

### 3. Towards the other

#### Chapter Overview

This chapter will further develop the understanding of ethics explicated in the previous chapter by considering the significance and centrality of the figure of the other. The chapter will consider Freud's reaction to the biblical directive to *love one's neighbour* and show how Freud's rejection of such a directive is based on a complex logic of misrecognition. The logic of such misrecognition will be developed through consideration of Hegel's master-slave dialectic and the Lacanian mirror stage. It will thus be shown how any conception of the other on the basis of identification fails to account for the otherness of the other and is tantamount to a reduction of the other to an object or image. The impossibility of such a reduction accounting for the other and the implications of this failure will be further examined in reference to Lacan's discussions of the poetry of courtly love, Freud's case of Dora and the legend of Saint Martin.

In light of the foregoing, the chapter will return to Freud's refusal of the directive to *love one's neighbour* and contrast this with Kierkegaard's advocacy of non-preferential love to expose the possibility of an ethical approach to the other beyond misrecognition and objectification. Such a possibility will be developed through critical readings of Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* and Alain Badiou's critique of

Levinas's 'ethics of the other'. Through the latter it will be shown how a Lacanian approach allows us to situate the other as essential to any rigorous conception of ethics whilst avoiding any appeal to a transcendental or divine guarantor. Such an understanding will be posited in terms of the encounter with the other as an encounter with the infinite or inaccessible, that which cannot be reduced to comprehension. This will allow us to conceive of the subject as necessarily constituted in relation to the other such that the responsibility entailed in the subjective assumption described in the previous chapters is shown to entail also a responsibility for the other, a responsibility which does not allow the reduction of the other to a generalisation but, rather, necessitates responding to the other as singular and unique.

### **3.1 Freud's Neighbour**

In the fifth chapter of *Civilization and Its Discontents* Freud broaches the directive that "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (King James Bible: Leviticus 19:18 and Matthew 19:19) and responds to this with what we might, following Lacan, characterize as "horror" (Lacan, 1992/1986: 186). For Freud, love of one's neighbour is something which would impose as an excess, an affront to the love that one would give to those closest, one's partner, one's friend, one's community. Where the sexual relationship can be understood as being the paramount case of relating to another, for Freud, the love given therein cannot be extended beyond the pair involved to encompass a wider world of people;

sexual love is a relationship between two people, in which a third party can only be superfluous or troublesome, whereas civilization rests on relations between quite large numbers of people. When a love relationship is at its

height, the lovers no longer have any interest in the world around them; they are self-sufficient as a pair, and in order to be happy they do not even need the child they have in common. In no other case does Eros so clearly reveal what is at the core of his being, the aim of making one out of more than one; however, having achieved this proverbial goal by making two people fall in love, he refuses to go further.

(Freud, 2002/1930: 45)

Consequently, for Freud, the pre-eminent question which arises in the face of this injunction to love one's neighbour as one's self is "how shall we manage to act like this? How will it be possible?" (Ibid.: 46). Freud considers one's love to be something one would value or treasure. Love is not something which should be squandered. Love can be given to the other on the basis of desert and such desert is categorized on the basis of identification.

If I love another person, he must in some way deserve it. ... He deserves it if, in some important respects, he so much resembles me that in him I can love myself.

(Ibid.)

One may love another insofar as one identifies with this other sufficiently that one's loving them is effectively one's loving oneself. One loves oneself in the other. Beyond this, one may love another who excels one's own self image but only insofar as in so doing one loves an idealised projection of oneself, the self one might (desire to) become. One would, in addition, love, by extension, those who are beloved by the one one loves. The example Freud offers here is of loving a friend's son. Such a love is comprehensible as one identifies with the friend and thus will share in the pain the friend experiences if harm were to befall their loved one(s). Beyond this proximity, for Freud, it becomes very difficult to see how love might be given. Moreover, it becomes questionable whether love should be shown towards such strangers as, in the economy of love, this would cheapen the love rightly shown to those closest. Love

here, in Freud's understanding can be seen to be characterized with an essential preference. To love all equally as the biblical directive appears to imply, is necessarily to extinguish preference and thus cannot but be detrimental to the love one would have given to one's friends and family. When love extends to all regardless of their qualities, then, effectively, those qualities are disregarded (Ibid.: 46-7).

What we can see in Freud's exposition here is that love is, initially, founded on the basis of identification with the self. As we have seen, however, such identification is by no means straightforward. Not only is the subject not self-identical, but, moreover, the subject in order to identify with another must first constitute its image of its own identification. Such an image, the ideal-ego, *i(a)*, is never adequate to the subject. It is always, in Lacan's terms, a *meconnaissance*, a misrecognition of the self. Consequently, the other who would come to be identified as *like* the subject is, in fact, only ever reminiscent of the ideal-ego. This logic would pervade any notion of intersubjectivity based upon identification. Recognition of the other as that with which one can identify is necessarily misconstrued as what one is inevitably seizing upon as identifiable is a misrecognition of the other based on its similarity with one's own misrecognition of oneself. We can see this logic at work in Lacan's rereading of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic.

If the love one would give to another or experience towards another is based on misrecognition then this would suggest the other is experienced in an objectified form, an objectification which necessarily obfuscates and protects one from the unfathomable in the other. Insofar as this unfathomable aspect of the other "demonstrates that something is there after all" (Lacan, 1992/1986: 52), that there is

something available which “will be there when in the end all conditions have been met” (Ibid.), the other can be understood to be experienced as indicative of that towards which desire would be directed. However, insofar as this object is unattainable, the likelihood is that the other, particularly in terms of a sexual relationship, is going to function as an object of fantasy, *a*. If the other is conceived as on the basis of an identification with the ideal-ego, then it is the other conceived such that it functions to cover over the unfathomable which the other would bear with its approach, *das Ding*. This is not however, to suggest that the incomprehensible in and with the other is somehow neutralised and rendered domesticated. The other in the mode of fantasy can, as we have seen in our discussion of *objet petit a*, only ever shield the subject from the encounter with the real. *Das Ding*, as the persistence of the real would continue to persist.

For Lacan, the union of two people under the aegis of Eros, which Freud invokes as the paramount and most proximate instance of loving the other, is never more than a matter of misrecognition. We can see this in two examples Lacan furnishes us with, that of the poetry of courtly love and his reading of Freud’s case of Dora.

Even if we do follow Freud in taking the example of the sexual relationship as being exemplary of the occurrence of the relationship or encounter the subject has with the other, it is still an encounter grounded in misrecognition. What is crucial to acknowledge here is the imaginary status of such a relation and the fact that this imaginary status is incapable of entirely diminishing the persistence of that which would exceed imaginary representation. In terms of proximity at least, such a relationship or encounter might be understood to be that of the closest kind but even

in the most proximate of relationship, there is something in the other which resists comprehension. The other cannot be totalised. The image one would construct of the other on the basis of identification is never the other as such. What persists is the unfathomable in the other which necessarily imposes a questioning of the subject.

The very unfathomability of *das Ding* as it is encountered in the other persists in the double articulation of the question of *Che vuoi?* As indicative of the lost object which “one is supposed to find again” (Ibid.) *das Ding* would give rise to, or in its insistence be experienced as, the question of what the subject wants. But conjoined with this, again insofar as *das Ding* is unfathomable, insofar as it resists representation, it will be experienced as the question of what the other wants from the subject. The problem here, for the subject, is that there is no way of knowing the answer to either facet of the question. Not only does the subject not know what its own good would be, but neither can it know what the other’s good would be. It does not know what the other wants. As the subject will then adopt various objects as its good, none of which will be *it*, it also will tend to suppose that the *it* it has adopted, which is never *it*, might be *it* for the other. This is exemplified in the story of Saint Martin when he gives his cloak to the beggar. How, Lacan asks, in this most benevolent of gestures, does he know that it is the cloak that the beggar wants? Although the answer here is, clearly, that he does not know, the question persists as to how we might love the neighbour when we do not know what he wants. How, in Freud’s terms, will it be possible?

### 3.2 Hegel and the Master-Slave Relationship

In *Seminar I: Freud's Paper on Technique* (1988/1975), Lacan presents a version of Hegel's master-slave dialectic which furnishes us with an initial answer to the question of why we might relate to the other in a manner which would entail a certain responsibility to and for that other. For Hegel, the very possibility of self-consciousness depends upon recognition; self-consciousness "is only by being acknowledged or recognised" (Hegel, 1967/1841: 229). Clearly, however, such a moment of recognition, if it is to provide a grounding for consciousness of the self, cannot be a simple recognition of each by the other as already existing as conscious selves. In order to be recognised by the other one would have to have recognised the other as a consciousness, something capable of bestowing the kind of recognition sought, but in order to recognise the other one would have to have already recognised oneself as something capable of bestowing such recognition, something other than a mere object of existence. It is this impasse which, for Hegel, would lead to the struggle between the two selves. The problem here is that the outcome of a struggle for domination is not and cannot be the recognition sought. The 'victor' may show himself to be an independent entity but would have negated the status of the other who might recognise him. That is to say, in the resultant situation of master (dominator) and slave (dominated), there would no longer be the mutual recognition necessary to attain any recognition. The master, having reduced the slave to something 'less' than an independent consciousness would have negated the possibility of his own being recognised. Clearly, too, the slave loses, as, reduced to the status of slave, he is not recognised as an independent entity. He will have become, rather, an object for the master. It is however, beyond this impasse, the slave

who eventually does attain something of his aim insofar as he is set to work and through his engagement with the world, his working on the things in the world, he affects a change in himself, attaining the self-consciousness he was initially unable to attain through recognition from the master.

in fashioning the thing, self-existence comes to be felt explicitly as his own proper being, and he attains the consciousness that he himself exists in its own right and on its own account.

(Ibid.: 239)

For Hegel, this possibility of attaining self-consciousness through labour is not an independent possibility which could have been attained without the prior stages of the struggle. That is, the fear experienced in conflict with the other and the fact of being put to work, the order, discipline and obedience inherent in being put to work, are necessary stages in the slave's attainment of self-consciousness. Without what Hegel terms "absolute fear" (Ibid.: 240), the slave would have remained in a "determinate mode of being", that is, it would not have attained the independence of self-consciousness but rather a "stubbornness" (Ibid.), a reactive and dependent mode of being. Coupled with the necessary disturbance of absolute fear, the fact of the slave's engagement in formative activity allows the possibility of his shaping not only this or that particular thing but a "universal power over the entire objective reality" (Ibid).

In Lacanian terms, the scenario Hegel presents can be understood as instructive of the subject's relations to and within the realms of imaginary and the symbolic. In Lacan's reading, the scenario of the struggle of master and slave is necessarily posited as mythical. It is as myth that the Hegelian scenario can be understood to conjoin the imaginary and symbolic realms.

Its point of departure, being imaginary, is hence mythical. But its extensions lead us on to the symbolic plane.

(Lacan, 1988/1975: 223).

The myth can be understood as a double inscription of the functioning of the imaginary order insofar as not only is the myth itself posited as an imaginary scenario but the recognition which would be attained within the myth would be of an imaginary order. However, for Lacan, this double inscription at the level of the imaginary also points towards a double inscription at the level of the symbolic, indicating the fact that from the subjective perspective the imaginary would have to already be structured by the symbolic. This would then indicate that imaginary recognition, including imaginary self-recognition, is always maintained or posited within the terms of the Other. The very positing of ‘oneself’ and the other as another person like ‘oneself’ relies upon inscription in the symbolic.

