

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. “To essay” and “to assay” both mean “to attempt,” but of course *assay* allows me to draw out the connection between these essays and what *the ass says*, so to speak. As for “abjective” writing, it can be distinguished from (while not being entirely unrelated to) “creative” writing (though it is, if anything, de-creative, antigenerative, at once prolific and abortive) and “objective” writing in the scholarly, argumentative sense (though the writing collected here is not exactly without scholarship or argument).
2. It was not Kristeva but André Breton who referred to Bataille as an excremental philosopher. For another brief history of abjection that considers Kristeva, Bataille, and Lacan, as well as the proto-abjectionist Marcel Jouhandeau, see the opening chapters of Keith Reader’s *The Abject Object: Avatars of the Phallus in Contemporary French Theory, Literature, and Film*.
3. In citing Lacan’s *Écrits* throughout this book I will almost always be using Bruce Fink’s 2006 translation of the complete edition. With regard to this particular passage, however, I prefer the Sheridan translation to what we find in Fink—“ask someone with writer’s block about the anxiety he experiences and he will tell you who the turd *is* in his fantasy” (693)—mainly because I like to think that Lacan is addressing a dysgraphic, scatontological anxiety that obtains for the subject who speaks and writes *as such* rather than merely describing a blocked writer on a bad day. So when this quotation or some variant appears—and I think I trot it out about a half-dozen times in this book—it will be in the Sheridan translation.
4. In *The Abject Object*, Keith Reader writes that the concept of abjection “does not figure explicitly in Lacan, though it is constantly inferable in his work” (44). In this work, I will be attempting to make the inferences explicit.
5. See Marjorie Levinson, “What Is New Formalism?”
6. *Amor fati* means “love of fate,” a very important trope for Nietzsche. With the word “triumph,” however, I am adumbratively alluding to a portion, “The Triumph of Love,” of the “Lacan Meets Queer Theory” chapter of Tim Dean’s *Beyond Sexuality*. You will have to read the essay in this book titled “Is What You Want Something You Can Discuss?” to discover what is odd, perverse, and unspeakable about this “triumph.”

7. Cf. Nietzsche's repeated assertion in *Birth of Tragedy* that "it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally justified" (52).

ESSAY 1

1. Here is a true story, a little pile of autobiography to go along with the scene of schoolyard defecation with which I opened *Male Matters*. My full name is Homer Calvin Thomas III. This is ludicrous enough, but when I was a child, certain members of my family, such as my mother and older sister, took some delight in pointing out the obvious rhyme for the tertiary number, so that I became not "the Third" but of course "the Turd." No doubt this early experience of having both the sign of my identity and the name of the/my father designated as shit by family females helped shape the theoretical concerns that cling to me and my writing to this day.
2. When I say that humanization depends upon a transvaluation of fecal values, I have in mind what Žižek calls "Lacan's thesis that animal became human the moment it confronted the problem of what to do with its excrement" (*Metastases* 179). I would, however, compare this thetic moment with another, better-known Lacanian thesis about humanization—"the moment at which desire is humanized is also that at which the child is born into language" (*Écrits* 262)—and I would suggest that scatontological anxiety emerges upon the suspicion that these two anthropogenetic "moments" are disturbingly equiprimordial. The little subject's problems—what to do with its words, what to do with its turds, what to do with itself—are all the same, or at least remain indistinguishable until mapped over with the formulae of sexuation, until "order and norms [are] instituted which tell the subject what a man or a woman must do" (*Écrits* 720) with words, turds, selves, bodies, pleasures, and so on.
3. *Male Matters* also posits that the specter of the *actively* abjecting mother in the heteromale imaginary might help explain masculinist resistance to the idea of maternal and/or feminine *agency*: feminism, which promotes and enacts women's agency and choice, is a bad idea for some men not merely because it seems to disempower or castrate them but because it turns them back into bad objects, *kakōn*. The actively abjecting Medusa turns men into stool, not stone.
4. In *Beyond Gender: From Subject to Drive*, Paul Verhaeghe writes that "the idea of castration is in the first place a defence against anxiety, and in that sense it is a secondary formation" (10); that castration "is nothing but a *secondary* elaboration of a more primary anxiety," and that "the interpretation of the lack of the Other in terms of a lack of the phallus—i.e., castration—is the reassuring interpretation" (15). In Verhaeghe's nonreassuring interpretation,

The fundamental anxiety or primary anxiety concerns the threatening first Other who becomes incarnated in woman and her enigma. Its fundamental character is such that it can be constantly found, transculturally as well as transhistorically, in either its positive aspect (reverence for the

woman) or its negative expression (misogyny). This fundamental anxiety is experienced as life threatening, and it is only in retrospect that it is linked to sexuality and anxiety in sexual matters. This link is installed precisely by the interpretation of the lack of the Other in terms of castration, and in turn this determines the gender-specific forms it takes. (15)

- Following from Verhaeghe, we can say that the interpretation of the Other's *lack* in terms of *castration* is "reassuring" precisely because it defends against a more anxiogenic interpretation of the Other's *excess* in terms of *abjection*. As Elizabeth Grosz puts it, "Abjection is the precondition of castration; castration is an attempt to cover over and expel it" ("The Body" 92). But what is specifically "life threatening" about the Other incarnated as cloacal, abjecting mother (though Verhaeghe does not address the "enematic" element of this woman's enigma) is that such a figure threatens to turn the subject into lifeless excrement, provokes what Roberto Harari calls "the phantasy of being shit" (253). If we imagine the Other's excess in terms of an archaic "situation in which lack is lacking," as Bruce Fink puts it in *The Lacanian Subject* (53), then we might get a sense of what is at stake, and what is repressed, in this anxious fantasy. After alluding to such a situation, Fink cites Lacan's *Seminar X: On Anxiety*, in which Lacan states, "What is most anxiety-provoking for the child is when the relationship through which he comes to be—on the basis of lack which makes him desire—is most perturbed: when there is no possibility of lack, when his mother is constantly on his back" (*Seminar X*, December 5, 1962; cited in Fink 53). But here Fink cuts Lacan off in an interesting way, for he leaves out what Lacan adds immediately after the line "when his mother is constantly on his back"—to wit, "especially by wiping his bottom" (*Seminar X*, December 5, 1962). Even though Lacan has earlier suggested that "it is not nostalgia for what is called the maternal womb which engenders anxiety, it is everything that announces to us something which will allow us to glimpse that we are going to re-enter it," his later reference to constant maternal ass-wiping allows us to imagine that it is the cloacal womb that engenders the most primordial anxiety (prior, that is, to castration): the perturbed "vision of excess" that has the mother constantly intruding up *my* shitty ass gives me my own message back in an inverted form and reveals my abject emergence from *hers*. It is from this scatontological fate, and not from an incestuous reentry into the maternal womb, that the phallus as *nom/non du père* saves me. So when Lacan writes of the phallus that "whether male or female, man must accept to have it and not have it, on the basis of the discovery that he isn't it" (*Écrits* 537), one might note the way this forced acceptance, based upon the discovery that one "isn't it," may be motivated by the anxious hope that one isn't shit.
5. Aside from the abundant instances of the money-shot from the world of porn, consider, for example, the Farrelly Brothers' 1998 film *There's Something about Mary*, in which the postmasturbatory cum that we first see hanging lugubriously from Ben Stiller's ear is eventually distributed into Cameron Diaz's hair (she mistakes it for styling gel); or Todd Solondz's 1998 film *Happiness*, in

which a young boy, standing on the balcony of his apartment building, jerks off while watching two women sunbathing in the courtyard below. His semen, which lands on a guardrail and is lapped up by the family dog, is transferred to his own mother's mouth when, in the very next scene, she kisses the dog at the dinner table. For further analysis of these films, see Greg Tuck, "Mainstreaming the Money Shot: Reflections on the Representation of Ejaculation in Contemporary American Cinema." For much more on ejaculation in general, see also Murat Aydemir, *Images of Bliss: Ejaculation, Masculinity, Meaning*.

6. EXCURSUS ON THE PROBLEM OF TAKING "THE MATERIALITY OF THE SIGNIFIER" LITERALLY: In "Identity and Hegemony," Ernesto Laclau writes that we should "understand by 'materiality of the signifier' not the phonic substance as such but the inability of *any* linguistic element—whether phonic or conceptual—to refer *directly* to a signified. This means the priority of value over signification, and what Lacan called the permanent sliding of signified under the signifier" (71). Given the absence of direct reference to which Laclau refers, we might say that it is impossible to take the materiality of the signifier literally if by "taking literally" we mean assuming a direct reference or a "real" conflation of a signifier's material being or substance with its meaning. Thus one can only ever take the materiality of the signifier metaphorically. But what I mean to metaphorize by "taking the 'materiality of the signifier' literally" is a sort of contamination of the abstract by the abject, even if this "will to contaminate" can only ever be effected metaphorically.

To clarify: In *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler writes, "I confess [. . .] that I am not a very good materialist. Every time I try to write about the body, the writing ends up being about language. This is not because I think that the body is reducible to language; it is not. Language emerges from the body, constituting an emission of sorts" (198). I would say that for my money Butler's self-confessed bad materialism is not bad enough, that even though she writes, "Language emerges from the body, constituting an emission of sorts," she never writes *as if* language so emerges. I, on the other hand, am on a(n) (e)mission of sorts to be an even worse materialist than Butler and to write *as if* language really were what it really is, *as if* language really did emerge from corporeal orifices, which it really does, though I can only write *as if* it does. In other words, no *writer* can ever fully or directly *be* a materialist but must always only be (or *mean* as) a symbolist. If I were to attempt to render my writings as literal *poubellications* or (apologies to Mary Kelly) cloacal "post-partum documents," I would have to make sure that each one of my texts was festooned with personally deposited boogers, fecal smears, seminal splashes, and other assorted anamorphic stains that would not show up "as such" on a Google word search. These would be limited editions, indeed.

7. EXCURSUS ON THE FATE OF "THE PHALLUS": In the chapter "In Defense of the Phallus" of his book *White Men Aren't*, Thomas DiPiero maintains that feminist critics of the Lacanian phallus who "get it wrong" by clinging to the argument that the phallus cannot fully be disintricated from the penis end up reinscribing the very "phallic posturing" they mean to undermine. In

other words, they unwittingly defend the phallus by attacking it. DiPiero wants to “get the phallus right” (152) and to defend it by, well, defending it. Elaborating on Lacan’s notion of the phallus as the primary signifier of lack that makes signification itself possible, DiPiero writes that

the essence of a signifier is to delineate an epistemological dimension from an ontological one (or, in the formulation Lacan often used, to cause people to exchange *la lettre* for *l’être*); the phallus thus denotes—or more properly arises as—the condition or the possibility of that separation. It stands in for the gesture of demarcating the continuous realms of absolute being into relational units that evoke one another because of symbolic taxonomic operations arising through the work of politics, history, and culture. That the function denoted by the signifier “phallus” must exist seems to me beyond doubt; why the signifier in question is called *phallus* is another matter. (152).

Why or whether the signifier in question *must* be called phallus is indeed a crucial matter, but it is one that DiPiero never adequately addresses in his phallic defense. Perhaps I myself am being phallic in even expecting an adequate or “complete” address, rather than fully accepting the lack thereof, but I still wonder why signifying or identificatory “phallic functions unrelated to gender or sexual difference” (167) can or must be called “phallic” if they actually are “unrelated to gender or sexual difference.” Nor do I understand how DiPiero’s defensive insistence on “the phallus as a fundamental signifier that marks the inception of difference and orders and regulates all other difference” (167) squares with his complaint against psychoanalysis for making sexual difference the fundamental organizing principle of differential human subjectivity. On the one hand, if the *fundamental* signifier that provokes signification itself through its prohibitory function (the subject *must* mean rather than be; we are *ordered* to symbolize, to exchange *la lettre* for *l’être*) *is* or *arises* as a phallic function (because the “order” emerges as the father’s “no,” the prohibition against incest taking the structural form of his prior possession of what the subject wants fantasmatically *to be* in order to complete the mother’s desire), then sexual difference is fundamental. If, on the other hand, there are other signifying functions that are equally important or more fundamental in shaping human identities but are “unrelated to gender or sexual difference,” then nothing would seem to warrant calling them “phallic.”

