the phallus. As such it is not dictated by the trauma of castration but can remain hysterical in a non-catastrophic way. Ettinger argues that with Lacan’s development of the term *sinthome*, this non-phallic can be given a place within the subject.

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<sup>374</sup> Bracha L. Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, 2006, p. 47.

<sup>375</sup> Ettinger, 2006, p. 51.



With the concept of *sinthôme*, a holy trinity is once more produced in the convergence of woman/psychosis/art-creation, inasmuch as all three elude the phallus. But the contribution of the new perspective developed in relation to the *sinthôme* is the idea that *eluding the phallus does not necessarily mean a complete detachability from subjectivity, but rather the creation of a secret site within it.*<sup>376</sup>

The feminine as term for what eludes the phallic, traumatic, is here related to *sinthome* as a function of holding the subject together even if the symbolic/imaginary/real are not linked. The *sinthome* functions to bind these fields together.<sup>377</sup> The *sinthome* is the fourth link that binds the ruptured unity. Ruptured because Woman/God or the Other of the Other keeps intruding, keeps returning and therefore refuses to stop being written.<sup>378</sup> In our usage of these terms, the feminine is what escapes castration and symbolisation. This constitutes sexual difference that is never realised but always approximated and therefore does not stop being written. This feminine is the outside of the symbolised, an outside that does not exist but drives symbolisation because of this. In the scene where Isabelle is preparing for her party, Victor's sexuality is hinted at when he says he does not need to kiss the girl in his class. Is this because of the five euros, or because he is not interested in kissing girls? When he talks about Marco, he reveals that Marco wants to have sex with a girl. He is being very specific here. Does this imply that Victor and Marco have been experimenting but that Marco is still keen on sleeping with girls?

This takes place as Victor moves out of the matrixial borderlinks that were staged through the doubling of their images in the mirror and the linking of their desires. Victor is here attempting to insert his own desire again, though he continues to speak about others. He tries to lure in Isabelle into his story, he acts coy, moves to the bed and retells his friend's desire. But Isabelle is not able to follow Victor in this. Instead she places her own self as an insulating function and the hysteric relation is broken. We never find out about Victor's desire, Victor and we with him, are left outside the narrative. Victor goes back to being

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<sup>376</sup> Ettinger, 2006, p. 57.

<sup>377</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXIII: The Sinthome, 1975–1976*, 2016, p. 12.

<sup>378</sup> Lacan, 2016, p. 5.

a boy. Next time we see him he is playing video-games, still with an attentive gaze, but unexplored. We are left with our catharsis unresolved.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have discussed aspects of spectatorship as displacement of the self in relation to Mitchell's theories about siblings and a maternal law, and how this plays out in the sibling relationship in *Young and Beautiful*. I claimed at the beginning of this chapter that this relationship is important and recurring in Ozon's cinema, not only in his family narratives, but also in his placement of the spectator as participant, as an equal but also as displaced and hysterised in relation to the spectator. The sibling relation is explored in *Young and Beautiful* for its differentiating as well as merging aspects, but these aspects are also present between lovers in *The New Girlfriend* (2014), between the women of *8 Women*, and in many other films. But *Young and Beautiful* stands out in its focus on siblings and sibling-like relations.

In this context, I have also explored Lacanian concepts and shown their shortcomings as they place the split, the alienation, between the self and its reflection or between the self and language. Conversely, the sibling relation and spectatorship reveals an experience of the uncanny and the other that is not reducible to the solipsism of a split or alienation of the self. Instead, it reveals an alienation of the self in the encounter with an other who cannot be fully understood.

In trying to understand Isabelle and her motives, we are driven to feel both what she is going through and what her younger brother is going through in relation to her, an older sibling who is experiencing things that the younger sibling cannot quite grasp. It is by not fully understanding what is taking place and by not knowing the psychology of Isabelle that we can be affected by this story.

## 5 The Feminine, or the Fallen Goddess in *8 Women*

*for a woman “woman” cannot remain a radical Other, as she can for a man; otherwise all women would be psychotic. For a woman, she is a border-Other.*

Bracha Ettinger

*The Matrixial Borderspace*

The main focus of this chapter is the film *8 Women*, Ozon’s adaptation of a play by Robert Thomas.<sup>379</sup> In this movie with an all-female cast, differentiation is negotiated along lines of class, race and generational difference. By linking the feminine and the hysteric with a film about eight women who are struggling to construct a kinship and community after the death of a father, Ozon is playing with notions of female desire as elusive and with stereotypical notions of hysterical women under the thumb of the father, even when the father is absent. This link was previously pointed out in relation to Cukor’s film *Women (and it’s all about men)*. *8 Women* can be read as suggested by Asibong as all about the Father/Director, but I will suggest a different reading of the subtle differences between its characters. In Lacan’s discussion of feminine jouissance, he defines two different versions. One is dependent on and the effect of castration. The other escapes the phallic signifier and is therefore not in thrall to castration. In this chapter, this second jouissance will be explored as having potential for reimagining the feminine outside the phallic and outside the father’s control. In the following interpretation of *8 Women*, I will argue that Ozon is playfully deploying a desire of the demonic father, but the father in this film is actually

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<sup>379</sup> Ozon’s adaptation was released in 2002. Thomas’s play has been adapted to screen before in the 1957 *La nuit des suspects (Night of the Suspects)*, directed by Víctor Merenda.

revealed as castrated. His position is undermined by the reality of the female jouissance that plays out around him when he is removed.

The real centre that the spectator is made to desire is not the absent father, but the female characters on screen. The theatricality and aestheticisation of the eight women at once distances them from the spectator and entices the spectator to fill that distance. This aspect of the film is reminiscent of Studlar's development of masochistic spectatorship as a pleasure in looking at and being passive in relation to the goddess-like woman, as opposed to a sadistic, voyeuristic gaze that consumes her. The question I will pursue here is if *8 Women* confirms this model of spectatorship. Or, alternatively, do the female characters manage to escape this madonna/whore dualism and instead build a different relationality. Through markers of race, class, generation, sexual and emotional differences, I argue that these women define their differences through intersections of relations, but not through borders that are fixed, but rather through uncanny explorations and re-findings of the other. Using Lacan's three modes of jouissance together with Irigaray's development of a feminine jouissance that is not clearly directed towards an external object, but rather towards a tactile experience of the self, I will suggest a feminine jouissance that is embodying what Ettinger calls the border-Other. This also links the feminine to the affective experience of the other in Laplanche's theory of seduction.

One of the foci of this chapter is a scene that depicts a maid's insurrection against her master. In the previous chapter, I discussed gender and sexual difference as acted out between two siblings. These two siblings were negotiating a potential hysterisation (Mitchell) or the borderspaces (Ettinger) between them. I argued that sexual division as a non-relation or a non-rapport was inserted as a defence against a hysterisation threatening the limitations of the self. I also argued that there were moments where this hysterisation could be lived with, where the porousness of the self was not experienced as threatening. The gender difference between Victor and Isabelle allowed for a sexual difference to fall back on when the intimacy and lack of separation between the two became too much. In this chapter, my readings will focus on a film with an all-female cast, and the question is: what difference will they fall back on when their hysterisation becomes threatening? By using the notion of sexual difference to read a film where only one gender is represented, my

intention is not to subordinate other differences to a primordial sexual difference. My intention is to highlight the psychoanalytic notion of non-relation as an aspect of difference distinct from difference as potentially porous and overlapping.

### **And it's all about women**

The entirety of this film is set in a mansion from the 1950s. The drama is acted out between eight female characters who discover that the man of the house has been killed. In an act of theatricality and in a pastiche of the classic *matinée* as well as the beautification of its idealised female characters we are introduced to the actresses we are about to spend an hour and a half with before the start of the film. This is done not with soft-focused images but by a combination of stills of colourful flowers together with their names. This introduction is then followed by a panoramic view of a wintery landscape. The snow lies heavy, hiding trees, plants and covering the mansion; this is contrasted with a deer, fragile and alive, standing in the deep snow by the mansion window. We are then brought into the mansion and confronted with a cacophony of colours and warmth that will stay with us for the rest of the film. A majority of this film takes place in the reception hall. Like a theatre, we are often confined to this room while the characters enter and exit the stage. The decisive events often take place somewhere else, outside the reaches of our gaze. After a brief introduction of some of the characters, we still remain in the reception hall when the maid finds the father of the house murdered in his bed. We are alerted to this — just like the rest of the women — by the sound of the maid's scream and then her description of the scene she has witnessed. As we hear her scream, we are looking down at the women looking up from their place in the reception hall. The scream comes from behind us and the gasping faces look past us. This emphasises the exclusion of the more dramatic scene of finding the body. We are confronted with the frustration of wanting to know, but also a complex identification with the person screaming as well as the women looking on.

As the maid screams behind us, while the characters seem to look at us for answers, we are startled with her. Where she is trying to make sense of the death of the head of the house, we are trying to make sense of the situation.

Her voice invites us to divine what may have happened, but we are kept at a distance from the event itself. As the maid returns, the scene is retold to us and the other women. The camera now places us on an equal plane with the other women of the house. We find out that a knife was planted in his back and, since the dogs had not been stirred, the conclusion is drawn that it must have been one of the women in the house who murdered Marcel. And so the scene is set for a classic murder mystery.

The women now start interrogating each other, trying to find the culprit. In keeping with the genre, secrets are revealed, motives unveiled and truths undone. In accordance with Ozon's thematics, these revelations are centred around sexual abuse, hidden pregnancies, closeted lesbian relations and unrequited incestuous love as well as accompanied by impromptu sing and dance performances by the actors. The narrative of *8 Women* is a homage to the classical whodunnit and this is also supported with slapstick comedy while mixed with melodramatic and musical genres. There are eight people in an isolated house (the phone lines are cut and the car has been sabotaged), the victim has been stabbed in the back (excluding any theories of suicide) and, consequently, the culprit has to be one of the women. As the charges are directed towards the various characters, it becomes clear that they all had motive and opportunity; they are therefore all potentially guilty of the murder. And, since they all have a motive, they all have a level of guilt. In a final twist to the story, Marcel reveals that he staged his own murder only to then commit suicide. The reason for his suicide only confirms the collective guilt, as it is the result of his realisation that his place in the household was all a sham. The omnipotent father figure is unmasked in the fact that, as a reason for his final suicide, he quotes all the truths that we have learnt throughout the film. There is no explanation of how the father — locked in his room this whole time — could have heard all this.

### **Critical reception of *8 Women***

As has been briefly discussed, it has been argued that the absent father as master manipulator of his family is an incarnation of Ozon the director:

The absent but present man of this film would be none other than the director himself. He continues to work behind the camera and to deliver such beautiful and alluring images.<sup>380</sup>

The director is here positioned as absent and quiet, yet the engine behind the stage. The director is both the cause and in control of the narrative. As I have shown, Asibong takes this one step further, linking Ozon's oeuvre with a statement about his fascination for dolls' houses. On this basis, Asibong views *8 Women* as an example of a troubling tendency in Ozon's films. The absent director/father is here transmuted into a sadistic grown-up boy who directs with a vicious hand to get what he wants from his actresses (and his audience?). Asibong clarifies his critique of *8 Women* by declaring that:

The women are, more than ever, in thrall to his memory, to his fantasy, to the empty signifier 'Papa'. This continued prostration to the name of the father despite everything results only in the women's turning on each other in a generalised, decidedly non-playful cult of sadism.<sup>381</sup>

This analysis goes further than Lee's critique, who still acknowledges the value of this film as a playful study of the actresses as they interpret and deliver this script to us.

Although there are moments of suspense punctuated with exposure, laughter and songs, the real interest of this film is to see these eight actresses play together, even if it means having a little surprise at the end of the film in order to foil the expectation of the spectator.<sup>382</sup>

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<sup>380</sup> Mark D. Lee, *The French Review*, 2004, pp. 602-603, p. 603. "L'homme absent mais présent de ce film ne serait autre que le réalisateur lui-même. Qu'il continue à travailler derrière la caméra et à nous livrer des images aussi belles et séduisantes."

<sup>381</sup> Asibong, 2008, p. 77.

<sup>382</sup> Lee, 2004, p. 602. "Bien qu'il y ait des moments de suspense ponctués d'exposition, de rires et de chansons, le véritable intérêt de ce film est de voir ces huit actrices jouer ensemble, quitte à avoir une petite surprise à la fin du film afin de déjouer l'attente du spectateur."

Though this enjoyment of the film is made suspect in Asibong's analysis, Lee and Asibong both assume an identification between Ozon and the absent father/master. Before I continue with a detailed discussion of the film I would like to suggest a different reading of the father. Rather than assuming that Ozon identifies with the absent father, I argue that the absent father represents an incarnation of the idealised Director within the narrative. In this analysis, then, the dead father is not a representation of Ozon the director, but rather of the ideal Director in whose thrall Ozon finds himself. Ozon is therefore identified with the dolls in the doll's house, rather than with the master who directs his dolls.

## **8 Women and the feminine**

The narrative in *8 Women* could be used to illustrate Lacan's definition of *Woman* as a category within which there is (potentially) one that has escaped castration. One of the women seems to have killed the father. One has acted on the wishes they all had and therefore broken with the fantasy of 'Papa' as the patriarch of the family. In the few scenes when Papa is alive, his gaze is directed towards the female characters together with us. His function in the film is similar to ours, his absent yet central role is an echo of the absent spectator. Papa exists in the dark room, passive yet at the centre of the story. If we use Mulvey's model of the male gaze, Papa would function as the object of identification. He is the object through which we as viewers can enter the cinematic narrative and also through which we can turn our gaze, via the narcissistic ideal ego on the screen, to the object of desire: woman, or women in this case.<sup>383</sup> The screen surrogate allows the spectator to enjoy the desired object at a safe distance, allowing for a "satisfying sense of omnipotence". This omnipotence is reflected both in the relation between the viewer, the spectator and the screen and within the narrative, where the male protagonist would embody a heterosexual ideology of male dominance. This complicity between the ideology in the narrative and the ideology of the spectator creates a hegemonic patriarchal space.

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<sup>383</sup> Mulvey, 2016 [1975], p. 715.



*8 Women* can be viewed as a challenge to Mulvey's suggestion of the effects of disrupting the promise of illusion offered by cinematic art, to introduce the materiality of the camera and the self-awareness of the audience as audience. The theatricality of this film makes the camerawork obvious. Cameras are keeping their distance. We often see the story unfold from a safe, unengaged distance, scenes are often framed with the help of windows and doors. This technique is mixed with a camera angle that is level with the actresses, placing the spectator as one among the characters, creating a duality in the spectator's approach to the narrative. The set often feels like a stage, with actors entering the scene rather than the camera following them. The duality of restricted view and a levelled, inviting view, creates a frustration in the viewer. This point is highlighted when the sight of the dead father is denied to us. We have to wait a long time before our gaze is allowed into the room where the father lies, assumed dead. This frustration functions as a masochistic enticement. The limitation of the view of the spectator creates a desire that enhances the illusion and the "satisfaction and reinforcement of the ego that represent the high point of film history [and that] hitherto must be attacked."<sup>384</sup> However, Ozon is not interested in removing the pleasure of the film. He paints it in pastel colours and have the actors singing and dancing for the pleasure of the viewer.

If we analyse the end of the film in Mulvey's terminology, what are we to make of Marcel's suicide? The omnipotent if absent father reveals himself as castrated, as defeated by the women. He could not bear the story that was unravelled to him and so he kills himself. The suicide also questions Asibong's critique because the dolls are no longer passive creatures, acting around the father/director. Instead, the father/director kills himself to escape the failure of his fantasy. The women's desires turned out to not be enthralled to the father; it is this realisation that seems to cause his actual suicide. In *8 Women*, the spectator may identify with the absent father, but as the women are arguing, this object of identification becomes less and less stable. What the women are interested in is not the father but the killer. Ozon's depiction of the narrative turns Cukor's film on its head. Instead of a film about women that is all about men, Ozon's work challenges the centrality of the male gaze, the male

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<sup>384</sup> Mulvey, 2016 [1975], p. 713.

spectator and the male director. In Ozon's film about women, it is still all about women.

## **Mimetic woman**

In an interview from 1975, Irigaray defines her usage of mimesis as a method by which to insert the feminine within a discourse that has always excluded her.<sup>385</sup> In this interview, she speaks of mimicry or mimesis as a strategic usage of what has historically been assigned to women. Irigaray says that one "must assume the feminine role deliberately."<sup>386</sup> This deliberate assumption of the feminine role — of what has been assigned to the feminine — is developed as a strategy to disrupt or destroy the discourse that excludes the feminine. Irigaray prefers this strategy to direct confrontation of the masculine discourse. This does not aim to recreate the feminine as essence but to avoid reproducing the position of the (male) subject assumed to be able to speak in a reaffirming way. Mimesis as strategy is aimed not only at the subordination of phenomenological women, but at the foundations of (masculine) discourse as excluding.

Whereas a direct feminine challenge to this condition means demanding to speak as a (masculine), 'subject', that is, it means to postulate a relation to the intelligible that would maintain sexual indifference.<sup>387</sup>

The mimesis that Irigaray suggests is a strategic imitation of the role and the position of the feminine within masculine discourse to avoid the (patriarchal) masquerade of being an imitation of the masculine subject. The feminine in this reading enacts something queer by strategically choosing the excluded as the impossible subject position of a political project. This subject position is foreclosed as identity. So its political usage forecloses any possible identification with this particular position. In my usage, I suggest that this queer potentiality of the feminine should be explored by emphasising its link to

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<sup>385</sup> This interview has been reprinted in *The Irigaray Reader*, and in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 1985b [1977]. The following references will be to the latter.

<sup>386</sup> Irigaray, 1985b [1977], p. 76.

<sup>387</sup> Irigaray, 1985b [1977], p. 76.

masochistic pleasure and as a challenge to the active/passive duality. The feminine is not simply or singularly tied to female bodies. However, the female body enabled Irigaray to think the feminine as having a physicality and morphology that has been used to undermine and exclude the feminine as passive, receptive and as lacking.

My usage of the term 'feminine' reflects a will to engage critically with this term. It is linked both to the phallogocentric discourses voiced by Freud and Lacan *and* to the mimetic engagements with this term by Irigaray and Ettinger. In my usage, I do not wish to make it a comfortable term. Instead, I wish to build on earlier definitions of this term, offered by Freud and Lacan. I am momentarily deploying it as a term developed by Irigaray and Ettinger, as something rather than as a lack of something. Irigaray's and Ettinger's different ways of deploying the term 'feminine' link it to the maternal, to passivity, to corporeal experiences. It is also connected to inter-corporeal experiences of tactile relationality and porousness of the self in relation to the self (as in Irigaray's 'This Sex which Is Not One') or to the maternal other (as in Ettinger's *Matrixial Borderspaces*). The term, as I deploy it here and as I put it to work in relation to Ozon's study of an all-female narrative, occupies a borderspace of its own: between exclusion and positive value, between lack and something. By assuming the not-yet-subject position of the feminine, a mimetic strategy enacts two separate strategies. The first is to attempt to proximate a different subject position from the excluded position of the feminine. The second is to undermine the logic of exclusion by questioning the metaphysical logos of the (male) discourse that has excluded the (feminine) as external to the logos of the master discourse. Quite simply, the position of the feminine in relation to the discourse under critique is impossible to define with the tools available within that discourse. As such this position can only be tacitly divined.

## **The feminine touch**

In *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Irigaray explores a feminine corporeality and a feminine sexuality based on its position within a master discourse that has tried to expel its body.<sup>388</sup> Irigaray starts out by redefining female pleasure as tactile

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<sup>388</sup> Irigaray, 1985b [1977].

rather than visual, whereas the pleasure that she excites is visual and she is made into a mirror for the male gaze. By contrast, her pleasure, for herself, is a tactile affair. The sex which cannot be seen feels itself.