Working within the terms of the master-slave myth itself, we can see that the recognition sought therein is imaginary. Each party implicated in the scenario seeks recognition in order to attain a sense of self-consciousness. In order for this to be possible, each party would have to recognise the other party as worthy of bestowing the desired recognition. This would then suppose that each party had already recognised the other party as at least potentially worthy of bestowing the desired recognition, that is, in Hegel’s terms, as a self-consciousness. However, in order for this to happen, each party would already have to have recognised themselves as capable of recognising the other as worthy of bestowing the desired recognition. The logic is impossibly circular. Neither party could recognise the other without already

having recognised themselves as recognising the other. It is only insofar as we understand the myth as an imaginary scenario that sense can be made of this impossible circle.

This becomes clearer if we turn to Lacan's formulation of the Mirror Stage. In the mirror stage, as we have seen, the infant is confronted with an image which, through a process of identification, is mis-taken as the model for the infant's own self, thus conferring a sense of unity and mastery which would pertain to that self. What is crucial here is that there is strictly speaking no unity and mastery at work. The infant sees what it takes to be a unitary form and assumes to model itself, that is its self-image, on that form. That is to say, the infant has modelled its unified self-image on the mis-taken unity of the image it sees before it. In a later reference to the mirror stage, Lacan indicates what we might understand as the necessary intersubjective (or symbolic) moment of the infant then seeking confirmation of this unity in another, for example, by turning to the parent "as if to call on him to ratify this image" (Evans, 1996: 116).

What is accounted for in both stages here, the child's initial misrecognition of itself and its dependence on another for ratification, is the purely imaginary identification of the self or ego. In each stage, the identification in question can be understood to attest to a division insofar as the infant who recognises itself in fact recognises something outwith itself, the mirror image, and the recognition requires supplementing by another who is clearly also outside. Moreover, as in the master-slave myth, the other would have to have already been recognised as worthy of conferring ratification. The recognition in question is necessarily misrecognition. It is this function of

*méconnaissance*, misrecognition, which, for Lacan, “characterizes the ego in all its structures” (Lacan, 1977/1949: 6).

The identification which would both proceed from and be necessary to the mutual recognition sought in the myth would be of a purely imaginary order. The subject, in assuming to be a unified entity in itself would seek to recognise this in a similarly unified entity which would be both modelled after and be the blue-print for the subject’s own misrecognized self, its ego. Such identification however must also partake of the symbolic order. The very differentiation between self and other would only be possible on the basis of a differentiating structuration.

Such differentiation is what would give rise to the aggressivity attested to in the Hegelian version of the myth. The subject in attaining its idea of itself as unified in an image which appears outside itself and, additionally, in confronting the other as unified, becomes aware of its own fragmented status. The other here, whether other in the sense of other person or other in the sense of the image confronting the infant, because of its mis-perceived wholeness, is taken as accentuating the fragmentation of the subject and thus threatening its desired or assumed wholeness.

Arguably the key to the forms of recognition here lies in the retroactive positing of the whole scenario. That “the myth itself can only be conceived of as already bounded by the register of the symbolic” (Lacan, 1988/1975: 223) points to the fact that the subject, in order to be seen to be divided in its own misrecognition, would always already have to appear as divided in the field of the symbolic, that is, in the locus of the Other. This suggests that it is not only the wholeness which would be desired

which is assumed, in all its fragility, in the posited encounter with the other, but also the fragmented self, the lack of wholeness which the image of wholeness would seek to repair. The myth can thus be understood as an instance of fantasy, wherein the subject,  $\exists$ , as already divided in relation to the symbolic, posits itself in relation to an idea of wholeness,  $a$ ; ( $\exists \& a$ ).

This would suggest that the mode of intersubjectivity attested to in the dialectic of the master and slave is only ever of an imaginary order but as myth, points, in a double inscription, towards the subject's (dis)location in the symbolic order. Not only does the Hegelian myth itself result in confirming the symbolic, in the guise of order and labour, as the ultimate locus of identity but the very myth itself can only be posited on the grounds of, in terms of, the symbolic order.

The symbolic, as we have seen, is itself a finite realm, the order of the Real imposing itself as its limit. This is the logic we encountered previously in the impossibility of a closed symbolic order. It would be this impossibility which would open up the space of desire which is necessary for subjective constitution. It is also, for Lacan, this impossibility, this insistence of the Real, as *das Ding*, which constitutes the possibility of the ethical. This opening, as we have seen, is encountered in the other, the *Nebenmensch*.

### 3.3 The *Nebenmensch*

If the other as other person appears to the subject as an imaginary entity, this is not to say that the other as other person is something which would be entirely constructed or projected by the subject. The subject is liable to encounter the other insofar as the other is recognisable as being the same but this cannot in itself account for the other; there is necessarily something in the other which escapes comprehension. This is the logic Lacan reads into Freud's description of the subject's encounter with the *Nebenmensch* in *A Project for a Scientific Psychology*. Freud asks us to suppose that,

the object which furnishes the perception resembles the subject – a *fellow human-being*. If so, the theoretical interest [taken in it] is also explained by the fact that an object *like this* was simultaneously the [subject's] first satisfying object and further his first hostile object, as well as his sole helping power. For this reason it is in relation to a fellow human-being that a human-being learns to cognize. Then the perceptual complexes proceeding from this fellow human-being will in part be new and non-comparable – his *features*, for instance, in the visual sphere; but other visual perceptions - e.g. those of the movements of his hands – will coincide in the subject with memories of quite similar visual impressions of his own, of his own body, [memories] which are associated with memories of movements experienced by himself. Other perceptions of the object too – if for instance, he screams – will awaken the memory of his own experience of pain. Thus the complex of the fellow human-being falls into two components, of which one makes an impression by its constant structure and stays together as a *thing*, while the other can be *understood* by the activity of memory – that is, can be traced back to information from [the subject's] own body. This dissection of a perceptual complex is described as *cognizing* it; it involves a *judgement* and when this last aim has been attained it comes to an end.

(Freud, 1966/1895: 331).

We can detect in Freud's passage the relations of the symbolic and imaginary which would govern the subject's relation with its counterpart. Clearly, there is here the recognition on a visual plane, an identification with the other as appearing similar or comparable. The other person appears as like or reminiscent of objects already

constitutive of the subject's psychic economy, the subject's recalled object of satisfaction, the subject's recalled object of hostility, the subject's recalled object of support. What this recalling already points to is the fact of structuration, the engagement with the world in terms of the symbolic order. Without the possibility of structuring and, in Freud's terms, cognizing that which is encountered and that which has already been encountered, the very process of imaginary recognition could not take place. This is why, as we have seen, the mirror stage cannot be reduced to a purely imaginary moment but is always already structured by the symbolic.

We can thus understand Freud as pointing to the fact that there is in the encounter with another person two processes at work. There is the process of identification wherein one recognises as the same that which would correspond to elements of one's prior psychic economy. Then there is the process of cognition wherein one would make the same that which does not immediately correspond to elements of one's prior psychic economy. What this initial reading would not account for is a third possibility, that which refuses reduction to the same. It is this third point which Lacan reads into Freud's passage in terms of the reference to that which "stays together as a *thing*" (Ibid.).

Lacan presents what he terms the 'climactic sentence' of this passage as:

"Thus the complex of the *Nebenmensch* is separated into two parts, one of which affirms itself through an unchanging apparatus, which remains together as a thing, *als Ding*."

(Lacan, 1992/1986: 51)

By emphasising the phrase “unchanging apparatus” (Ibid.), Lacan draws our attention to the fact that the *thing* under discussion here cannot be reduced to something which would attain coherence in the symbolic, in our cognition of our ‘experience’ of it.

In the previous section of *A Project for a Scientific Psychology* Freud has described the process whereby one would distinguish in the complex experience of same and other, what he terms ‘similarity’, on the basis of that which is experienced as that which “on the whole remains the same” and that “which for the most part varies” (Freud, 1966/1895: 328). Freud links this process explicitly to the function of grammar, claiming that language would call the former “the *thing*” and the latter “its activity or attribute – in short, its predicate” (Ibid.).

Lacan’s point, in his reading, would appear to be that, despite the references to activity, gestures etc., in the passage of Freud’s to which he refers, the *thing* attested to in the encounter with the fellow human-being, the *Nebenmensch*, cannot be reduced to this previously disclosed explanation in terms of grammatical subject and predicate, noun and verb. The *thing* in this second instance, the thing which would be encountered as an “unchanging apparatus” (Lacan, 1992/1986: 51) in one’s experience of the *Nebenmensch* is not the same *thing* as the *thing* which would be recuperated as a grammatical certainty.

It has nothing to do with an allusion to a coherent whole that would occur in the passage from a verb to a noun, quite the contrary.

(Ibid.: 51-2)

Lacan’s point here would be that in addition to the imaginary and symbolic relations we would entertain with others, both of which would be forms of recuperation, the imaginary being a recuperation to that image of ourselves we had fixed in the

constitution of the ego, the symbolic being a recuperation to the system of knowledge we have at our disposal, there is an aspect of the encounter which could not be recuperated. This third aspect would be the Real, attested to by *das Ding*.

Failure to account for this last aspect would render the other as a projection of one's ego. A mirror of that ego which is in itself but an imaginary construct. For Lacan, it is clearly not that actual people do not actually do this, that is, reduce others to other egos like their own. The point is rather that in doing this one is necessarily not recognising the other as other. Coupled with this, as the image of the other one would have recuperated would have been recuperated on the basis of its similarity to one's 'self', one's own ego, which is but an image of completion, the image one would have recuperated cannot, itself, be other than incomplete.

The ego is an object. Any recognition attributed to the other on the basis of its resemblance to the ego would then also be recognition as an object. To so recognise the other as an object is to miss something of the other.

The complex of the object is in two parts; there is a division, a difference in the approach to judgement. Everything in the object that is quantity can be formulated as an attribute; it belongs to the investment of the / system and constitutes the earliest *Vorstellungen* around which the destiny of all that is controlled according to the laws of *Lust* and *Unlust*, of pleasure and unpleasure, will be played out in what might be called the primary emergences of the subject. *Das Ding* is something entirely different.

(Ibid.: 52)

We can understand this distinction between object and non-objectifiable in terms of the distinction we drew previously between drives and desire. Where drives maintain their course in terms of an impermeable aim, fixating on an object and trajecting that

object, achieving their satisfaction in the repetition of the circuit of that object, desire, properly, has no object. It ‘aims’ towards *das Ding*. Drives, then, can be understood as concerned with a refinding, with re-cognition;

the first and most immediate goal of the test of reality is not to find in a real perception an object which corresponds to the one which the subject represents to himself at that moment, but to find it again, to confirm that it is still present in reality.

(Ibid.)

This endeavour of refinding is exemplified by Freud in the case of a child encountering the breast from an angle which does not immediately correspond to the wished for image. The child encounters the breast from the side where the nipple is not apparent but recalls a previous experience of suckling wherein a movement of its head presented the side image it now experiences. By linking the head-movement to the previously experienced side image the child is now able to reverse the movement and achieve the wished for image of the front view with nipple apparent. In such a way, by conjoining images already, accidentally, experienced, the child is able to achieve a return to and of that object experienced as the object of satisfaction (Freud, 1966/1895: 328-9).