For myself, I agree with DiPiero, and Lacan, that the function designated by the word “phallus” must exist or designation itself would not. Moreover, given the long history of the ideological reproduction of patriarchal relations and the concomitant Oedipalization of heteromasculine subjectivity, I can see why that function has indeed been phallic and has been needed to be called phallic. But if we are interested in disrupting that reproduction, or if we are interested in dethroning sexual difference as *the* fundamental organizing principle of human subjectivity, then we might want to come up with other names than the *nom/non du père*. Perhaps, following a certain Artist Formerly Known

as Prince, we might for a while think in terms of a fundamental signifier formerly known as the phallus. As Tim Dean writes in *Beyond Sexuality*, “Since ‘the phallus’ names various functions and structural elements that may be substituted with alternative conceptual terms, it may be time to retire the phallus” (83). Lacan himself, moreover, gives us permission to stop defending and start retiring the phallus when he writes in *Seminar XX* that

the phallus—as analysis takes it up as the pivotal or extreme point of what is enunciated as the cause of desire—analytic experience stops not writing it. It is in this “stops not being written” (*cesse de ne pas s’écrire*) that resides the apex of what I have called contingency. [. . .] Because of this, the apparent necessity of the phallic function turns out to be mere contingency. It is as a mode of contingency that the phallic function stops not being written. (94)

If I am getting Lacan right here in understanding the difference between necessity and contingency in terms of the difference between what does not stop not being written (necessity) and what does (contingency), then the mere contingency of the phallic function is exposed, made apparent, whenever we stop not writing it, for what remains unwritten, immune or removed from writing, ends up being allowed to masquerade as the necessary, the eternal, the transcendent, the immutable, and so on. Ultimately, defending the phallus means not to stop not writing it. To write the phallus, or stop not writing it, is to demean it, to abject it, to queer it. Tim Dean’s writing is of course exemplary here, but see also Keith Reader, *The Abject Object: Avatars of the Phallus in Contemporary French Theory, Literature and Film*.

One further point on necessity and contingency in regard to the phallic function. Here are two of Lacan’s explicit formulations: “If the mother’s desire *is* for the phallus, the child wants to be the phallus in order to satisfy that desire” (*Écrits* 582); and

The whole problem of the perversions consists in conceiving how the child, in its relationship with its mother—a relationship that is constituted in analysis not by the child’s biological dependence, but by its dependence on her love, that is by its desire for her desire—identifies with the imaginary object of her desire *insofar as* the mother herself symbolizes it in the phallus. (*Écrits* 463)

In the preceding I have emphasized two conditionals—if and *insofar as*—both of which indicate that Lacan is here suggesting the contingency of the phallic function, the possibility that the mother’s desire might not be for the phallus and that she might symbolize (or at least express, press out) her desire otherwise. Many critical descriptions of Lacan’s phallocentrism fail to note or make much of these conditionals.

8. In *The Parallax View*, Slavoj Žižek performs a sort of “dialectical” reading of various sexual activities in order to “short circuit” the perceived incompatibility between the lowest levels of bodily practice and the highest strata of

philosophical speculation. Two particular moments in this “weird” exercise seem to relate to what “Piss Hegel” attempts to demonstrate:

In masculine masturbation, the vagina, the ultimate passive organ, is substituted by the hand, the ultimate active organ which passivizes the phallus itself. Furthermore, when the phallus penetrates the anus, we obtain the correct insight into the speculative identity of excrementation and insemination, the highest and the lowest. (*Parallax View* 13)

We note a nice Žižekian move in the last phrase as Žižek inverts the normal expectations of respective parallelism and, in a sort of dialectical topsy-turvy, appears to couple “excrementation” with “the highest” and “insemination” with “the lowest.” What my “Piss Hegel” argues is that when Hegel recurs to the urethra in an attempt to distinguish *Begriff* from *Vorstellung*, he unwittingly—or perhaps, given the cunning of reason, all too knowingly—offers an abject insight into the speculative identity of ejaculation and excrementation, and he does so without even having to trot out the image of the ass-fuck (for the excremental dimension of semen is inscribed in its general visibility, not in any specifically rectal destination). As for Žižek’s “perverse” dialectical demonstration, and what he takes to be its point,

what accounts for the weird (if not—for some, at least—tasteless) character of this exercise is not the reference to sexual practices as such, but the short circuit between two spheres which are usually perceived as incompatible, as moving at ontologically different levels: that of sublime philosophical speculation and that of the details of sexual practices. [. . .] The unpleasant, weird effect of such short circuits is that they play a symptomatic role in our symbolic universes: they bring home the implicit, tacit prohibitions on which these universes rely. (*Parallax View* 13)

9. See www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/bosch/delight/delighted.jpg. Cf. Lacan’s comments on Bosch in “Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis”:

One must leaf through a book of Hieronymus Bosch’s work, including views of whole works as well as details, to see an atlas of all the aggressive images that torment mankind. The prevalence that psychoanalysis has discovered among them of images based on a primitive autoscopy of the oral organs and organs derived from the cloaca is what gives rise to the shapes of the demons in Bosch’s work. (*Écrits* 85)

10. See www.press.uillinois.edu/s98/jpg/thomas.jpg.
11. See www.press.umich.edu/coverImages/0472095978.gif.
12. Because this body belongs to an “ethnic” Antonio Sabado, Jr., one could say that it does not turn out to be exactly white, that it is almost the same but not quite, and so on. But the point is that Sabado’s body functions in the video as a signifier of what Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks calls “desiring whiteness.” See her *Desiring Whiteness: A Lacanian Analysis of Race*.
13. And if we are familiar with the video for Sir Mix-a-Lot’s “Baby’s Got Back,” we know what *he* would have to say about the racial politics of this

shrinkage. For the unfamiliar, “Baby’s Got Back” registers a protest against the imposition onto black women of white male standards of female booty size.

14. At the time of the video’s production and release, this black male face was anonymous, and the fact that the video could count on the face’s namelessness underscores its castration of its bearer: the black man can be safely seen but has no vision, can be symbolized but cannot signify himself through his name. The fact that the face now recognizably belongs to Djimon Hounsou, who went on to appear in Spielberg’s *Amistad* (1997) and Ridley Scott’s *Gladiator* (2000), ironizes the video’s strategy but does not fatally compromise my reading of it.

ESSAY 2

1. The question of *Female Masculinity*, to use the title of Judith Halberstam’s book, is important and interesting but pretty much out of my ballpark, so to speak. Let’s just say that I am opposed to any “masculinity,” female or male, that sustains itself through the punitive abjection of the other, or that I am opposed to any subject-formation that sustains itself through the punitive abjection of the other, whether it calls itself “masculine” or not.
2. At the very beginning of the *Écrits*, Lacan writes of “the division in which the subject is verified in the fact that an object traverses him without them interpenetrating in any respect, this division being at the crux of what emerges at the end of this collection that goes by the name object *a* (to be read: little *a*)” (4). What strikes my interest, however, is the little bit of crucial information that we find in Bruce Fink’s translator’s notes: “*Petit a* [. . .] also sounds like *petit tas*, little pile” (766).
3. The term “sex/gender system” comes from Gayle Rubin’s essay “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex.” Perhaps the following from that essay—particularly the phrase “oppresses everyone”—could be cited as evidence for Braidotti’s claim that gender theorists miss the point about the asymmetries of sexual difference:

Gender is a socially imposed division of the sexes. It is the product of the social relations of sexuality. [. . .] Far from being the expression of natural differences, exclusive gender identity is the suppression of natural similarities. It requires repression: in men, of whatever is the local version of “feminine” traits; in women, of the local definition of “masculine” traits. The division of the sexes has the effect of repressing some of the personality characteristics of virtually everyone, men and women. The same social system which oppresses women in its relations of exchange, oppresses everyone in its insistence upon a rigid division of personality. (546)

Also potentially problematic from a feminist perspective would be Rubin’s later essay “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality.” In it, Rubin writes that “feminist thought simply lacks angles of vision which can fully encompass the social organization of sexuality. The criteria of

relevance in feminist thought do not allow it to see or assess critical power relations in the area of sexuality. [. . .] Feminism is no more capable than Marxism of being the ultimate and complete account of all social inequality” (34). For discussion of both essays, see Gayle Rubin, with Judith Butler, “Sexual Traffic.”

4. I allude here to both the title of Lacan’s seminar, *ou pire*—“or worse”—and the opening lines of Beckett’s *Worstward Ho*: “Try again. Fail again. Fail better” (7).
5. This is what I understand Lacan to mean when he writes that “one may find that a lack of satisfaction of sexual needs, in other words, frigidity, is relatively well tolerated by women, whereas the *Verdrängung* [repression] inherent in desire is less in them than in men” and speaks of “a centrifugal tendency of the genital drive in the sphere of love, which makes impotence much harder for [the man] to bear, while the *Verdrängung* inherent in his desire is greater” (*Écrits* 583).
6. Actually, what I have in mind here is what Ernesto Laclau calls “a process of *mutual* contamination.” Laclau writes:

What is crucial is not to conceive the hegemonic process as one in which empty places in the structure would be simply filled by preconstituted hegemonic forces. There is a process of contamination of the empty signifiers by the particularities that carry out the hegemonic structures, but this is a process of *mutual* contamination; it does operate in both directions. (“Identity” 70)

My assertion that the abstract is always already contaminated by the abject is analogous to Žižek’s claim that the Symbolic is always contaminated by the Real that it would exclude, the Real that is only the Real by virtue of the attempted expulsion: “In other words, the paradox is that the Real as external, excluded from the Symbolic, is in fact a symbolic determination—what eludes symbolization is precisely the Real as the *inherent point of failure* of symbolization” (“Class Struggle” 121). To contaminate this paradox with some particularity, and to suggest that the “inherent point” is not merely failure but *Durchfall*, I would put the matter like this: the abstract is contaminated by the abject but the abject must be contaminated by the abstract to be *abject* and not merely excremental. In other words, there is a profound difference between animal and human excrement, mainly because the animal does not *become* animal by having to learn what to do with its shit. Here again I have in mind what Žižek calls “Lacan’s thesis that animal became human the moment it confronted the problem of what to do with its excrement” (*Metastases* 179). But I would stress that while it is true that “for this unpleasant surplus to pose a problem, the body must already have been caught up in the symbolic network” (*Metastases* 179), the symbolic network itself remains caught up in an excremental unpleasantness from which it never fails to fail to extricate itself.

7. “Anal identifications, which analysis has discovered at the origins of the ego, give meaning to what forensic medicine designates in police jargon by the name of ‘calling card’” (*Écrits* 117).

8. See note 4, Essay 1.
9. Note the relish with which Lacan quotes the Jonathan Swift line on “the *Author of the Excrement*” (*Écrits* 389) and its relative proximity to Lacan’s reference to himself as “the author of these lines: the Gongora of psychoanalysis, as people call him, at your service” (391). *Poubellication* is a Lacanian pun mixing publication with garbage disposal. *Durchfall* is my favorite German word and it refers to failure, falling through, or taking an involuntary dump.
10. Note, however, that this “strapping” of linguistic or grammatical normality onto psychosexual heteronormativity has the effect of *queering* syntactical or stylistic deviation or deformation—has the effect, that is, of making Lacan’s writing queerer than ever.
11. I once walked into a seminar room in which a creative writing workshop had just been held. An instructional imperative or symbolic order from that workshop remained uneraser on the board. Creative writing students were told to “choose words that are close to life!” I let the order remain there for my seminar and appropriated it to explain that from a Lacanian perspective no word is closer or further from life than any other because what any word must do in order to be a word is nothing other than to separate or distantiate itself from life: any and every word—even “word”—*words* only by virtue of its sacrifice of life, for “the symbol first manifests itself as the killing of the thing” (*Écrits* 262). Words that appear to be lively are actually, functionally, quite mortifying—“lethal symbols” (249)—and so they must be or they will fail to be words. So the imperative “Choose words that are close enough to life to kill it!” would have been more in keeping with the actual operations of the symbolic order, though whether or not such instruction would facilitate good “creative writing” is quite another question.
12. Both Dean and Shepherdson use Millot to score Lacanian and Copjecian points “against the historicists” in general and against Butler in particular.
13. If I understand Lacan on the two deaths, then the first death, “the one that life brings,” involves the “vital misery” of species prematurity and “the fact that man’s death, long before it is reflected [. . .] in his thinking, is experienced by him in the earliest phase of misery that he goes through from *the trauma of birth* until the end of the first six months of *physiological prematurity*, and that echoes later in the *trauma of weaning*” (*Écrits* 152); while the second death, “the one that brings life,” involves the subject’s “essentially suicidal” (152) sacrifice to human reality’s “lethal symbols” (249), “the sacrifice of his [inadequately animal] life that he agrees to for the reasons that give human life its measure” (263), “the profound relationship uniting the notion of the death instinct to problems of speech” (260), and pretty much all of the following:

Death brings the question of what negates discourse, but also the question whether or not it is death that introduces negation into discourse. For the negativity of discourse, insofar as it brings into being that which is not, refers us to the question of what nonbeing, which manifests itself in the symbolic order, owes to the reality of death. (316)

14. (Note to the reader about this note: it is very long, and contains two excurses, one on Shepherdson's imperative/role distinction, the other on Lacan's myth of the lamella.)