Woman takes pleasure more from touching than from looking, and her entry into a dominant scopic economy signifies, again, her consignment to passivity: she is to be the beautiful object of contemplation. While her body finds itself thus eroticized, and called to a double movement of exhibition and of chaste retreat in order to stimulate the drives of the “subject,” her sexual organ represents *the horror of nothing to see*.<sup>389</sup>

The ‘subject’ in this passage is of course the male subject, gazing at the female object, at once enticed by her scopic beauty and terrified by her lack. For Mulvey, this horror was displaced and managed through an identification with the omnipotent male protagonist. For Irigaray, instead, what is at play, is feminine sexuality. What becomes of this inverted, involuted and convoluted feminine that seems to take place on the inside, hidden from the scopic gaze? Irigaray, using the method of mimesis, theorises the result of the feminine’s inversion through passivity, through the hampering of the active libido. Instead of the visual, it is the touch, the hidden, that becomes Irigaray’s springboard to theorise feminine sexuality from within but reaching beyond; her mimesis aims at the formulation of a feminine sexuality and a feminine desire and thus a feminine subject. However, this move is not enough for Irigaray. The feminine is not merely an other that seeks to find its own discourse. It is also the internal lack in this discourse. Irigaray thus uses the non-visible form of the female sex to theorise a logic that escapes the logic of discourse. Discourse should here be read in the Lacanian sense of social link. See for instance Seminar XVII, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, where the four discourses are presented as four possible social links. And yet the feminine is excluded in the formation of these links. This is why — as we have seen — there can be no sexual rapport according to Lacan. The visibility of male sex is contrasted a plurality that cannot be reduced to one, the touching walls, sides and folds of the female sex. In many ways, this becomes a physical representation of masochism as feminine. Masochism, in Freud’s interpretation, in its feminine form, is an

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<sup>389</sup> Irigaray, 1985b [1977], p. 26.

inversion of desires for an other. Irigaray's incorporation of this notion follows Freud mimetically. As we have seen, the not-visible sex organ is turned into something else. Rather than a lack, it is a complexity, it is a plural, sensory imagination. Irigaray then uses this imaginary to formulate a symbolic that would rest on this plurality rather than on the singularity of male discourse.

What she says is never identical with anything, moreover; rather, it is contiguous. *It touches (upon)*. And when it strays too far from that proximity, she breaks off and starts over at "zero": her body-sex.<sup>390</sup>

This re-formulation questions the logic of the (male) master discourse as a solid entity by introducing the non-visual, that which the gaze cannot reach. The tactile opens up an excluded mode of the self. In this mimetic reformulation of Freud's argument, we can also see an opening for affective, tactile aspects that have been excluded as the feminine and the non-visual, non-represented. The masochistic turning back on itself caused by the lack of penis in the mother and the self is here given a bodily representation that is not imaginary, not visual, but tactile. Rather than Marks's formulation of haptic vision as engaging with images, Irigaray's tactile turn back on the self opens up for a haptic visuality. Here the visual creates a tactile experience of the self by denying visual representation. Haptic visuality would then not be a result of the failure to make an image intelligible, but a result of the refusal of an image with which one can identify. The feminine as tactile experience is here closeness as well as exclusion: it is an exclusion as implosion rather than through a delimited formation of the self. It is the failed turning back since there was nothing to hold on to during the turn.

In *8 Women*, active sexuality or the active search for satisfaction has been held back. But as the patriarch dies, it is all let out, their truths come out one after the other and the group of women finally get to speak of who they are. What has been hidden comes out. The desire that is expressed by the women in this story only rarely involves the father figure. Instead they are directed between the women. Even the maid, who had been Marcel's mistress, reveals that the person she really loved was his wife. His sister had an affair with the other maid

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<sup>390</sup> Irigaray, 1985b [1977], p. 29.

in the house. His mother-in-law who killed her husband, showed no interest in helping him and his wife share a passionate kiss with the same sister who was having an affair with the maid. His eldest daughter was not in fact his but the daughter of his wife's first and never forgotten love, who died in a car crash before her birth. In sum, his presence in the house seems to have had no lasting effect other than to conceal the desires of the women. Once they think he is gone, their desires are openly displayed and expressed.

## **De-centring the elsewhere**

In Lucy Bolton's theorisation of women's cinema, she uses Irigaray's concept of speculum and bent mirrors as metaphors for a cinematic project to explore the inner lives of women.<sup>391</sup>

It is my contention that, in likening the filmmaker's camera to an Irigarayan speculum rather than a flat, reflective device, film can be conceived of as a means of 'getting inside' the subjectivities of women, revealing and examining interiority and consciousness.<sup>392</sup>

The speculum as device for examining and exploring the not-yet-visual figure of the female is here placed in relation to cinematic technique for exploring the not-yet-visual. The methods that Bolton suggests articulates a mimetic method of undermining the male gaze.

Mimesis in the work of Irigaray is a strategy of subversive imitation: the idea is that, by replicating a scenario or representation in which the female is the object of masculine discourse, such replication being effected by a knowing and informed woman, the fallacy of the original may be highlighted.<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>391</sup> Bolton, 2011.

<sup>392</sup> Bolton, 2011, p. 37.

<sup>393</sup> Bolton, 2011, p. 47.

Bolton points out that cinema can be used to produce mimetic challenges to a discourse that excludes the feminine as a mirror without its own shape. Bolton suggest that haptic cinema could be analysed as mimesis of the female corporeal and tactile experience.

It is possible to consider haptic cinema in this way, in that by factoring the body into the cinematic experience one can mimic the specular spectator, but highlight the realm of embodiment.<sup>394</sup>

Haptic film serves two functions, according to Bolton. First, it displaces the male gaze; second, it reveals the place of the spectator as someone quiet and disembodied. Bolton is critical of Mulvey's refusal to develop a feminine cinema. "Mulvey called for the destruction of pleasure in the voyeuristic-scopophilic look, but did not propose an alternative 'feminine' cinematic language."<sup>395</sup> Against this, Bolton suggests a theorisation of feminine cinema, where the position of the spectator is questioned by the contents of the cinema. Bolton argues that:

[...] silence might be used to challenge the visibility and accessibility of character and to complicate representation and reception. So, silence and pauses, as opposed to dialogue, could convey interiority without perhaps requiring obvious articulation or representation: just as the spectator watches in silence, so they witness the woman on-screen experiencing self-reflection and repose.<sup>396</sup>

Silence in cinema is here used as a method of mimetic exploration of the feminine relationship to corporeal identity, and also to challenge the position of the spectator. By not filling the gap in discourse, by not letting the absence of the elsewhere be talked about, this gap or this elsewhere is actualised in the pause, in a silence that enables an identification with what cannot be spoken. In *8 Women*, however, there is no end to the words. If they are not speaking, they are singing. Like the hysteric, filling the gap out of fear of what might be said if silence left space for it. The incessant talking does not mean that there is no

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<sup>394</sup> Bolton, 2011, p. 42.

<sup>395</sup> Bolton, 2011, p. 25.

<sup>396</sup> Bolton, 2011, p. 51.

space for silence, however. As Powrie suggested in his reading of the soundtrack to *5x2*, voices have a haptic aspect as well.<sup>397</sup> The incessant talk and over-saturation of valences functions, like silence, to blur out meaning. In turn, this opens up a haptic subjectivity with the characters on screen.

### **The insubordinate maid**

In a scene that follows the revelation that Mamy killed her husband and thereby deprived her daughter, Augustine of a father, Gaby, wife of the murdered Marcel is confronted by Louise, one of the maids in the house. We see Gaby enter the room as Louise is giving orders to herself, bossing herself around.

Louise: Louise, mon manteau, s'il vous plaît. Posez-le moi là... Non plutôt ici !  
[Louise, my coat, please. Just put it there. No, here instead.]

As Gaby slams the door, Louise turns around, towards the camera, her eyes are not quite directed towards us and she is smoking a cigarette.

Gaby: Mais à quoi jouez-vous, Louise ? Vous vous prenez pour la maîtresse de maison ? [What are you playing at, Louise? Do you think you're the lady of the house?]

Gaby enters the frame and Louise comes closer, without looking at Gaby directly.

Louise: Oui. J'en ai marre d'être votre bonne. [Yes. I'm bored of being your maid.]

As Louise says this, she flicks off some ash from her cigarette, which lands outside the frame, presumably on a table. Gaby, shocked, brushes the ash off the table. Louise, in return, grabs Gaby's fur stole and uses it to wipe the table.

Louise: Vous appelez ça nettoyer ? Mais passez-moi votre chiffon là! je veux que ça brille ! [You call that cleaning? Give me that cloth, I want it to shine!]

Gaby: Non mais vous êtes complètement folle, où vous croyez-vous ? [You are crazy, where do you think you are?]

Louise: Dans une maison assez mal tenu, je dois dire... La maîtresse de maison me semble bien légère et faisant preuve de peu d'autorité ! [In a badly managed

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<sup>397</sup> See Phil Powrie, 'The Haptic Moment: Sparring with Paolo Conte in Ozon's *5x2*,' 2008.



household, I must say. The lady of the house is incompetent and doesn't instil any authority.]

Gaby: Mais comment vous permettez-vous de me juger, Je vous rappelle que vous êtes mon employée ! [How dare you judge me? I will remind you that you are my employee!]

Louise: Mais si je suis votre employée, ce n'est ni par nécessité, ni pour Monsieur, c'est pour vous, Madame... Hélas, vous m'avez déçue aujourd'hui par votre attitude, votre manque de poigne, votre médiocrité... [If I'm your employee, it is not out of necessity, nor for him, it's for you, madam. And today I was very disappointed with your attitude, your lack of gravitas and your mediocrity.]

Then Louise exits the frame she shared with Gaby. The camera angle changes and we see Louise walk past a window, still with a cigarette in her hand, looking slyly in our direction but without meeting our gaze. A sad melody is gradually introduced as Louise extinguishes her cigarette in a vase before turning directly towards Gaby. She removes her apron whilst walking towards Gaby, who is now outside the frame, behind our gaze. Louise's eyes are finally fixed on Gaby as she unties her apron, throws it on the floor, rips off her collar, unties her headband and shakes her hair to make it fall naturally. Through this transformation, at once seductive and challenging, Louise becomes more like Gaby, her bosom is exposed like the lady of the house and her hair falls in a similar style, but it is less groomed, like a younger, grittier, and livelier version of Gaby. Louise steps on her apron on the floor and a photo slips out of the apron's pocket. Gaby picks it up and asks if this is her former employer. Louise confirms and says that she loved her. As Gaby exits the room, the camera slides back to Louise, followed by a panoramic transfer to a painting on the wall, behind Louise. The painting is of Gaby as a young woman.<sup>398</sup>

In this scene, Louise expresses her love for her mistress, a love that she has evidently been hiding. She has been Marcel's lover for five years and it was as such that he employed her in the house. But the object of her desire was not Marcel, instead it was the woman whose husband she shared and whom she relieved from her marital obligations by keeping her husband satisfied (as she expressed in a previous scene).

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<sup>398</sup> The painting is from the cover of *Belle de jour*, a film from 1967 in which Catherine Deneuve played a housewife who develops a double life where she works as a prostitute in an upscale whorehouse in Paris after the war.

In the beginning of this chapter I suggested that Marcel is not the incarnation of Ozon, but instead the incarnation of the Director, the auteur and the genius in whose thrall Ozon works. It is also possible to read Marcel as the incarnation of the spectator, that absence in the centre of the film. The spectator is also a demonic figure for the auteur caught between the genius of past and the expectation of new acts of genius. In between the two, is not Louise an incarnation of Ozon in the film? Ozon has been the lover of the Director/Spectator for years, through him he was invited to this doll's house, driven by a will to please his two masters. Louise talks about the pleasures that she was able to offer the master of the house, in line with a feminine jouissance that is still phallic, masochistic and castrated. But the divine object, the object that was really desired, was instead the actress. As the director dies, the directed also dies and the divine turns out to be human, just like Louise. As the divine order that gave meaning to Louise's subordination is revealed as an arbitrary division between similar humans, between siblings, Gaby becomes the hated other. If *Young and Beautiful* challenged the male gaze, *8 Women* challenges Studlar's celebration of the goddess as a masochistic, unattainable object. In the absence of the demonic Other, the un-castrated mOther as an escape from the threatening castration turns out to be just as hollow. Gaby becomes just another woman, serialised, like Mitchell's siblings, reversing the move from hysteric seriality to Oedipal uniqueness. As the never-castrated mother falters, the relation between Louise and Gaby instead becomes a social, levelled relationship, allowing for identification instead of difference. Louise's love for Gaby, it seems, could only be expressed after its failure. Her love for Gaby was based on the distance between them. Once that distance was removed and they were equals, the love is lost. As long as Gaby conformed to Louise's fantasy of perfection, she could be loved, but not openly. Gaby's husband was instead used as a proxy for the truly desired object.

### **The silence of the maid**

Up until this point, Louise has largely remained silent. At the same time, she is offered as a possible point of entry and identification for the spectator. Like us, she is invested yet an outsider to the drama. Whereas the other women are constantly talking to fill the silence, Louise has been mainly tacit and spoken

about. She is the '*jeunesse*' whom Marcel preferred to the older ladies and their accusations against her go mainly unanswered. Instead, she mainly expresses herself through movements and facial expressions. She is the one who finds Marcel dead as she walks in to his room with a tray of toast and tea. In the scene before she brings it up to his room, she licks the jam of her finger in a sensual gesture. This implies not only an aesthetisation of her, but hints at hidden pleasures and desires underneath her silence. Implying that this silence is not merely the result of the submissiveness demanded by her profession but instead a thin cover for something else.

When Gaby's sister Augustine faints and Gaby orders Louise to administer her injection, Louise reluctantly accepts the order. She argues that it is not her place; she is merely the maid and what would happen if people were no longer confined to their place? But as Gaby orders her to do it, she submissively accepts her mistress's order and gets ready to give the medication to Augustine. As she does so, we see Louise over Augustine's surprisingly sensual underwear, licking her mouth as she penetrates Augustine's buttock with the syringe. The other women are looking on from behind the sofa. Once again, Louise acts while the rest of the women are looking on. Louise is the only one who expresses her pleasure and this forms a bond between her and the spectator. It is through Louise that we are implanted in this scene. The scene where Louise licks her mouth is reminiscent of the scene where she licked the jam off her finger. As the remainder of the cast enact any fear of syringes, the maid seems to embody the pleasure of the scene. This specific scene is also a representation of the murder scene that we are denied, with its attendant sadistic pleasure of stabbing a helpless victim. Louise, and with her the spectator, may enjoy the eroticised penetration of Augustine's skin. As Louise is asked to perform this potentially sadistic act, something she only reluctantly agrees to, she remains relatively passive, challenging the dualism of the sadistic/masochistic positions. The scene upsets heterosexual assumptions of desire and also the active/passive dualism. Louise, as both active and passive, both masochistic and sadistic, challenges assumptions of stability as well as suggesting that there is an active side to masochistic pleasure. She does not conform to a notion of feminine desire as passive and, at the same time, she is not taking a fully active, masculine position. Instead, her actions remain resolutely ambiguous and her expressions of pleasure, like the scene where

she licks the jam off her finger, retains an enigmatic function for the spectator. It remains unclear what her pleasure and her agenda is. Hence the enigma of the murder mystery is transposed onto Louise and, as she is the entry point, the way in to the story for the spectator, what happens to her also happens to us. Her puzzling expressions resonate with previously implanted enigmatic messages in the spectator, triggering attempts at translating. By her various gestures, we have to relate to the enigmatic as something haptic, as the self touching the self. The one incident where she steps out of her role as a quiet and passive maid is given a partial explanation in the scene of insurrection described above. The lack of structure in the household undermines Gaby's ideal position of not lacking. Gaby's order to inject Augustine reveals her dependency on Louise, not just to serve, but to do things that her mistress is incapable of.

In Bolton's argument, a tacit female character may be a tool to invite the spectator into the story. By not filling the space with words, the silence shared by viewer and character may trigger identification. Furthermore, this identification between the spectator and Louise also works through physical acting. Louise is very correct in her dealings with her employers, but her disdain is ill-concealed. As such, she offers a respite from the over-the-top expressions of the other women. Then, by going 'out of character,' Louise offers an ironic distance to the story, and this distance helps us enjoy the theatricality of the other characters. In line with Bolton's argument, we are allowed to become part of the story by means of Louise's silence and her hinted-at emotions, implied through the enigmatic message of her facial expressions. When Louise's relationship with Marcel is first revealed, she is happy to reveal how she was able to give him orgasms that he had never before experienced. This reveals a desire to satisfy Marcel, to give him pleasure. But is there also an allusion to Marcel as a woman in this? In the sexual logic of patriarchy, the male orgasm is rarely seen as evasive. Louise's desire for Gaby, however, follows a different logic: this is the desire for the divine, the Other who is not lacking.

Being the Other, in the most radical sense, in the sexual relationship, in relation to what can be said of the unconscious, woman is that which has a relationship to that Other.<sup>399</sup>

As Louise discovers Gaby's inability to live up to the image of the divine Other of the Other, Gaby inevitably fails and is emptied. No longer a revered and distant object of Louise's desire, Gaby is reduced to a castrated despot in her own home. So what is the position of Gaby in the scene discussed here and above? When the scene ends, we are presented with an image of Gaby as a young, beautiful and eroticised woman. But this is not through the eyes of Louise, instead the painting hangs behind Louise. In a manner, the painting is a double of Louise. As Louise removes her symbols of servitude she herself becomes both a sexualised object and a sexual subject. Her pleasures have been implied throughout the narrative. But in this moment, her desire and desirability is in the open rather than in those scenes where the other women's gazes are absent. Louise's transformation is caused by the failure of Gaby (as mother) to remain an incarnation of the Other.

Lacan's logic of sexuation as presented in his seminar *Encore* follows this logic: on the male side, for all it is true that they are subjugated to the phallic function; on the female side, the formula says for not all it is true that they are subjugated to the phallic function. Something in the female thus escapes the symbolic and the discursive — this social link is dependent on the signifiers that these speaking beings are defined by.

A man is nothing but a signifier. A woman seeks out a man qua signifier (*au titre de signifiant*). A man seeks out a woman qua — and this will strike you as odd — that which can only be situated through discourse, since, if what I claim is true — namely, that woman is not-whole — there is always something in her that escapes discourse.<sup>400</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge/Encore, 1972–1973*, 1998, p. 81.

<sup>400</sup> Lacan, 1998, p. 33.

Woman, as not-whole, therefore (partially) escapes the discourse, the social link that defines her. Woman can therefore only be known through the discourse produced by her partial escape from the phallic function. She is the exception that forms the link between subjects. How are mother (Gaby) and daughter (Louise) to be understood, then? Is there no social link between these two women? The rupture in their relationship as a result of the removal of the father seems to hint at this. However, it is only through this rupture that the maid becomes a subject who speaks for herself. Reminiscent of Jean-Paul Sartre's introduction to Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* — the killing of a master is not the death of one but the birth of two subjects. How should we understand this social link between two women who are only known through the exclusion of the social link?

The maid in *8 Women* has, until this point, been defined as based on her role, on her social position rather than by her personality, as opposed to the other women in this narrative. Nevertheless, there is a discrepancy between her role (maid, servant, employee, if sometimes insubordinate) and her personality (seductive, secretive, enjoying). Louise is a canvas that cannot be filled immediately. Again, she offers a possible identification for the viewer, her spying gaze tends to be present as the story develops. The other maid — Madame Chanel — is of course also defined by her role rather than by her personality, but this role is not questioned in the same way. Her role does not offer the contrast that Louise does. This assignment of roles does offer some evidence that Ozon prefers young, white characters. The black maid remains peripheral and stereotypical whereas the younger and blonde maid is used to propel the narrative and to develop a personality as odds with her role in the household.