*Das Ding*, however, is that which escapes cognition and cannot be recuperated as an image. It is beyond the realm of the imaginary. As such, it is experienced as “strange and even hostile on occasion, or in any case the first outside” (Lacan, 1992/1986: 52). In its insistence as absent, as that which cannot be grasped or brought to rein within the symbolic nor fixed in the imaginary, *das Ding* suggests the presence elsewhere of something which could solve the lack in the subject.

It demonstrates that something is there after all, and that to a certain extent it may be useful.

(Ibid.)

It is in relation to this impression which cannot be grasped, which can be recuperated to neither an imaginary nor a symbolic relation, that the subject's desire manifests and around which the subject's representations are governed.

*Das Ding* is experienced as the desire of the Other attenuated to the other but, as that which will also motivate desire in the subject, it is also the desire of the subject as the desire of the Other. What we can understand from this persistence of *das Ding* is that the unity of the object which is accomplished in the imaginary is only a unity insofar as it excludes from consideration *das Ding* as that ununifiable, irrecoverable kernel of the Real which would persist both in the subject and in that which the subject would attempt to comprehend or cognize.

In this way we can understand that the image which would constitute or provide the possibility of the complex of identity and identification, recognition of the other and self-recognition, is never actually 'it'. That is to say, in its failure to account for, to comprehend, to take in *das Ding*, the impossible kernel of the Real as it imposes on the subject, particularly in its encounter with the *Nebenmensch*, the image at one and the same time becomes that which would (impossibly) conceal the failure of comprehension and that which would point to the failure to conceal the lack of comprehension. The false unity inherent in the imaginary relation is indicative of the non-unity of the object of comprehension.

What this then suggests, in terms of the subject's relation to another person is that what is grasped as identifiable, what is mis-recognized, is necessarily not all. The other apprehended as another ego, an alter-ego, necessarily brings with it *something* which cannot be reduced to recognition, *something* unrecognizable. This would be the other, not as another ego, but as absolutely Other.

The world of our experience, the Freudian world, assumes that it is this object, *das Ding*, as the absolute Other of the subject, that one is supposed to find again.

(Ibid.: 52)

This persistence of *das Ding* as the absolute Other in the other is further elucidated by Lacan in reference to the example of the poetry of the Lady of courtly love.

### **3.4 The Poetry of Courtly Love**

The example Lacan proffers of the poetry of courtly love serves as an example of the objectification of the other at its most extreme. What must necessarily be disentangled in Lacan's example here is the literary figure and the actual existing person for whom or in place of whom the literary figure would stand. The poetry of courtly love, ostensibly the troubadour poetry of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, is concerned with the presentation of a female character who is exalted and inaccessible. Typically, the Lady of courtly love poems is described in a formulaic manner, thus serving to empty her "of all real substance" (Lacan, 1992/1986: 149). As Lacan points out, "courtly love was, in brief, a poetic exercise, a way of playing with a number of conventional, idealizing themes, which couldn't have any real concrete equivalent"

(Ibid.: 148) This is not, however, to suggest that the poetry of courtly love was solely concerned with fictional characters. That the women cited in the poems actually existed, the names at least were those of actual existing people, clearly indicates that the poetry in question is concerned with something beyond exclusive imagination. There is here a divergence in the functioning of the poetry insofar as it both addresses actual people and renders those actual people fictionalised, deprived of the complexity of their actuality.

This love that led some people to acts close to madness was addressed at living beings, people with names, but who were not present in their fleshy and historical reality.

(Ibid.: 214-5)

The crucial point here is that, insofar as the discussion of the poetry of courtly love might allow us to understand something of the relation of the subject to the other, it is a relation here without relation. The other attested to in the poetry is reduced to an object. But reduced to an object in such a way that she is exalted to a position of extreme unattainability. The poetry in question addresses an actual existing woman but in such a way that her 'reality' is covered over by the irreality of the poetic creation. This is not, however, a case of replacing the available woman of social reality with an exalted and exaggerated fictionalised version. For Lacan, what is evident here is the fact that both the actual woman and the poeticized Lady are unattainable, only in different ways. The construction of the poetry and, with it, the Lady of the poetry as unattainable, serves to obfuscate the fact that the actual woman was always already unattainable;

courtly love ... is a highly refined way of making up for (*suppléer à*) the absence of the sexual relationship, by feigning that we are the ones who erect an obstacle thereto.

(Lacan, 1998/1975: 69)

The replacement of the actual woman by the fictional version not only serves to obfuscate the actual woman, but, crucially, serves to obfuscate the fact that the actual woman was unattainable. It is not, thus, that the poetry of courtly love seeks to 'improve' upon the 'naturally given' woman by rendering her more beautiful, more perfect. It is rather that the poeticisation seeks to posit a certain mastery over the woman's unattainability, her ungraspability. This point becomes more evident when we consider that the poetry of courtly love was not exclusively concerned with aggrandisement, but would also on occasion serve to reduce the woman in question to a hideous caricature (Lacan, 1992/1986: 162).

As we have seen, the other brings with it the encounter with *das Ding* as that in the other which is neither reducible to the other nor recuperable to the subject as self or ego. In the example of the Lady of courtly love, Lacan shows one manner in which the subject can be seen to deal with *das Ding* as it impresses itself in the encounter with the other. As we have seen in the examples of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic and in the mirror stage, the subject is inclined to absorb the other as a projection of and ratification of its own self image as it is experienced in the constitution of the ego. This absorption necessarily fails insofar as the subject cannot absorb that of the other which escapes symbolic and imaginary recuperation, *das Ding*. In the example of courtly love poetry this failure is circumvented by elevating the object to the place or status of *das Ding*. This is clearly not to say that the Lady in question is encountered as *das Ding*. Quite the contrary. It is by elevating her in the poetic imagination to the

place of *das Ding* that the very encounter with *das Ding* in all its impossible horror is avoided.

The object that specifies directions or poles of attraction to man in his openness, in his world, and that interest him because it is more or less his image, his reflection – precisely that object is not the Thing to the extent that the latter is at the heart of the libidinal economy. Thus, the most general formula that I can give you of sublimation is the following: it raises an object – and I don't mind the suggestion of a play of words in term I use – to the dignity of the Thing.

(Ibid.: 112)

But raising the other as object to the dignity of *das Ding* in no way obliterates *das Ding*. It does not solve the enigma of the other, the inescapable otherness of the other. It merely, albeit in a rarefied manner, covers over this enigma with a less threatening enigma, an enigma which is or can be domesticated. The Lady raised to the dignity of *das Ding* is the veil of *das Ding*.

If the Thing were not fundamentally veiled, we wouldn't be in the kind of relationship to it that obliges us, as the whole of psychic life is obliged, to encircle it or bypass it in order to conceive it. Whenever it affirms itself, it does so in domesticated spheres. That is why the spheres are defined thus; it always presents itself as a veiled entity.

(Ibid.: 118)

It is thus as veiled and only as veiled that *das Ding* can be encountered not as *das Ding* in itself but as what Lacan terms “the Other thing” (Ibid.), *das Ding* as it is “represented by something else” (Ibid.). The representation of *das Ding* is thus not only the elevation of *something* else to the dignity of *das Ding* but, through this very process, the representation of the place of *das Ding* by something in the signifying field. It is *das Ding* veiled but then necessarily marked by a signifier. This then returns us to the operation of the pleasure principle as that which regulates the

mechanisms of the subject's desire. If *das Ding* is veiled by and thus represented by a signifier, this would serve to displace the subject's desire onto something other than *das Ding*, thus at one and the same time avoiding the destructive encounter with the Real and allowing desire to proceed in a domesticated environment.

Clearly, the logic of sublimation at work in the example of courtly love is akin to that of fantasy. It is the 'replacement' of that in the other which would motivate desire, *das Ding*, with a posited object of desire, *objet petit a*, and thus the subject's positioning of itself in relation to something other than the absolute (otherness of the) other; ( $\exists$ &*a*).

Hence, what emerges with the term by which Aristotle designates it is quite precisely what analytic experience allows us to situate as being the object – from at least one pole of sexual identification, the male pole – the object that puts itself in the place of what cannot be glimpsed of the Other. It is inasmuch as object *a* plays the role somewhere – from a point of departure, a single one, the male one – of that which takes the place of the missing partner, that what we are also used to seeing emerge in the place of the real, namely, fantasy, is constituted.

(Lacan, 1998/1975: 63)

We should recall here that fantasy functions to cover over a lack in the symbolic artifice, that lack in the big Other which would be experienced as the motivation of desire. As we saw earlier, the formulation and persistence of fantasy offers the subject an illusory sense of its own identity, the formulation of the ego, and concomitant with this, an illusory perception of the social reality within which the subject would posit its (illusory) existence. Here we can see more precisely the conjunction of these two aspects of this operation, a conjunction which, properly, renders them as one, not two. The *meconnaissance* of self-identity achieved in the realm of fantasy is achieved and only achieved in relation to the *meconnaissance* of the social reality which would be

read as being beyond the subject. Bound within this *meconnaissance* is the subject's *meconnaissance* of the other as other person, one of those who would be experienced as populating the social reality in relation to which and within which the subject's own *meconnaissance* of its 'self' is bound. As we saw earlier, the subject's fantasy arises and functions as a response to the question of *Che vuoi?* as it is experienced as being addressed to the subject from the Other. That the subject might posit its misconstrual of the other in the place of the answer to the question is no accident. To the extent that the other is perceived as being that which, or the one who, has an answer to the question, the other can function as the hope of the subject's own attainment of the / an answer.

### **3.5 The Case of Dora**

This logic can perhaps be seen more clearly in another example from the psychoanalytical canon, Freud's case of Dora, or, more precisely, in Lacan's reading of this case. As is perhaps evident, and as Lacan remarks himself in the above quotation from *Seminar XX* (Lacan, 1999/1975: 63), the mechanism of sublimation in the example of courtly love is particularly male. It should be noted here that in Lacan's usage the terms 'male' and 'female' refer less to any biological determination of the sexes and more to the 'determined choice' of structural position the subject assumes. The mechanism which Lacan detects in the case of Dora allows us an understanding of the relation ascribed more typically to the hysteric, structurally female, subject.

It is important to consider in our reading of the Dora case that what we are presented with in Freud's original 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria' (1977/1905), and consequently as can be traced in any subsequent commentary or critique based on this fragment, is never more than a particular representation of a young woman and the circumstances, events and symptoms pertaining to her as understood, described and interpreted by Freud. That is to say, as with the example of the lady of the poetry of courtly love, what we have at our disposal here is once again a woman "not present in [her] fleshy and historical reality" (Lacan, 1992/1986: 214-5) but rather a woman represented, a woman "as signifier" (Ibid.: 215). In this sense, it might be argued that the 'facts' of the case of Dora say more about Freud's desire than they do about Dora's (or Ida Bauer's – the proper name of the patient whose treatment the case describes).<sup>1</sup>

What we can appreciate in Lacan's reading of the case is that he is not so much claiming to have somehow uncovered the 'truth' of Dora's (or Ida's) desire but that he is, rather, concerned with demonstrating an understanding of the functioning and structure of hysteria. Whether such functioning would have pertained to Ida Brauer is another question entirely. Neither is the point here to generate a 'rule' of hysteria from the singular example of the Dora case, but rather it is to consider the structural relations evident in the case study and the potential insights that uncovering such structures would allow. Such uncovering can allow us an insight into the mechanism, and the complexity of the mechanism, of desire as it can be adduced in and through the example. Where for Freud the case study can be understood to constitute an example of the hysteric's desire – who or what it is that Dora herself desires – on

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<sup>1</sup> for further discussion of the complexity of interpretation pertaining to the Dora case, see Bernheimer and Kahane (eds.), 1985.