EXCURSUS I: ON IMPERATIVES AND ROLES

In *Vital Signs*, Shepherdson urges us to distinguish between “the historicist *construction of subjectivity* and the psychoanalytic *constitution of the subject*, by reference to the terms ‘role’ and ‘imperative’” (93). He warns us against “confirming an opposition” between historicism and psychoanalysis “at the cost of recognizing the real complexity of the relation” (93) but at the same time, or on the same page, complains that “in much of our current literature, there is no clear distinction between the constitution of the subject in psychoanalysis, and the social construction of subjectivity.” But perhaps one of the reasons for this lack of “clear distinction” between “constitution” and “construction” or “imperative” and “role” in “our current literature” is that there is no clear distinction among these formations in *our ongoing sociosymbolic reality*—or at least that no “clear distinction” can really be made except at “the cost of recognizing the real complexity of the relation.”

To follow Shepherdson's distinctions, we might say that at the level of representational “role” or “construction” there will always be cultural and historical variations in what it might “mean” for a man or a woman to act or appear (in cuneiform or hieroglyphics or on the silver screen or in cyberspace) as a “sex symbol,” but at the level of linguistic “imperative” or “constitution” there will always be, transhistorically and transculturally, an invariably profound and constitutive relation between sexuation (from *secare*, “to cut”) and symbolization. OK, fair enough. And yet, the question of the complexity of the relation between role and imperative remains. Indeed, we see it emerge in the dialogue between Shepherdson and Jessica Miller that constitutes the final chapter of *Vital Signs*. At a certain point in this dialogue, Shepherdson is attempting to explain why anorexia is neither genetic nor “merely a general ‘social’ phenomenon” but rather a matter of “symbolic inheritance—a nonbiological transmission of anorexia. It isn't just a question of the particular woman, in relation to cultural ideals of femininity. It's an inheritance that passes symbolically from mother to daughter, around the question of femininity” (191). But we might ask how “the question of femininity” can be clearly distinguished from “cultural ideals of femininity” simply through recourse to the symbolic. Indeed, Miller asks Shepherdson, “Why can't language and symbolic transmission be subsumed by theories of social construction?” (191). Shepherdson responds: “Partly because accounts of the general social milieu can't explain why one subject rather than another becomes anorexic. Many women are exposed to the cultural representations, but they aren't all anorexic. It's a question of the particularity of the subject” (191–92). Shepherdson goes on to say:

It's the same with reproduction: the sexual drive is not governed by the instinct to reproduce. Freud's discovery was to show that sexuality in the human is denatured, it doesn't follow a developmental path directed

toward procreation. It shows up through the transformed reality that representations make possible, which is why “sexuality” in Freud’s sense is a uniquely human problem, distinct from biological sex. (192)

Again, of course, OK, fair enough. But one might still ask how we can really *clearly* distinguish the anthropogenetic denaturing of sex or “the transformed reality that representations make possible” from any “general social milieu” except at the cost of recognizing the real complexity of the relation. In other words, where do representations come from? Since they neither grow on trees nor fall out of the sky, can their origin, reproduction, distribution, transmission, or reception have any other source than culture or history as the untranscendable horizon of all (imperatively sociosymbolic) thought and interpretation?

EXCURSUS 2: ON LACAN’S MYTH OF THE LAMELLA

Toward the end of “Position of the Unconscious,” Lacan begins to construct his “myth” of the lamella. He begins by stressing the need to counter any characterization of human sexuality as biologically determined with a mythological (i.e., fictional, metaphorical, and conjectural) account:

As for sexuality, which people would like to remind me is the force we [analysts] deal with and that it is biological, I retort that analysts perhaps have not shed as much light as people at one time hoped on sexuality’s mainsprings, recommending only that we be natural, repeatedly trotting out the same themes of billing and cooing. I will try to contribute something newer by resorting to a genre that Freud himself never claimed to have superseded in this area: myth. (*Écrits* 716)

What Lacan has in mind here is of course the Aristophanic myth from Plato’s *Symposium* to which Freud turns at the end of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the myth of “primitive double-backed creatures” originally “fused together” but “separated later by a surgical operation arising from Zeus’s jealousy,” the scissored or sexuuated “beings we have become in love, starving for our unfindable complement” (*Écrits* 716–17). Lacan lets this mythical “sphericity of primordial Man” bring to his mind an egg, and he asks that we

consider the egg in a viviparous womb where it has no need for a shell, and recall that, whenever the membranes burst, a part of the egg is harmed, for the membranes of the fertilized egg are offspring [*filles*] just as much as the living being brought into the world through their perforation. Consequently, upon the cutting the cord, what the newborn loses is not, as analysts think, its mother, but rather its anatomical complement. Midwives call it the “afterbirth” [*délièvre*]. (*Écrits* 717)

Then, in a rather impressive move from yolky anatomy to creepy poetry—or, in a sense, from the raw to the cooked—Lacan writes:

Now imagine that every time the membranes burst, a phantom—an infinitely more primal form of life [. . .]—takes flight through the same passage.

Man [*l'Homme*] is made by breaking an egg, but so is the “Manlet” [*l'Hommelette*].

Let us assume the latter to be a large crêpe that moves like an amoeba, so utterly flat that it can slip under doors, omniscient as it is guided by the pure life instinct, and immortal as it is fissiparous. It is certainly something that would not be good to feel dripping down your face, noiselessly, in order to seal it. (*Écrits* 717).

And if, Lacan writes, this yolky remainder of the “pure real” were to seep out of its own sphere into that of human reality, “even the bravest person would be justified in thinking twice before touching it in order to shove a negligible overflowing amount [*un rien*] back in, for fear that it would slip between his fingers and take up its abode who knows where?” (*Écrits* 718).

At this point in his mythmaking, Lacan changes the *nom du l'Hommelette* to “lamella,” and then to “libido,” and writes that the lamella libidinally represents “the part of living being that is lost when that being is produced through the straits of sex,” that “it marks the relationship—in which the subject plays a part—between sexuality, specified in the individual, and his death” (*Écrits* 718). Now, obviously, with Lacan’s “lamellian” mythopoetic marking of the relationship between the individual’s *specified* sexuality (man or woman) and his death, we find ourselves back in the general vicinity of the subject’s “articulated question—‘What am I there?’—about his sex and his contingency in being” (459). For what Lacan here attempts to make obvious—or perhaps *obscenely* evident—through the figure of the lamella is the relationship between the straits of sex, the defiles of the signifier, and the trajectory of the death drive:

Speaking subjects have the privilege of revealing the deadly meaning of this organ [the lamella], and thereby its relation to sexuality. This is because the signifier as such, whose first purpose is to bar the subject, has brought into him the meaning of death. (The letter kills, but we learn this from the letter itself.) This is why every drive is virtually a death drive. (*Écrits* 719)

Since the lamella is “the organ of what is incorporeal in the sexed being” and “the aspect of the organism that the subject manages to invest when his separation occurs,” Lacan writes, “It is through this organ that he can really make his death the object of the Other’s desire” (*Écrits* 720). But since, as we all know, “man’s desire is the Other’s desire” (525), the lamella must be the organ or aspect through which the subject can make his death the object of his *own* desire. But this idea of owning or desiring to own one’s death as one’s “own-most” *object* is complicated, or at least given a certain color, by Lacan’s very next set of assertions; to wit:

In this way, the object he naturally loses, excrement, and the props he finds in the Other’s desire—the Other’s gaze or voice—come to this place. The activity in the subject I call “drive” (*Trieb*) consists in dealing

with these objects in such a way as to recover from them, to restore to himself, his earliest loss. (*Écrits* 720)

The quite complicated remainder of “Position of the Unconscious” concerns what Lacan calls “the impact of sexuality” as it is “manifested in the subject,” “the absence of anything that could represent in the subject the mode of what is male or female in his being,” and “the fact that there is nothing in his dialectic that represents the bipolarity of sex” (*Écrits* 720). The “true basis of that polarity,” Lacan writes, is that

sexuality is distributed on one side or the other of our *rim* as a threshold of the unconscious in the following manner:

On the side of the living being as a being that will be taken up in speech—never able in the end to come to be altogether in speech, remaining shy of the threshold which, notwithstanding, is neither inside nor out—there is no access to the opposite sex as Other except via the so-called partial drives wherein the subject seeks an object to take the place of the loss of life he has sustained due to the fact that he is sexed.

On the side of the Other—the locus in which speech is verified as it encounters the exchange of signifiers, the ideals they prop up, the elementary structures of kinship, the metaphor of the father considered as a principle of separation, and the ever reopened division in the subject owing to his initial alienation—on this side alone and by the pathways I have just enumerated, order and norms must be instituted which tell the subject what a man or a woman must do. (*Écrits* 720)

Now, having looked at love from both sides—having examined “the beings we have become in love” and “in speech” from both sides, so to speak, of what Lacan calls “our *rim*”—what we might say about Lacan’s myth of the lamella is that it is not *not* half-bad. For the myth does suggest something pretty bad about the “pure life” that I lose upon being halved, upon being “sexed,” upon being a living being that will be taken up in speech. If nothing else, the myth suggests greater complications in the relation between the “fact of the signifier” and the “fact” that I am “sexed” than the simple conflation of “linguistic difference” with “sexual difference” as “differentiation from the maternal” would allow. Complicating the Oedipal myth, the “exchange of signifiers,” and “the elementary structures of kinship,” the lamellian myth suggests that what I am most fundamentally separated from when the cord is cut, even if it is scissored by “the metaphor of the father considered as a principle of separation,” is not the mother, “as analysts think,” but a more sinister, yolkly, excessive, excremental, obscene overflow of the “pure real.” If I am reading Lacan’s myth correctly here, then, at least on “the side of the living being,” as opposed to “the side of the Other,” this loss of really excremental life is what the “fact” of being “sexed”—that is, separated from myself, from my worst half, from my unfindable and unspeakable anatomical complement—really amounts to. This reading would involve me in some very complex relations among the following: (1) my

possible (but regulated) desire in relation to sex, which is presumably “in the end to come”; (2) my impossible desire in relation to words, which is “in the end to come to be altogether in speech” (impossible because I cannot *be* but can only come to *mean*—that is, be and not be—in speech); (3) my drive in relation to objects, which is to deal with them “in such a way as to recover from them,” to restore to myself, my “earliest loss”; and (4) my drive in relation to my death, since “every drive is virtually a death drive” and since my final objective is to make my death “the object of the Other’s desire.” But to the extent that my buried memories of my “earliest loss” involve the object I “naturally” lose, excrement, my desire to make my death the object of the Other’s desire must relate to my drive to recover myself, to restore myself to myself, to re-find my unspeakable complement, to lose my loss of excremental life and regain a purely thanatical identity with the excremental real, or a purely excremental identity with the thanatical real. In any case, this mythical relation could help explain why some people read the erasure of “sexual difference” as the *Durchfall* of the distinction between life and death: if I am no longer “sexed,” if I am no longer symbolically separated, I am thus “no different” from a really shitty death, a fatally fecal real. The myth also helps explain the tension between desire, which is understandably metonymically always “for something else” (*Écrits* 431), not *that*, and drive, which is always unreasonably literally for exactly *that* and nothing else. Finally, the myth explains why Lacan insists that desire desires to sustain itself as desire by always circling around the *objet a* but never finally “grasping” it: it allows us to rewrite the Lacanian slogan of subjectivity, “Don’t give me what I desire because that’s not it,” so that it more fundamentally reads, “Don’t give me what I desire because it’s really (to be) shit.”