As apparent from the scene with Louise and Gaby, they seem to move fluidly if not freely between the masculine and the feminine. This in itself does not contradict Lacan's theorisation of the feminine. Lacan points out that these boxes can be inhabited by anyone, man or woman.

One ultimately situates oneself there by choice — women are free to situate themselves there if it gives them pleasure to do so. Everyone knows there are phallic women, and that the phallic function doesn't stop men from being

homosexuals. It is, nevertheless, the phallic function that helps them situate themselves as men and approach women.<sup>401</sup>

One can also situate oneself on the side of the not-whole. There are men who are just as good as women. It happens. And who also feel just fine about it. Despite — I won't say their phallus — despite what encumbers them that goes by that name, they get the idea or sense that there must be a jouissance that is beyond. Those are the ones we call mystics.<sup>402</sup>

The sexual division of these bodies happens not in how they place themselves in the male/female relation to desire, but in relation to the discourse that define them. These discourses place the bodies as secondary effects. The gendered body is the effect of the signifier in the discourse. And the discourse that defines the others is the discourse of the master.

Every dimension of being is produced in the wake of the master's discourse — the discourse of he who, proffering the signifier, expects therefrom one of its link effects that must not be neglected, which is related to the fact that the signifier commands. The signifier is, first and foremost, imperative.<sup>403</sup>

In Lacan's theory of the feminine, there is a different solution to this appellation of the discourse; this is the function of The Woman. As she is not whole, she escapes the imperative of the master signifier. She is the surplus that escapes. In the scene with Louise and Gaby there is no point of identification, Gaby is placed in the past as the Other, as the one who escaped the imperative of castration. Despite this, we see her now, she is the castrated object of lost desire. Louise is desiring but her object is fallen, and the doubling of her by the still (dead) image on the wall castrates her, as well as the repetition of her lost object. This scene repeats an aspect of the maternal Thing in the Oedipal situation. The mother is discovered to have already been castrated. Her escape from castration is revealed as false. Once the words of desire are able to be

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<sup>401</sup> Lacan, 1998, p. 71.

<sup>402</sup> Lacan, 1998, p. 76.

<sup>403</sup> Lacan, 1998, p. 32.

spoken, it is already too late. This point is further emphasised in the following scene, where we return to Augustine, sitting in front of three angled mirrors. We see her from behind as well as fractured in the three mirrors. In one of them, our gaze is met by hers. From the setting we are led to believe that she is about to transform herself. Just like Louise, after this scene she returns to the rest of the women with an elaborate dress and hairstyle. But this change is only superficial. Once the other women have acted out their surprise they return to treating Augustine as they did before her transformation. As in the scene between Gaby and Louise, this female jouissance is not locked to a female body. Rather, female jouissance or jouissance beyond the (lack of the) phallic is a mode that enables a different solution of the Oedipus complex, one not confined to the castration of the master's discourse.

As this solution is not a metaphor that ties the imaginary with the symbolic and the real to form an interlinked subject, this solution must be understood in a different way. In a later seminar, Lacan develops a theory for a subject where these links are not tied together. Instead, Lacan inserts the *sinthome* to keep the symbolic, real and imaginary tied together. The *sinthome* functions on a level similar to the real, as a repressed linkage. It is the necessary link that takes on the function of the impossibility of a meta-language, or the Other of the Other, as Lacan called it. As there can be no outer guarantee or link to hold the symbolic and the imaginary together, Lacan invented various exclusions to link these. Woman as excluded in order to form the negation of the social link as discourse is one of these incarnations. The real with its link to the maternal Thing is another. The *sinthome* is an attempt to imagine a subjectivity of this excluded that, even so, forms the social link.

To have a relationship with one's own body as though it were foreign is certainly a possibility, one that is expressed by the use of the verb *to have*. One has one's body. To no extent is it something that one *is*. This is what makes one believe in the soul, and there is no reason to stop there. So, one thinks that one has a soul, which really tops it all. The form that this *dropping* of the relationship with the body takes for Joyce is, however, altogether suspicious for an analyst. This idea of the self, the self as a body, carries weight. This is what is called *the Ego*.<sup>404</sup>

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<sup>404</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXIII: The Sinthome, 1975–1976*, 2016, p. 129.



The relationship to the body in Joyce's writing (and life) is suspicious to Lacan. Lacan claims that the body for Joyce has a function that is not included in this identification with an image and the relation between the signifier (symbolic) and the signified (imaginary) as secondary. In the case of Joyce, this relationship is distinct. It is one of love.

The *Ego* is said to be narcissistic because, at a certain level, there is something that supports the body as an image. In the case of Joyce, however, isn't the fact that the image is not involved on this occasion the sign that the *Ego* has an extremely particular function for him? And how is this to be set down in my Node Bo?<sup>405</sup>

The Node Bo is merely the translation of the following, which I was reminded of yesterday evening — love, and into the bargain the love that one may qualify as eternal, is addressed to the function of the father, in the name of the fact that he is the bearer of castration. This at least is what Freud puts forward in *Totem and Taboo* through his reference to the primal horde. The sons love the father to the very extent that they are deprived of women.<sup>406</sup>

The ego in Joyce is here described as following the function of love rather than of identification. Lacan defines love as the feeling the horde has for the father as he deprived them of women. Women are representations of the impossibility of Woman, or God. The Father has a relation to the representations of God and the horde loves the Father as guarantor for the deprivation of the consuming relation to the (m)Other/God. The ego, or the relation to the body, follows this function in Joyce; Lacan argues here for a loss of relation that is more primordial than the loss of the Name-of-the-Father, the loss of the body as non-discursive, as the feminine or as Woman. This relationship to the body touches on an effort to understand *jouissance* beyond the phallic, a *jouissance* that Lacan had previously placed on the side of the feminine.

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<sup>405</sup> Lacan, 2016, p. 129.

<sup>406</sup> Lacan, 2016, p. 130.

But Lacan does not connect these dots, he does not critically review his own model of sexualisation through this theorisation of feminine jouissance. Sexualisation is understood as a symptom, as a result of a functional Oedipus complex. However, in his turn towards the *sinthome*, Lacan attempts to understand the surplus that has been displaced in the hysteric and in the feminine. But instead of investigating sexualisation and the sexed body, Lacan turns to the language of Joyce, of the associational surplus of language that reaches the limit of the symbolic. Where Lacan seems to look for the beyond of language in Joyce's fragmented language, Irigaray finds it both in the failure of language and in tactile, bodily experiences.

In Irigaray's usage of mimesis, she explicitly aims at renegotiating the feminine, yet she refuses to define the feminine, leaving the feminine as a surplus. She argues that the feminine should be understood in tactile rather than scopic formulations.<sup>407</sup> The scopic, on a level of identification is, according to Irigaray, phallic — it searches for the phallic marker and turns away in horror from the lack thereof on the female body. Irigaray mimics a phallic logic in order to undermine the assumptions of that logic. As opposed to Lacan and his reading of Joyce, Irigaray does not focus on the word and the disruption of logic within language; she concentrates instead on the body as a tactile instrument. In particular, she foregrounds the female body and its sex that is not visible, in its hidden form it accentuates the tactile aspect, the self-touching aspect of this sex which is not one.

This organ which has nothing to show for itself also lacks a form of its own. And if woman takes pleasure precisely from this incompleteness of form which also allows her organ to touch itself over and over again, indefinitely, by itself, that pleasure is denied by a civilization that privileges phallicism.<sup>408</sup>

This touching aspect without a discernible object is mimicking Lacan's positioning of the feminine as object *a* and an attempt at taking a morphology of the female body to move towards a re-evaluation of the feminine. In Bolton's reading of Irigaray, we can produce images that reveal and enable a self-

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<sup>407</sup> See Irigaray, 1985b [1977].

<sup>408</sup> Irigaray, 1985b [1977], p. 26.

reflection in women that corresponds to this self-touching, which might be used to undermine a phallogocentric culture. Mimesis is here a tool for revealing the fallacy of masculine discursivity.<sup>409</sup> But mimesis as a tactile aspect also indicates the boundaries of identification and the narcissistic aspect of the bodily self. By mimicking the feminine in Lacanian discourse, Irigaray explores this category as an aspect that has been suppressed through a focus on the phallic. Now, the phallic is read as the master signifier that guarantees the submission to castration on a symbolic level, and the feminine as the position that (partially) escapes the master signifier's order. If that is so, then the feminine, as tactile and as non-scopic, is something more than the revelation of the fallacy of a phallogocentric order and the possibility of female self-reflection. It reveals the absence of a possible identification between the characters and between the spectator and the characters. This is a different usage of mimesis, one that points to the limits of identification rather than towards a utopian feminine identity. Tactile, objectless feminine pleasure instead points towards a disruption of identification.

Woman derives pleasure from what is *so near that she cannot have it, nor have herself*. She herself enters into a ceaseless exchange of herself with the other without any possibility of identifying either.<sup>410</sup>

This proximity to the self and the other does not let in any light, no spectator is let in and difference is negotiated not as differentiation but as subtle surfaces, as meeting points that do not conform to the phallic master's discourse. These differences work on a subtle, excessive level, where the Oedipal separation of the imaginary, symbolic and the real has not been achieved. And as the separation has not been achieved, they cannot be linked together. In this perspective, the feminine is thus linked through bodily traces that they define, but not bound by them. The example of the female sex that Irigaray uses is based not only on the physical reality of the female sex but on the interpretation or signification of this sex. As it is the sex that is not visible, symbolically it has

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<sup>409</sup> See Bolton, 2011, p. 47, see also quote above.

<sup>410</sup> Irigaray, 1985b [1977], p. 31.

been withheld from identification, and it therefore lends itself to speculations about the excluded.

## **Conclusion**

I have outlined a model where sexual difference is to be understood as the result of a foreclosure through rupture, as opposed to gender as the result of a return to the self through a masochistic turn. This turn is not an event but the result of a being-with an enigmatic alterity. This being-with is not reducible to identification, nor incorporation through what Irigaray and Butler see as a melancholic turn towards the self. Yet, between Gaby and Louise sexual difference is exchanged, transformed and replaced with a fluidity that the foreclosure of sexual difference should not allow.

This scene, read in this way, presents a critique of the model of sexual difference as foreclosure and suggests instead a different model of sexual difference. In Irigaray's tactile formation of the feminine, the distance between the self and the self implodes so that there is no room for light, no room for a visibility to take place. In Lacan's formulation of the *sinthome*, a similar collapse of the relationship to the self as body is suggested, where a body is something that one has, not is. One is never identical with one's self. This harks back to our initial discussion of the split of the self. It also echoes Lacan's early definition of sexual difference, where man seeks to have the phallus while woman seeks to be the phallus. The self that assumes to be the body, to refuse the split, is therefore incarnating woman's position and is excluded from discourse. Yet Joyce speaks, he creates meaning. This suggests a possibility of meaning beyond castration. This notion is taken up by Ettinger and, as already noted in the present thesis, she develops her concept of the *matrixial border space* to negotiate Irigaray's tactile non-visibility and Lacan's concept of the *sinthome* as possibilities for meaning 'beyond' castration.

The *matrixial borderspace*, modelled on the intra-uterine relation between the mother and infant, may help to articulate what is going on between Louise and Gaby. Their exchanges suggests an identification, or rather a merger between the two. This merger does not place them on a continual, hereditary line. After the drama and once the snow has melted, Louise will not take her master's

place. Their differences through merger and through simile is a temporary failure of the function of sexual difference as I have defined it here. The two can never meet, except for this temporary failure of their selves to uphold the difference that make them distinct.

Ettinger's definition of 'sexual difference' is the (non) difference of the intrauterine contact between infant and mother — two selves in the waiting. Sexual difference in this sense is closer to a self touching itself without being able to visualise this and therefore form itself. This conflation of two distinct experiences of the self in the same term can be confusing, but rather than reading this as an unfortunate confusion in Ettinger's terminology, I suggest that this confusion is an illustration of sexual difference as tactile and fluid, not yet conceived of beyond castration or beyond the phallus. This beyond — again — does not contradict the phallic, castrating aspect of Louise's and Gaby's relationship, their differences places them on different planes, unable to have rapport. The temporary renegotiation and merger of the two women is possible beyond castration, in that room where Louise's transformation is enacted. Sexual difference in that space is the sexual difference of two selves in the making, two selves that are not yet, whilst temporarily occupying the same space.

In this chapter, *8 Women* has been used to engage critically with the feminine and with sexual difference. Through a close reading of the conflictual scene between Louise and Gaby, the notion of sexual difference as an escape from a porous sibling-like relationship was challenged. Louise and Gaby seem to suggest a different direction of this movement, a direction where the failure of an Oedipal situation instead leads to a temporary sibling-like relationality.

## 6 Rats and Shit, the Limits of Masochism

*If the sexual is, at the most primitive level, the attempted replication of a shattering (or psychically traumatizing) pleasure, art [...] is the attempted replication of that replication.*

Leo Bersani

*The Freudian Body:  
Psychoanalysis and Art*

In the previous chapters I have discussed sibling relations and the maternal through an engagement with hysteria, femininity, maternal and paternal law. These discussions have also further informed and developed the concept of spectatorship. Ozon's films have helped illustrate these issues but they also suggest new readings of the feminine and sibling relations. In this chapter, I will focus on the father in Ozon's cinema and the relationship between masochism and sadism. The sadistic father as a limit to the masochistic *fantasy* of a sadistic father will be investigated on the basis of a number of father figures in Ozon's cinema. In this chapter there will be a greater focus on the normative and antinormative. This is because the films discussed seemingly break the tacit contract between spectator and film assumed in masochistic spectatorship theory. The films in question leave the spectator with an excess of emotions and affect, interrogating genre norms in violent ways.

Masochistic spectatorship has been used to formulate a critique of the active/sadistic or male gaze in earlier theories of spectatorship. Sadism, on the level of the presumed origin of the film, will be explored in this chapter to extend this to the very real pain and discomfort caused to the viewer by films in extreme cinema. As discussed previously, Deleuze and Deleuzian spectatorship models emphasise that the sadist and the masochist are not complementary positions

and challenge the Freudian argument that masochism is sadism turned inward or turned back on itself. In Deleuze's model, the masochist remains in control and in his study of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch he highlights the male protagonists' ability to scrip and thereby remain the master of their fantasies of withheld pleasure and pain.

## **Norms and normativity**

As already discussed briefly, Wiegman and Wilson have pointed out an allegiance between queer theory and antinormativity. Critical of this, they question what would happen if queer theory were disinvested from this desire to align itself with antinormativity. Building on Foucault's critique of repressive models of power and normativity, Wiegman and Wilson criticises the anti-normative stance of queer theory for painting the normative as unrealistically rigid and stale.

Our hypothesis is this: antinormative stances project stability and immobility onto normativity. In so doing, they generate much of the political tyranny they claim belongs (over there) to regimes of normativity. For in taking a stand against normativity, antinormative analyses must reduce the intricate dynamics of norms to a set of rules and coercions that everyone ought, rightly, to contest.<sup>411</sup>

By making the normative rigid and vilified, the queer project disregards the changeability and the complexity of norms, posing the normative as the opposite of what is assumed to be queer. This positioning of queer and normativity as opposites disregards the interconnections between the two and produces the normative as fixed. Wiegman and Wilson argue that, following Foucault, the normative and antinormative are not opposing forces but rather interlocking movements that produce each other. In the field of queer studies, the normative is made passive, receptive to whatever projections those with an antinormative stance wish to fight. Wiegman and Wilson point out that "these lifeless norms (e.g., heteronormativity) don't stand prior to our antinormative

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<sup>411</sup> Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth A. Wilson, 'Introduction: Antinormativity's Queer Conventions,' in *differences*, 2015, p. 13.

analyses, awaiting diagnosis; rather, they are one of our own inventions.”<sup>412</sup>  
Antinormative practices thus produce the normative as an imagined other.

Antinormativity is antinormative, then, in a way that it presumably does not intend: it turns systemic play (differentiations, comparisons, valuations, attenuations, skirmishes) into unforgiving rules and regulations and so converts the complexity of moving athwart into the much more anodyne notion of moving against.<sup>413</sup>

Antinormativity is antinormative in the sense that normativity is in itself flexible and ever changing, while antinormativity produces the normative as what is inflexible and without complexity. In so doing, the antinormative stance produces two fixed opponents, undermining the flexibility that is inherent in the normative, at least according to Foucault’s theory of the deployment of sexuality. Antinormativity is thus antinormative by creating an opposition devoid of the flexibility and dynamic processes of the normative. This remapping of the normative and antinormative proposes the normative as a dynamic field, the range and grasp of which should be altered rather than undermined. Wiegman and Wilson describe normativity as “a structure of proliferations: some of these normative proliferations duplicate already existing terms, some twist those terms or minimize or amplify or warp them.”<sup>414</sup> This description of the normative follows Foucault’s sense that the deployment of sexuality is both a production of knowledge, a proliferation of sexuality and sex, which serves as the ontological assumption of sexuality.

This discussion also highlights some of the issues discussed in the Preface to this thesis. The trope ‘always already’ was there discussed as a closing off of the history and changeability of a norm and the incorporation of a self or a statement within the citationality. Diana Fuss was quoted arguing that this trope function to let essentialism in through the back door. Fuss is not, however, unequivocally for or against essentialisation, whether it sneaks in the back door or not. Distinguishing between what she calls real and nominal essentialism, Fuss makes the argument that essentialism is not as stable as anti-essentialists

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<sup>412</sup> Wiegman and Wilson, 2015, p. 13.

<sup>413</sup> Wiegman and Wilson, 2015, p. 18.

<sup>414</sup> Wiegman and Wilson, 2015, p. 17.



make out. “To insist that essentialism is always and everywhere reactionary is, for the constructionism to buy into essentialism in the very act of making the charge; *it is to act as if essentialism has an essence.*”<sup>415</sup> Similarly to Wiegman and Wilson, Fuss makes the argument that essentialism is made reactionary, stable and ultimately essentialist through the argument of anti-essentialism. As such, the anti-essentialist and the anti-normative stances foreclose the possibility of using these norms or essences. They are instead seen as always already problematic and always already fixed in their meaning. Through discussions of the feminine and masochism I have shown how normative and essential imagery — of submissiveness and subjugation — can be deployed to produce something unintentional. In the Preface I used Braidotti’s argument for a desire for being as more primary than the subversion of being as well as Sedgwick’s notion of periperformatives to challenge the stability of the normative and the presumed essence of the being aspired to. Fuss argues that Irigaray’s return to morphological metaphors of the feminine should be understood as a metonymic deployment of nominal essentialism — in other words a destabilising project aimed at the exclusion that is being quoted. “For Irigaray [...] women are engaged in the process of both constructing and deconstructing their identities, their *essences*, simultaneously.”<sup>416</sup> Fuss makes this argument in relation to Irigaray’s notion of *parler-femme* and masculine and feminine syntaxes. I have argued against this step as I see this as a link to Irigaray’s more positivist (and real essentialising in Fuss’s vocabulary) tendencies. I have shown how Studlar’s notion of female masochism becomes problematic as it fixes the subjugated position by separating and then conflating woman and feminine. My project is focused on the self and the dethroning of the ego as a completed entity — an always already achieved being — and instead open this self up to affectability and continuous negotiations, goings astray and puzzlement at re-discovering a self that is not quite familiar. For this, I have been mining discussions of masochism to challenge the established self and the dichotomy of active/passive pleasures and readings. For this project, I have been less interested in morphologies in Irigaray’s metonymic language and more interested in the metaphors of affectability and incomplete ego-formation that her studies of subjugation and exclusion led her to.