Lacan's reading we can begin to see that the case study, rather than unproblematically representing simply Dora's desire, can be understood to present the question of desire, the question, that is, of "who desires in Dora" (Lacan, 1993/1981: 174). The text, and the context, of the case study, in this sense, can be understood to alert us to not only Dora's desire, in that she is the subject of the analysis, but also the desire of the other 'characters', specifically Herr K. and Dora's father, in that their desire can be understood to be operative on and conjectured by Dora, but also Freud's desire in that he is the author of the text we would be reading, and, by extension, the desire of subsequent interpreters of the text, such as Lacan and ourselves. With this complexity of desire in mind, we can perhaps appreciate that the case of Dora, 'A Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria', functions as significantly more than a mere example of hysteric desire as evident in one patient. That is to say, (the text of) the case study can be understood to function as an example of the very impossibility of locating desire with any certainty, the impossibility of any unquestionable objectivity in the field of desire. Just as in the example of the lady of the poetry of courtly love, we can understand Freud, in his presentation of the case of Dora, to have so rendered her an object. In response to this reading, Lacan allows us to ascertain the strict impossibility or failure of any such reduction of the other, the strict impossibility of ever knowing the other's desire as such.

In Freud's presentation of the case, the eighteen-year-old Dora is brought to him suffering from hysterical symptoms which, in Freud's interpretation, can, at least in part, be explained by her entanglement in a complex 'family romance'. Dora's father is engaged in an affair with a family friend, Frau K. and, meanwhile, Dora is the object of amorous advances by Frau K.'s husband, Herr K., advances with which, it

appears, her father is quite complicit insofar as Dora could be understood to have been “handed over to Herr K. as the price of his tolerating the relations between her father and his wife [Frau K.]” (Freud, 1977/1905: 66). While, initially, Dora complains of this situation, opposing both her father’s relationship with Frau K. and his embroiling of her in this relationship through Herr K., Freud concludes from her analysis that she is actually quite complicit with the whole scenario, that “She had made herself an accomplice in the affair” (Ibid.: 67) and “had given every possible assistance to her father’s relations with Frau K.” (Ibid.). The apparent contradiction between her complicity and her protestations is, according to Freud, due to the conflict between, on the one hand, her love of her father and, on the other, her love of Herr K. For Freud, Herr K.’s amorous advances are met with opposition from Dora precisely because they “brought forward and reinforced her old affection for her father” (Ibid.: 92), feelings of affection which “had now become distressing to her” (Ibid.). That is to say, for Freud, there exists in Dora a conflict between her object choices, an obstacle to the progression from her first object choice, her father, to “a more normal object, namely, another man” (Lacan, 1993/1981: 90). In addition to this conflict of feelings, Freud detects a certain “current of homosexuality” (Freud, 1977/1905: 95) evident in Dora’s affection for Frau K. and the manner in which Dora would praise her “in accents more appropriate to a lover than to a defeated rival” (Ibid.: 96-7). In a later footnote to the case, Freud remarks that Dora’s “homosexual (gynaecophilic) love for Frau K. was the strongest unconscious current in her mental life” (Ibid.: 162).

Picking up on this latterly posited centrality of Frau K. to the case of Dora, Lacan, in his reading, concurs that it is in fact Frau K. who should be understood as the object of Dora’s attention. Lacan’s point, contra Freud, is not to indicate the resurgence in

Dora of a commonplace “homosexual predisposition” (Ibid.: 95) but rather to demonstrate the “unusual object relations” (Lacan, 1993/1981: 90) typical of the hysteric subject. In unravelling the complex of relations evident in the Dora story, Lacan suggest that, rather than see Herr K. as the object of Dora’s “suppressed” love (Freud, 1977/1905: 92), as the successor in her affections for her father, we might understand Herr K. as being little but a tool or a pawn;

Dora in fact uses Herr K. as her ego, in that it is by means of him that she is effectively able to support her relationship with Frau K. ... It’s only Herr K.’s mediation which enables Dora to sustain a bearable relationship.  
(Lacan, 1993/1981: 91)

In Lacan’s reading, Dora can be understood to identify with both Herr K and her father in order to gain access to Frau K. Herr K., in such a reading, stands in relation to Dora’s father not so much as a rival but rather as a surrogate. That is to say, where Freud would contend that Herr K. was the ‘normal’ object of Dora’s affections and that her assenting to his advances was blocked due to, for example, her jealousy over his attention towards a servant and the correspondent wound to her pride in his repetition of the very same words to both her and the servant (Freud, 1977/1905: 147), for Lacan, Herr K. is not essential to Dora for any attribute of his own, but rather he is significant in the access he provides to developing an understanding of Frau K., her father’s object choice, and, more generally, what it is *in* a woman that a man would desire. It is in this sense, rather than in the sense of object choice that Herr K. can be understood to function as a replacement for Dora’s father. It is Herr K.’s desire, understood as resembling her father’s desire, which interests Dora, an interpretation which is supported by the diminishing of Dora’s interest in Herr K. after he tells her

that he is not in fact interested in his wife (Lacan, 1982/1952: 70); when he tells her, “I get nothing out of my wife” (Freud, 1977/1905: 147).

For Lacan, Dora’s relationship with her father is imbued with both “identification and rivalry” (Lacan, 1993/1981: 91) and it is this complex which both situates Frau K. as an object of attention and Herr K. as a necessary foil. Her identification with her father leads to the assumption of the ‘same’ object of desire, Frau K. Her rivalry necessitates that a fourth figure, contra her father, is introduced to the scenario. What is crucial here is that, for Lacan, Dora assumes her father’s desire for Frau K. in both senses of ‘assumes’. It is not important here whether or not her father had actually elevated Frau K. to a position akin to that of the Lady of courtly love, an idealised or perfected object of desire; we do not, in any case, have sufficient information to discern this. What is crucial is that Dora can be understood to have assumed that he does. Having made such an assumption, Dora can then be understood to have taken this same imaginary object to be the object of her ‘own’ desire.

It is thus that Lacan can assert that the crucial question one must ask here is not that of the object of Dora’s desire so much as that of who it is “who desires in Dora” (Ibid.: 174). It is a matter of locating Dora’s ego. As we have seen in the mirror stage, the ego is constituted in relation to a complex misrecognition based on an exterior model. Here the function of the ‘exterior model’ is assigned to Herr K. It is thus that we might understand that it is the structurally male point of view which comes to operate in Dora.

Herr K. is Dora’s ego. The function filled by the specular image in the schema of the mirror stage, where the subject situates his sense so as to

recognize himself, where for the first time he situates his ego, this external point of imaginary identification, is, for Dora, placed in Herr K. It is insofar as she is Herr K. that all her symptoms adopt their definitive sense.

(Ibid.: 175)

That we can thus understand the desire operative in Dora as being structurally male is not to say that we should understand Dora herself as being structurally male. Crucial here is the logic of assumption at work in the narrative. As symptomatic of the functioning of hysteric desire, the mechanism we have in operation here is that of the assignation of the object of desire assumed to be the object of the structurally male obsessional to the hysteric subject. Clearly, this not to equate the two structures insofar as they might be understood to have taken the same object, rather, it is to indicate a dissymetry between the two insofar as the movement of desire detected is radically different. The hysteric, in adopting the desire of the other, can be understood to experience desire in a manner irreducible to the obsessional both in spite of and because of the assumption of the 'same' object. Neither is this by any means to suggest that the structurally male or obsessional subject somehow has a more direct access to or experience of desire, that his desire would be truly his while the hysteric's desire is a mere semblance or copy of this 'authentic' male desire. In both cases, that of the hysteric and that of the obsessional, the desire experienced is the desire of the other (Lacan, 1988/1978: 269). It would be the function of analysis to allow the subject to traverse such a position and come to assume the place of the cause of their desire.

Significant here, in terms of locating and nominating the cause of desire in Dora, is the point made earlier concerning the 'textual' status of the case study and thus Freud's status as author. In so emphasising Dora's authored status, we can understand

that the answer to the question of “who desires in Dora” (Lacan, 1993/1981: 174) is necessarily doubled. While on the level of Freud’s narrative we can see that it might be Herr K. and her father who ‘desire in her’, who function as models for her desire, we can also discern, on the level of Freud as narrating, as authoring the text before us, that it is also Freud who desires in Dora (Lacan, 1982/1966: 68). In each case, what we are presented with is a man’s desire assumed as the model for the young girl’s.

In this way, Lacan’s reading of the Dora case allows us to detect the mechanism of assumption evident in any attempt to ascertain the other’s desire. Dora, as here presented, desires what she assumes the other, Herr K., her father, desires. But in addition, we cannot ignore the fact that Dora, as presented, is necessarily mediated by the desire of the other and thus ‘her’ desire, as (re-)presented, is always, to an extent, coloured by the desire of the other, most notably, Freud. This then indicates less a clear access to or apprehension of the (hysteric) other’s desire than it does an impasse, the impossibility of discerning the other’s desire with any veracity or certainty, the impossibility of accessing the other’s desire beyond or entirely outwith the mediating effects of one’s own.

In understanding both these examples, the example of the poetry of courtly love and the example of the case of Dora, in terms of the logic of fantasy, we can see how both offer answers to the question of *Che vuoi?*, the fundamental and traumatic encounter with the Other as experienced as a question of the subject’s very subjectivity. In the example of courtly love poetry, an answer to the question *Che vuoi?* is offered in the form of the Lady encapsulated and created in the poetry, a logic we can see as carried over into the presentation of Dora in ‘A Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of

Hysteria'. This answer, however, must be understood to be an answer which comes from the Other. As Lacan stresses, the poetry in question is rarefied, highly ornate and constructed in accordance with rigorous poetic convention;

courtly love was, in brief, a poetic exercise, a way of playing with a number of conventional, idealizing themes, which couldn't have any real concrete equivalent.

(Lacan, 1992/1986: 148)

It is a linguistic answer. An answer in the terms of the Other. The very fact that the woman in question is radically divorced from any actual, historical, flesh and blood person and rather follows predetermined prescriptions and descriptions points to this. 'She' is literally 'pre-scripted', a poetic cliché, an answer taken from, already inscribed in, the Other, rather than one offered singularly by the subject. The 'person' involved in the poetry is "transformed into a symbolic function" (Ibid.: 149); *a.* Freud's revolutionary contributions to the understanding of the psyche notwithstanding, a similar logic of transformation should be understood as occurring in his presentation of the Dora case. Despite Freud's pioneering research and forging of new terminology and concepts, it remains the case that Dora is transformed into a symbolic function; she is written.