15. In “Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis,” Lacan writes that “it is precisely the *kakon* of his own being that the madman tries to get at in the object he strikes” (*Écrits* 143).
16. I like Denise Riley’s formulation in *The Words of Selves*:

While the Lacanian psychoanalytic subject is indeed constituted “in division,” what one might want to see admitted is a yet more ubiquitous division. Not only that formulaic division through language operating at the level of the unconscious, but division made convex, as it were, folded upwards and outwards to the surface, in a far more prolific but a stolid and quotidian scission, to be tolerantly grasped as everywhere in play. This isn’t to advance an aesthetic and perverse longing for fragmentation, but only a sanguine acknowledgement of how things do seem to be. (14–15)

17. In “Is the Rectum a Grave?” Bersani posits sexuality as self-shattering, and the “self-shattering into the sexual as a kind of nonanecdotal self-debasement [. . .] in which, so to speak, the self is exuberantly discarded” (217–18). Bersani writes that

the self which the sexual shatters provides the basis on which sexuality is associated with power. It is possible to think of the sexual as, precisely,

moving between a hyperbolic sense of self and a loss of all consciousness of self. But sex as self-hyperbole is perhaps a repression of sex as self-abolition. It inaccurately replicates self-shattering as self-swelling, as psychic tumescence. If, as these words suggest, men are especially apt to “choose” this version of sexual pleasure, because their sexual equipment appears to invite by analogy, or at least to facilitate the phallicizing of the ego, neither sex has exclusive rights to the practice of sex as self-hyperbole. (218)

On Bersani’s analysis, the hyperbolic self or phallicized ego cannot experience sexuality as anything but power, cannot give itself over to the “strong appeal of powerlessness, of the loss of control” (217). It cannot exuberantly discard and shatter itself *into* sexuality, and so can have contact *with* sexuality only as the shattering discard of the devalued other. Phallocentrism, therefore, is according to Bersani “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. I don’t mean the value of gentleness, or nonaggressiveness, or even of passivity, but rather of a more radical disintegration and humiliation of the self” (217). But this subversion of phallocentrism through radical self-disintegration is, for Bersani, not only sexual but also ethical, for it is, he says, “the sacrosanct value of selfhood [that] accounts for human beings’ extraordinary willingness to kill in order to protect the seriousness of their statements. The self is a practical convenience; promoted to the status of an ethical ideal, it is a sanction for violence” (222).

18. Pronger explicitly refutes the suggestion that “men need to take on homosexual identities in order to be feminist. Indeed homosexual identity is no guarantor of feminist insight” (“On Your Knees” 77). Nor, it should be pointed out, are celebrations of male anal effusiveness per se any guarantor of feminism. In this regard, see Judith K. Gardiner’s essay “‘South Park,’ Blue Men, Anality, and Market Masculinity.”
19. The source of this information was a lecture by Professor Jan Nattier, of the Department of Religion at Indiana University, delivered at the Bodhi Manda Zen Center, Jemez Springs, New Mexico, June 1997. The information is, as I say, transcultural, but not universal, for as Nattier pointed out, in traditional Chinese culture writing is highly valued and carries no such abject associations or proscriptions.
20. I am working here from Edelman’s “Tearooms and Sympathy” essay as it appeared in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. The language about homographesis in Edelman’s *Homographesis* is slightly different.

ESSAY 3

1. Among the reasons I flatter myself by *not* including is the condition of the ass itself, which—despite my advancing age, and because of the ridiculous

amount of time I spend working out in the gym (when I could be out working for real social change)—I like to think of as still fuck-worthy, even if I do not like to think of its being fucked.

2. The conference on “Posting the Male: Representations of Masculinity in the Twentieth Century,” organized by Daniel Lea and Berthold Schoene-Harwood, was held at the Research Centre for Literature and Cultural History at Liverpool John Moores University in August of 2000, and I will here again thank the organizers for inviting me to speak at that event.
3. My allusion here is to Marx’s insistence on praxis in the 1844 manuscripts: “In order to abolish the *idea* of private property, the *idea* of communism is completely sufficient. It takes *actual* communist action to abolish actual private property” (99).
4. For Lacan’s relationship and indebtedness to Bataille, see Roudinesco, Carolyn Dean, and Botting and Wilson. For Lacan and queer theory, see both Tim Dean’s “Lacan Meets Queer Theory” chapter in *Beyond Sexuality* and his “Lacan and Queer Theory” chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*.
5. In her biography *Jacques Lacan*, Roudinesco writes of the “anxiety that afflicted Lacan whenever the terrible question of publication arose. ‘*Poubellication*,’ he was to call it later, a pun on ‘*poubelle*’ (trash can), perhaps referring to the residue or waste that might in his view be the object of his dearest desire” (319). Lacan himself refers to the word *poubellication* as “a pun of my own making” (*Écrits* 304) in “On a Purpose.”
6. Cf. D.A. Miller in “Anal Rope”:

Aligned with [the] subject’s heterosexualization (as what most brutally enforces it), castration anxiety may not finally be all that anxiogenic. For while such anxiety no doubt occasions considerable psychic distress, neither in the long run can it fail to be determined by the knowledge that it enjoys the highest social utility in tending to confirm heterosexual male identity in a world where, if this precious, but precarious identity is not exactly rewarded, the failure to assume it is less ambiguously punished. At the point where castration anxiety is taught to anticipate its redeeming social value, it immediately carries ultimate reassurance; its normalizing function allows it to be not just thought, but even lived, as normal itself. (135–36)

7. Cf. Bataille, “Two Fragments on Laughter,” in *Guilty*:

We have to distinguish:

—Communication linking up *two* beings (laughter of a child to its mother, tickling, etc.)

—Communication, through death, with our beyond (essentially in sacrifice)—not with nothingness, still less with a supernatural being, but with an indefinite reality (which I sometimes call *the impossible*, that is: what can’t be grasped (*begreift*) in any way, what we can’t reach without dissolving ourselves, what’s slavishly called God). If we need to we can define this reality (provisionally associating it with a finite element) at a

higher (higher than the individual on a scale of composition of beings) social level as the sacred, God or created reality. Or else it can remain in an undefined state (in ordinary laughter, infinite laughter, or ecstasy in which the divine form melts like sugar in water). (139)

8. For biographical details, see Alan Stoekel's introduction to Bataille, *Visions of Excess*.

ESSAY 4

1. Bersani's most extensive treatments of gay male sexuality are in *Homos* and "Is the Rectum a Grave?" He mentions Beckett only on the last page of *Homos* and not at all in "Rectum." Though he glances at Beckett in *The Culture of Redemption* and *The Freudian Body*, his most extensive treatment is in the chapter "Beckett: Inhibited Reading" in *Arts of Impoverishment*, in which he does not mention homosexuality at all. This essay is an attempt to investigate connections that are suggested but nowhere made explicit in Bersani's work.
2. I have attempted to discuss the problems and possibilities of "straight" negotiations with queer theory in the following: "Straight with a Twist: Queer Theory and the Subject of Heterosexuality"; "Is Straight Self-Understanding Possible?"; "Men and Feminist Literary Criticism"; "On Being Post-Normal: Heterosexuality after Queer Theory"; and "Crossing the Streets, Queering the Sheets; or, 'Do You Want to Save the Changes to Queer Heterosexuality?'" In the last two of these I respond to Annette Schichtler's critique of my attempts, "Queer at Last? Straight Intellectuals and the Desire for Transgression."
3. The relevant passage from Jameson is given below:

The thematizing of a particular pleasure as a political issue [. . .] must always involve a dual focus, in which the local issue is meaningful and desirable in itself, but is also *at one and the same time* taken as the *figure* for Utopia in general, and for the systemic revolutionary transformation of society as a whole. [. . .] So finally the right to a specific pleasure, to a specific enjoyment of the potentialities of the material body—if it is not to remain only that, if it is to become genuinely political [. . .]—must always in one way or another also be able to stand as a figure for the transformation of social relations as a whole. ("Pleasure" 73–74)

4. At first glance, Bersani's deployment of Freud would seem to depend upon his separating Freud's radical discoveries of and about sexuality from his tendency to domesticate those very discoveries by subsuming them into the theoretical edifice (or monument) called psychoanalysis. Bersani certainly makes that separation, but goes further and insists that it is the very collapse or failure of the theoretical edifice that produces the radical discoveries as such. See *The Freudian Body* and the chapter called "Erotic Assumptions" in *The Culture of Redemption*.
5. In an interview published in *October*, Bersani also distinguishes between a masochism that he considers "not as pleasure in pain so much as the pleasure

of at once losing the self and discovering it elsewhere, inaccurately replicated,” or again as “a certain pleasurable renunciation of one’s own ego boundaries, the pleasure of a kind of self-obliteration,” and castration. The terms of this distinction are somewhat confusing in that Bersani does occasionally use the phrase “self-divestiture” positively, whereas here he distances himself from it, but nonetheless:

It’s important to me to talk about it precisely as masochism and narcissism and not as self-divestiture because self-divestiture approaches what I have tried to avoid, and that is any connection of these ideas to castration. This is a major point of difference between us [Bersani and Kaja Silverman]: I am interested in a pleasure in losing or dissolving the self that is in no way equated with loss, but comes rather through rediscovering the self outside the self. It is a kind of spatial, anonymous narcissism. (Dean, “A Conversation” 6)

6. For an elaboration of this point, see Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*.
7. As Nietzsche continues:

Why have morality at all when life, nature, and history are “not moral”? No doubt, those who are truthful in that audacious and ultimate sense that is presupposed by the faith in science *thus affirm another world* than the world of life, nature, and history; and insofar as they affirm this “other world”—look, must they not by the same token negate its counterpart, this world, *our world*? (*Gay Science* 282–83)

And Nietzsche has already suggested what “our world” consists of and what “life” aims at: “semblance, meaning error, deception, simulation, delusion, self-delusion. [. . .] [T]he great sweep of life has actually always shown itself to be on the side of the most unscrupulous *polytropoi*” (282).

8. From a 1925 letter, cited in Vendler, xi. I cannot read Bersani’s references to “monumental” aesthetics without thinking (and thinking that Bersani was thinking) of Nietzsche’s critique of “monumental history” in “On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life” in *Untimely Meditations*, and also of Yeats’s lines from “Sailing to Byzantium”: “Caught in that sensual music all neglect/ Monuments of unageing intellect,” and “Nor is there singing school but studying/ Monuments of its own magnificence” (193).
9. For an early valorization of Beckett’s deployment of expulsion or abjection, see Georges Bataille’s 1951 essay “Molloy’s Silence.” In it Bataille writes that Beckett’s writing represents “repellent splendor incarnate” (131) and that Beckett confronts us with “the fundamental reality, which is always in front of us but which fear always separates us from, which we refuse to see and which we always strive to avoid being engulfed by” (131). This “fundamental reality” is for Bataille related to both “creative convulsions of language” and the “incontinent flux of language” (132), and hence to what he calls “the intrinsic debility of literature” (136), all of which Beckett’s writing reveals. Bataille himself is of course an important figure, not only in the history of theories of abjection (see Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* and Reader,

The Abject Object), but also for Bersani's antiredemptive aesthetics (see Bersani's chapter on Bataille in *The Culture of Redemption*). Moreover, Bataille is a compelling figure in the argument for "straight queerness" or universal homo-ness. In fact, the title for my first essay on this subject ("Straight with a Twist") comes from Carolyn Dean's description of Bataille in *The Self and Its Pleasures: Bataille, Lacan, and the History of the Decentred Subject*. Dean writes that "Bataille remains, to be sure, a man, but a different sort of man; he remains heterosexual, but he is a straight man with a twist" (240).

10. In his preface to the second edition of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes: "Oh, those Greeks! They knew how to live. What is required for that is to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance, to believe in forms, tones, words, in the whole Olympus of appearance. Those Greeks were superficial—*out of profundity*" (38).
11. Cf. Althusser:

I shall then suggest that ideology "acts" or "functions" in such a way that it "recruits" subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or "transforms" the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by the very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: "Hey, you there!" Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn round. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was "really" addressed to him, and that "it was *really him* who was hailed" (and not someone else). (174)

12. My reference here is to Barthes's assertion that "the text is (should be) that uninhibited person who shows his behind to the *Political Father*" (*Pleasure* 53).
13. In *Heterology and the Postmodern*, Julian Pefanis uses the word "heterology" to refer to a "*thought of nonidentity*" that aims "to preserve the difference of otherness, resisting the totalizing and totally compromised tendency of civilization" (5). For Bataille, however, the word "heterology" refers not only to "the science of the completely other" but also to "scatology" (*Visions* 102).
14. Though I write that Beckett learned this lesson from Joyce (for an examination of Joycean applications, see the chapter "Not a Nice Production: Anal Joyce" in *Male Matters*), I should point out that Bersani is curiously unappreciative of Joyce's anal tropings and tends to read Joyce more as a producer than as a subverter of cultural monumentalization. See the chapter "Against *Ulysses*" in *The Culture of Redemption*. Tim Dean, however, in "Paring His Fingernails," demurs from Bersani's positioning of *Ulysses* within the redemptive aesthetic, and reads Joyce's novel "as one of Bersani's best allies" (245).
15. For a feminist objection to Bersani, see Modleski, *Feminism without Women*.
16. In "Straight with a Twist," I suggest that "perhaps people who fuck in the name of identity, who make an identity out of whom they fuck, who fuck

to reproduce ‘the person,’ are fucking heteronormatively—are, in a sense, ‘breeders’—even if ‘the person’ or ‘identity’ thereby reproduced is ‘homosexual’” (33). One could rewrite that passage, substituting “write” for “fuck,” and get a sense of what I mean when I write that Beckett was not a breeder.