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<sup>415</sup> Fuss, 1989, p. 21.

<sup>416</sup> Fuss, 1989, p. 70.

## **A body of resistance**

In Foucault's model of the deployment of sexuality, bodies and pleasures are described as both the object of and the limitation to any knowledge of sexuality. This led him declare that bodies and pleasures are points of resistance to the deployment of sexuality.<sup>417</sup> As the desired object of knowledge, the body and its pleasure function as an ideal point that is sought but always escapes the prying eye of the will to know. Bodies and pleasures in their undetermined plural form constitute Foucault's attempt to formulate a 'beyond' of the power that produces the subject to be known. In this thesis, I have used the 'feminine' to name this 'beyond.' The bodies and pleasures of Foucault are not 'beyond' in the sense that they are excluded from the work of power, nor are they a different layer as the matrixial borderspaces. Instead, bodies and pleasures are the unformed matter out of which power shapes subjects. In this analogy, the bodies and pleasures resemble the shapelessness of the chora or the feminine matter out of which selves are shaped by the addition of forms. By invoking Foucault, I wish to ask what power is returned in the formation of the self and also how power as external norms functions in that process.

My argument is that the melancholic foreclosure of Butler's gender formation is incompatible with the continuation of bodies and pleasures, or with the feminine as a tactile return to the self as not yet shaped. This aspect demands a return to the self 'beyond' foreclosure — this is in my argument the continuous return to the self through affective contact with an enigmatic alterity. This formation of the self is not absolute and therefore does not end, nor does it ever form a self that is definite. It is forever open to the enigmatic other. The body is what escapes only insofar as what is excluded, like Fuss's argument above, the body is produced as that which escapes knowledge, therefore embodying the enigmatic that escapes translation. This model, then, takes into account the excluded and the limits to the proliferation of the normative. The body in Foucault's work functions as an evasive target for the creation of knowledge, but also as what is never an integral part of knowledge. The body serves as what is outside the

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<sup>417</sup> "The rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex desire, but bodies and pleasures." Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol 1: The Will to Knowledge*, 1998 [1976], p. 157.

discursive production of knowledge but it is also what motivates this production.<sup>418</sup>

This chapter will analyse the normative as a process of expansion and absorption, both as reductive processes and via its potential for altering normativity. I will focus on Ozon's *See the Sea* and *Sitcom*, two films deploying disruptions of norms. In different ways, these films enact notions of the normative and the anti-normative. This analysis will also open up a wider discussion of this thematic occurrence in Ozon's cinema. The different formulations of the 'limits' or 'beyond' of norms and language also serve as an opportunity to refine further my definition of the 'feminine' as an elsewhere, as pursued across this thesis. In the previous chapter, this was examined in relation to Lacan's notion of the sinthome as well as Irigaray's tactility as the expression of a refused visuality.

### **The masochistic spectator**

As discussed earlier, Studlar has developed theories of masochistic aesthetics and the masochistic spectator based on Deleuze's critique of Freud's reduction of masochism to inverted sadism. Studlar sees the spectator as involved in masochistic pleasure based on the pre-Oedipal relationship to the maternal object, not the Oedipal model of scopophilic pleasure as related to paternal control. This move away from the Oedipal model challenges the phallic economy where woman is defined as lack. Studlar writes in opposition to Mulvey:

[In Mulvey,] Spectatorship is determined solely by the workings of the castration complex which constructs the female into an image of threatening lack, a passive, fetishized object in a theoretical construct of immutable polarities.<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>418</sup> Foucault's distinction between the soul and the body is further revealed in the following quotation: "The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body." Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1995 [1975], p. 30.

<sup>419</sup> Studlar, 1988, p. 37.

Against this reduction of the spectator and of the pleasure available for the spectator, Studlar posts masochistic pleasure. This is rooted not in castration fear but in a pre-Oedipal relation to the mother. In this pre-Oedipal phase, the mother is not yet associated with lack.

In returning to fantasies that have their origin in the prephallic, prelinguistic, pregenital stage of development, the masochistic aesthetic suggests that all of film may be capable of forming spectatorial pleasures divorced from castration fear and sexual difference defined exclusively on feminine lack.<sup>420</sup>

The masochistic realm is thus posited as an alternative theory for spectatorial pleasure unburdened by castration and its association of the feminine with lack. As discussed in the introduction to the present thesis, Studlar argues that the masochist clings on to the female as an ideal, rather than an object to be consumed, destroyed or fucked, this idealisation leads — in Studlar's argument — to “an almost desexualized contemplation.”<sup>421</sup> In this challenge to Mulvey, Studlar underscores the pleasure to be had in contemplation. To contemplate the object of desire is to remain at a distance, to delay satisfaction indefinitely rather than consuming the desired object. Studlar's argument, however, seems to assume that the mother is lacking and that it is only through distant contemplation that lack can be kept a bay. In effect, in their attempts to reread the mother as a desexualised, ideal object, Studlar and Deleuze confirm the phallogocentric reading of the mother as lacking, something that can only be contemplated as desexualised, always kept at a safe distance so as not to risk discovering that lack.

Studlar sketches out spectatorial pleasures devoid of the phallic and sadistic. But this only reveals the underlying assumption of a phallus that the idealised object does not have. Studlar calls it ‘an almost desexualized contemplation.’ This contemplation allows pleasure (almost) devoid of sex. Certainly, such desexualised contemplation may be found in Ozon's cinema, in the fascination with nudity and juvenile beauty, whether masculine or feminine, and a seeming lack of interest in the sexual act. This was discussed earlier in this thesis in

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<sup>420</sup> Studlar, 1988, p. 29.

<sup>421</sup> Studlar, 1988, p. 22.

relation to the sex scenes in *Young and Beautiful*, which are remarkably devoid of erotization. Such a relationship to the other is also at play between Louise and Gaby in *8 Women*. The end of Louise's love for Gaby was caused by the collapse of a desexualised contemplation of her beauty, a contemplation that needed the distance offered by Marcel.

At this point in the argument it is important to note that, in the masochistic subject's attempts to conceal, deny and delay pleasure, this type of subject merges or at least negotiates the passive/active distinction. The object of desire is supposed to be the active part, yet the object also follows a script, namely the subject's fantasy. This contradictory nature of masochistic pleasure is further developed in Studlar's essay 'Visual Pleasure and the Masochistic Aesthetics'. Here, she points out the ambivalence inherent in the child's relation to the mother.

In Deleuze's view, the mother is regarded with ambivalence. She is both love object and controlling agent for the dependent child.<sup>422</sup>

As masochistic pleasure originates in this ambivalent relationship, it continues to be inhabited by this ambivalence about the object of desire. In Studlar's critique of Deleuze, she points out that he, like Freud, assumes that the masochistic subject is male and that, in this case, masochism is a perversion. The female subject, as we have seen, is considered to be already masochistic.

Like Freud, Deleuze positions the male as the fantasizing masochistic subject in his study. This exclusion of the female subject might be taken as a sexist limitation to Deleuze's analysis, but Deleuze is quick to point out that the female can assume *the same* position in relation to the central figure of the fantasy — the oral mother.<sup>423</sup>

Studlar goes beyond this afterthought of equivalence, so typical of Freud and also seemingly adopted by Deleuze. In her usage of the masochistic subject,

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<sup>422</sup> Studlar, 'Visual Pleasure and the Masochistic Aesthetics,' in *Journal of Film and Video*, 1985, p. 7.

<sup>423</sup> Studlar, 1985, p. 7.

the ambivalence of the object relation becomes a means of theorising the fluidity and ambivalence in gender identification.

Through the mobility of multiple, fluid identifications, the cinematic apparatus allows the spectator to experience the pleasure of satisfying "the drive to be both sexes" that is repressed in everyday life dominated by secondary process.<sup>424</sup>

Thus the masochistic spectator moves away from one identification into an ambivalent identification/desire, with the cathartic pleasure of being able to live out the drive to be both sexes through the pleasure of cinema. Aaron expands on such pleasures in her development of the term masochistic spectatorship. Masochism here functions to pull the viewer into the story. As a function of the narrative film, masochism relates to suspense and our desire to discover. But also a desire not to know, a desire to not be satisfied.

Suspense, then, further normalises or popularises masochism; it gives masochism a (narrative) method. It reveals much about the machinations of spectatorship, for where masochism can be attributed to the experience of both characters and spectators, suspense is spectatorial.<sup>425</sup>

Suspense normalises the function of masochism. Whereas Studlar's use of the term generally relates to identification with characters, Aaron relates it to narrative unfolding. She is not here in opposition to Studlar or Deleuze because both point out that masochism has a close relation to the narrative. But Deleuze's relation to the narrative tends to be subordinate to the object of desire/identification, as the narrative functions to postpone the pleasure to be derived from the object. For Aaron, suspense is not necessarily the postponement of pleasure derived from an object, but from a mechanism within the narrative itself. For Studlar, the spectator may be entangled in ambivalent relations to the objects on the screen, but these objects remain gendered and related to the feminine. This explains why, though Studlar is critical of both Mulvey's and Deleuze's blind spots about sexual division, there is still a problem

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<sup>424</sup> Studlar, 1985, p. 13.

<sup>425</sup> Aaron, 2007, p. 71.

in this argument in relation to gendered language about the mother and the feminine.

The masochistic fetish signifies the attempt to reconstruct the mother as inseparable plenitude and returns the subject to the eroticized transitional object marking the point of departure from her.<sup>426</sup>

Aaron here focuses on the structural dimension of masochism, on suspense, rather than the relational, and on the mother and transitional objects. This means that Aaron's usage of masochist spectatorship is transferrable both to cinematic structures and to cinematic objects.

### **The spectator's body**

As noted earlier in this thesis, Marks developed the concept of haptic visuality to theorise the effects images can have on an incorporated viewer by engaging with memories.<sup>427</sup> She points out that her definition of the body is not outside the cultural, rather she is interested in "the culture *within* the body".<sup>428</sup> This points to a non-symbolised aspect of meaning. And this, in turn, is related to Marks's usage of mimesis, as a means of relating to the world and to meaning without referring to the symbolic.

Not all accounts of mimesis or of tactile epistemology call for a return to a state before language and before representation. They do, however, insist that symbolic representation is not the sole source of meaning.<sup>429</sup>

Using these definitions of the body, meaning and mimetic approaches to the world, it is possible to understand Marks's separation of two types of vision: one

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<sup>426</sup> Studlar, 1988, p. 43.

<sup>427</sup> Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 2000.

<sup>428</sup> Marks, 2000, p. 145.

<sup>429</sup> Marks, 2000, p. 141.

haptic and the other optic.<sup>430</sup> Haptic and optic visuality are both related to seeing, but the haptic is closer to touch in its involvement of the body in the perception of the world. On the haptic side of the scale, meaning is communicated through mimetic experiences in the body rather than a symbolic communication. A further distinction that Marks makes is between haptic imagery and haptic visuality, defining the difference as “a film or video (or painting or photograph) may offer haptic *images*, while the term haptic *visuality* emphasizes the viewer’s inclination to perceive them.”<sup>431</sup> A picture is haptic if it entices the viewer into an embodied reaction. “The haptic image forces the viewer to contemplate the image itself instead of being pulled into narrative.”<sup>432</sup> The haptic image is here contrasted with the narrative/symbolic aspect of visuality. An image is haptic if it forces the viewer into closeness, if it forces the viewer to interpret the picture surface on its own. Marks exemplifies with images that are too grainy, too close or too blurry to be easily interpreted. These pull the viewer in, pushing the viewer towards more intimate means of interpreting such imagery.

### ***See the Sea***

This was Ozon’s longest film at the time of its making. After a number of short films, *See the Sea* has the unusual length of fifty-two minutes. As so many of Ozon’s films, this film is set by the beach in the summer. We first encounter a mother with a child. The mother, Sasha, is played by Sasha Hails and her child, Sioffra, is Hails’s own daughter Samantha. The mother speaks English to her child and we watch the two in long shots as the mother tends to her child. Though the scenery is idyllic, the lack of dialogue creates a claustrophobic feeling further enhanced by the sounds of crickets and the scorching sun.

When we are finally introduced to another adult character, it is the rough-looking backpacker Tatiana, played by Marina de Van. De Van was also involved in writing the script and she has continued as an actress, writer and director, often starring in her own productions. Tatiana is first seen walking on a ridge behind

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<sup>430</sup> Marks, 2000, p. 129.

<sup>431</sup> Marks, 2000, p. 162.

<sup>432</sup> Marks, 2000, p. 163.



the sunbathing mother and child out of view for Sasha, but revealed as a silhouette traversing the scene for the spectator. The placement of Tatiana above and behind Sasha, away from the beach and fully dressed with a backpack, alerts the viewer to the impending danger that she poses as well as the difference between the two women. They occupy different planes and different spaces and they are presented differently through their dress. In a subsequent scene, Tatiana abruptly bangs on Sasha's door, demanding rather than asking, to set up her tent in the garden. Sasha first refuses, claiming that her husband has to make that decision. Tatiana does not take no for an answer and Sasha finds herself accepting the request to use her garden as a camping ground. Despite how Tatiana is presented to the spectator, Sasha invites her for dinner and later lets her look after her child. In a later scene, Sasha invites Tatiana to use the bathroom, where we see Tatiana smoke, shit and take a bath. She then takes Sasha's toothbrush and dips it in the toilet bowl, rubbing it against the shit that had apparently not been flushed.

Sasha's fascination with Tatiana grows throughout the film, despite Tatiana's aggressive behaviour, Tatiana is depicted as oblivious of all the markers of threat and danger that are presented to the viewer. Sasha's apparent naiveté is further emphasised when she finds Tatiana's notebook with deranged scribbles but still continues to invite the visitor into the house and to entrust her with her daughter. After the toilet scene, the two women are shown sitting on the beach, Tatiana tells Sasha about a forest close by, where men meet up for casual sex. When Tatiana abruptly leaves, Sasha soon leaves her sleeping child on the beach to explore the woods. She observes various men having sex before having a stranger perform cunnilingus on her. This scene is strange in a number of ways. First of all, the beach, which has up until then been a place for Sasha and her daughter, a place of bright sunshine and somewhat claustrophobic intimacy. This is contrasted by the murky forrest and the men in there. But the contrast between the two spaces is not kept separate. As Saha leaves her daughter on her own, a sense of danger infects the beach too. It is also noteworthy that this is the only time we see other actors in this film. The beaches and the landscapes are barren and empty of people, except for this murky haven of men looking for anonymous sex. It raises the question if this is a fantasy of intimacy with Tatiana displaced onto the sinful forrest full of sexually available men.

Back in the house, we find out that Sasha's husband is expected to come the following day. Sasha invites Tatiana to spend the night in the house, assuring her that her husband will not mind. We then see Sasha and her child, asleep in bed. Tatiana enters the room and looks at them, tears rolling down her cheeks, before she undresses and walks towards the bed.

In the next shot, it is daytime, Sasha's husband is dropped off outside the house where he sees Tatiana's red tent. He looks at it with a confused expression before entering the house, calling for Sasha. After having looked in all the rooms, he leaves the house and returns to the tent. He asks if anyone is in there but gets no answer. As he opens the tent he sees Sasha's body, tied up and naked, covered in blood from what seems to be a series of cuts. Again, there are hints at lesbian desire before the spectator is confronted with this terrifying scene. Like the forrest, the scene where Tatiana undresses and goes to bed with Sasha is dark and is contrasted with the daylight in the following scene. If Saha's desire for Tatiana took place in a displaced fantasy, its potential realisation have some terrifying consequences. By mixing these levels of fear of the stranger, fear of homosexual desire and the breaking up of the mother-child bond, this film produces an uncomfortable amalgam of emotions in the spectator. In the final scene, Tatiana is standing on a ferry, holding a crying baby as the camera moves away into a panoramic view of the ship and the ocean.

### ***Sitcom***

In *Sitcom*, the crime is committed in the opening scene rather than at the end of the film. It begins with a theatrical curtain-opening that reveals a large, white house with a lush garden. A car enters and drives up to the house, a man steps out and enters. The camera leaves the viewer outside, looking at the house, while hearing singing from the inside. The sound of a family singing "happy birthday Papa" is too clear to have been transported through thick walls, placing our hearing in a more intimate relation with the family than our eyes. In contrast to the more realistic *See the Sea*, this sonic illogicality further enhances the sense of fantastical creation already suggested by the theatre curtain. The singing is then interrupted and we hear voices asking "Why? Why Papa?" followed by screams and gunshots. A subtitle then informs us that we are

transported to a few months before this event. The drama that we heard but were not allowed to see becomes the first narrative device and drives a spectatorial will to know. The past functions as a restaging of the future, and the camera now takes us inside the house. As beautiful and white on the inside as it was on the outside, we encounter the mother (Évelyne Dandry) who is instructing her new maid (Lucia Sanchez). The spectator is also introduced to her son Nicolas (Adrien de Van) and daughter Sophie (Marina de Van), who is being visited by her partner, David (Stéphane Rideau).

De Van returns in this cast from *See the Sea* and is joined by her brother, who plays her character's brother. In this role, Marina de Van looks diametrically different from the outcast Tatiana. At least initially, in *Sitcom*, she looks like the perfect upper-class daughter.

We are then confronted by a few stormy shots, where we are introduced to the family in a manner reminiscent of the glossy, overexposed cinematography of a domestic sitcom. The father (François Marthouret) enters the house and announces he has a gift. As we are already aware of his future crime, his appearance is foreboding and the bringing of a gift further underscores the link with his own birthday a few months later. The gift he has brought turns out to be a white lab rat from work. The story then unfolds with the rat as the new narrative centre. As each of the characters come into contact with the rat they are altered by the encounter. First is the son, Nicolas. He cuddles the rat and, after that, refuses his mother's request to wash his hands before dinner and then tells his family that he is gay before rushing off to his room. All three of these actions defy his mother's wishes and are linked together by the staging of this sequence of events.

The maid's partner, Abdu (Jules-Emmanuel Eyoum Deido) offers to talk to the son in his capacity of gym teacher. As Abdu enters Nicolas's room, he too is touched by the rat's power. After being bitten by the rat, Abdu seduces Nicolas. Next in line is the daughter who, after playing with the rat, loses interest in life and in her partner. Her subsequent attempt at suicide fails but leaves her paralysed from the waist down. She also loses all interest in her lover and the sadomasochistic games they indulge in after her suicide attempt leaves her bored. The maid turns anarchic, rebelling against her masters by aligning herself with the daughter and ignoring her duties in the household. The mother,

though at first afraid of the rat, finally plays with it and goes on to seduce her son, in order to save him from his homosexuality.

The only person who seems unaffected by the rat is the father, although we did not see him before he was already in contact with the rat. This changes when the rest of the family goes for a therapy weekend, an activity the father refuses to participate in. We learn that the family has left the house for this weekend when the phone wakes up the father from a dream. In this dream, we see the first scene of the film, but from the father's perspective. He enters the house and is greeted by his family who all sing 'happy birthday'. He then takes out a gun from his bag and shoots them all. The initial cliffhanger thus turns out to be nothing but a dream sequence. When the father picks up the phone, we hear the mother explaining that the rest of the family has decided that the rat is the problem and that it has to go.

We then see a series of silent shots where the father places the rat in the microwave. Afterwards he eats what miraculously appears to be a nicely grilled rat, chewing on a crispy tail. When the family returns to their home, the mother is attacked, in her bedroom, by a human-sized rat. Apparently, the father has metamorphosed into a rat and is attacking the mother. The mother is at last saved by her daughter, who climbs the stairs with her hands, holding a knife between her teeth, before using it on her rat father. In the final scene, the family buries their father.