In Lacan's reading of the case of Dora, operating at a level which we might describe as interior to the narrative itself, we can understand the answer to *Che vuoi?* as being, 'what the other wants', insofar as the hysteric's desire is directed towards the desire of the other, that which the other is perceived as desiring. This is not, clearly, to suggest that the hysteric, through the other, has access to pure desire or access to *das Ding* as that towards which desire would aim. The other's desire is not directed towards *das*

*Ding* in itself but rather towards a surrogate thereof. In this sense, the other no more has the ‘answer’ than the hysteric. The question of the hysteric might then be, what is it in this *thing* that would be the answer to what the other wants? This incessant questioning is further conjoined to the attempt to identify, which, as we have seen, is inherent to the logic of fantasy. The hysteric, here, chooses another woman as the object of her fantasy in order not to possess but rather to discover what it is *in* the other woman which would make her desirable. The question is then, ultimately, “*What is it to be a woman?*” (Lacan, 1993/1981: 171). The prevalence of this question can, in addition, be detected in the very writing of the Dora case insofar as we can understand that it is not only Dora who asks this, but also Freud and, by extension, the reader.

The hysteric, so understood, chooses to identify with the other in the belief that he can provide the answer which otherwise eludes her. The gap in the symbolic, the fact of the symbolic’s necessary incompleteness, that it is %, is in a sense denied by assuming that the other has the answer. Where, for the male-obsessional, the gap in the Other impresses as that which cannot be signified, the answer to his own failed identification, for the hysteric-female, that which is taken to be that which would fix the gap is taken to be with the other. In either case the answer to the question is out of reach.

In this sense we can understand that in its encounter with the other the subject is interminably faced with a question of its own existence. Where for the obsessional this question would be characterised as its asking of itself, “Why is he here? Where has he come from? What is he doing here? Why is he going to disappear?” (Ibid.:

179), for the hysteric, as we have seen, it would be characterised as the question “*What is it to be a woman?*” (Ibid.: 171). This imposition of this questioning and the form of questioning the subject would adopt is inseparable from its emergence in the field of the Other, the choice retrospectively taken in the face of the *vel* of alienation. The subject is, as we have seen, impossibly divided from itself, incomplete, barred,  $\exists$ . This very incompleteness of the subject instigates a search for the answer in the Other. As the Other can be understood to be commensurate with the field of signification as it is encountered by the subject, the answer sought is going to be sought as a signifier. What we see in Lacan’s reading of the Dora case and his discussion of the poetry of courtly love is the demonstration of these different possibilities of approaching the insistence of this questioning, different possible means of responding to the asymmetric lacks in the subject and the Other. Where in the poetry of courtly love the answer constructed would be that of a signifier which would function as the mask of the lack in the Other, in the case of Dora, we might understand that it is the fact that the Other might have or at least have access to the answer which functions as the mask to the subject’s own lack of answer. If we recall that the subject, whether hysteric or obsessional, is such that it is constituted as barred, as  $\exists$ , that is, that it is not possible for the subject to attain any complete, objective identity, then we can understand the two different modes of questioning here to indicate two possible responses to the condition of lack (both in terms of the lack in the subject and in terms of the lack in the Other). Crucially, these two possible responses are both marked by necessary failure (Glynos, 2000: 214). It is in this sense that we can understand the woman as being the phallus and the man as having the phallus.

As we saw previously, the (symbolic) phallus is another name for that master signifier which would solve the lack inherent in the subject. In suggesting that the woman, as other, is the phallus, we should understand this in the terms of the poetry of courtly love, where the other in question is not another person so much as a signifier, the other person reduced to a signifier. In suggesting that the man, as other, has the phallus, again, we should not understand this as meaning that the other *actually* has the phallus so much as the other is perceived to have the phallus. Thus the hysteric can be understood to identify with the other as he who would have the phallus, the answer, as “a means of approaching this definition that escapes her” (Lacan, 1993/1981: 178), utilizing the phallus she believes he possesses “as an imaginary instrument for apprehending what she hasn’t succeeded in symbolising” (Ibid.). The other, however, is as incapable of attaining, of having, the answer as she is.

If we can understand the different approaches here to be essentially failed, this is clearly not to suggest that there is another, successful approach. Fantasy, as we have seen, is that which supports desire, which is to say it is essential to the possibility of subjectivity. The fantasy as exemplified in the poetry of courtly love supports desire by positing a surrogate answer to the question of desire, *a*. The fantasy exemplified in Lacan’s reading of the case of Dora is shown to support desire by assuming that the answer lies elsewhere. In both cases, *the* answer is necessarily avoided. This is not, however, to suggest that the answer can ever be accepted, or even posited, as not existing. Even a refutation of the possibility of an answer would function as an answer. The answer given is always *not it* and yet the answer that there is no answer is also *not it*.

In terms of the encounter with the other and the experience of *das Ding* that this would bring, we can understand both these modes of fantasy as responses towards and defences against the trauma that such an encounter would entail. By elevating the other to the status of an object, as in the example of courtly love, the subject both marks the place of *das Ding* and renders the other, as the harbinger of *das Ding*, as 'neutralized' or 'non-threatening'. On the other hand, as in Lacan's reading of the Dora case, by rendering the other as averted of the answer, the hysteric subject also covers over the insistence of the Real the other would bring by rendering the other as having attained the signifier necessary to fill their lack. In both cases, crucially, *das Ding* continues to persist. That fantasy covers the lack, as we have seen, is not to suggest that fantasy solves the lack. *Das Ding*, as the insistence of desire in the other necessarily persists insofar as the subject's answer, the subject's fantasy, is never adequate to the gap it would seek to cover.

In addition to the mechanism of desire illustrated in Lacan's reading of the Dora case, what we have called a level interior to the narrative, his commentary on the case and the shortcomings of Freud's conclusions can be understood to underscore the central impossibility here of ever knowing or incapsulating the other and its desire. While the image of the lady of the poetry of courtly love and the understanding of Dora with which we are presented are only ever re-presentations, and, within this latter representation, the mechanism of desire illustrated as hysteric is itself indicative of a logic of assumption as to what it would be that the other desires, the 'truth' of the other's desire, the other *qua* other, in each case, necessarily eludes the subject. The other's desire, the other *in-itself*, is essentially inaccessible.

### 3.6 Saint Martin and the other's Good

The other is reduced to an imaginary effect, the semblance of the subject's own misrecognised ego, but such reduction necessarily entails a remainder, that of the other which refuses, which escapes the reductive process. This 'remainder' would be the insistence of *das Ding*. The insistence of the lack, the lack of *the* answer, the impossibility of knowing and thus adequately responding to or accommodating the other's desire, is evident in the case of Saint Martin and the beggar. Saint Martin, presumably with all the best of intentions, gives the beggar his cloak but, how, Lacan asks, does Saint Martin know that the cloak is what the beggar truly wants? He may want Saint Martin to "kill him or fuck him" (Lacan, 1992/1986: 186).

Lacan presents the example of Saint Martin in the context of discussing Freud's "horror" (Ibid.) in the face of the commandment to love one's neighbour. As we have seen, Freud rejects the directive to love one's neighbour, protesting that such a directive runs counter to reason. It is reasonable, in Freud's perspective, to love those close to one, those in whom one can identify oneself. The directive to love one's neighbour would constitute an affront to those who would be deserving of love and, in so doing, an affront to the subject and the love he would hold precious. What, according to Lacan, Freud misses in this protestation is the "opening on to *jouissance*" (Ibid.) that the encounter with the other would offer.

What is crucial here is the indeterminacy of *das Ding*, that in its strangeness, it is impossible to characterise *what* it might be. *Das Ding* is the suggestion, the promise with no guarantee, of something beyond the realm of the symbolic, that which would

solve the lack in the subject and thus it, in all its unknowability, functions as that towards which desire would be directed. *Jouissance*, as we have seen, is only ever retroactively posited as that which would be attained and experienced in this beyond, in this impossible grasping of *das Ding*.

It is as unknown that *das Ding* can become the site, for the subject, of the emergence or possibility of both good and evil. As the insistence of the realm of the unknown, *das Ding* avails itself to encapsulate that which cannot be explained in the terms of the symbolic order. It marks the limit or, better, indicates the beyond-the-limit of the symbolic.

It is in this sense that Lacan discusses *das Ding* in conjunction with the question of creationism. As we have seen in both the logic of the origin of law and in the notion of the signifying realm as essentially marked by its own limit, there is a fundamental problem in the conception of origins or limits. A limit always necessarily and impossibly points to its own *beyond*. The necessity here lies in the fact that without a beyond, there can be no limit. The impossibility lies in the fact that to conceive of the *beyond* is recuperate it to within the limits of the system. *Das Ding* functions as an attempt to conceive this limit/beyond in all its radicality. *Das Ding* is the pure insistence of the limit without imputation of content. It cannot, thus, be said, that that of which *das Ding* is indicative is 'good' or 'bad' and yet it is still indicative of the insistence of the possibility of good or bad. The very fact of the insistence of *das Ding* on the subject who is rendered incomplete in its emergence in the symbolic avails the positing of good and evil in the beyond of which it, *das Ding*, is indicative.

The gap or opening of the real which would be indicated in the insistence of *das Ding* is the gap in the Other. The Other as the site of the subject's emergence is also constitutive of the incompleteness of the subject,  $\exists$ . In this sense *das Ding* can be conceived as commensurate with what Lacan terms "the human factor" (Ibid.: 124).

The Thing is, in effect, involved insofar as it is defined by the fact that it defines the human factor – although, as we know, the human factor escapes us.

(Ibid.)

The human factor escapes us insofar as it is conditioned in relation to a beyond, the beyond of the signifying order, the beyond of the domesticated satisfactions of the pleasure principle. That such a beyond refuses categorisation, that it is beyond signification, is indicative of the error inherent to any question of humanity's fundamental moral nature, whether humanity "is fundamentally good or bad" (Ibid.: 125). The posing of such a question already assumes the limitations of what the answer might be. As Lacan, insists, the question cannot be reduced to such a binary but must rather be "a question of the whole" (Ibid.).

*Das Ding*, as we have seen, is experienced as the suggestion of that which would exist which would render us complete. It is the insistence of that lost *Thing* which at one and the same time gives rise to the sense of incompleteness in the subject and 'promises' the solution to this incompleteness. The paradox here is that in introducing the concept of completeness, the subject effectively models it on something which is not there. Lack is only experienced as lack in the light of the impression of something which would shore this lack but this something is, strictly, inconceivable.

The fact is man fashions this signifier ['whole' or 'wholeness'] and introduces it into the world - in other words, we need to know what he does when he fashions it in the image of the Thing, whereas the Thing is characterized by the fact that it is impossible for us to imagine it.

(Ibid.)

This impossibility of imagining *das Ding* indicates once again the fantastic nature of the subject's relation to the other. If the other brings with it something irrecoverable to the subject, something which radically refuses incorporation, the attempt to displace the intrigue of this alien aspect onto a fantasised image of the other is essentially to attempt to avoid the unknowability, the incomprehensibility, of this alien aspect. Whether one conceives of the other, imagines the other, as hostile or benevolent, one necessarily misses, in this conception which cannot but be a retreat to the imaginary, that of the other, that which insists in and with the other, which cannot be imagined. This is one sense in which Freud can be seen to be over hasty in his dismissal of the injunction to love one's neighbour, in his contention that the neighbour is hostile or evil. Freud himself can be understood to have *imagined* the other as hostile, to have refused that of the other which cannot be known.