17. See Barthes, “The Structural Analysis of Narrative,” in *Image-Music-Text*, and Brooks, “Freud’s Master Plot,” in *Reading for the Plot*.
18. See *The Postmodern Condition* for Lyotard’s discussion of relations among postmodernism as the “shattering of belief,” Nietzschean perspectivism, masochism, and the Kantian sublime, which “carries with it both pleasure and pain. Better still, in it pleasure derives from pain” (77).
19. My reference here is to Nietzsche’s “I am afraid we are not getting rid of God because we still believe in grammar” (*Twilight* 48). Perhaps it was this perceived connection between sexual and syntactical normality that led Bertha Harris to suggest that “if in a woman writer’s work a sentence refuses to do what it is supposed to do [. . .] the result is innately lesbian literature” (cited in Smith 1416).

ESSAY 5

1. I of course allude here to the title of Slavoj Žižek’s edited collection *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)*. But I also provoke the question of why we should even ask the Lacan/Hitchcock question at all when so much Lacanian-influenced work has been done on Hitchcock in the last 30 years (dating from the 1975 publication of Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”). My answer is the revitalization of Lacan studies by queer theory, particularly by Tim Dean, whose *Beyond Sexuality* convincingly argues that “psychoanalysis is a queer theory” (215), and by Lee Edelman, whose *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* not only blends Lacan and queer theory with the figure of the “*sinthomosexual*” (described below, note 7) but also applies its considerable interpretative force to Hitchcock’s *North by Northwest* and *The Birds*. I rely rather heavily on Dean’s and Edelman’s explications of Lacan in what follows here.
2. In his chapter on *Spellbound* in *Hitchcock’s Bi-Textuality*, Samuels writes, “What most commentators of this movie have missed is the most obvious and repetitive symbolism of the film. Black lines on a white surface refers [*sic*] to writing, just as the title *Spellbound* can refer to both a trance and the act of spelling out something in language” (30). Samuels himself misses the pun about being bound to spelling that I was bound to spell out, but I thank him for leading me to it. As for the matter of our corporeal experience’s being always already put in writing, I specifically have in mind Lacan’s observation that “the instinctual stages are already organized in subjectivity [i.e., written] as they are being lived” and his reference to

the subjectivity of the child who registers as victories and defeats the epic of the training of his sphincters—enjoying in the process the imaginary sexualization of his cloacal orifices, turning his excremental expulsions into aggressions, his retentions into seductions, and his movements of release into symbols. [. . .] In other words, the anal stage is no less purely historical when it is actually experienced than when it is reconceptualized, nor is it less purely grounded in intersubjectivity. (*Écrits* 217)

3. I remind the reader that for Lacan the anthropogenetic moment of accession to language is inextricably linked to what Slavoj Žižek calls “Lacan’s thesis that animal became human the moment it confronted the problem of what to do with its excrement [. . . and that] in order for the unpleasant surplus to pose a problem, the body must already have been caught up in the symbolic network” (*Metastases* 179). Cf. Lacan’s comments in note 2 above.
4. “Another way of putting this,” writes Dean,

is to point out how linguistic duplicity—the very possibility that language can deceive—produces the perpetual illusion of a secret located beyond language, and it is this enigma that elicits desire. Hence, for Lacan, the subject and desire come into being at the same moment; and he names this constitutive division that founds the subject “object *a*,” a term intended to designate the remainder or *excess* that keeps self-identity forever out of reach, thus maintaining desire. (Dean, *Beyond* 250)

5. Regarding the lethality of the linguistic symbol, Bruce Fink, in *The Lacanian Subject*, writes:

In Lacan’s work, the sacrifice of *jouissance* [. . .] is necessitated by the Other’s demand that we speak. [. . .] That demand is obviously tied to all culture, all bodies of knowledge, for without language we could have no access to any of them. [. . .] The symbolic order kills the living being or organism in us, rewriting it or overwriting it with signifiers, such that being dies (“the letter kills”) and only the signifier lives on. (100–101)

Regarding the sacrifice of *jouissance* and the loss of the real as constitutive for the subject, Dean writes:

At the level of the real the phallus stands for castration as loss of *jouissance*. Symbolic castration . . . should not be located *in* the real, because the real lacks nothing (it is devoid of signifiers). This is why Lacan characterizes the real as always returning to the same place, for the signifier as a principle of substitutability remains foreign to the real. Hence the real can be defined only negatively, as a zone of impossibility. Yet far from its negativity rendering it conceptually redundant, the real’s impossibility is what renders it constitutive. That is, the real represents the condition of possibility for both the subject and discourse, insofar as the real is what must be excluded for the subject as a speaking being to constitute itself. (*Beyond* 88)

6. Dean writes that “although the real has no positive content, it has more to do with sex and death than does the imaginary or the symbolic” (*Beyond* 230) and, again, that “though the real has no predetermined content, Lacan associates it with the traumatic, unassimilable dimension of sex” (245).
7. I do not mean to trivialize queer by aligning it with comedy, or to make light of the serious, futureless business of Lee Edelman’s *sinthomosexuality*. However, as I take it, what actually constitutes the seriousness of *sinthomosexuality* is the way it fatally ironizes the seriousness of “meaning” itself and figures a queer refusal to take identity seriously. Thus Edelman conflates the Lacanian *sinthome* with Bersanian (preferably anal) sex, the value of which is “to demean the seriousness of efforts to redeem it” (“Rectum” 222). Or, again, Edelman conflates the *sinthome*, which “functions as the necessary condition for the subject’s engagement of Symbolic reality [but] refuses the Symbolic logic that determines the exchange of signifiers [. . .] admit[ting] no translation of its singularity and therefore carr[ying] nothing of meaning, recalling in this the letter as the site at which meaning comes undone” (*No Future* 35), with queerness as what “figure[s] an unregenerate, and unregenerating, sexuality, whose singular insistence on jouissance, rejecting every constraint posed by sentimental [heteronormative] futurism, exposes aesthetic culture—the culture of forms and their reproduction, the culture of Imaginary lures—as always already a ‘culture of death’ intent on abjecting the force of a death drive that shatters the tomb we call life” (*No Future* 48). Edelman goes on to write that

the *sinthomosexual* who stops the world, who exposes the Real in reality and shatters the totalized significations, all the meanings that metaphor generates, into the shards of material signifiers only metonymically linked, destroys, by revealing the promiscuous conjunctions of signifiers without benefit of marriage, all faith in the redemptive possibility of their meaning-producing rapport. The thematic extension of the wound thus inflicted on the viability of any thematics is the *sinthomosexual*’s insistence on the lack of a *sexual* rapport, on the absence of any natural or instinctive relation between the sexes, of any complementarity, any access to meaning between them. [. . .] The *sinthomosexual*, like jouissance, makes the sexual relation impossible, obtruding with the force of the Real on the fantasy of the reciprocal fulfillment of male and female in the One of the Symbolic couple. (180n42)

To return all this destruction to the question of the comedic, I will simply let the anal thematic of these passages resonate and suggest that, at least for some of us, it is always devastatingly funny to find “the fundament at the foundation of the profound” (*No Future* 178n2). Just as the value of anal sex is to demean the seriousness of efforts to redeem it, so at least part of “the explanatory virtue of turds” (Dean 265) is that they have no future. Our laughter is Bataillean.

8. Of course, to phrase the problem this way is to suggest that gynophobia and misogyny are *problems* in normative heteromasculinity rather than the

latter's very condition of possibility. On the contrary, we should understand that successful masculinist heteronormativity depends less (or even not at all) upon "liking" women or "being into" female genitalia and more (or even completely) upon establishing control or ownership of the vagina and everything it represents and everything that represents it, including the problematic of representation itself. *And everything it represents*: most notably—that is, most obviously aligned with notation, with representation, with the cut of language—symbolic castration. *And everything that represents it*: less obviously, but more problematically, or archaically, the "bottom" in Freud's Wolfman's "front-bottom," the rectum from which, says Freud, borrowing an "apt phrase from Lou-Andreas Salomé," the vagina is only "'taken on lease'" (SE 22:101). *Including the problematic of representation itself*: if the crucial problem of representation is how to gain and maintain control of it, and if the proof of heteronormative masculinity is less *liking* than *controlling* feminine sexuality, then successful heteronormativity can be said to depend upon controlling representation, while its failure can be signaled by a loss of representational control. These considerations, which link normative heteromale success with the proper control of words, images, women, and one's own sphincter, would seem to have a direct bearing on a representational space as tightly controlled as Hitchcock's cinema seems to be—particularly if we agree with Robert Samuels that Hitchcock actually "radically fails at his control of the visual world" (111), and particularly if we think, with Samuels, that this failure can be a productive site of queer interpretation.

9. Lisa does not see the smirk and either misses or ignores the insinuation. What is remarkable, though, is that some of the critics of the film who are engaged with the question of Jeff's "repressed homosexuality" or general emasculation—Samuels, even Edelman—similarly miss, ignore, or completely misconstrue the line. Most egregious in this regard is John Fawell, who not only gets the line completely wrong (as I have already shown, Fawell tends to misquote) but also incorporates the misreading into his own heteronormative projections about *Jeff's* projections and hence Hitchcock's. Fawell writes that "Jeff interprets the Composer's window as he does all the windows, projecting his own ideas and biases upon the Composer. When Lisa, moved by the music, inquires about the Composer, Jeff says, 'he lives alone, probably an unhappy marriage'" (98). Of course, what Jeff clearly says is "but they have a very unhappy marriage." If he says what Fawell hears, then what's up with the smirk? In any case, Fawell goes on to say that Jeff "sees in the Composer a reflection of his own situation, another man harried by the institution of marriage. But a closer examination of the Composer's window suggests a man who is unhappy not because he has been married but because he misses or needs a woman" (98). Armed with these misreadings, Fawell interprets Hitchcock's cameo in terms of the director's desire to participate in the composition of the songwriter's tune "Lisa."

Hitchcock wanted to be seen as, in a sense, the author of the song that is the source of the strong feeling of love for Lisa that permeates the film, and this is further evidenced by the fact that he seems to be giving the composer instruction on how to write the music. Hitchcock's words are not audible in this cameo, but the act of his speaking is clearly recorded, and the lip-readers I have asked to look at this scene have agreed that what he is saying is "B, B flat." (101)

Could this reading be any flatter? I don't want to pick on Fawell any further because I think that his full-length book on *Rear Window* is in ways quite valuable. But if one is going to write a whole book about a single film, and even call in lip-readers, one could at least quote accurately the lines that are quite audible.