## Readings of the films

These two films have been divided in two different categories by Schilt in his monograph on Ozon's cinematic productions. *See the Sea* is a part of what Schilt calls "the trilogy on female desire"<sup>433</sup> while the second film, *Sitcom*, is placed together with two other films under the heading "Paternal Monsters"<sup>434</sup>. Schilt makes a good argument for this and my only critique is that his categories are too vague, both could be extended to include many more works by Ozon. The monstrous father is present (though sometimes in his absence) in most of

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<sup>433</sup> Thibaut Schilt, 2011, p. 24. The other films in this trilogy are *Under the Sand* and *Swimming Pool*.

<sup>434</sup> Schilt, 2011, p. 38. The other two films are *Criminal Lovers* and *8 Women*.

Ozon's work. Likewise, female desire is a prevailing theme in many of the films. The reason that this chapter brings *Sitcom* and *See the Sea* together is because I want to study how outsiders are dealt with in Ozon's cinema. These two films deal with norms and the breach of norms, both in their cinematic language and in their subject matter, they stage outsiders and reactions to these outsiders in very different ways. *Sitcom* also functions as Ozon's first engagement with genre citationality. This film playfully uses markers from sitcoms both to create an ironic distance to the narrative and to the genre that is being cited. If *See the Sea* reveals an attempt to find his own voice, *Sitcom* embraces the performative aspects of quoting from established traditions and the interaction between the familiar and the strange.

As mentioned earlier, Ozon's films tend to whitewash or simply exclude any disruption based on class or race or other markers of social exclusion. Even in *8 Women* the insubordination of Louise becomes problematic because of the racial divide between the subversive and eroticised white maid and the stereotypical, underdeveloped character of the black maid. The two films under discussion now deal with some of the trauma of the excluded in liberal ideology, and also with the efforts of a self-identified liberal middle or upper class when confronted with this excluded other.

In *Sitcom*, the rat at the centre of the film is given symbolic meaning through the mother's initial alarm at it, together with subsequent transformations of the characters as they come in contact with the animal, this is enhanced by the use of sound effects to produce the rat as traumatic and as threatening. Mixed with the superficiality of the sitcom genre, however, these attempts are revealed as futile and as silly as the mother's aversion to her son's homosexuality and her insistence that he wash his hands before dinner. In *See the Sea*, the object of fear is produced as a danger using more effective means. In deploying metaphoric filmic language that associates aggressiveness, poverty, lesbian desire and lack of cleanliness, *See the Sea* confronts the spectator with the amalgam of these fears. In *Sitcom*, Ozon uses techniques borrowed from horror films and thrillers to build fear in the viewer but mixed with sitcom aesthetics, these efforts are revealed as impotent and petty, much like the sadomasochistic games that leave Sophie bored.

When it comes to *See the Sea*, Schilt chooses merely to sum up the critique of this film. He states that “*Regarde la mer* also touched off, arguably because of one single controversial shot, the notorious love/hate relationship between film critics and Ozon’s art.”<sup>435</sup> Only to conclude that though critics have been unable to agree on the value of the ‘one single controversial shot,’ the value of the film is apparent by the comparisons to such directors as Roman Polanski, Claude Chabrol, Henri-Georges Clouzot, Alfred Hitchcock and Ingmar Bergman.<sup>436</sup> Beyond this, Schilt leaves the controversial shot without comment. By contrast, he spends time defending *Sitcom* from its detractors (including his own and Ozon’s initial reaction to this film). Schilt’s argument is that the value of *Sitcom* is not in its engagement with homosexuality but in its address of the paternal figure and female desire. He argues that the father’s “complete inability to adapt to the fluid environment around him leads to his failure as a patriarch.”<sup>437</sup> The father, in this analysis, is the only figure in *Sitcom* who does not change when in contact with the rat. He does not go through any transformation but instead remains rigid until the end, when he consumes the rat and, catastrophically, becomes a giant rat himself. After the father’s transformation, the family is finally able to kill him and get rid of him. But, Schilt points out, in the final scene, the rat returns, as we see a rat on the father’s grave as the rest of the family walks away. “Patriarchy is tough to kill, and male monsters are too crucial in Ozon’s cinematic realm to be done away with permanently. In the director’s next feature, this archetype takes the form of a taciturn, sadistic ogre-like figure. As if to link the two films together even further, the ogre’s cellar is infested with rats.”<sup>438</sup> The feature referred to by Schilt is *Criminal Lovers*. In this film, however, the rats carry a very different symbolism. They live in a dark, murky cellar and they threaten to eat the protagonists while they are kept there. In *Sitcom* the rat is never scary on its own. The albino rat, released from a laboratory, looks clean and harmless. It is only when the father becomes the rat that it becomes frightening. Up until this point, all the various attempts to shock the viewer through the introduction of the rat and the scary sounds only help to

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<sup>435</sup> Schilt, 2011, p. 24.

<sup>436</sup> Schilt, 2011, p. 25.

<sup>437</sup> Schilt, 2011, p. 50.

<sup>438</sup> Schilt, 2011, p. 51.

reinforce the film's failure to charge the rat with fear, much like the anti-normative behaviour of the characters. Here it is also important to point out the racial connotations of the rat. Rats are symbolically associated with dirt, disease, homelessness and general rootlessness. They are often used in classist and racist rhetoric to describe lower classes, Jews and/or non-whites. But the animal in *Sitcom* is white, clean, in a cage and with a home. When the father metamorphoses, however, the rat becomes brown, playing on the racialised function of the rat.

In *Sitcom*, after the no longer well-behaved son has come out to his family, we see a montage of shots from his bedroom and from the dinner table. From the bedroom we follow the son's initiation by Abdu, the Cameroonian gym teacher and the maid's partner, enacting class, race and intergenerational seduction all at once. In parallel, we witness the remaining dinner guests' attempts at dealing with the news that the son is gay. While the son is being seduced, the father remarks on homosexuality in ancient Greece and the other dinner guests tell stories about homosexual teachers that were good even if they were gay. The maid notes that even in Spain there are homosexuals and that nowadays it is quite easy to live as a homosexual, especially in big cities. After this we see the mother with a facial expression indicating unwillingness to accept her son's sexuality. Schilt contextualises these scenes by reference to a time when gay rights were still contested in France. "One must remember that the film was released the year before the French parliament officially recognized the civil union of same-sex (and opposite-sex) couples in the form of the PaCS, voted in November 1999."<sup>439</sup> He then argues that, because the dinner guests turn directly to the camera as they give their defences of homosexuality, this reflects a wish to direct this not only to the doubting mother, but directly to the spectator.

Although a countershot of a devastated H  l  ne creates the illusion that the three interlocutors were attempting to convince the mother that her son's life was far from doomed. Ozon's choice of *mise-en-sc  ne* — close shots on the characters and, more importantly, direct gazes at the spectator — suggests that in the late 1990s H  l  ne is certainly not the only person in need of convincing.<sup>440</sup>

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<sup>439</sup> Schilt, 2011, p. 46.

<sup>440</sup> Schilt, 2011, p. 48.

For Schilt, Ozon is trying to make an argument for the acceptance of homosexuality. But as Schilt points out, this is precisely what this film has been criticised for: trying to kick down doors already wide open. He quotes Pierre Murat in *Télérama*, who stated that “attacking in 1998 the social and moral order that the family represents is comparable to ‘shooting a mosquito with a machine gun’”<sup>441</sup>. But if this film is not actually an attempt to convince the spectator of the harmlessness of homosexuality, what could the function of this scene with the devastated Hélène be?

### **Breaking the norm**

By juxtaposing this film with *See the Sea* and its ‘one controversial shot,’ I would like to suggest something different about these films. These films are in direct conversation with their viewers. Not in the sense, as Schilt suggests, that they are trying to convince us of the harmlessness of homosexuality, but rather to confront us with our own value systems. In Ozon’s early career he was known as a gay director, as we have seen from his reaction to being categorised as a gay director, and so his film was unlikely to be watched by any conservative viewers or by anyone still opposed to homosexuality. Instead, the choice to have the actors talk straight into the camera as they come up with defences for Nicolas’s homosexuality can be read as an attempt to mirror rather than lecture the spectator. The aim is not to be convincing. We are here faced with the liberal values of the upper-class family we are watching as a mirror of the presumed viewer of the drama, or someone with the same superficially liberal values even if not of the same social class as this family. The futility of these defences then reveal the assumed necessity for defending Nicolas’s sexual preferences. By arguing along the lines that being gay does not affect the life of whoever is gay, the liberal order is evidently trying to consume, to incorporate the excluded, and to retain the gay son as no longer threatening. The statements around the dinner table all function to normalise homosexuality.

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<sup>441</sup> Pierra Murat, “Contre: Une potache postpubère.” *Télérama*, 27 May 1998. Quoted by Schilt, 2011, p. 44.



In Asibong's analysis of *Sitcom*, the rat takes on a Žižekian demand to 'enjoy!' Asibong points out that it is the father's pet and that he is the last to be affected by it. In relation to the father's acceptance of everything that is going on in the house, "the unbelievably tolerant figure of Jean, *Sitcom* represents the absurd extremities of a certain 'post-ideological' liberalism that has contributed to the gradual blurring of categories of political struggle".<sup>442</sup> The pair, father and rat, thus function in tandem to create this late capitalist situation where the law of the father has been emptied out while the imperative to enjoy has taken the place of the law. Asibong quotes Slavoj Žižek, stating that "the direct injunction 'Enjoy!' is a much more effective way to hinder the subject's access to enjoyment than the explicit Prohibition which sustains the space for its transgression."<sup>443</sup> In this reading of *Sitcom*, Asibong points out the limitation of the characters's liberation. "Ozon's *Sitcom* rat seems to destroy the film's underlying dream of revolt and renewal, encouraging its pet humans to take it up on its offer of 'new relations', but then mocking their naive gullibility as they find themselves more trapped than ever in frustrated and frustrating forms of desire."<sup>444</sup> Asibong's reading of *See the Sea* follows a similar pattern and he relates the rat in *Sitcom* to the homeless Tatiana in *See the Sea*, describing her thus:

A true precursor to *Sitcom*'s magical rat, like Michel Piccoli's devilish Husson in Buñuel's *Belle de jour*, she contaminates her prey with the desire for fruitless transgression, before swallowing the hapless transgressor with a truly cataclysmic force.<sup>445</sup>

In sum, Asibong describes these films as failed transgressions, where the playful sadomasochistic role-swap is revealed as fruitless in the sadistic hands of the rat or Tatiana. Asibong also extends this sadism to Ozon and de Van themselves in *See the Sea*, pointing out that the two kept Hails unaware of the

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<sup>442</sup> Asibong, 2008, p. 37.

<sup>443</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Center of Political Ontology*, 1999, p. 367. Quoted in Asibong, 2008, p. 37.

<sup>444</sup> Asibong, 2008, p. 39.

<sup>445</sup> Asibong, 2008, p. 57.

film's ending. She was forced to improvise a scene where Tatiana interrogates Sasha about the act of giving birth, knowing that she had recently given birth to her own daughter who is also Sasha's daughter in the film.<sup>446</sup> This is in line with Asibong's reading of *8 Women* and the demonic director/father. He further posits that this sadistic tendency breaks with the sadomasochistic playfulness of role-change if the films in question are read as being about class. In Asibong's interpretation of *See the Sea* and *Sitcom* it is the limits to transgression that come to the fore.

This stands in contrast to Schilt's readings, which take the films more at face value. Asibong takes into account the effects on spectators, but the narrative and the internal relations of the characters remain his focus. Both Schilt and Asibong avoid analysing 'the one controversial shot.' Their two monographs represent the most thorough works on Ozon's cinema to date and it is striking that this shot remains unapproachable for both.

## **Reintroducing the discharged**

As already mentioned, the first scenes of *See the Sea* are claustrophobic in their lack of dialogue. Sasha is only interacting with Sioffra, who is depicted as a mild nuisance for her mother. One example is when Sasha is unable to read as her child is playing with her book. Sasha looks lonely and displaced in this idyllic setting. The entrance of another adult is forewarned to the viewer, but not to Sasha, the looming figure of a person with a backpack, walking across the ridge over the beach where mother and child are sunbathing.

The child is repeatedly presented as an uncanny element, the scenes of her sleeping in the sun are eerily reminiscent of a child corpse. As she sleeps, her head is covered or she is turned away from our gaze, the burning sun on her skin and the perceived heat gives a sense of discomfort that is realised in the scene where Sasha leaves her child on the beach to enter the forrest. Image 2 shows the mother and infant asleep in the heat after the mother has given up trying to read as her child climbs on her. The two are stuck in a symbiosis, sleeping and awake at the same time, making any alone time impossible for Sasha. In this shot, it is clear how the cinematography focuses on the intimacy

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<sup>446</sup> See Asibong, 2008, p. 56.

and exclusiveness of the mother/child couplet. The shot does not take in anything but the two. The child is at once exposed to the sun and at peace on her mother and the hidden gaze of the mother is turned away from the child while her body both holds and support the child. When the second adult is finally introduced to the film, after a silent introduction as a looming stranger passing above the two, she beats loudly on the door, breaking the silence and stillness once and for all. The two women are portrayed in stark contrast: one lives in a house, the other in a tent; one is stable, the other does not stay in one place for more than two weeks; one is wealthy and safe, the other is poor and unsafe. Tatiana's lack of safety is transformed into a general feeling of unease around her. She becomes unsafe, unruly and dangerous in Sasha's eyes. Sasha clearly does not want her near her house or her baby.



**Image 2.** Mother and daughter on the beach in *See the Sea*. The grainy film stock together with the colour palette gives an impression of scorching heat.

Still, as soon as she accepts Tatiana's presence, her proximity to her home, she starts acting like a good host. Presumably to make up for her fear, she invites Tatiana into her home, offering her to have dinner together. This is an example of what Asibong refers to as "a supremely elegant comedy of manners, almost in the tradition of Buñuel, picking apart the neuroses and compulsions of a repressed bourgeois housewife with a playful savagery."<sup>447</sup> Sasha fights her

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<sup>447</sup> Asibong 2008, p. 54.

impulse, one that we share, to distance herself from the threatening stranger so as to overcome her fear. This initial fear is turned around in an attempt to not be the uptight bourgeois stay-at-home-mother that she seems to be. This is also an attempt to normalise the vagabond stranger, giving her a safe place to live and eventually to invite her into her home. Like the family around the dinner table, Sasha looks to incorporate the strange into the the fold of the normal and the knowable.

In her attempts at finding a common ground, Sasha only further reveals the distance between her and Tatiana. Sasha tells her guest about a moment when she and her friends were travelling together and they ended up in a situation where she feared she might be raped. She was locked up in a room, at the mercy of her host, whom she thought might be getting his friends. But instead her story ends with the host returning to unlock the door to reveal a feast he and his wife had prepared. This heartfelt story possibly hints a Sasha's and the spectator's wish that everything will be fine, that the stranger is not a threat, that life and normality will simply expand and include the stranger. As she tells this story, we are led to conclude that Tatiana has been through similar situations but without such happy endings. Asibong points out that "Tatiana might be considered as a filmic descendant of the Sandrine Bonnaire character in Agnès Varda's *Sans toit ni loi* (1985)".<sup>448</sup> Seen in relation to this film, Mona (Sandrine Bonnaire) is given a history after her death. *Vagabond*<sup>449</sup> is constructed as a search for answers after the body of a female wanderer has been found in a ditch. Mona is portrayed as the author of her own destiny, but also as the victim of circumstances that led to her death. In contrast to Mona, who solicits our sympathy, Tatiana resists any possible sympathy.

As Sasha ends her story with a nervous laugh to fill the silence that comes from her guest's lack of reaction, Tatiana goes on to devour the remains on her plate by licking it clean. This is a sign both of a lack of table manners and of an insatiable hunger for food, a double marker of the social difference between the women. This difference is then challenged by a series of shots where the women are connected through physical contact and there is a developing sense of intimacy. This intimacy, however, is disrupted by de Van's careful acting; she

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<sup>448</sup> Asibong, 2008, p. 54, note 4.

<sup>449</sup> *Sans toit ni loi* in French, this can be translated as Without Roof Nor Law.

communicates a discord to the viewer that Sasha remains unaware of. As seen in image 3, Tatiana's disdainful regard is contrasted by Sasha's blissful expression. As spectators we see Tatiana looming behind Sasha. This scene is a repetition both of the scene where the spectator is first alerted to Tatiana's arrival and the shot where Sasha is resting on the beach with her daughter on top of her. Once again, Sasha's gaze is hidden in the intimacy of a shot that excludes anything but the two characters. In this shot, however, Sasha is enjoying the physical proximity and touch of the other. This pleasure is contrasted by Tatiana's gaze, directed at Sasha while her head seems to pull away from her host and her face expresses contempt. As onlookers we share a secret that Sasha is unaware of. This complicates the possible identification with Sasha as the kind mother and host.

As Sasha invites Tatiana to use her bathroom, we see a series of shots that mirror those of Sasha from earlier that morning. These images are further juxtaposed with shots of Sasha looking after her child in the garden. The mother-child relation has now taken an idyllic tone, both are laughing animatedly in the sun and the harshness of the heat on the beach is replaced with a lush green surrounding. Mother and child are now enjoying each other's company. We are lulled into a feeling that maybe everything is going to be fine.



**Image 3.** Tatiana and Sasha in *See the Sea*, where the direction of Tatiana's gaze breaks the doubling of the two, hinting at the sadism that she will later display. Meanwhile, Sasha appears unaware and is instead enjoying the massage.

As we see this transformation, we also follow Tatiana as she is using the bathroom. We see her legs and feet as she sits on the toilet. They are the opposite of Sasha's legs that we saw before: blemishes, yellowed toenails and hairy toes and legs. Tatiana takes a bath, masturbating with the soap, she then submerges herself into the water with her eyes open, giving the viewer a sense of stinging eyes, emphasised by her red eyes as she comes out of the bath. The bath does not seem to clean her so much as soil the bathroom, causing further spectatorial discomfort. This is an example of haptic visuality not reliant on the closeness of the visual but rather on our identification with the sensations we imagine Sasha is feeling. These scenes are also silent, allowing for the kind of haptic engagement through silence that Bolton suggests. As viewers we are in a state of recognition, beholding an image including our own embodiment. The haptic aspect of this scene implants a painful feeling in relation to Tatiana's visit to the toilet as opposed to the open-air freshness of Sasha in the grass with her child. This sensation, both affecting and incorporating the viewer, is one of rejection and disgust, a physical version of the fear that Sasha is trying to get over. She is out in the grass, playing with her child as she seems to enjoy having a new friend. She has projected this expectation onto Tatiana already and she is not going to be swayed from this belief. She is acting as the good hostess, embracing what she at first found disturbing.

Scenes of Sasha changing her child's nappies are then mixed with Tatiana getting out of the bath and taking Sasha's toothbrush and dipping it in the toilet bowl, rubbing it against the excrement that is still there. In a following scene, we see Sasha brushing her teeth with this toothbrush. This scene and the connection between the shit and Sasha's mouth is disturbing, testing the limits of the haptic connection that has been established leading up to this moment. It is a scene that is difficult not to feel. Though the scenes of Tatiana in the bath, with her red eyes, gave us a feeling of pain and dirt, the sight of a toothbrush rubbing against excrement still comes as a shock. And this is further brought home by the following scene where Sasha uses that toothbrush. The haptic aspect of this scene does not disrupt the narrative so much as it enhances and is enhanced by the placing together of these two scenes of cleaning teeth and excrement. There is a physicality in these scenes that is hard to deny. The implementation of the body is here overwhelming and acute.