As Lacan illustrates with the example of the story of Saint Martin, the good one gives towards the other, insofar as the other is imagined as the counterpart of one's own ego, is liable to be the good as one conceives of it for oneself. Saint Martin encounters a beggar one winter night as he is entering a city. The beggar stops him and asks him for alms but, as Saint Martin has no money, he can only give what he has, his cloak. So, he takes his sword and cleaves his cloak in two and gives one half to the beggar. For Lacan, this example, which might be held in the Christian tradition as the epitome of loving one's neighbour, actually says very little. The good that Saint Martin takes to be the good of the beggar is nothing but his own good transposed onto the beggar, a

point attested to in the story by the fact Saint Martin keeps one half of the cloak for himself. The other as conceived on the basis of its identification with the subject's own image of itself, its ego, leads to the good of the other being similarly conceived on the basis of the subject's misconception of its own good.

It is a fact of experience that what I want is the good of others in the image of my own.

(Ibid.: 187)

What Saint Martin does not account for here is that in the other which escapes identification. He does not know what the other wants.

Perhaps over and above that need to be clothed, he was begging for something else, namely, that Saint Martin either kill him or fuck him.

(Ibid.: 186)

What Lacan is pointing to here is the fact that it is not a question of an either / or. That Saint Martin sees the beggar as wanting or needing clothing to stay warm is not necessarily a mistake. The beggar, in all probability, was quite grateful for the cloak. The point is that this does not exhaust the beggar's desire, there is, beyond that in the beggar which can be recuperated by Saint Martin, something excessive, a desire which cannot be reduced to the services of goods, i.e. *jouissance*.

This conjunction of goods serves to illustrate the error Freud commits in assuming that the other is evil and harmful. The good one assumes for oneself, the object which would satisfy, serves to safe-guard against the encounter with unbearable *jouissance*. In imputing this good to the other in an exclusive fashion, that is as The Good, the subject would necessarily fail to account for the fact that this good was never *the good*

for them, but only ever a surrogate, albeit a necessary surrogate, that which is necessarily not *it*.

As the subject is constituted as the subject of desire in relation to a lack in its own being, a lack which is necessarily extimate, that which can be understood to be most central to the subject is also necessarily beyond the subject;

[It is] that which is most myself in myself, that which is at the heart of myself, and beyond me, insofar as the self stops at the level of those walls to which one can apply a label. What in French at least serves to designate the notion of self or same (*même*), then, is this interior or emptiness, and I don't know if it belongs to me or to nobody.

This is what my sophism signifies; it reminds me that my neighbor possesses all the evil Freud speaks about, but it is no different from the evil I retreat from in myself. To love him, to love him as myself, is necessarily to move towards some cruelty. His or mine?, you will object. But haven't I just explained to you that nothing indicates that they are distinct? It seems rather that they are the same, on condition that those limits which oblige me to posit myself opposite the other as my fellow man are crossed.

(Ibid.)

*Das Ding* is that in the subject and that in the other which would be encountered as desired and as abhorrent. It is hostile, but it is the same hostility the subject would encounter in itself. The abhorrence of the *jouissance* of which *das Ding* would be indicative is that beyond the meagre enjoyment afforded by the pleasure principle. It is that which would bring a pleasure unbearable for the subject insofar as it would be the destruction of subjectivity as such. But it is an abhorrence inseparable from the very symbolic order constitutive of the subject insofar as it is that which would be indicated at the very constitutive limit of the symbolic order, that lack in the symbolic which would be inherent, as limit, to the symbolic. *Das Ding* would then be that which would mark the limit encountered in the attempt to integrate the other. That of

the other which refuses identification is, paradoxically, inseparable from that in the subject which refuses identification. Or phrased otherwise, that in the other which refuses identification is indicative of that in the subject which refused identification. It is then precisely this *Thing* which binds me to the other. This would suggest that the occlusion of the other through its reduction to an image modelled on the ego is, effectively, an occlusion of *jouissance*.

### 3.7 Non-preferential love

It is at this point that we can return to Freud's discussion of the directive to love one's neighbour as one's self. Freud's initial refusal of the directive is centred around the fact that it appears to advocate a non-preferentiality which would, for him, deny the very possibility of love that it sets out to promote. Love for one's neighbour which would be love without preference is wrong, "for my love is prized by my family and friends as a sign of my preference for them; to put a stranger on a par with them would be to do them an injustice" (Freud, 2002/1930: 47). It is, for Freud, the very distinguishing qualities of the object of love, most notably those qualities in which the lover can find a point of identification, which confers on love the value which would be proper to it.

If I love another person, he must in some way deserve it. ... He deserves it if, in certain important respects, he so resembles me that in him I can love myself. He deserves it if he is so much more perfect than myself that I can love in him an ideal image of myself. I must love him if he is my friend's son, for the pain my friend would feel if any harm befell him would be my pain too; I should have to share it. But if he is a stranger to me and cannot attract me by any merit of his own or by any importance he has acquired in my emotional life, it becomes hard for me to love him.

(Ibid.: 46)

In his *Afterword to Revolution at the Gates* (2002), Žižek critiques Kierkegaard in a manner which would allow us to see him as joining with Freud in opposition to the directive to love one's neighbour in favour of preferential love. In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard argues that the love attested to in the directive to love one's neighbour is the highest form of love precisely because it does not distinguish on the basis of preference. For Kierkegaard, the love one might have towards one's partner, the beloved, or one's friend is but a form of self love.

self-love and passionate preferential love are essentially the same, but love for the neighbour – that is love. ... For this reason the beloved and the friend are called, remarkably and profoundly, to be sure, the *other self* and the *other I*

(Kierkegaard, 1995/1847: 53)

In opposition to exclusively preferential love, Kierkegaard advocates love of one's neighbour as non-preferential, as a love which renounces distinctions. Such love is the perfection of love precisely insofar as it is not dependent on any extraneous perfection in the object. Love predicated on a perceived perfect object cannot, for Kierkegaard, be perfect love because it is by definition limited to and by the object which would condition it. He compares such limited love to the health of a person which only subsists in one particular and favourable location. Clearly, Kierkegaard argues, we would not consider this person's health to be particularly excellent. We may consider the conditions or arrangements excellent, insofar as these conditions and arrangements are what allow the person's health to subsist. But the person's health itself we would no doubt find frail in that it is dependent upon these limited conditions. So it would be for love reserved only for persons who would display the kinds of excellences that Freud advocates as the proper aim for love. Such love is limited and, thus, while perfection may well reside in its object the love itself is by definition poor, imperfect.

Thus, the perfection of the object is not the perfection of the love. Because the neighbour has none of the perfections that the beloved, the friend, the admired one, the cultured person, the rare, the extraordinary person have to such a high degree, for that very reason love for the neighbour has all the perfections that the love for the beloved, the friend, the cultured person, the admired one, the rare, the extraordinary person does not have.

(Ibid.: 66)

Love for one's neighbour, in Kierkegaard's understanding, is perfect love precisely because it does not distinguish. It is perfect as love in that it is not dependent on the qualities of the object on which it befalls. Indeed, as perfect, it falls on every object equally.

Concerning himself with the object here, Žižek contends that, following Kierkegaard's argument, the only good neighbour is a dead neighbour. Death might be understood as that which would remove all distinctions and, thus, in death, the neighbour can be fully loved, can attain to that perfected love which renounces distinctions.

Žižek, accurately, perceives in Kierkegaard a desire to delimit a non-pathological love, in the Kantian sense of non-pathological, where there would be no subjective incentive or attachment in the act of love, where love is "motivated not by its determinate object, but by the mere *form* of love – love for the sake of love itself, not for the sake of what distinguishes its object" (Žižek, 2002: 213). In order to do so, Kierkegaard is not advocating that the only good neighbour is a dead neighbour. To do so would be to treat death as the distinction *par excellence* and thus miss the very point at which he aims; a love which is not predicated on any distinction at all. This would properly be, as Žižek claims, the love of the poet who can valorise the object of his love in death not because this erases distinctions but precisely because death here

distinguishes the beloved above all else. What Kierkegaard, in Žižek's reading, appears to be advocating is rather that we treat the neighbour, that is, each individual, equally, as "already dead, erasing his or her distinctive qualities" (Ibid.: 214). This, Žižek maintains, indicates the failure of Kierkegaard's argument, this is "where Kierkegaard cheats" (Ibid.). This non-pathological love, for Žižek, would precisely miss what is difficult in love, the work of love which would describe it as authentic. Kierkegaard's love for the neighbour, devoid of any particularity, is, for Žižek, an "easy feast" (Ibid.). Against this, and we can perhaps understand this as a support for Freud's rejection of the directive to love one's neighbour, Žižek suggests that we "love the other *because of his or her very imperfection*" (Ibid.). What Žižek clearly has in mind here is that *something* in the other which would render them different.

Contra both Freud and Kierkegaard, Žižek isolates the imperfection as that which would render the other as worthy of love, the difficult work of love. Kierkegaard and Freud appear to be very much in agreement on the fact that that which commonly renders someone worthy of love is their identification with the lover. For Freud someone deserves love when they "so resembles me that in him I can love myself" (Freud, 2002/1930: 46). Similarly, for Kierkegaard, "passionate preferential love is another form of self-love" (Kierkegaard, 1995/1847: 53). We can clearly understand this identification in self-love which Freud defends and Kierkegaard criticises as the imaginary objectification of the other. One loves the other here, as Kierkegaard and Freud both point out, inasmuch as the other resembles oneself. Or, to be more precise, one loves the other inasmuch as the other is misrecognised as resembling one's misrecognition of one's self. A misrecognition of the self which originates in the other.

it is from this fellow as such that the misrecognitions which define me as a self are born.

(Lacan, 1992/1986: 198)

Against such identification on the basis of misrecognition, Žižek would appear to advocate a love which, difficult as this may be, is predicated on difference, a love which would celebrate that in the other which could not be reduced to or recuperated to an identification. This resistant *something*, he argues, is *objet petit a*.

Lacan's name for this 'imperfection', for the obstacle which makes me love someone, is *objet petit a*, the 'pathological' tic which makes him or her unique.

(Žižek, 2002: 214-5)

Where Žižek's argument falters is in that that which he identifies as that which would constitute the other as the proper object of love is precisely the fantasy object which would shield the "annoying excess" (Ibid.: 214) which would render the other imperfect and deserving of authentic love. Žižek confuses the object of fantasy with that which it would serve to conceal.