10. Although the phrase "volcanic Bataillean hot monkey-love" calls out for explanation, I turn first to the phrase "hot spot," which does not occur in Jeff's phone conversation with Gunneson, though Gunneson does say that Kashmir is "about to go up in smoke" and Jeff says, "Didn't I tell you that was the place to watch?" Rather, the phrase appears in a long footnote in Edelman's "*Rear Window's* Glasshole," in which Edelman points out the Western association of non-Western territories (like Kashmir or Shanghai) with "the archaic remnants of repudiated libidinal systems" and with "pregenital pleasures and libidinal pathways that must culturally evoke associations like those assigned to the repudiated racial and ethnic other: associations with dirt and uncleanness, with foul smells and inappropriate desires." Edelman writes that these associations find

a thematic home in *Rear Window's* anatomy of Jeff's regressive investment in postcolonial adventure. The film, after all, immobilizes Jeff the better to mobilize a narrative in which his nominal susceptibility to the hetero-genitalizing charms of Miss Fremont must struggle against the much greater appeal of "hot spots" far from Western eyes, places distinguished, in the lurid descriptions he offers to explain why Lisa could never hope to accompany him there, primarily by their capacity to compel an immersive experience in filth and disgust. (95n25)

I follow Edelman here but will eventually diverge from him to argue that Miss Fremont, overcoming or at least setting aside like a book or magazine her own susceptibility to heterogenitalizing charms, actually does more than hope to accompany Jeff to the archaic and repudiated "there." Returning to the Bataille reference, however, and speaking of filth and disgust, I meant to allude not only to the defecation/enucleation parallels in *Story of the Eye* but also to such simian moments in *Visions of Excess* as Bataille's evolutionary alignment of human facial expressiveness with "the shit-smeared and obscene anuses of certain apes" (75); his assertion that "the blossoming of the human face [. . .] is like a conflagration, having the possibility of unleashing immense quantities of energy in the form

of bursts of laughter, tear, or sobs; it succeeded the explosiveness that up to that point had made the anal orifice bud and flame" (77); and his description in "The Sacrifice of the Gibbon" of an interspecial analingual orgy, a truly vile ritual or immersive experience in which an ape's ass becomes an excremental volcano and the most active human participant is an "Englishwoman" who, come to think of it, may bear a certain resemblance to the Hitchcockian ice-hot blonde embodied in *Rear Window* by Grace Kelly.

11. Samuels elaborates on Lacan's treatment of the gaze in the eleventh seminar in order to correct what he sees as Laura Mulvey's "confusion" about the "controlling male gaze" (for Lacan, the "gaze" involves exactly what exceeds the ego's intentional control). But while Mulvey does employ Lacan in the essay "Visual Pleasure," she never claims that her use of the term "gaze" conforms to or stems from Lacan's discussions in *Seminar XI*. Even if Lacan's treatment of the gaze complicates the notion of the "controlling male gaze" as deployed in feminist film theory from Mulvey on, I do not think Mulvey or feminist film theory is "confused" about the ideological function of the controlling male gaze.
12. See my "Last Laughs: *Batman*, Masculinity, and the Technology of Abjection," which I had originally planned to situate as an essay in this book between this essay on Hitchcock and the following one on Lynch.
13. Modleski writes that "in Hitchcock's films, women's purses (and their jewelry) take on a vulgar Freudian significance relating to female sexuality and to men's attempts to investigate it" (*Women* 78). Perhaps the magazine is less vulgar for being textual rather than imaginary; or perhaps it is only that the vulgarity is more Lacanian than Freudian.
14. Cf. *Casablanca*: "Vultures, vultures everywhere."
15. Readers who want a more historicizing account of the sexual and gender dynamics in *Rear Window* would do well to consider Robert Corber's *In the Name of National Security: Hitchcock, Homophobia, and the Political Construction of Gender in Postwar America* or Amy Lawrence's "American Shame: *Rope*, James Stewart, and the Postwar Crisis in American Masculinity," both fine works. As for myself, I give up the ghost of pretending to be interested in or even capable of always historicizing—the best I can put out is the occasional, meager historicization—and plan to continue here to proceed as vulgarly as I can.
16. The salvational rhetoric alludes to the discussion between Robin Wood and Tania Modleski about the question of whether or not Hitchcock can be "saved for feminism."
17. Edelman writes that "the Child [. . .] marks the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity: an erotically charged investment in the rigid sameness of identity that is central to the compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism" (*No Future* 21).
18. This section's title debases the title of the novel on which *Spellbound* is based, *The House of Dr. Edwardes*, written by John Palmer and Hilary St. George Sanders under the name Francis Beeding, and the title of the Thomas Hyde essay "The Moral Universe of Hitchcock's *Spellbound*."

19. At one point J.B. tells Constance that he does not remember ever kissing a woman before—and there may be a good reason for this.
20. In Sheridan's translation of the railway story, we find Lacan saying that "only someone who didn't have his eyes in front of the holes (it's the appropriate image here) could possibly confuse the place of the signifier and the signified in this story" (*Écrits: A Selection* 152). Fink gives us the inappropriate and completely unillustrative "one would have to be half-blind" (*Écrits* 417) for *Il faudrait n'avoir pas les yeux en face des trous* and relegates the literal translation, involving eyeholes, to the endnotes (807). Lacan, favoring holes over halves, clearly means to mess with us here, and one wonders why in this instance Fink chooses not to take Lacan to the letter.
21. If we approach the skiing scene with sexual expectations, then Constance and J.B.'s preparations take on certain comically sinister dimensions, particularly when Constance, kneeling to buckle herself into her skis, looks up at J.B., who has not yet donned his, and sternly commands him to "put them on"—as if the skis were some strange erotic/prosthetic/prophylactic devices.
22. Hitchcock sets this all up nicely by repeating the point-of-view shot of Constance's ascending approach to Murchison's door; in the earlier sequence she had approached the same door, seeing the same light showing through the same lower crack, but expecting a very different man behind it.
23. I am sure that Freud somewhere explicitly links blinding with castration, but this bit from Lacan, who speaks of "that eye which, in the myth of Oedipus, fulfills so well the role of equivalent for the organ to be castrated" (*Television* 86), was closer to hand.
24. Hence my earlier allusion to Bataille, which was intentional but perhaps involuntary. At least, I cannot seem to help allowing this last look, *Spellbound's* parting shot of ocular anality, in which an eye stares at us through an end, remind me of the disastrous ending of *Story of the Eye*. Bataille's novel ends with a trio of debauchees murdering a priest, pulling out his eye and using it as a sex toy. The eye ends up lodged in Simone's end, among other places, though it finally stares out at the narrator from her hirsute fissure:

Now I stood up and, while Simone lay on her side, I drew her thighs apart, and found myself facing something I imagine I had been waiting for in the same way that a guillotine waits for a neck to slice. I even felt as if my eyes were bulging from my head, erectile with horror; in Simone's hairy vagina, I saw the wan blue eye [. . .] gazing at me through tears of urine. Streaks of come in the steaming hair helped give that dreamy vision a disastrous sadness. I held the thighs open while Simone was convulsed by the urinary spasm, and the burning urine streamed out from under the eye down to the thighs below. (84)

25. In "The Insistence of the Image: Hitchcock's *Vertigo*," Mark Cousins insistently and repeatedly uses the word "coil," rather than the more common "curl," to figure the curve of Judy-Madeleine's hair and its function in the

narrative. I find this usage interesting because while I for one cannot see the word “coil” without thinking of excrement, Cousins, whose brilliant essay is all over the subject of lost objects and melancholic remainders in *Vertigo*, does not register the way Judy-Madeleine figures in the film as “excremental abject-remainder” (Žižek, “Hitchcock’s Organs” 137) or consider how this “coiling figure” figures into Scottie’s melancholic loss.

26. As Freud reconstructs the melancholic process,

An object-choice, an attachment of the libido to a particular person, had at one time existed; then, owing to a real slight or disappointment coming from this loved person, the object-relationship was shattered. The result was not the normal one of a withdrawal of the libido from this object and a displacement of it on to a new one, but something different. . . . [The] libido was not displaced on to another object; it was withdrawn into the ego. There, however, it was not employed in any unspecified way, but served to establish an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object. Thus the shadow of the object fell up on the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object. In this way an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss. (*SE* 14:248–49)

Though Freud here obviously libidinally attaches object-choice to “a particular person,” he elsewhere in the essay drops clues as to the impersonal and abject redolence of “the forsaken object.” Toward the beginning of the piece, for example, he writes that “the melancholic displays [. . .] an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale. The patient represents his ego to us as worthless, incapable of any achievement and morally despicable; he reproaches himself, vilifies himself and expects to be cast out and punished” (*SE* 14:246). Not only do these descriptions of the ego’s transvaluation remind us of what Freud says about anality and the fecal object elsewhere—“the ‘anal’ remains the symbol of everything that is to be repudiated and excluded from life” (7:187); the feces represents everything “worthless, disgusting, abhorrent and abominable” (21:100)—but toward the end of “Mourning and Melancholia” Freud explicitly connects melancholic ego-impoverishment to anal leakage: “As regards one particular striking feature of melancholia that we have mentioned, the prominence of the fear of becoming poor, it seems plausible to propose that it is derived from anal erotism which has been torn out of its context and altered in a regressive sense” (14:252). I am sure there is other evidence that what is at issue here is *melanc(ass)holia*, but I consider these unwithheld portions sufficient to the day.

27. In “The *Démontage* of the Drive,” Maire Jaanus writes that

when a drive object is approached in an instinctual way, as in anorexia, something merely psychic and absent is “eaten” as if it were present and filling. Conversely, in perversion, an uneatable, instinctual object may literally be consumed, with erotic pleasure, as if it were the object *a* of the

drive. [. . .] Coprophagy is a drastic example of the transgression of drive back into instinct. [. . .] One way to be sure one has the lost feces back is to ingest them. (123–24)

I cite these unsavory lines to underscore the correspondence between coprophagy as literal ingestion of lost feces and melancholia as ego-identification with the forsaken object *a*. To put this another way, melancholy as neurosis is the negative of coprophagy as perversion: what the melancholist displays as metaphorical symptom the coprophagist positively enjoys/assimilates as metonymy, if not as “fact.”

28. In *Lacan’s Seminar on “Anxiety”*: *An Introduction*, Roberto Harari helps us understand what justifies my calling Lacan’s emphasis on the copula scantological. According to Harari, Lacan

teaches that *the object is constituted specifically at the moment at which it is lost; that is when it is cut off as fallen, separated*. This is radically different from the belief that, in the first place, there is an object and, second the object departs. [. . .] Lacan maintains the inverse of this: the outline of the object can only be delineated and obtain quiddity at the moment of the loss. In this regard, the classical example of feces is the most transparent and even obvious. (112, emphasis Harari’s)

Later in the book, in a detailed and charted analysis, with tables and graphs, of various “phantemes” and objects, Harari writes: “It should be observed that the *a*’s are not objects located in front of the divided subject but rather, first, *the subject is its object in the phantasy*. Therefore, this is about something of the order of being (‘is’)” (253, emphasis Harari’s). There are several “phantemes” and “phantasy axioms” on the tables here, including “*the phantasy of being swallowed, ingurgitated again by the primordial Other in a helpless reabsorption by the maternal womb*” (253, emphasis Harari’s), but there is also what Harari calls the

decisive phantasy through which the subject locates itself in the place of the anal object *a*. To be colloquial and blunt, we define it as *the phantasy of being shit*. [. . .] This is one of the habitual ways that a subject can achieve—through putting this phantasy into act—that the Other demand that it place itself in the place of stool in order to be ejected, humiliated, won over, thrown away as waste. [. . .] The subject over and over finds itself involuntarily implied in situations where it comes to occupy the place of feces, which corresponds to the loss (of the love) of the object. (253–54)

Of course, what “remains to be seen” in my commentary is the way this fantasy of being shit pertains to Scottie’s “situations” in *Vertigo*.

29. I situate a *sic* after the bit about “It is the abyss. . . the void” because in the *Lacanian Ink* version of Žižek’s essay the lines appear thus, without quote marks, while in the *Organs without Bodies* rendition there are quote marks and an attribution: the sentence comes from Harari, *Lacan’s Seminar on*

“Anxiety” (74). Harari, I should point out, is discussing vertigo in general, not *Vertigo* specifically.

30. See notes 11 and 28 above. We might say that in the gaze certain analogies obtain, that thing is to void as stain is to picture, as word is to page, as image is to screen, as turd is to toilet. Indeed, in a 2007 film called *The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema*, Žižek reportedly “compares the experience of looking up at a blank screen to that of staring into a toilet bowl” (*The New York Times*, April 15, 2007, 2:19). Here are the lines from *The Pervert’s Guide*:

In our most elementary experience, when we flush the toilet, excrements simply disappear out of our reality into another space, which we phenomenologically perceive as a kind of netherworld, another reality, a chaotic primordial reality. And the ultimate horror, of course, is if the flushing doesn’t work, if objects return, if remainders, excremental remainders, return from that dimension. . . . When we spectators are sitting in a movie theatre looking at the screen . . . at the very beginning, before the picture is on, it’s a black dark screen, and then the light is thrown on. Are we not basically staring into a toilet bowl and waiting for things to reappear out of the toilet? And is the entire magic of a spectacle shown on the screen not a kind of deceptive lure, trying to conceal the fact that we are basically watching shit, as it were?