This scene is the main reason why Quandt placed Ozon in the category 'New French Extremity.' Bonnaud decries this film as being "heavy-handed, underlining something that would have been much stronger and smarter had it been passed over in silence."<sup>450</sup> Bonnaud's repulsion, he claims, is rooted in the bluntness and the overtness in the shock-value of this sequence. He blames this, and his own inability to look beyond it, for not being able to see this film for what it is — "a youthful effort, a cruel tale grounded on the notion of phobia," this film, Bonnaud continues, "doesn't adequately conceal its psychological hypothesis: because she has had an abortion she has not yet come to terms with, a drifter kills a mother and kidnaps her young daughter, leaving behind her tent as a tomb of fabric for the horribly mutilated corpse."<sup>451</sup> In this reading of the scene, the trauma is Tatiana's. The drifter is the one suffering from the memories of an abortion and so she murders the mother and steals her baby. I concur that Tatiana is portrayed as deranged, through the manic scribbles in her notebook, the toilet scene and her killing and baby-snatching. But is the trauma really Tatiana's?

A different reading would revolve around the fear that we as spectators project onto Tatiana. In this interpretation, she is a proxy for all of our fears of strangers. Unlike the lab rat, the drifter is already a feared object. The female stranger entering the home of another woman is also an archetypal Hollywood trope foreboding insanity and murder. It reminds us of the maternal Thing and the insanity that threatens us if the father's limitations are not installed. By realising this fear, we are confronted with Sasha's (and our) desire to not be controlled by it, to be open to strangers, even to the extent of letting them use our bathrooms if in need. But what shocks us here is that our fears were justified. The stories about the big bad she-wolf were true. There is also a counter movement at play here, as we see what Sasha does not see and as Sasha's blissful ignorance of the dangers that the stranger presents reminds the spectator of the numerous victims of the Hollywood trope. In this counter movement, where we are invited to identify with Tatiana's sadistic impulses against Sasha, the limits to our identification with this sadism is tested.

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<sup>450</sup> Frédéric Bonnaud, 'Wannabe Auteur Makes Good', in *Film Comment*, 2001 pp. 52-55. p. 53.

<sup>451</sup> Bonnaud, 2001, p. 53.

## **Whose trauma?**

My argument is that this is not a story about Tatiana's trauma, but about Sasha's attempt to overcome her fear of the threatening other. It is the clash of two discourses, or two expectations: a fear of the stranger set alongside a humanist, liberal inclusion of the stranger, rather like the dinner guests' attempts to disarm the gay son's strangeness. When Tatiana first appears on her doorstep, Sasha denies her shelter. On failing to reject the stranger, Sasha instead tries to manage her fears and invites the stranger into her home. Once she is confronted with the stranger, her need to be a good host and treat her visitor with respect takes over. When we see Sasha, we see something familiar on the screen. She seems to represent the familiar and the safe, the white hats of old westerns. Even if we do not identify with her, we have all seen her on screen before, she represents what is wholesome, safe and good. Tatiana is the threat. The toilet scene can be interpreted as revenge for Sasha's perfection. But by going too far, this scene does not conform with the masochistic pleasure of experiencing an acceptable level of discomfort, nor does it conform wholly with a sadistic pleasure of seeing the perfect Sasha become the victim. The transgression goes too far to fit in either category.

This scene's bluntness is not a sign of the director's heavy-handedness but of the bluntness of the fantasy of the threatening wanderer. We want Tatiana to be a threat. She is the incarnation of the dangerous underclass that might invade the safe home of a lonely wife with her child. Or the vengeful agent that goes too far in punishing the idealised, ignorant woman in her perfect house and her perfect life. While we might accept standard filmic transgressions against Sasha, even including her mutilated body towards the end, the disgust we feel when we see the toothbrush and the shit goes too far. As such it reveals our expectations of the 'normal,' acceptable transgressions by the stranger and the vagrant.

The trauma is not Tatiana's, she shows no sign of struggling with her abortion. The trauma is instead in the gaze looking at Tatiana, judging her for her abortion and her unwillingness to display sadness about it, judging her blunt ways of demanding to stay close to the house, judging her for her unkept physical



appearance. It is our fantasy as viewers that she must be dangerous that is confronted by becoming reality. When Tatiana stands on the boat, with the crying baby in her arms, she is confronting the viewer: this is what you wanted me to do, this is your fantasy of me!

This response to the enigmatic message that Tatiana represents reveals *our* intentions. Sasha, like the defenders of Nicholas's homosexuality, is held up as a mirror to the viewer. But she is not as a mirror to identify with this time. Rather, it is a revealing mirror, divulging our judgements of Tatiana. But this is not the whole story. The toilet scene is blunt, it is transgressive. The physical revulsion we feel is not the same as the pain in our eyes felt in relation to the prior scene; where the haptic aggression against our bodies is acceptable. By mixing shit with Sasha's mouth, this transgresses the contract between viewer and director. Within masochistic pleasure, we expect a certain amount of pain to be inflicted when we watch a film. But this pain/pleasure must be held within limits defined by the narrative of the film. So the transgression here comes from the scene's breaking away from the filmic language of *See the Sea*, it does not comply with the masochistic pleasure of the film. In comparing Ozon with Hitchcock, Mark Hain writes that:

In these instances, the filmmakers dredged up more of the darkness lurking beneath the surface than we wanted to see; what was titillating in its hidden-ness now confronts us, and our sadistic pleasures profoundly disturb us. It's as if we've been betrayed — not simply by the directors, but by the limits of our own capacity to justify our voyeuristic thrills.<sup>452</sup>

Hain indicates these acts of betrayal though he theorises them within a framework of voyeuristic thrills as sadistic pleasures. The point becomes even clearer if we translate this into a masochistic understanding of pleasure. For the masochist, the contract is essential. Trust is necessary for enjoyment of the pain, its cathartic effects can only be embraced within certain limits. When this contract is broken, we feel betrayed. The toilet scene can therefore be interpreted as a sadistic transgression of masochistic pleasure. As Deleuze

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<sup>452</sup> Mark Hain, 'Explicit Ambiguity: Sexual Identity, Hitchcockian Criticism, and the Films of François Ozon,' in *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 2007, pp. 277–288, p. 282.

pointed out, the masochist is not looking for a sadist to satisfy their needs, instead the sadist is incompatible with masochistic pleasure.

The distinction between masochistic and sadistic pleasure is further emphasised by the symbolics of the toilet scene. The transgression not only of inflicting pain on the spectator. But the mixing of body fluids and body orifices challenges the stability of the self. If Ozon posited an occupation of the same space in the scene between Gaby and Louise, in the toothbrush episode this failure of sexual difference to foreclose a rapport or a link with the stranger is traumatically challenged. The renegotiation of our distance from the stranger is no longer a playful act but a threat that imposes itself on us. In relation to McCormack's mucosal monsters, the shit scene can be suggested to challenge the distance or perspective of looking on. Using Irigaray's notion of mucosal as a liminal relationality, McCormack argues for a mucosal spectatorship "For Irigaray the body does not occupy a threshold but *is* threshold. Its meaning emerges as perception, antagonistic to essence or ontology."<sup>453</sup> The shit, following this line of thought functions as a threshold or a touching surface between Tatiana and Sasha as well as between Tatiana and the spectator. However, as I have argued here, the shit scene, rather than open up a mucosal affectability, closes it off through its traumatising transgression.

As mentioned above, Tatiana first takes on the paternal function in a traditional Oedipal triangle by introducing a third into the mother/child dyad. This function is further enhanced by recognising the sadist/father incorporated by Tatiana in her repeated violence. De Van was a co-author and through her active part in improvising and keeping Hails in the dark, her sadistic insertion in the narrative is a meta-insertion of the sadistic pleasure of the author in the text.<sup>454</sup>

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<sup>453</sup> Patricia MacCormack, 'Mucosal Monsters' in *Carnal Aesthetics*, 2013, p. 228.

<sup>454</sup> Marina de Van has continued her career as a director a writer parallel to her career as an actor. In *In My Skin*, (*Dans ma peau*, 2002), she takes extreme filmic language to a further level. In this film, which she wrote and directed, she also plays the lead role. The film is a gory study in self-mutilation and self-consumption, depicting the protagonist as taking great pleasure in cutting, biting and peeling her own skin and then play with and drink her own blood. This study, however, follows its own logic, supporting a masochistic pleasure where the pain of the spectator remains cathartic as it is sustained by its narrative logic. The spectator is given reason and introduction to the self-mutilation through a scene where the protagonist accidentally falls and hurt herself.

This sadist/anal imposition in the masochist/oral pleasure of the spectator is symbolised through the transfer of the shit, via the toothbrush, to Sasha's mouth. My point here is that this external (as opposed to inter-narrative) attack on Sasha and the viewer should not be reduced to youthful bluntness. Instead, the aggression towards the spectator should be analysed via its own performance. The bluntness of these shots alienates us from the film. It tests us, and it makes the haptic feeling of violation hard to resist. The end of the film can be inserted in a meta-narrative such as Bonnaud's interpretation of Tatiana's trauma of a terminated pregnancy. However, the shit-scene or the toilet-scene refuse this type of reduction. The haptic inclusion of violation and trauma defy a narrativisation of the traumatic experience of the other as a sadistic figure.

### **Sadist interruptions**

In an early short film by Ozon, *Truth or Dare* (1994), the viewer is lured in to a story of youth and pleasure. Four teenagers are playing truth or dare, challenging each other to go further and further, from kisses to touching each other. Then one of the girls is challenged to touch another girl under her dress and describe the smell to the rest. When she pulls her hand out, it is covered with blood. The viewer is then confronted with the gaze of all four actors, one after the other, in absolute silence. The laughter and innocent pleasure is gone, the last face we are confronted with is the girl whose menstrual blood we have just seen, staring directly at us, seemingly to accuse us of something.

The display of blood, faeces or Sasha's dead body is not simply a crude, heavy-handed director's attempt to express something within the narrative. There is an aggressiveness towards the viewer here. This aggression is sometimes included in the narrative of Ozon's films. In *Time to Leave* (2005), the young protagonist isolates himself after finding out that he has terminal cancer, using his disease as an excuse, he explodes his previously narcissistic tendencies into overt attempts to chase away his family and his lover. It is only when he achieves this that he is able to love, to miss his lover and his family and to have a child with a barely known couple.

These examples reveal a double movement in Ozon's work rather than a simple development of his directorial skills. Ozon is both trying to reject his audience and trying to question this rejection. By inserting anger in the narrative he develops a potentially therapeutic aspect, whereas the outside attack of *See the Sea or Truth or Dare* represent a non-therapeutic transgression. Read in this way, the shit in *See the Sea* is not an expression of youthful bluntness, but a measured attempt to confront his audience with its own falsely liberal values. The shit in the toilet points to a limit in our acceptance of the stranger.

In *Time to Leave*, there is also an echo of the scene where Nicolas professes his homosexuality in *Sitcom*. The protagonist's sister is trying to comfort the photographer by saying that, in a few years, gay people will be able to adopt too, which then triggers an expression of rage against the sister. This scene follows shortly after the protagonist finds out that he will not be around for years; this may explain his reaction, but based on the reaction of their parents, this outburst is not unique. The aggression within the narrative is a reformulation of the sarcastic aggression that is displayed in *Sitcom*. Nicholas was not able to defend himself against the pitying attempts to normalise his behaviour. We have to wait for *Time to Leave* to get the cathartic expression that normalising is simply not good enough.

Read in relation to norms, and in relation to Aaron's general model for masochist spectatorship, the tacit understanding is that the pain inflicted should follow a *consensual* dynamic, "the masochist agrees to — both desires and requires — the other party's infliction of pain within a consensual dynamic."<sup>455</sup> . The closest this consensual dynamic comes to being written down, is perhaps the genre description of a film. The norms that govern what a film can do to its audience are not static or fixed. The limits change over time and between genres. What is acceptable in a horror film is not acceptable in a comedy. It is this genre restriction that constitutes the new Extreme cinemas. Often, these are not gorier than contemporary horror films, but audiences expecting an art house or auteur film are not prepared for their violence. Similarly, Martine Beugnet has argued in relation to *Trouble Every Day* (2001) that "it is less the 'gore' effects in themselves which attract disapproval than the fact that neither the filmmaker, nor the film itself, can be fully assimilated into the generic terms

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<sup>455</sup> Aaron, 2007, p. 91.

and categories that the film evokes.”<sup>456</sup> The breach of this contract may be what Wiegman and Wilson calls an ‘anodyne notion of moving against.’ And some sadistic interventions in the tacit masochist contract may indeed be anodyne. However, from the reactions discussed here, the shit scene is far from dull or anodyne. The question is, then, if the shit scene points to the limits of discourse and the normative, the elsewhere of the feminine, the bodies and pleasures? Or does it actually reinforce the normative other of chosen antinormativity, rendering it as more rigid than it is, and in the process missing a chance to subvert the normative.

### **See the mother**

One aspect of *See the Sea* that is lost in translation is that *Regarde la mer* is a homonym for *regarde la mere* — ‘see the mother’ or rather the imperative ‘look at the mother!’ In fact, the sea is not looked at in this film, in contrast to other films by Ozon. Instead, the camera repeatedly places us with the sea behind us, looking at the mother. Tatiana is the escape from this looking at the mother. As an adult with a voice, she opens up the story and offers space for a narrative as opposed to the timelessness in the long silent shots at the beginning. The shit scene, read from this perspective, then functions to collapse the escape from the mother/child dyad. The Oedipal promise of escape from the maternal Thing through the paternal figure breaks down, just as the bodily limitations are literally broken down in this scene. *Young and Beautiful* suggested a possible being alongside or being-withness with the sibling and seriality of self, and *8 Women* a reverse movement from an Oedipal mOther kept at a distance through the paternal figure into a seriality that breached generational differences. *See the Sea*, on the other hand, reveals a traumatic limit to this being-withness. The intimacy of porous selves, explored through relations to the maternal and to the feminine as a non-hermeneutic self, here finds its limits. Instead of Victor telling Isabelle that he does not know what he thinks about Felix because he is a boy. We, the spectator and the critic, may exclaim that this is heavy-handed, childish and brutal filmmaking, making it impossible to see the intricate and sublime qualities that the *enfant terrible* later hones and develops.

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<sup>456</sup> Beugnet, 2007, p. 37.



**Images 4 and 5.** In *Sitcom*, the laboratory rat functions to release inhibitions through touch. The film's attempts to charge the rat as a phobic object is contrasted by its initially clean and 'safe' appearance.

Sexual difference is here not enacted between characters, but between the spectator and the characters and the images.

The fluidity of bodies and the transmission of bodily fluids enact what is threatening in the displacement of desires and pleasures in others. The loss of self in-between Sasha and Tatiana reaches its catastrophic limits when this is sadistically played out. And our reaction is to flee into a notion of a rigid, hermeneutic self, protecting us from the loss of self in an other, from the borderspaces that the tactile feminine self enables. If we read this Oedipal situation via Mulvey, we would identify with Tatiana to enjoy Sasha; this further traumatises our position as it makes us do the unthinkable. In *Sitcom*, Ozon uses a rat as a plot vehicle and to transform the characters on screen. The rat is first introduced as someone's phobic object: the mother screams and runs up the stairs as her husband uncovers the cage and the animal he has brought home from work.

After this initial meeting we follow the rat as it affects the family members, one by one. When the mother finally embraces the animal, she decides to seduce her son. In the following scene she is speaking to her therapist about the incident, presented as a dream sequence. However, after the therapist tries to assure her that it was only a dream, she reveals that it was not. This scene stands in contrast to a previous one, where the mother talks to her therapist as she sees her family falling apart around her. Here, we listen to her trying to soothe herself and the therapist by downplaying her daughter's attempted suicide and ensuing loss of mobility, her son's homosexuality and her husband's distance from the family.

This assurance echoes Sasha's attempts to welcome Tatiana into her family and home. The rat brings to the surface what seems to be hidden in the idyllic family but, by using a rat instead of excrement, Ozon places the feared object within the narrative, within the boundaries of masochistic pleasure. The rat does not in itself produce an effect on the audience. As already argued, the white laboratory rat is devoid of many negative connotations usually associated with rodents. This discrepancy is emphasised by the generically scary music that we hear every time the the rat comes into view. Even so, behind the slapstick humour of *Sitcom*, we are still on trial.

## Conclusion

In *See the Sea*, we were confronted by a narrative that makes real our fear of the outcast. In *Sitcom*, it is instead our attempts to explain away, like the mother with her psychologist or the dinner guests, to diminish the pain of a transgressive enactment on the screen. For both cases, it is an inclusive normativity that is on trial. Asibong calls this "a certain 'post-ideological' liberalism that has contributed to the gradual blurring of categories of political struggle in late capitalist Western Europe: this is perhaps, the film's most significant contribution to contemporary French cinema and culture."<sup>457</sup> This post-ideology, where anything goes, is turned against the viewer, mirrored in the mature and weighed responses of the dinner guests. By the time we see the mother seduce her son, not even this incestuous act is a surprise. It happens entirely within the film's narrative norm, reflected in the acceptance of any act by the rest of the family members. Together, the two films pose a question: is not the anti-normative, disruptive stance of *See the Sea* a better method of waking up the spectator from his fantasy? Here, masochistic pleasure is disrupted by introducing the extra-narrative, sadistic pleasure. Lee Edelman<sup>458</sup> has suggested reading the queer challenge to the normative via the death drive, as this suggests an impossible identity with queer. Edelman calls this the *sinthomosexual*, merging Lacan's concept of the *sinthome* with homosexual. He uses it to refer to an incarnation of the non-heterosexual who is not invested in the reproduction of society.

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<sup>457</sup> Asibong, 2008, p. 37.

<sup>458</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, 2004.

*See the Sea* can be read as a challenge to such an identification with the rupture of the norm. As Tatiana breaches the norm, she remains our fantasy of the frightening stranger. She may challenge this by reflecting this fantasy back at us, but she still remains our fantasy of the she-devil who steals the babies of unsuspecting, kind mothers. The breach challenges the being-withness of matrixial borderspaces rather than building them. The sinthome was an attempt to imagine a link that would make sexual rapport possible, not break it down. So the sinthomosexual would be closer to being-withness than to a fracturing, sadistic challenge to an imagined norm. The sinthome, though a breach, ultimately functions to link the symbolic, imaginary and the real back together. As Ettinger suggests, the ethical challenge may be in being able to stand the stranger and to be with the borderspace that the sinthome presents, as a 'beyond' but not opposed to or a replacement for the norm. The scene between Gaby and Louise explores a non-traumatic experience of this being with the tactile — the always too close other — that breaches but still does not consume nor is consumed by the norm. Though this was only temporary within the narrative, this opens up for a recognition of the other as enigmatic and too close for safety.



## 7 Conclusion, Or why won't the director go away?

*As institution, the author is dead ... but in a text, in a way, I desire the author: I need his figure (which is neither his representation nor his projection), as he needs mine (except to 'prattle').*

Roland Barthes

*The Pleasure of the Text*

Throughout this thesis, I have returned to the notion of an auteur and its relation to notions of subjectivity and the speaking and acting self. These discussions are central to the questions a play in this thesis. Though the focus has been on the notion of spectatorship and the relatability and affectability of the self in the face of an enigmatic external, previous discussions have suggested the notion of the auteur as a reader, not just of genres and film history, but as a reader of the self and what the self leaves behind. This also links with what it means to write this thesis, from the perspective of masochistic spectatorship and as a process critical of the interpretative, ossifying tools of interpretation. In short, this chapter will bring the earlier considerations and questions back to the self as both reader and writer, as both active and passive, enjoying the seductive other but also the act of seducing and creating something seductive. The origin or intention behind the film is an ideal position that we are led to assume. Like the spectator, who is the ideal focal point of the camera angles and address, so is the auteur an ideal focal point of origin.