As we have seen in Lacan's reading of Freud's *A Project for a Scientific Psychology*, the encounter with the other can be separated into two aspects, "one of which affirms itself through an unchanging apparatus, which remains together as a thing, *als Ding*" (Lacan, 1992/1986: 51) "while the other can be *understood* by the activity of memory – that is, can be traced back to information from [the subject's] own body" (Freud, 1966/1895: 331). That is to say, in the encounter with the other there is necessarily a process of identification and there is necessarily some *Thing* which cannot be reduced

to this process of identification. Without the process of identification, the other would not be recognised as another person. Without the remainder, that which would resist identification, the other would not constitute *another*. In the terms of Lacan's reading here, we can understand that what, in Freud, we might term 'deserving love' and what, in Kierkegaard, we might term 'love of the self in the other' are commensurate with that in the other which can be "understood by the activity of the memory – that is, [that which] can be traced back to information from [the subject's] own body" (Ibid.). That is, it is love based on (mis)identification with the other, identification of the other as the counterpart of one's ego. Against this, however, *objet petit a* is not the "unchanging apparatus" (Lacan, 1992/1986: 51) but rather that which would simultaneously be indicative of and protective against the "unchanging apparatus" (Ibid.). To fixate on the object of fantasy and, moreover, to impute this object to the other, to make of this object a distinctive *part* of the other, is precisely to refuse to acknowledge one's own part in the constitution of this object in the relation of fantasy.

It is that in the other which refuses identification which, paradoxically, for Lacan, is necessarily already the *same*, that which would lie beyond the positive distinctions the subject would draw between itself and the other. It is not the same, however, in the sense of a recuperation to the self, but rather because it is that which is in the subject more than the subject itself, that which is extimate to the subject. It is that which both insists upon the subject and cannot be reined within the subject. It is precisely that which would lie beyond all distinctions.

In this sense, we can see, contra Žižek, that, despite the apparent morbidity, Kierkegaard's claim is perfectly valid. Where Kierkegaard might be understood to falter himself is in the idea that such removal of all distinctions might be possible. Though, to be fair, it is not clear that Kierkegaard is actually making this claim at all. The love for the neighbour which would be a love oblivious to all earthly distinctions is in his own words not something which should "abolish dissimilarity, neither dissimilarity of distinction nor of lowliness" (Kierkegaard, 1995/1847: 88). Rather, he advocates that dissimilarity should be seen, in loving the neighbour, as hanging "loosely on the individual, as loosely as the cape the king casts off in order to show who he is" (Ibid.).

In other words, when the dissimilarity hangs loosely in this way, then in each individual there continually glimmers that essential other, which is common to all, the eternal resemblance, the likeness.

(Ibid.)

Kierkegaard seems not to be so much advocating a renunciation of the recognition of positive differences, those aspects of the other which would set that other apart in their unicity, their particularity, as he is indicating that such differences are necessarily an imputation of the subject who would perceive them. Kierkegaard's point is to admonish those who would seek to validate self-love on the illusory ground that it is love of the other in all their individuality. In indicating that dissimilarity may be made to "hang loosely" on the individual, Kierkegaard is indicating precisely that this is no easy feast. Relations with the other are such that they are bound in a logic of identification. The danger lies in allowing such identification, such love (or hate) of the "other I, the other self" (Ibid.: 53) to be mistaken as *true* recognition of the other's "particular characteristic" (Žižek, 2002: 214). To refer to one of Žižek's preferred

examples, the mole on Cindy Crawford's lip is not *her objet petit a*, it is precisely Žižek's *objet petit a*, that which Žižek perceives in her which renders her unique and desirable for him, that which allows her to be escalated to the status of an object of fantasy *for him*. For Kierkegaard, we should struggle to allow, to remain with this example, Cindy Crawford's mole, to 'hang loosely', that is precisely to acknowledge the objectifying perspective in which we might place 'her', to accept that the other necessarily exceeds the image, and thus the relation with the image, we would have constructed of them.

This is to suggest that the relation with the other entails a certain impossibility, an aporia wherein the other can neither be reduced to a point of identification nor experienced exclusively in their otherness. Any relation with the other is such that it would necessarily entail a process of identification, but an identification which is necessarily a recuperation to the *meconnaissance* of the subject in the form of the ego, an identification, that is, which is necessarily a misidentification which cannot but point to its own limitations. In so pointing to the limitations of identification, both in the sense that such identification is limited to recuperation and in the sense that such identification is necessarily *not all*, any relation with the other necessarily entails a beyond of identification but a *beyond* which must be understood as entailing a *with*. It is beyond identification and recuperation that we would experience the otherness of the other but such a beyond cannot be experienced in itself, that is, it can only insist at the limits of the symbolic and imaginary frameworks and, thus, only figure in subjective experience as the limitations of the symbolic and imaginary frameworks.

### 3.8 The Same and the other

The logic of such conjunction of the same and other, the impossibility of either reduction to the same or the reduction to exclusive separation of otherness, can be adduced in Husserl's phenomenological investigation of the experience of the other in his *Cartesian Meditations*.

*How can my ego, within his peculiar ownness, constitute under the name, 'experience of something other,' precisely something other – something, that is, with a sense that excludes the constituted from the concrete make-up of the sense-constituting I-myself, as somehow the latter's analogue?*  
(Husserl, 1991/1929: 94)

If the experience of the other is precisely something differentiated from the subject's own experience of his or her self, then what is there that would substantiate such an experience while still marking it as distinct from the experience of an object? On the one hand, if it were possible to experience subjectively the very subjectivity of the other, then there would be nothing to differentiate such an experience from one's own experience of one's self. On the other hand, if the other is merely experienced as *being there*, as another object in the world, then on what basis would one be justified in assuming its attributes to extend beyond this physical appearance?

if what belongs to the other's own essence were directly accessible, it would be merely a moment of my own essence, and ultimately he himself and I myself would be the same.

(Ibid.: 109)

In response to these dilemmas, Husserl argues for a deduction of the other on the basis of an analogy with the subject. The subject, for Husserl, experiences itself “as *uniquely* singled out” (Ibid.: 97).

there is included in my ownness, as purified from every sense pertaining to other subjectivity, a sense, ‘*mere nature*’, that has lost precisely that ‘by everyone’ and therefore must not by any means be taken for an abstract stratum of the world or of the world’s sense. Among these bodies belonging to this ‘Nature’ and included in my peculiar ownness, I then find my *animate organism* as *uniquely* singled out – namely as the only one of them that is not just a body but precisely an animate organism: the sole Object within my abstract world-stratum to which, in accordance with experience, I ascribe *fields of sensation* ..., the only Object ‘in’ which I ‘*rule and govern*’ *immediately*, governing particularly in each of its ‘organs’.

(Ibid.: 96-7)

That is, the subject perceives its own ‘psychophysical self’ as the only *noema* which is not merely the perception of a physical body but is conceived as that which is “reflexively related to itself” (Ibid.: 97). In order to conceive of the other as similarly capable or productive of such self-experience, such governing, the subject must conceive of the other analogically as the same but different. The essence of the other cannot be directly experienced without this effectively amounting to a recuperation to the self of the subject. It can, however, according to Husserl’s argument, be deduced as existent through the logic of recognition and analogy.

The analogy here would be one drawn by the subject on the basis of its recognition in the imaginary of a similarity between the appearance of the other and the image it, the subject, has of itself. This would be what in Lacan’s terms we might call ‘ego identification’. It is, however, not, in Lacan’s understanding, so easily reducible to an identification by analogy of the other with the self. As we have seen in the mirror stage, the subject can be understood to have constituted its own image of *itself*, its

ideal ego, on the basis of a misrecognition of the other. Any identification with the other on the basis of an analogy with the self is thus necessarily an identification of the other with the ideal ego, rendering the other analogous, not with the subject as such but with the subject's misrecognition of itself which was necessarily already constituted in misrecognition of the other as something other than the subject.

That is to say, the (mis)recognition of other on the basis of imaginary identification, precisely because it is misrecognised on the basis of imaginary identification, cannot account for the other in all its alterity. As imaginary identification would be, by definition, partial, that is, as it is only identification with the ideal ego, the other so comprehended or so constituted on the basis of such identification is necessarily not all. Something of the otherness in the other still persists as unknown. The very possibility of encountering the unknown in the other arises from this possibility of a point of perceived resemblance. Without such, there would be no suggestion of encountering the other as anything other than an object. It is insofar as the other is encountered as analogous to the subject that it is encountered as other than or more than an object. Insofar as the other is encountered as a speaking being or potentially speaking being, the otherness perceived in it insists on the subject.

Significant in Husserl's discussion of the possibility of intersubjectivity is his emphasis on the point of perception. True to the phenomenological method, Husserl's assertion of a distinction between *himself* and the other *noemata* is based on *his* own role of perceiver. As *he* perceives or intends the objects of his consciousness, *he*, as perceiver, is already there, already engaged in the conscious act. Such apperception of course speaks only of consciousness. The noema of the physicality of the self is

concluded through the consciousness of *his* own body being governed by *himself*. Through the perception of *his* touching an object and the contrastive perception of *his* touching a part of himself, Husserl concludes his relation to the body doing the touching and the thing touched is not the same. The analogous deduction of the other as another self, must then also follow from the logical priority of the perceiver. The other as other is necessarily logically subordinated to the self insofar as the self is construed as the perceiver.

Where, clearly, the Lacanian formulations we have been following complicate such a picture is in their theorizing of the subjective basis upon which any such analogous deduction might be said to take place. Any identification configured as an identification on analogy is dependent on the starting point with which the analogy is made. *Other* is necessarily thought as *other than*. *Same* is necessarily thought as *same as*. Either render themselves logically dependent upon that which would be located at the point of comparison. Whether *A* is other than *B* or *A* is the same as *B*, in both cases the identity is determined by *B*. The question in such a formulation would be that of initially identifying *B* in order to, subsequently, determine the otherness or sameness of *A*. What Lacan allows us to do is to understand that such a starting point is only ever a pure assumption.

Insofar as the encounter with the *Nebenmensch* brings with it that which can be recuperated to the understanding, the familiar, and that which remains alien, *das Ding*, we can understand that in such a formulation, to remain with our simplified terms,  $A^1$  is the same as *B* and  $A^2$  is other than *B* insofar as  $A^1$  is that which is taken to be recuperable to an identification with that of *B* which was constructed on the basis

of a misrecognition of or misidentification with a prior term and  $A^2$  is taken to be irrecoverable to such an identification. By recognising this bifurcation or separation in  $B$ , that there is a  $B^1$  and a  $B^2$ , where  $B^1$  would represent that which had been constructed on the basis of misrecognition and  $B^2$  would represent that which refused any reduction to such an identification on the basis of misrecognition, that which would be excluded from any such identification, we can understand that  $A^1$  is (taken to be) the same as  $B^1$  and  $A^2$  (is taken to be) the same as  $B^2$  with the proviso that it is only as  $A^2$  and  $B^2$  are only identified by their non-identity, by the impossibility of construing them as such, that  $A^2$  and  $B^2$  can be understood to be the same. So far, within such an abstraction, the terms of each pair,  $A^1 = B^1$  and  $A^2 = B^2$  would appear to be quite reversible. What renders the pairings irreversible is the fact of perception, or the starting point.  $A^2$  and  $B^2$  cannot strictly speaking be construed as reversible insofar as they are, effectively the same thing. There are not two points here to reverse. From the point of view located in the symbolic order there is that which cannot be known, that which would resist all representation. The insistence of this unrepresentable excess, *das Ding*, is what would be indicated in  $A^2$  and  $B^2$ , the insistence of a beyond of the symbolic and the imaginary both in or with the subject and in or with the other. As such, the two terms are not so much reversible as never reducible to two terms as such in the first instance. It is only from the question of perspective that the separation of the points into two might arise, a separation which would be properly understood as a misconstrual. The very question “His or mine?” (Lacan, 1992/1986: 198) asked of the indeterminate “interior or emptiness” (Ibid.) is, properly, inappropriate insofar as there is nothing which “indicates they are distinct” (Ibid.). The otherness, the alien in the other as *Nebenmensch* is irreducible to a

reversible relation not because of a fixed priority of one term over the other but rather because of a radical impossibility of distinguishing two points at all.