31. On “The Real/Judy”: the slanted bar here suggests simultaneously Judy’s separation from and metonymic contiguity with the real—not that Judy as “real woman” as opposed to fantasy object can or should be *identified* with the real, identity and the real being mutually exclusive, but that she is in a sense closer to it than either the symbolic Scottie or the imaginary Madeleine, even if the “sense” in which she can be *said* to be “closer” to the real is exactly what closes her off from it, even if we ourselves can only ever really *think* of “Judy Barton” in terms of *jouissance* barred.
32. With regard to an idiotic male masturbatory mechanics of fluids, what Scottie wants is not exactly “to masturbate with the aid of Judy-Madeleine’s real body.” Rather, he employs the ethereal presence of Madeleine as mental “image of bliss” to inscribe his own “pathological stain” across the surface of Judy’s body as remainder of the real. Or, to make a blunt analogy, Madeleine is the *petit mort* of orgasm, Judy the *petit objet a* of squalid ejaculation. If we could translate Scottie’s idiotic *jouissance* into the visual language or *mis-en-scene* of contemporary pornography’s money-shot, we might imagine Scottie popping onto Judy’s face while watching Madeleine on a video. With the phrase “image of bliss” I allude to Murat Aydemir’s splendid book *Images of Bliss: Ejaculation, Masculinity, Meaning*.
33. A joke that has to be explained has failed, but my joke here depends upon your recognizing the allusion to Tarantino’s *Pulp Fiction* and knowing at least the title (which is all I know of it) of Erin Felicia Labbie’s *Lacan’s Medievalism*.

34. In “The Signification of the Phallus,” Lacan writes that in phallic signification “the signifier plays an active role in determining the effects by which the signifiable appears to succumb to its mark, becoming, through that passion, the signified” (*Écrits* 578).
35. In regard to the bell tower, here is an interesting coincidence: In “In Memory of Ernest Jones: On His Theory of Symbolism,” Lacan comments on Jones’s “fallacious” but “fascinating” remark that “while a church bell tower can symbolize the phallus, the phallus will never symbolize a bell tower” (*Écrits* 594).
36. Quoting Charles Barr’s *Vertigo* in regard to the nun’s intrusion, Žižek writes: “At the film’s end, the nun appears in the tower at the very moment Scottie and Judy embrace in a reconciliation, with Scottie content to accept the reality of Judy: ‘What if the nun had not appeared, at the moment when, for the first time, they are being completely open and honest with each other?’ [Barr 59] Would they live happily ever after?” (*Organs* 168). I would submit (1) that, mainly thanks to the nun’s intrusion, it is not at all clear that Scottie is “content to accept the reality of Judy” and that, for all we know, his own disgust may have prevailed over love’s triumph without the nun’s assistance: in any case, he looks much more anguished than content, mainly because (2) if this embrace really does signify the triumph of love then it is not that “they” are “being completely open and honest with each other” (honesty depending, after all, upon articulation) so much as they are being mutually dehiscently *real* together, one formless slime with another, so that (3) if these two slime balls really did live happily ever after, and *Vertigo* were reimagined as a queer comedy rather than as *the* straight tragedy it is, then they could only do so as pervers, who, as Dany Nobus points out, are “generally happy, satisfied people” (*Perversion* 14)—or, as I have put it in an essay title, “Happy S(c)atisfied People,” s(c)atisfaction being perhaps the perverse negative of normal scatontological anxiety.

ESSAY 6

1. I do not mean to suggest that reading *Mulholland Drive* in terms of the dream-work is the *only* way to make sense of it, though in what follows I hope to demonstrate that such a reading provides the best possibility for producing a coherent interpretation of the film’s hermeneutics, its suggested meanings, as well as its poetics, or the way it achieves its formal effects. As for other readings: Martha P. Nochimson dismisses the dream angle altogether as a “misunderstanding” (180) and instead takes the film for a fable about the way the film industry putrefies the creative spirit. Todd McGowan reads the two parts of the film in terms of a split between “the general structure of fantasy” and “reality” as the “general structure of desire” (86) but never mentions the dream-work specifically. Heather Love’s “Spectacular Failure: The Figure of the Lesbian in *Mulholland Drive*” does occasionally mention dream, but like McGowan dwells more frequently on fantasy. McGowan and Love both

demonstrate that there is much to be gained from reading the film as an “exploration of fantasy” (McGowan 68) and of “the experience of the fantasizing subject” (Love 122). But while fantasy and dream can share common psychological purposes—wish fulfillment, compensation, analgesia, escape, encounter with trauma, the negation of an unacceptable reality—the two do not always work in the same manner or, more importantly, employ the same representational techniques. Thus, considering the film as specifically treating the dream-work yields different (and I think stronger) interpretive results than reading it primarily or exclusively in terms of fantasy. In fact, the fantasy focus fails to account for some of the film’s key images and sometimes prompts (or at least accompanies) notable misreadings of the film’s formal and narrative innovations (see note 17 below). N. Katherine Hayles and Nicholas Gessler do recognize the function of dream in relation to narrative in the film and meticulously chart the film’s time sequencing in a reading that is fundamentally congruent with what I offer here, but because they are not as concerned as I am with the specific play of condensation and displacement in the film they do not account, hermeneutically or poetically, for some of its most perplexing and crucial images: for example, that of the gangster figure spitting out his espresso, which I here address at some length.

2. Discussing the aesthetic/erotic experience of *ébranlement* or self-shattering in relation to Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy*, Leo Bersani writes:

Art plays with [. . .] boundaries—to the point even of reflecting upon that play in its moves along the boundaries between the bounded and the unbounded. It is, then these risks of disappearance and of appearance—the risk of a dying at once more insignificant and infinitely more consequential than our personal death—that we accept when we “enter” art. (*Culture* 101)

3. Lacan says: “Man’s desire finds its meaning in the other’s desire, not so much because the other holds the keys to the desired object, as because his first object(ive) is to be recognized by the other” (*Écrits* 222).
4. Naomi Watts is a star now but, except for fans of a film called *Tank Girl*, was unknown in 2001, which means that if Lynch were making *Mulholland Drive* today he could not cast Naomi Watts.
5. Though Lacan sometimes translates *Trieb* as “pulsion,” in *Seminar XX* he states that he prefers “*la dérive* to translate *Trieb*, the drift of *jouissance*” (112). The translator, Bruce Fink, comments in a note that “*dérive* literally means ‘drift,’ but is very close in spelling to the English term for *Trieb*, ‘drive’” (112).
6. In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud admits that Eros and the death drive are “fused, blended, and alloyed with each other . . . regularly and very extensively” (*SE* 19:41). However, in his introduction to the new English translation of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Leo Bersani writes:

It should at once be said that his blurring of distinctions [between sex and aggression] is by no means what Freud the rational thinker *wants*.

Indeed the opposition advanced in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* between Eros and Thanatos (between, on the one hand, sexuality, and on the other, aggression and a death drive)—an opposition that Freud unreservedly reasserts in *Civilization and Its Discontents*—might even be thought of as an anticipatory theoretical defence against the collapse of that very dualism into a nearly inconceivable sameness. (xx)

For an extensive treatment of both Freud's and Lacan's take on this "collapse," see Boothby, *Death and Desire*. See also note 13 below.

7. See www.lynchnet.com/mdrive/mdscript.html.
8. Slavoj Žižek's discussions of "fundamental fantasies" are pertinent to the question of Diane's fantasized suicide, particularly since the "temporal loop which defines the structure of a fantasy" (*Indivisible Remainder* 19) also defines the structure of Lynch's film. Žižek writes that the fundamental fantasies always involve the subject's preposterous ability to witness moments before or beyond its own temporal finitude, that is, moments of preorigin or of postdemise. Thus, in the fundamental fantasy, "the subject is miraculously present as a pure gaze observing his [*sic*] own non-existence" (19). Žižek writes that "when one indulges in fantasies about one's own death, one always imagines oneself as miraculously surviving it and being present at one's own funeral in the guise of a pure gaze which observes the universe from which one is already absent, relishing the imagined pathetic reactions of relatives, and so on. We are thereby again at the fundamental time-loop of the fantasy" (22). In the loopy representation of Diane's dream-fantasy, we see the fantasized *result* of her suicide—the rotting corpse that Betty and Rita discover on the bed in Diane Selwyn's apartment—*before* we see the fantasized *event* of her shooting herself on that same bed (I argue at the end of this essay that Diane's suicide takes place in dream-fantasy rather than in reality). But note also the aggression against Camilla that is enacted in this fantasy, for while what we see in the corpse-discovery sequence is Betty comforting a horrified Rita, what is actually happening, the actual payoff for the dreamer, is Diane's aggressive relishing of Camilla's "imagined pathetic reaction" to the sight of her (Diane's) dead body. Here one is reminded of the lyrics of the old Police suicide anthem "I Can't Stand Losing You": "You'll be sorry when I'm dead/ All this guilt will be on your head." But there is more aggression, for what the corpse-discovery sequence precipitates is a return to Aunt Ruth's apartment and a *Vertigo*-ish transformation of the dark-haired Rita into a more Betty-resembling blonde. I call this transformation aggressive because it effectively destroys something specifically other about the other by turning it into a more properly narcissistic version of the same. Here one is reminded of the Lacanian lyrics: "*I love you, but because I love in you something more than you . . . I mutilate you*" (*Seminar XI* 268). My thanks to Adrian Johnston for helpful insights and leads on these matters.
9. Sinnerbrink makes this point in an unpublished essay called "Silencio," but see his "Cinematic Ideas." Bonnie Aarons, by the way, cleans up nicely: <http://ia.ec.imdb.com/media/imdb/01/1/33/04/92/10m.jpg>.

10. Bear in mind that the dreaming Diane has reason to want Dan dead, to get rid of him and the god-awful feeling he represents. In the dream's Winkie sequence, when Dan is relating his dreams to Herb, he says: "Of all people, you're standing right over there by that counter. You're in both dreams. And you're scared. I get even more frightened when I see how afraid you are." Then, when Herb is paying the check at the counter and looks back at Dan, Dan's face does register fear, and we know that he is now seeing Herb just as he appeared in the dream. But much later in the film we find out what really went down in this Winkie's: we see Diane sitting in Dan's seat while hiring the hit man to murder Camilla. And then we see *Dan*, of all people, standing at the counter, looking back at Diane; he is scared, and Diane is even more frightened when she sees how afraid Dan is. We might conjecture that Dan is afraid because he has overheard Diane's conversation, or at least that Diane is afraid that he has, which would make him a material witness to her homicide conspiracy. Thus we can imagine how Diane feels.
11. Lynch makes more explicit his concerns with homelessness as the abject and anonymous underside of the Hollywood dream factory/star system in the 2006 film *Inland Empire*. In a key scene, one that seems to depict a traumatic rupture in the "wall" between the two realms, Nikki Grace/Susan Blue (Laura Dern) gets stabbed in the stomach and staggers down Hollywood Boulevard, spilling blood onto the "stars" on the sidewalk. She stumbles into an alley or side street off the corner of Hollywood and Vine and collapses into the cardboard encampment of three "street persons" (as they are designated in the credits): an African American woman, an Asian American woman, and her companion, an African American man. Street Person #1, the African American woman—played by Helena Chase, who, I would hazard to say, seems to be a "real" street person and not an actress playing one (she in any case has no other screen credits listed on www.imdb.com)—says to Nikki, "Lady, you're dying," and then continues her conversation with the other two abjects about whether or not there is a bus to Pomona from Hollywood and Vine. Street Person #2, the Asian American woman (listed in the credits as Nae, who does have multiple credits on imdb.com) begins to talk about her beautiful friend Niko, who lives in Pomona, who is "on hard drugs and turning tricks" but who looks "just like a movie star" when she wears her "blonde star wig." Niko, as we are told in halting, broken, subtitled English, has "got a hole in her vagina wall," has "torn a hole into her intestine from her vagina," and is consequently dying. This "hole" would seem to correspond not only to Nikki's wound but also to the above-mentioned traumatic rupture in the wall separating the symbolic world of fantasy (represented here by Niko's vagina) and the real world of abjection (represented by her intestine). In any case, the Asian woman's companion, Street Person #3 (played by Terry Crews, numerous credits on [imdb](http://imdb.com), including *How to Get the Man's Foot Outta Your Ass*), says, "Shit, baby, don't be telling us that shit," and so she changes the subject

(sort of) to Niko's pet monkey: "This monkey shit everywhere" and "scream like in a horror movie." Nikki then gets up on all fours, vomits blood for a while, and settles down to die. The camera lingers on her fresh corpse for a while, and then, in one of the great moments of cinematic *mise en abyme*, pulls up and back far enough to reveal *another* camera also pulling up and back. We hear the film-within-the-film's director (Jeremy Irons) say "cut . . . and print it!" and see the three street persons get up and leave the set. Nikki stays still long enough for us to begin to suspect that, even though "it's only a movie," she may "really" be dead, but then seems so comatose and unresponsive when she finally does get up and move around that we are not completely convinced that she is "really" alive, either. Indeed, the whole sequence leaves us in a profoundly disturbing state of undecidability in which it is impossible to say, for example, whether Street Person #1 is a "real" street person or "merely" an actor, whether Nikki is "really" alive or dead, and, finally, whether the *mise en abyme* trick, which reveals that "it's only a movie," symbolically sutures or really leaves open the traumatic rupture in the wall between the symbolic and the real.