In my reading of *8 Women* I suggested that the psychologisation of Ozon and his fascination with doll's houses forecloses a reading of this film where it seems to me that the director is actually identifying with one of the female

characters. Specifically, I demonstrated that Louise, the young maid, could be read as an incarnation of the director within the script. Like Victor in *Young and Beautiful*, Louise functions as a way in to this story and though Ozon denied that Victor was an incarnation of him within the film, I would challenge his assumption that Victor has to be *either* Ozon *or* the spectator. I have argued that Ozon's method of making films and the speed with which he writes or re-writes, shoots and edits them aims to dislodge a critical perspective and I will now argue that this technique transforms the auteur into a spectator of their own creation as it unfolds. Walter Benjamin argued that the public has a much more radical appreciation of experimental cinema than of art, comparing Chaplin and his contemporary cinema with exclusionary avant-garde art creation: "*Dadaism attempted to produce with the means of painting (or literature) the effects which the public today seeks in film.*"<sup>459</sup> The accessibility inherent in the filmic language make techniques that required a level of taste and knowledge of art-history essential to appreciation democratically available, at least to consume. Ozon's method of relieving his work process of the panoptic gaze of ideological supervision can be read along a stream-of-consciousness tradition. The bemused character within the drama who is at once inside and outside the drama unfolding can be seen as a representation of writer looking on as a story writes itself. The choice of a child symbolically trying to figure out what is going on in the room next door can be read to aid Ozon as much as it aids the spectator to interpret and sympathise with the other characters.

A stated fascination for doll's houses in relation to a film about eight women, who are grasping to define themselves without the presence of the father figure, must surely also be linked to Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House*.<sup>460</sup> In it, a wife leaves her husband, accusing him of treating her and the children as dolls. This play was controversial at the time of its premiere, not least because it was an informed analysis of women's roles in a male-dominated society.<sup>461</sup> From this perspective, *8 Women* could be read as a meditation on what would happen if the father would suddenly disappear. In Ibsen's play, it is the wife who walks

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<sup>459</sup> Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version', 2002, p. 118

<sup>460</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House*, included in the collection *Henrik Ibsen, Four Major Plays*, 2008.

<sup>461</sup> See Henrik Ibsen, *Notes for a Modern Tragedy*.

out, leaving her husband and her children behind. This act was denounced by Ibsen's contemporary, August Strindberg, who criticised the female character in Ibsen's play, but also what he argued was its one-sidedness, where the plight of the husband is ignored. Strindberg's *The Father* was written as a reply to Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. In Strindberg's story, a husband's assumption that he is the father of his daughter is questioned and, through a series of manipulations, the wife has her husband committed to a mental asylum.<sup>462</sup> This last turn in *The Father* is a sinister reference to the inspiration behind Ibsen's play. Laura Kieler, a friend of Ibsen, was the model for Nora in *A Doll's House*. In the real story, Laura forged her husband's signature and as a punishment was sent to a mental asylum for two years. Ibsen's inspiration for Nora in *A Doll's House* could not leave her husband, and her attempt to gain a level of freedom led to her internment. The point of this excursus is not to prove that Ozon intentionally quoted Ibsen when making *8 Women*. I do not claim that this speculation is correct. Rather, my argument is that the assumption of the director as master manipulator, as the unequivocal origin of the story, leads to a diminished comprehension of the 'ideal focal point' behind the film. The problem is equally acute in Mulvey's early assumption that the spectator's gaze is necessarily sadistic.

In the last two chapters I have discussed the demonic or monstrous father figures in Ozon's cinema, as well as the limits of masochistic pleasure. In this chapter I will further explore the link between demonic father figures, specifically the ever returning father in Ozon's cinema, and the notion of an auteur, a creator behind the film. This undead father — in *8 Women* as the father coming back from the dead and in *Sitcom* as the rat returning on the father's grave — refuses to go away. Even when dead, his presence is felt and it often drives the narrative in Ozon's films. Certainly, the problematic relationship between Ozon, the director, and the notion of an omnipotent Director may be found in several of Ozon's narratives, which hinge on problematic relationships to 'monstrous fathers' as both sources of pleasure and destruction. These fathers lend themselves to a reading of a masochist director/reader in relation to an ideal Director/author within Ozon's narrative.

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<sup>462</sup> See August Strindberg, *The Father*, included in August Strindberg, *Three Plays*, see also *Getting Married* by Strindberg for a direct response to Ibsen's play.

The problematic relation to the sadistic element in Ozon's films are evident in my readings of *8 Women* and *See the Sea*. When discussing *8 Women*, I suggested that the demonic but absent father is an incarnation of two things. First, there is the legacy of earlier directors and, second, there is the silently judgmental spectator, seeing everything and always ready to find faults. In this reading I suggested that we should see Louise as the incarnation of Ozon the director. Louise had been the mistress of the great Director/spectator/critic. But what she really desired, her 'real' reason for being in the house, was her love for Gaby, the iconic *femme fatale* from *Belle de jour*. This reading posits the films' director/origin as the victim of the Director/spectator/critic. In a film such as *See the Sea*, however, the director as assumed intention behind the film is revealed as harbouring open aggression towards the spectator/critic in my suggested reading.

In this concluding chapter I will return to Freud and Laplanche to probe further the connection between sadistic and masochistic impulses in order to interpret this duality as a continuation of conflict, not a maturation of a director who was once an *enfant terrible*. In *A Child Is Being Beaten*, Freud discerns three phases of the fantasy of a child being beaten.<sup>463</sup> The first is "My father is beating the child whom I hate", the second "I am being beaten by my father", and the third "A child is being beaten".<sup>464</sup> Freud points out that the first phase is not really a fantasy. "It is perhaps rather a question of recollections of events which have been witnessed, or of desires which have arisen on various occasions."<sup>465</sup> The second phase, Freud claims, "is the most important and the most momentous of all. But we may say of it in a certain sense that it has never had a real existence. It is never remembered, it has never succeeded in becoming conscious. It is a construction of analysis".<sup>466</sup> In contrast, the third phase is the fantasy that remains conscious whilst the preceding two have to be reconstructed through analysis. It is worth pointing out here what Freud is saying, the middle phase in this construction, the one linking the two and that makes sense of the other two, has no source outside analysis. It is through

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<sup>463</sup> Sigmund Freud, "A Child is Being Beaten' A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversions." (1919) in SE 17, pp. 175-204.

<sup>464</sup> See Freud (1919), pp. 185-186.

<sup>465</sup> Freud (1919), p. 185.

<sup>466</sup> Freud, (1919), p. 185.

interpretation or translation of the other two phases that the third, the link, the one that provides meaning — is to an extent made up. My argument is not that this invalidates the interpretation, though we should perhaps be alerted to the value of interpretation. Silverman points out the gender of the patients that Freud refers to here to make the argument that Freud's use of the only male patient's reconstruction of the missing middle fantasy links the formation of the feminine to male masochism.<sup>467</sup> Silverman concludes that this gender displacement in the formation of erotogenic and feminine masochism conceals the gender displacement necessary in this transitional phase.

The final phase attests to three transgressive desires, not one of which Freud remarks upon, but which clamor loudly for my attention: to the desire that it be boys rather than girls who be loved/disciplined in this way; to the desire to be a boy while being so treated by the father; and, finally, to the desire to occupy a male subject-position in some more general sense, but one under the sign of femininity rather than that of masculinity.<sup>468</sup>

The fantasy of the child being beaten starts as one of another child being punished. This looks like a sadistic fantasy, but Freud points out that it is the father, not the fantasising child, who does the beating. It is not until the second phase that the fantasising child is directly implicated, at this stage as the one being beaten. And this recreated fantasy is a male fantasy of masochism, of taking the feminine position. As we have seen in the initial chapters of this thesis, this feminine position has been repeatedly articulated as secondary, as the turning back of the sadistic/phallic/male position. But as we can see here, this masochistic position is rather the first incorporation of an external, viewed position. The third position that can be sadistic or masochistic is the result of the initial incorporation of the passivity in relation to an adult beating a child. In Silverman's reading, this argument is linked with gender to argue for a complex male subject position as well as a a complex female subject position. Read from the perspective of reader/auteur rather than male/female or sadistic/masochistic, this reading would open up for a complex identification and desire between the director and the spectator as well as their incorporations within narratives. *8 Women* could be read as an expression of this second phase,

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<sup>467</sup> See Silverman, 1988, p. 48.

<sup>468</sup> Silverman, 1988, p. 48.

where the director dreams about being in thrall to the father, about being symbolically beaten. However, the fantasy is perhaps turned on its head since the relationship between Louise and Marcel was sexual. The fantasy of being beaten is therefore reversed to a sexual relation, a substitutional fantasy, but between Gaby and Louise, rather than between Marcel and Louise.

The second phase has the double function of punishing the desire for the father and, simultaneously, keeping this desire as a regressed expression of the desire to be loved. *“It is not only the punishment for the forbidden genital relation, but also the regressive substitute for that relation”*.<sup>469</sup> In Louise’s relation to Marcel, the genital relation becomes the regressive substitute for the courtly love of her ‘true’ master, Gaby. It should be noted that in this formulation of masochism the turn towards the self includes both the prohibition and the transgression of this prohibition. Hence the violence directed at the self is both a representation of the sexual act directed towards the self as passive and, simultaneously, the representation of a prohibition of this act. I have proposed using a masochistic model rather than a melancholic one for the formation of the self and for the incorporation of norms and prohibitions in the self. The desire for the father’s sexual acts is here not foreclosed, there remain symbolic traces of this prohibition and its acts. In my argument, the melancholic version of this turning back towards the self is a subcategory of masochistic turning back. In chapter 1 of this thesis — Freud and Femininity — I developed a reading of Irigaray’s model of a melancholic refusal of identity as a particular foundation of the self. In this reading of Irigaray’s argument, this occurs when identification between the emerging self and an object is arrested because it cannot be visualised, and this therefore leads to a collapsed self whose borders are not visualised and thereby not clearly defined. I argued that the feminine escapes or refuses identification because it lacks visual evidence of existence. I suggested that this should be read as a melancholic aspect of the message that is implanted. From there, I suggested using Laplanche to theorise the formation of the self through passive, masochistic implementations of untranslatable messages. Based on these two strands of my argument, the feminine can be read as the message of the already masochistic pleasure of alterity. Under the heading ‘Enigmatic gender’ in chapter 1, I further argued for a reading of

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<sup>469</sup> Freud, (1919), p. 189.

Laplanche's theory of seduction where we are first of all passive receptors of a seduction into the world, including appellations or prescriptions into gender. This seduction is enigmatic because it is unconscious and not yet understandable, the balance of power lies on the side of the sender or seducer.

The duality of a fantasmatic replacement of the sexual and the prohibition against the sexual relation is what Freud calls "the essence of masochism."<sup>470</sup> Masochism uses the memory or part fantasy of a child being beaten by the father to formulate a repression of the desire towards the father, where the act of beating is both a visualisation of the prohibition of this love and the replacement, through regression, of this love. The third phase of the child being beaten returns to the original phase where another child is being beaten. But through its genealogy this third phase carries with it its masochistic desire. Freud points out that:

[...] only the *form* of this phantasy is sadistic; the satisfaction which is derived from it is masochistic. Its significance lies in the fact that it has taken over the libidinal cathexis of the repressed portion and at the same time the sense of guilt which is attached to the content of that portion. All of the many unspecified children who are being beaten by the teacher are, after all, nothing more than substitutes for the child itself.<sup>471</sup>

The sadistic turn is here secondary to masochistic desire, it is a turning outward of the regressed desire to be loved/beaten. This model contradicts Freud's earlier assertion that "[m]asochism, in the form of a perversion, seems to be further removed from the normal sexual aim than its counterpart; it may be doubted at first whether it can ever occur as a primary phenomenon or whether, on the contrary, it may not invariably arise from a transformation of sadism."<sup>472</sup> In this earlier text, masochism is the secondary phase, the result of a failed sadism that has been turned inward. Masochistic desire is simply the reverse of sadism. "The most common and the most significant of all the perversions — the desire to inflict pain upon the sexual object, and its reverse — received from

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<sup>470</sup> Freud, (1919), p. 189.

<sup>471</sup> Freud, (1919), p. 191.

<sup>472</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905a). in SE 7, pp. 123-246, p. 158.

Krafft-Ebing the names of 'sadism' and 'masochism' for its active and passive forms respectively."<sup>473</sup> Freud's definition of masochism as a passive form of sadism in this early essay, aligns the sadist and masochist division with Freud's division of masculine and feminine. The passive, masochist or feminine position is a reversed active, sadist or masculine position. As we saw in the last chapter, this is further emphasised by the anal/sadistic desire as opposed to the nurturing breast/masochist desire in Deleuze's usage. In *Instincts and their Vicissitudes*, Freud still maintains the opinion put forward in *Three Essays*. He even exemplifies 'reversal into its opposite' and 'turning around upon the subject's own self' with the case of masochism. The process from sadism to masochism is described in the following three stages:

- (a) Sadism consists in the exercise of violence or power upon some other person as object.
- (b) This object is given up and replaced by the subject's self. With the turning round upon the self the change from an active to a passive instinctual aim is also effected.
- (c) An extraneous person is once more sought as object; this person, in consequence of the alteration which has taken place in the instinctual aim, has to take over the role of the subject.<sup>474</sup>

This process is closely related to the tripartite process of the fantasy of a child being beaten. However, the differences are significant. In this particular model, the movement constitutes a turning around, the subject becomes object. In contrast, in the fantasy of the child that is being beaten, the vicissitudes of desire takes a different path. Freud emphasises that the first phase of the fantasy is not a fantasy. Instead, it is constructed by experience. The foundational phase is therefore not an involvement with the object through a sadistic desire, but rather an observed relation. This observed relation, formulated as 'my father is beating a child' is a relationship that corresponds to step (a) in the *Vicissitudes* essay. The relation between the father and the child being beaten is one of 'exercise of violence or power upon some other person

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<sup>473</sup> Freud (1905a), p. 157.

<sup>474</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Instincts and their Vicissitudes*. (1915), in SE 14, pp. 109-140, p. 126.



as object.' But as this relation is being observed rather than desired by the subject, this stage is not sadistic. The violence has not yet become sexual.

In the second phase, the child is replaced by the subject. The internalisation here takes place not on the level of identification but as replacement, it is "*the regressive substitute*"<sup>475</sup> for the desire to be loved. There is a hint here of a further stage in between the first and second phase, a stage where the fantasising child is jealous of the child being beaten. This is expressed in Freud's quick move from an impersonal "My father is beating a child" to the supplementary "My father is beating a child whom I hate"<sup>476</sup> The pain as transgression was directed towards a child who had the desired father's attention. As the transgression of love is prohibited, even as fantasy, this is instead replaced by a fantasy to be beaten, to experience the transgression of pain caused by the desired object.

In *A Child Is Being Beaten* the separation of the beater from the one creating the fantasy replaces the sadistic origins with a scene or fantasy, in relation to which the child remains passive. This passivity is then carried through to the second stage, where the fantasising subject is itself the object of the beating. This renders the passive position as primary, as opposed to Freud's earlier view of a simple reversal of a previous, sadistic phase. This leads him to formulate the notion of a primary or erotogenic masochism, as opposed to a feminine or moral masochism. Moral masochism is the split between the ego and the superego, where the ego takes on masochistic tendencies while the superego takes on sadistic tendencies. This relationship between ego and superego is symbiotic in that each serves to strengthen the other. In the later model of the child being beaten, the passive position is explored as prior and independent of the active/sadist position. "Instincts with a passive aim must be taken for granted as existing, especially among women."<sup>477</sup> Again, Freud connects passivity and women. "In the case of the girl the unconscious masochistic

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<sup>475</sup> Freud, (1919), p. 189.

<sup>476</sup> "This first phase of the beating-phantasy is therefore completely represented by the phrase: '*My father is beating the child.*' I am betraying a great deal of what is to be brought forward later when instead of this I say: '*My father is beating the child whom I hate.*'", Freud, (1919), p. 185.

<sup>477</sup> Freud, (1919), p. 194.

phantasy starts from the normal Oedipus attitude; in that of the boy it starts from the inverted attitude, in which the father is taken as the object of love.”<sup>478</sup>

## Primary masochism

Freud would later concede that he is open to the possibility of a primary masochistic desire. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, he states that “there *might* be such a thing as primary masochism — a possibility I had contested at that time.”<sup>479</sup> In *A Child Is Being Beaten* masochism is not yet conceived of as a primary drive; it is still achieved through the memory/fantasy of a father beating a child. This memory/fantasy is then turned into a fantasy of the subject being beaten by the father. In *The Economic Problem of Masochism*, Freud calls this primary, non-reversed masochism erotogenic. “Masochism comes under our observation in three forms: as a condition imposed on sexual excitation, as an expression of the feminine nature, and as a norm of behaviour. We may, accordingly, distinguish an *erotogenic*, a *feminine* and a *moral* masochism.”<sup>480</sup> In this text, Freud also aligns masochism with the death drive. In this manner, sadism and masochism become different expressions for this destructive drive.

If one is prepared to overlook a little inexactitude, it may be said that the death instinct which is operative in the organism — primal sadism — is identical with masochism. After the main portion of it has been transposed outwards on to objects, there remains inside, as a residuum of it, the erotogenic masochism proper, which on the one hand has become a component of the libido and, on the other, still has the self as its object.<sup>481</sup>

In moral masochism, sadist and masochist impulses are split off into the ego and the superego. Masochism is located in the ego whereas sadism is in the superego. “The sadism of the super-ego and the masochism of the ego

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<sup>478</sup> Freud, (1919), pp. 198-199.

<sup>479</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. (1920), in SE 18 pp. 1-64, p. 54.

<sup>480</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘The Economic Problem of Masochism’ (1924), in SE 19, pp. 155-170, p. 161.

<sup>481</sup> Freud, (1924), p. 164.

supplement each other and unite to produce the same effects.”<sup>482</sup> Masochism, directed towards the self in this later version, can take on outer actors to inflict pain on the self, like the fantasy of the father beating the child. This, however, becomes an externalisation of a relation that has been internalised. In Ozon’s cinema, as I have argued, there is a duality within the sadism expressed within the narrative. Either the sadistic figure is presented within the narrative, as in *8 Women* or *Sitcom*, or if the sadistic act transgresses the narrative and points to a sadistic figure outside that narrative, as in *See the Sea*. When the sadistic figure is placed within the narrative, there emerges the potential of killing the father and being free from his controlling gaze.

When, however, the sadistic father figure is kept outside the narrative, the origin of sadism is transported to the ideal point of origin. It is the Director’s sadism that is assumed. Tatiana in *See the Sea* may be vindictive and sadistic in her torture of Sasha, but the sadism that the viewer feels is the sadism of the scenes. It lies in the act of placing the scene with the toothbrush and the shit next to the scene where Sasha is using the same toothbrush to clean her teeth. The transgression against the viewer comes from this transgression between the characters. Clearly, this aspect of extreme cinema lends weight to Mulvey’s assertion that certain filmmakers are already breaking down the fiction of the narrative, revealing looks that are traditionally hidden from the spectator. But whereas Godard and Bergman were including shots of the camera to destroy the illusion of the narrative, Ozon, Gaspar Noé or Lars von Trier use violence as a transgression of the tacit contract between the viewer and the imagined origin of the film, so as to undermine the illusion of narrative.

## **Ozon’s fathers**

As mentioned before, Schilt discusses the monstrous fathers in Ozon’s films. For him, these fathers signify a questioning of the father but not as a direct attack on the paternal institution. Instead, he argues, “with a filmmaker like Ozon, any seemingly straightforward chastisement of the patriarchal system becomes, upon closer analysis, a much more ambiguous depiction that redefines the boundaries between normalcy and monstrosity, between the

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<sup>482</sup> Freud, (1924), p. 170.

familiar and the queer.”<sup>483</sup> Schilt places monstrosity and queer as opposites to the familiar and normal. The monstrous fathers thus seem to inhabit a position of opposition to the familiar and the normal. Queer fathers, however is not what Schilt is suggesting when he speaks of monstrous fathers. Instead this monstrosity of the father falls within gendered power relations that are all too familiar, all too normal. The excess of the monstrous father is a perversion of the normal, not a queer questioning of the norm. Schilt sees Ozon’s monstrously patriarchal fathers as ambiguous, both victims and sadistic manipulators. One example is “Marcel, the unseen paterfamilias in *8 femmes*, though first assumed to be a victim of one of the eight women’s murderous scheme, is later revealed to be a sadistic manipulator and possibly incestuous father.”<sup>484</sup> So the victim turns out to be the manipulator behind the scenes. The other films Schilt discusses in this section are *Criminal Lovers* and *Under the Sand*. In all of these films the paternal figures end up being punished “two will die, and one is arrested by police.”<sup>485</sup> According Schilt, ambiguity is given to these fathers by means of on-screen punishment. He sees this as a critique of the father figure, however ambivalent. Conversely, Asibong argues that the patriarchal structure of Ozon’s films excludes the possibility of exploring feminine identity. “How is it possible to negotiate a feminine or significantly feminised identity within a social framework at the unreachable centre of which sits a silent, bland or indifferent patriarch?”<sup>486</sup> This absent/ever present patriarch is then applied to Ozon as manipulator behind the scenes.

As I argued above, the reference to a love of dolls’ houses and dolls may point in a different direction than the one proposed by Asibong. Ozon’s approach to making a film about women, but it’s all about men,<sup>487</sup> may have recalled his fascination for dolls and dolls’ houses as a kind of self-critical remark. In remaking an old film all about women, he may well have likened himself to

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<sup>483</sup> Schilt, 2011, p. 39.

<sup>484</sup> Schilt, 2011, p. 39.

<sup>485</sup> Schilt, 2011, p. 39.

<sup>486</sup> Asibong, 2008, p. 71.

<sup>487</sup> The reference is to George Cukor’s film *The Women* (1939), the film that Ozon wanted to remake before finding Robert Thomas’s play that became the basis for Ozon’s *8 Women*. As mentioned previously, the tagline for *The Women* was: *And it’s all about men*.

Torvald in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, or even reference the play as another male writer's attempt to explore female subjectivity. This interpretation is not present in the film nor in Ozon's commentary, but like Freud's reconstructed masochistic phantasy between the observed and the imagined, this link is not unimaginable and arguably it could help connect the masochistic pleasure I have been arguing for in this thesis with the position of a masochistic auteur behind the scenes. And the fantasy of the sadistic father within a narrative is then a representation of the third position where we are all seeing the abusive father. The masochistic director does not contradict the sadistic father figure on screen, in fact, the masochistic director, as Silverman has shown, will keep reproducing the scene with the abusive father. And perhaps this can allow both auteur and spectator to work through this fantasy. This aspect of the father as undead, as returning from the ashes, is something that the rest of this chapter will pursue. But I do not regard this as "a sharply increased cynicism, an altogether more solemn renunciation of the potential, no matter how ludic, for new forms of intimacy, kinship and community."<sup>488</sup> On the contrary, I shall question this identification of the presumed subject behind the films with the father figures within the films. Rather than analyse these as representations of sadistic inflexibility, I will read them as masochistic representations of the problematic relation between the author, the text and the viewer.

### **The evasive auteur**

In the short film *Little Death* (1995) Ozon deals with the father image in relation to self-formation and self-assertion. The focus of this early film is negotiations of the gaze, definitions of beauty and self-image as seen through the eyes of a young photographer. All this is set in a triangular drama between two siblings and a dying father. Paul (François Delaive) is a photographer who is haunted by an image of himself as a toddler. Paul has been told, that his father who was away on a business trip during his birth, though that a picture of him as a newborn was so ugly that he doubted that it could be his son. In this film, Paul is engaged in a project where he is taking pictures of people in the moment of orgasms. The title links the orgasmic *petite mort* with the impending death of

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<sup>488</sup> Asibong, 2008, p. 82.

Paul's father. His sister insists that he should go and see their father who is in a hospital, Paul at first refuses. And when he finally goes, it is in order to take pictures of the dying man. These pictures can be understood as an act of revenge on the dying and helpless father. Paul, as a toddler, was not asked if his picture could be taken, and so the father is not asked. The father's expiring body is exposed to underline its ugliness and helplessness. As Paul is photographing his father's naked and dying body, his sister walks in on him. Outraged by her father's exposure and Paul's lack of respect, she kicks him out of the room.

Later, in the darkroom, Paul finds a picture of his father where he is awake, his glaring eyes look right into the eye of both photographer and spectator. This triggers something in Paul and he cuts the eyes out, replacing them with his own as he looks into a mirror through the holes in the print. This doubling indicates that Paul's revenge has brought him closer to his father, but not in a reconciliatory way. Instead his father's anger becomes his, both in his act of revenge and in the aggression he reveals towards his lover and his sister. The photographer, in exposing his father has also captured his dying father and in the accusing eyes that look back he seems to have come across the punctum of Barthes theory of photography. The eyes looking back are Paul's eyes. The demonic father who has haunted Paul becomes him, his judgmental look has become Paul's. This movement contains a linking, a rapport between the father and son. However, this link does not lead to reconciliation. Instead it increases Paul's anger and aggressive refusal of his lover and his sister. Like Barthes's punctum, the eyes haunt without allowing for mourning, there is no decrease in tension or in pain.

### **The stranger within**

Barthes argues that there is no culture, not mourning where this punctum is, there is no history, only melancholic preservation. And Paul's wearing his father's face, looking through this face with his own judgmental eyes enacts this impossibility of resolution and the eternal return of the demonic father. If, however, we turn to a masochistic reading of the punctum, there are means to process and to work through the impasse of the demonic father. As opposed to

the foreclosed loss of melancholia, the masochistic model suggest that the punctum is outside the grasp of translatability — it is strange but not blocked. Through translation we can start picking at it.

In Laplanche's theory, the punctum, or the image we cannot comprehend is understood as something other inside the self and he sources his formulation of this in Freud's early model of seduction as the cause of pathological developments of sexuality. "*Das Andere*, the other thing in us: this is the unconscious as it is discovered before 1897 and as it will re-emerge at numerous points in Freud's work."<sup>489</sup> The first step where a child is seen being beaten in *A Child Is Being Beaten* is an example of this reemergence of something that is neither reducible to a fantasy nor its pure materiality, but as something observed with meaning that escapes us. Real events are intermingled with fantasies and, accordingly, the child tries to understand these real events. So the child being beaten is connected to masochism, and to the linking of sexuality and prohibition with a violent act. In this, the beaten child becomes a version of the primal scene. Freud is ambiguous about whether the primal scene is a fantasy or a real event. For the child hearing the uncanny sounds of adults next door, it is the perceived sound that triggers a divination of what cannot be known or fully translated. This is Laplanche's notion of a third real. This real is neither reducible to the factual sound reaching the child nor the fantasy that the child creates through its imperfect divination or translation, mingled with previous divinations and translations. The self is then not the effect of a turning back against a pre-existing will or sexuality, but the implementation of an other thing in the self as the self. It now becomes possible to formulate a model of the self where seduction by the outside world simultaneously prohibits, directs and entices the will or sexuality behind the deed, while also leaving the door open for the psychoanalytic insight that every translation is a failure.

A masochistic model based on Laplanche's reworking of the seduction theory is already turned against itself. The primary transgression, through erotogenic discomfort and passivity, allows for a model where the will is secondary. Sadism comes after masochism. "What must be affirmed is the following: if the primary is the unconscious, and the unconscious is the repressed, then this 'primary'

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<sup>489</sup> Laplanche, *Essays on Otherness*, 1999, p. 63.

has '*become* primary', so to speak."<sup>490</sup> Conversely, in Barthes's critique of the author, the core of the author is not only given up on the level of origin but also at the level of target. Barthes points out that the author as myth is linked with the critic as myth. In these twinned myths, there is an origin or a self to be represented in the text, a core knowledge in the text and an attainable correct interpretation. "Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing."<sup>491</sup> The death of the author thus also signifies a death of the limited series of interpretations. Barthes concludes his short manifesto with a celebration of the reader as opposed to the writer/critic of classic criticism.

Classic criticism has never paid any attention to the reader; for it, the writer is the only person in literature. We are now beginning to let ourselves be fooled no longer by the arrogant antiphrastical recriminations of good society in favour of the very thing it sets aside, ignores, smothers, or destroys; we know that to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.<sup>492</sup>

The birth of the reader implies a liberation of interpretations but also a focus on the reader/spectator as a point of critique of the selfsame origin of the text/film. The death of the author also has a temporary aspect to it. As I pointed out above, reasoning along similar lines about the self as the effect of the deed does not imply a death but rather a birth of the self. Although it should be noted that Butler's critique of the self and consciousness reaches a point where the origin of the self is blurred. This is because the motion that starts the return does not begin from the split between two types of bodies. Instead, it is the split between body and self or soul that is the effect of the returning motion.

This critique of the ontology of the body and soul theorises the self as simultaneous with the body as an object of consciousness. Or, rather, the two are always already there, they are both found when turning back on

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<sup>490</sup> Laplanche, 1999, p. 70.

<sup>491</sup> Barthes, 1977 [1967], p. 147.

<sup>492</sup> Barthes, 1977 [1967], p. 148.



themselves. This, however, does not question the originating process of the (false) return to the self or the body. In facing the self through identification with the law and the lost object, the self is produced as a false ontology. In Barthes's manifesto, however, the author is dead. To be more precise: by being produced simultaneously with the text, the author as authoritative figure is dead. The death of the author is related to a temporality for Barthes: "As soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins."<sup>493</sup> The relation to reality, as opposed to writing, is always happening in a now, just as reading happens in a now. However, the author has to turn away from reality to write, therefore the writing is dislocated in its temporality, it represents a past in a now. The act of retelling is a return to something and therefore comes with a disjunction between the author and the retold. The voice also loses its origin in the text. The Author is removed by the temporary disjunction between the written and the author. When we read, the author is simply not there, the written is not occurring now and the text is an artefact instead of a presence. In a manner of speaking, the writer of a text or the director of a film both become immortal through their works.

Authors are selves present in and through their works. They become immortal through their texts but, as such they also become a part of a past. The text produces not only the author as a self but the author as a fixity. After the writing is done, the writer can no longer change, update and transform the text in relation to their audience. If they do this, it will always be in the past of the viewing/reading of the text/film. The author always implies a temporality. It implies a then, when the movie was made or the text was written. The author always speaks from the grave, no matter if alive or not. This of course is similar to Benjamin's understanding of the translator's work and Barthes text can be read as a universalisation of what Benjamin said about translation into any form of writing.

In a later text, Barthes returns to the author. "As institution, the author is dead ... but in a text, in a way, *I desire* the author: I need his figure (which is neither his

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<sup>493</sup> Barthes, 1977 [1967], p. 142.

representation nor his projection), as he needs mine (except to 'prattle')."<sup>494</sup> The author here returns in a relation with the reader. The author is desired, just like the reader is desired by the author. Is Barthes not here leaving out the masochistic aspect of this desire? Though he hints at it, in the added subclause; as an afterthought, the author needs us. Or so we are lead to believe, we can only desire the author behind the text if they are assumed to desire us. Surely, they wanted to say this to us!

The desired author becomes the desiring writer in this text, it is by deploying this split into the text that the author and reader can remain a "living contradiction': a split subject, who simultaneously enjoys, through the text, the consistency of his selfhood and its collapse, its fall."<sup>495</sup> Barthes speaks about a bliss in this living contradiction, a bliss that cannot be expressed in words but only between lines.<sup>496</sup> The resurrected author is first and foremost a reader. As such the producer of text can create a text that is contradictory, a split subject, the author. That allows the reader to explore the amorous relation between reader and text. In this equation, the author as object had to die in order to return, alive, through the reader's birth. For the masochistic spectator, this desired author/father must return to inflict pain upon us. The transgressive director is desired in the text. So it may well be that the placement of a monstrous father within the narrative is an incarnation of our desire for a Director who dares to take us on a journey. At the same time, it is also an incarnation of the director's desire to be that Director. This, of course, only further emphasises the director as a masochist, as a reader, before becoming a sadist, a Director.

If one bases a model of the self on a masochistic construction rather than a melancholic one, it becomes possible to encapsulate the incorporation of a law with the incorporation of bodily identification and, at the same time, to account for this splitting of the self into active and passive aspects. Melancholia follows a movement of Freud's thought, a development where the ego is explored as an internalised object. This development in Freud's thought is reflected in his development of masochism as a reversal that is primary. The model of

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<sup>494</sup> Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 1975 [1973] p. 27.

<sup>495</sup> Barthes, 1975 [1973] p. 21.

<sup>496</sup> Barthes, 1975 [1973] p. 21.

melancholia, as developed in *Mourning and Melancholia*, is thus linked to masochism, but masochism when linked to sexuality and femininity is not theorised as a finalised event.

### **A Director is beating the director**

When Ozon kills the patriarch it is not only the Director he kills, it is also himself, as a director. But the Director keeps returning. In Lacanian terms, the young man is unable to be the phallus, and therefore the lack of the Other cannot be satisfied. In *8 Women*, the Director/father is presumed to be dead only to return, as if out of revenge he must be the one to kill himself. And if we return to the young photographer in *Little Death*, the young man seeking revenge by exposing his father instead becomes his father. So how do we break the deadlock of the returning father? The punctum or the foreclosed history of 'always already' allows the father to maintain his thrall, the melancholic response incorporates and makes the other a part of the self. In *Death 24x a Second*, Mulvey explores the "narrative disintegration," by "digital editing systems" that "have enabled film to be quoted and referred to with unprecedented ease."<sup>497</sup> This quotability of films, caused by digital editing systems democratises the the filmic medium both in the sense that we are all photographers and cinematographers today, and in the sense that we now have access to and can comprehend what has previously been exclusive to the avant-garde. Echoing Benjamin's assertion that what was once the incomprehensible techniques of elitist dadaists or surrealists becomes available for popular consumption in the hands of Chaplin, Mulvey asserts that "as the cinema ages it acquires greater cultural legitimacy and the divide between art and popular film has narrowed almost to invisibility."<sup>498</sup> And this quotability and manipulability also allows the spectator to see the photographs that are hidden in the flow of film, revealing the 24 deaths per second that the normal flow of these images hide by its perpetual movement. In *Little Death* this hidden aspect of death and photography in film is represented by Paul's photography. This film links the hight of pleasure with the death of a demonic father in the expression

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<sup>497</sup> Mulvey, 2006, p. 29.

<sup>498</sup> Mulvey, 2006, p. 29

*la petite mort* — linking orgasm and the sense of satisfaction with the stillness of death. As Paul captures the passing moment of *la petite mort* his photography enacts the punctum of photography, but in relation to taboo and symbolic death. It is not until he turns his camera toward his dying father that the punctum becomes traumatic and overwhelming for the photographer. And it is not the death but his father's open eyes that breaks down the protective distance that his photography allowed Paul. The eyes looking back is the punctum that shatters Paul's world and the flow of time. In his attempt to humiliate and degrade his father, the link to the demonic father is opened instead of closed off. How does Ozon's film suggest that we move on from this impasse? The reconciliatory moment comes after the death of his father. His sister gives him a box of photos that belonged to their father and in the final scene of the film we see Paul opening an envelope with his name on it, in there there is a picture of a father holding a child lovingly. Paul looks up and the film fades to blue. But we had already seen his sister writing on this envelope, placing a photograph in the envelope and sliding it in amongst their father's actual photographs. The sister makes up this lie about the father to allow his brother to heal. As spectators we are left with the ethics of this action. Paul's healing is based on a lie, his father never could make his son feel loved, instead it is up to his sister to make him feel loved the only way she knows how to.

The staging of Paul's mourning process starts when the film ends, this in a sense enacts the photography as this marks the end of the filmic time. We can interpret this as the beginning of something new, but we also know that the new is based on a lie, so while Paul might be able to start his mourning process, the spectator has the mourning process halted and the past of the film haunts the viewer despite the fading to blue which acts as a counter colour to the red of the dark-room where Paul discovered his father's gaze. The film thus seem to push in two directions, one toward reconciliation and the other toward remaining in the traumatic refusal of closure. Using Mulvey, we could read this contradiction in movement as an example of how "the delayed cinema dissolves the imaginative power of the fiction, as well as the forward drive that, Barthes argues, obscures a cinematic *punctum*."<sup>499</sup> And this is the birth of the pensive spectator. Left to the stillness of time, the spectator is left to grapple with and try

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<sup>499</sup> Mulvey, 2006, p. 183.

to make sense of Paul's trauma and the lie that seems to heal this trauma. "The pensive spectator attempts to translate these different experiences of time into words along the lines suggested by Barthes in relation to the still photograph: the persistence of a present that is now past, 'this was now'."<sup>500</sup> The 'this was now' of Paul's life are the 'this was now' of the now when his father reacted to a picture of him as if he was too ugly to be his son. And the 'this was now' of the picture of a father lovingly holding a child, a now that is real for Paul but that we know is a lie. So while Paul can heal, we are pushed into becoming the pensive spectator.

As mentioned in the preface, Barthes's punctum as something outside of culture does not mean that Barthes does not create culture around it. So what happens when we 'attempt to translate these different experiences of time'? Does the punctum remain in its melancholic elsewhere, always already excluded and talked about but never successfully translated? If Mulvey's argument moves from the moving and from life, to the still and death to reveal the presence of death in life, then Emma Wilson explores the opposite direction in *Love, Mortality and the Moving Image*. "I see stillness denied, nudged into motion, in the animation of cinema. Cinema in its matter and make-up is concerned more than other media with the line between the still and the moving, between the living and the dead."<sup>501</sup> Instead of focusing on the arrested time in the photograph, Wilson's approach to photography, film and death focus on the nudge toward life in its opposite. Barthes does not stop by the image of his dead mother, it pulls him back and in but also forward, to write, to translate, the image and his affect. And what is this if not the opposite of stillness? I have argued for a masochistic model of the self as a more porous notion of the self, one that is not based on the foreclosure and exclusion of the punctum and its own formation but that places the self in relation with this other within and other without. My argument has been that the strangeness or the enigmatic aspect of the internal or external does not ground, ossify or halt the self in a set form, but rather opens the self up, affectively and productively with the world and with itself. "The tacit acknowledgement that mastery, knowledge, possession of other, or the self, will remain an illusion, opens the way to a different way of

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<sup>500</sup> Mulvey, 2006, p. 186.

<sup>501</sup> Emma Wilson, *Love, Mortality and the Moving Image*, 2012, p. 5.

holding that other, that self.”<sup>502</sup> Wilson’s focus is death and palliative care as a site of the hesitant and affective meeting between life and death and its relation to art. My focus has been the formation of the self in the encounter with the nebulous demands of the world as well as how we continuously live with the traces of this formation at the start of life. I have used the language of gender and sexual difference as well as the feminine and the queer to understand exclusion and subjugation as a haunting site but also as a productive site. I have investigated the possibilities of being affected by something external and something that escapes our understanding, but also the limits to this affectability.

As we leave Paul to mourn what he now believes to be his loving father, we are left with the uncanny, not of death or of the frozen past in a still image, but of the uncanny and not quite intelligible intentions of Paul, Paul’s father, his sister and of the film. We become aware, not so much of the punctum of time lost, but of the multiple and shadowy intentions of fictional as well as real characters. And we are left to translate, to keep reading and keep trying to understand.

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<sup>502</sup> Wilson, 2012, p. 104.

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