12. I provide this information in case you were wondering why the fake tear leaking from Rebekah Del Rio's right ocular orifice in the *Club Silencio* sequence looks so solid and brown. Tears are after all a form of abjection (even if usually one of the most transparent). In this lachrymal regard it is interesting that Bataille, in a book titled, appropriately enough, *Guilty*, writes of "tears in my eyes at this idea of being waste" (69).
13. Compare Žižek's comments from *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* in note 30 to Essay 5 above. In regard to incorporation and excorporation, note that when Dan and Herb leave the Winkie's table, the camera (which, as Chris Rodley observes, "seems to be floating ever so slightly up and down" and "makes you feel seasick" [277]) makes a point of showing us that Herb has eaten all of his breakfast while the anxious Dan has left his bacon and eggs untouched. Compare the brief essay "On Negation," in which Freud groups together incorporation, affirmation, and erotic union in opposition to excorporation, negation, and thanatical destruction:

Expressed in the language of the oldest—the oral—instinctual impulses, the judgement is: "I should like to eat his," or "I should like to spit it out"; and, put more generally "I should like to take this into myself and to keep that out." That is to say "It shall be inside me" or "it shall be outside me." As I have shown elsewhere, the original pleasure-ego wants to introject into itself everything that is good and to eject from itself everything that is bad. What is bad, what is alien to the ego and what is external are, to begin with, identical. (*SE* 19:238)

Moreover, Freud writes:

Judging is a continuation [. . .] of the original process by which the ego took things into itself or expelled them from itself, according to the

pleasure principle. The polarity of judgement appears to correspond to the opposition of the two groups of instincts which we have supposed to exist. Affirmation—as a substitute for uniting—belongs to Eros; negation—the successor to expulsion—belongs to the instinct of destruction. (*SE* 19:239)

What we find in this formulation is not only one of the thicker Freudian roots of contemporary theories of abjection but also a clue about what Leo Bersani calls the collapse of the dualism of Eros and Thanatos into “a nearly inconceivable sameness” (see note 6 above). For if by erotically affirming or loving an object we express the desire to consume it, consumption itself is certainly a form of destruction or waste; and if by destructively negating an object we express the desire to expel it, our earliest expulsions—our infantile turds—were originally nothing other than “sumptuous gifts charged with sexual love” (Bataille, *Visions* 119).

14. Rather than quoting here from Žižek’s *Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: On David Lynch’s Lost Highway*, I would prefer, in relation to the final, ridiculously sublime image cluster in *Mulholland Drive*, to compare Bataille in *Story of the Eye*: “Is it not astonishing that the bleakest and most leprous aspects of a dream are merely an urging in [the] direction [of an outburst of superhuman happiness], an obstinate waiting for total joy” (31).
15. Bataille notes that “in the unconscious, jewels, like excrement, are cursed matter that flows from a wound; they are a part of oneself destined for open sacrifice (they serve, in fact, as sumptuous gifts charged with sexual love)” (*Visions* 119). Nobody really appreciates hearing about this destiny, least of all those dreaming youth destined to give or be given diamonds. But somebody in the advertising business surely understands the archaic jewel-turd connection: the old DeBeers television commercial that features a male fist *excreting* a string of diamonds into a woman’s waiting hand must be seen to be believed. Once I was discussing these matters with students in a seminar devoted to Bataille, and the very next day (December 3, 2003) there appeared in the *New York Times* a full-page ad (Section A, page 25) featuring a brilliant and lubricious woman heavily made up and laden with gems next to the caption “Mounds of diamonds and gobs of jewels”!
16. In other words, the flickering light is not just a trademark piece of creepy Lynchiana: like all the other eerie or *outré* shots in the film, it actually serves a functional role in the film’s formal narrative design. Paradoxically, for a film so concerned with waste, and in which sometimes apparently “anything goes,” *Mulholland Drive* actually wastes very little.
17. See Heather Love for an extensive treatment of the difference between the two sex scenes, and for an interesting reply to those “disturbed by Lynch’s representation of lesbians as objects of ‘male fantasy’” (121). But note also what I take as Love’s misreading of the narrative sequencing of the scenes. After describing what she calls the “very breasty, very kissy” Betty/Rita scene, Love writes, “The later scene between Diane and Camilla works according to a much different logic. It occurs in the morning, just after Diane has been awoken from a deep

depressive sleep” (127). Whoa! Certainly it is after the film presents Diane dragging her half-dead body out of bed that it reveals her and Camilla topless and frisky on the couch. But the actual (and actually missed) sexual encounter occurs before the rude awakening. And this temporal reversal is important, for unless we see the Betty/Rita scene as occurring (in dream) *after* the Diane/Camilla event, we will not see the former (Betty/Rita) as the dream’s compensatory reversal of the latter (Diane/Camilla). McGowan is also a bit flummoxed by Lynch’s play with *fabula* and *syuzhet* in this sequence. He writes:

The world of desire in the second part of *Mulholland Drive* lacks even a sense of causal temporality. Events occur in random order, without a clear narrative logic. At the beginning of this part of the film, Diane’s former roommate (and, it seems, lover) retrieves her belongings, including an ashtray shaped like a miniature piano, from Diane’s apartment. But in a subsequent scene, the same ashtray is on Diane’s coffee table, as if the roommate had not yet removed it even though we know she did. The same sequence occurs with a blue key. It is lying on the coffee table as the second part of the film begins, and then it’s gone until the end of the film, when Diane again sees it on the coffee table. The disappearance and reappearance of the ashtray and the blue key do not indicate anything magical at work. It is just that this part of the film operates according to the atemporal logic of desire. There is no chronology in the world of pure desire because desire does not move forward: instead, it circulates around the *objet petit a*. . . . As a world of desire, the second part of the film moves according to the compulsion to repeat rather than according to the dictates of time. (73)

In my reading, the key and ashtray disappear and reappear not because of any narrative incoherence or atemporal logic of desire but simply because we are quick-cutting between scenes of Diane’s present and flashbacks of her recent past, with the distance between the two temporalities being bridged by the entire dream sequence that constitutes the first two hours of the film. The flickering objects, then, are signs not of causal or narrative illogicality but of Lynch’s bewildering but brilliant formal design. The narrative is complicated, to be sure, but it is anything but incoherent. And yet the film’s actually quite impressive coherence is clearly missed if we read its first two hours as general fantasy *world* rather than as representing the dream-*work*.

18. The mysterious blue key fits into the general Saussurian description of the signifier: it is not a positive term, means nothing in or by itself, but means only in terms of its differential relation to another signifier, the ugly blue key. As for the blue box, I feel content rather to let it stand as an instance of what Freud refers to as a dream’s inexplicable “navel,” its point of utter defiance to interpretation. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud writes:

There is often a passage in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream which *has to be* left obscure; this is because we become aware during the

work of interpretation that at that point there is a tangle of dream-thoughts which *cannot* be unraveled and which moreover *adds nothing to our knowledge of the dream*. This is the dream's navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown. (*SE* 5:525)

Perhaps it is also worth noting that in discussing *Mulholland Drive* in his book *Catching the Big Fish*, Lynch writes the following under the heading "The Box and the Key": "I don't have clue what those are."

19. *Faire l'amourir* is "a Lacanianism derived from the combination of *faire l'amour* (to make love) and *fair mourir* (to make die)" (Harari 209n1).
20. This is the third time we have seen the cowboy but the first time for Diane. In the dream, the cowboy tells Adam that he, Adam, will see the cowboy only once again if he, Adam, does good and twice if he does bad. Diane, who has done bad, does see the cowboy twice again in the dream: once when he appears smiling at her bedroom door, saying, "Time to get up, pretty girl," and a second time immediately thereafter when he withdraws from that same door, his face gone blank and stony.
21. For another few layers of condensation and reversal, note that when we cut from the dinner party to the diner scene, we see the waitress offer coffee refills to Diane and the hit man. Diane accepts, but the hit man refuses the refill with a subtle wave of the hand. The real hit man, a slacker slob, contrasts nicely with his natty dream-gangster analog, just as his subtle refusal reverses the gangster's extreme expulsion, and just as the (presumably) shitty Winkie's java converts into the dream's "finest espresso in the world."
22. I refer here to Irigaray's *This Sex Which Is Not One*, which contains a chapter called "When These Lips Speak Together."
23. In this regard let me note that Lynch himself says that "*Mulholland Drive* is about more than Hollywood" (Rodley 274). If this excessive "more" at all concerns symbolic nihilation, "the profound relationship uniting the notion of the death instinct to the problems of speech" (*Écrits* 260), or the idea that "the symbol first manifests itself as the killing of the thing" (*Écrits* 262), as I am arguing here that it does, then when Chris Rodley gives the following as part of the historical context of Lynch's film—"It seems like only yesterday (1932) that bit-part actress Peg Entwistle hanged herself from the Hollywood sign when she failed to get a studio contract" (268)—we can respond that perhaps it seems like only yesterday because this self-sacrifice on and to a symbol is constitutive of everybody's history: every speaking subject has hanged itself from "the sign."
24. For an extensive unpacking of Lacan's "there is no sexual relation" see the discussion in the first section of Essay 5, particularly the commentary by Fink and Grosz.
25. Here I allude to a line from Frank Booth (Dennis Hopper) in *Blue Velvet*: "Do you know what a love letter is, fucker? It's a bullet from a fucking gun!"
26. Nochimson, McGowan, Love, Hayles, and Gessler all take Diane's suicide as given. But I base my conjecture that Diane is still sleeping, and her nightmare still wish-fulfilling, on two additional pieces of evidence, the first

visual, the second thematic and intertextual. *Visual*: In the film's final sequence, just before the tiny old folks crawl under her door, Diane is sitting on her couch staring at the blue key. There is a pulsating light, and a heavy knocking at the door. We start to hear tin(n)y obscene elderly cackling, but we also see that Diane's eyelids are getting conspicuously and narcoleptically heavy. We do not see the eyes fully close, but the suggestion is that they do, and the fact that we hear Diane screaming *before* we see her jump up and bolt away from the couch screaming suggests that she has actually lapsed back into sleep on the couch and is merely dreaming of jumping, bolting, screaming, and so on. *Thematic and intertextual*: Toward the end of the *Twin Peaks* television series, in episode 16, the following dialogue about the uncanny and supernatural aspects of Leland Palmer's rape and murder of his daughter Laura occurs between Sheriff Truman and Agent Cooper:

Truman: I've lived in these woods all my life. I've heard some strange things. Seen some too. But this is way off the map. I'm having a hard time believing.

Cooper: Is it easier to believe a man would rape and murder his own daughter? Is that any more comforting?

Truman: (pause, horrified) No.

Now, by the end of *Mulholland Drive*, Diane has heard and seen some strange things, as have we. But the horrible little grandparents are, shall we say, way off the map. In what way can they possibly represent the fulfillment of a wish? For Freud, the dream-wish always involves the negation of an unpleasurable reality. So what is Diane's specifically painful reality at this moment? What is the actual source of the pulsing light? Who's that knocking at her door? Quite banally, it's just the cops, who we know have been looking for Diane and who have finally shown up to arrest her for murder, and she is actually *more* horrified by the banal, merely factual reality of her guilt and its impending punishment (a reality all the more painful for being so banal) than she is by the hysterical and uncanny but ultimately more comforting return of the repressed. It is easier for her to believe in these horrible, off-the-map old folks even as—or, precisely, because—they chase her to her fantasized, desired, but literally unaccomplished death.

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