It is thus only in the case of  $A'$  and  $B'$  where a reversibility might be considered possible. Here reversibility is only conceivable on the basis of the hypothesis of a third external vantage point, one which would consider both elements from an equal distance. It is in the very impossibility of such an external vantage point that the irreversibility of the elements in question imposes itself. The only vantage point is one of the elements itself. Consequently, regardless of the formal identity of the two components, a formal identity which is at best illusory, constituted as it is on the basis of a double misrecognition, there imposes a contextual dissymmetry insofar as one point is necessarily the point of perspective, a requisite condition which necessarily repudiates the hypothesis of reversibility. Where  $A'$  stands for the other, the *Nebenmensch*, and  $B'$  stands for the ideal ego, the subject's misrecognised self image, we can understand that, beyond the insistence of *das Ding*, both  $A^2$  and  $B^2$ , where these terms are understood to be not so much formulated on the basis of an identity as to be misconstrued as two separable terms, there is another factor which renders the pair irreversible; that of the point of perception.

This is not, however, to suggest that the point of perception is in any way a pure given, that there is something which would independently insist apart from misrecognition or *das Ding* which would radically differentiate  $a$  from  $i(a)$ . The point of perception is rather that point which must be assumed, the *I° it (Ich° Es)* of *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*. What differentiates  $a$  from  $i(a)$  is the fact that  $i(a)$  is constituted as the image of what  $I$  would be, the ideal image one would have of

oneself, and  $a$ , as the other, is constituted as what would be other than  $me$  for  $me$ . Both points are constituted as *for* but inadequate to the subject, but, in being so constituted, both points are located or imagined separately for the subject.

What this allows us to understand is that in any attempted or projected identification between the subject and the other, there is (1) imaginary identification on the basis of misrecognition,  $i(a) \not\sim a$ ; (2) *das Ding*, as that which insists but refuses a recuperation to identification and thus refuses any allocation to either the subject,  $\exists$ , or the other; and (3) a necessary point from which the other is perceived as identifiable. What ought to be clear here is that the point of perception cannot be reduced to  $i(a)$ , that on the basis of which (mis)identification with the other is construed. It is rather because of the inherent proximity of  $i(a)$  to that which would perceive it, that  $i(a)$  is constituted as an (illusory) image of the self, that the process is deemed irreversible.

It is important here to acknowledge that this imaginary identification must also partake of symbolic mediation. That is to say, beyond or in addition to identification in the imaginary order, the subject, in order to be constituted as a subject must enter the realm of the symbolic. This “*secondary identification*” (Lacan, 1977/1948: 22) can be understood to emerge in the process of the Oedipus complex with the intervention of the father, or as we have seen previously, in the process of castration which would be synonymous with the subject’s emergence in the field of the symbolic. The initial stage of the Oedipus complex (though, this, for Lacan, should be understood as a logical rather than a chronological sequence) can be understood to be commensurate with the imaginary identification we have been discussing. In encountering the mother as lacking, the child, as we have seen previously, seeks to situate itself as the

object of her desire. Since the child is incapable of accomplishing this, is incapable, that is, of completely satisfying the mother, it encounters itself as also lacking. The ‘second’ stage of the Oedipus complex would be characterised by the intervention of the imaginary father, that is, the perception of desire as prohibited. It is in the third stage that the Real father is understood to intervene and display that he has the ‘phallus’, that which would satisfy desire. Crucial here is the point that the Real father is a function and is not essentially bound to the biological father. Rather, the Real father would be defined precisely in terms of that which is understood to possess the phallus, “the signifier of the desire of the Other” (Lacan, 1977/1958: 290), that which would satisfy the mother’s desire. The intervention of the Real father can be understood as allowing the child access to the symbolic through the process of renunciation of the always failed attempt to situate itself as the cause of the mother’s desire. This can be understood as the inauguration of law and, thus, the Real father can be understood in terms commensurate with the mythical father of the primal horde; he who would satisfy the women of the group, he who would be without lack. Through identification with the Real father, the subject can be understood to have adopted and internalised the prohibitory strictures understood to have been imposed by the father. This is the moment of incorporation we have seen in terms of Lacan’s reading of the myth of the primal horde.

Freud shows us, in fact, that the need to participate, which neutralizes the conflict inscribed after the murder in the situation of rivalry between the brothers, is the basis of the identification with the paternal Totem. Thus the Oedipal identification is that by which the subject transcends the aggressivity that is constitutive of the primary subjective individuation. ... it constitutes a step in the establishment of that distance by which, with feelings like respect, is realized a whole affective assumption of one’s neighbour.

(Lacan, 1977/1948: 23)

This 'secondary', symbolic, identification can be understood to be constitutive of the ego ideal,  $I(A)$ , that on the basis of which one would internalise the law and the symbolic order. In identifying with the father, in incorporating the father as prohibitory force, the subject locates itself in terms of the phallus, the signifier of desire which would be understood to be inaugural of the signifying chain. The position so assumed is one of symbolic identification. The phallus, as the signifier of desire, would be that in relation to which the subject would symbolically constitute itself.

It is in so far as the function of man and woman is symbolized, it is insofar as it's literally uprooted from the domain of the imaginary and situated in the domain of the symbolic, that any normal, completed sexual position is realized.

(Lacan, 1993/1981: 177)

It is the different positions adopted in relation to the phallus which would determine the symbolic and sexual identity of the subject. This can be seen most clearly in the formulae Lacan adopts in his schema of sexuation in *Encore*. Where the subject who would be structured as male would be understood to be wholly determined by the signifier, the subject who would be structured as female is not. Where the phallus is understood as the signifier of desire and thus, inseparable from this, the signifier which would be understood to introduce lack, it can be understood to be constitutive of the subject. Where the male-obsessional subject would be such that  $\neq_{\xi}\Phi\xi$ , that is, the whole of  $x$  is such that is subject to the phallic function, the hysteric-female subject would be such that  $\approx_{\xi}\Phi\xi$ , that is, not the whole of  $x$  is such that is subject to the phallic function. This is not to suggest that hysteric-female subjects would be such

that they would be excluded from the symbolic order;  $\forall x \square \neg x$ , that is, there is not one instance of  $x$  which is not (in part) subject to the phallic function.

It is thus only through symbolic identification that the subject can come to 'be' in the symbolic order and the precise manner in which this identification is undertaken or experienced is determinative of the particular (sexed) position the subject will take up. It is only from such a position that the misrecognition on the basis of the *same* and *other* can be understood. That is to say, without symbolic structuration, there is, properly, no position from which to perceive the (mis)identification in question. The subject as symbolically constituted, as barred,  $\exists$ , is the position of perception which would be assumed, not an already constituted or existent position in front of which such processes of identification would unfold. As we have seen, though, *das Ding*, as that which is beyond both imaginary and symbolic recuperation, would be that which would persist beyond both imaginary and symbolic identification.

Where the Husserlian conception of adduction of the other through the process of empathy is such that there is the suggestion of the other as a mere reduplication of the ego, in a Lacanian conception what stops a reduplication is the persistence of that which cannot be recuperated to such an identification, that which was never reducible to the ego and, where the *and* here does not necessitate any suggestion of consequence, is not reducible to any alter-ego. That the irreducibility of *das Ding* in either instance is not predicated on a logic of consequence is attested to by the fact of the impossibility of any firm exterior starting point. If, as is suggested in Husserl's formulation, the alter-ego were construed or apperceived on the basis of an originary ego, then it might be possible to claim that that which insists as an excess in

impossible relation to the ego is subsequently or consequently read into the apperception of the alter-ego construed on analogy with the original model. The problematic to such an understanding that Lacan allows us to grasp is the fact of their being no clear cut original from which to work. As the mirror stage indicates, not only is the ego itself construed upon a misrecognition of some exterior model – the child's own image, the parent or even a toy – but also the whole scenario of (mis)recognition is only ever received in a retroactive movement. That is to say, there is not available any comfortable, linear progression from ego to analogous ego formulated on a basis of identification of similarity but rather a disrupted circle or *reductio ad infinitum* of misrecognition from  $i(a)$  to  $a$  to  $i(a)$  .... What would disrupt such a knit of misrecognition is not only the fact of misrecognition, that is, that each moment would entail an encounter with that which could not be accounted, *das Ding*, but also the fact of the point of perception. In order for the process of (mis)identification to be seen to have taken place, there must be, no matter how obfuscated, a point from which the process is seen to have taken place. Both  $i(a)$  and  $a$ , the ideal ego and the other, are such that they are only ever taken to be. They are imaginary effects. They are construed by the subject,  $\Xi$ , and, as construed by the subject, form part of the psychological make-up of the subject. As we have seen previously, such a subject is by no means a pre-given unity but rather a position which must be assumed. The subject in coming to be can be understood, as we have seen previously, as the very split between the imaginary 'self-present ego' and the indeterminable, unfathomable otherness within itself. It is this location of the subject as barred,  $\Xi$ , not so much *in* as *as* the very disjunction of these two positions, which should be seen as the point of perspective. What this indicates is that the point of perspective is not in any predetermined sense the truth of the subject, its original or proper position. Rather,

the point of perception is the position the subject would come to assume and thus from which the subject would retroactively posit the very disjunction it could not inhabit.

Clearly here such a point is going to be unstable. As we have already seen, the assumption of the *I* in *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden* is only ever pulsational, it is not a matter of an assumption once and for all, but rather an assumption to be made again and again.

### 3.9 Badiou's Critique of Levinas

In *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (2001/1998a), Alain Badiou presents what might be understood to be an intervention on this very point. Against what he characterises as the “ethical predication based upon recognition of the other” (Badiou, 2001/1998a: 25), Badiou posits what we might understand as an ethics of the same, that is, that, for Badiou, “the real question [of ethics] ... is much more that of *recognising the Same*” (Ibid.). For Badiou any theory of ethics which would purport to found itself on a notion of difference from the other is destined to, at least philosophical, failure insofar as the positing of any foundational difference between self and other is necessarily ignorant of the constitutive difference which would entail to everything including the self itself.

Infinite alterity is quite simply *what there is*. Any experience at all is the infinite deployment of infinite differences. Even the apparently self-reflexive experience of myself is by no means the intuition of a unity but a labyrinth of

differentiations, and Rimbaud was certainly not wrong when he said: 'I am another.'

(Ibid.: 25-6)

Isolating Emmanuel Levinas as the originator of contemporary ethics of difference, Badiou argues that such ethics are, in their Levinasian form at least, essentially religious and as such cannot be "gathered under the name of philosophy" (Ibid.: 23).

In Badiou's reading, Levinas refuses traditional metaphysics on the basis of its prioritising of the Same. Such prioritising would be exemplified in the Husserlian notion of analogy we have seen above. Any conception of the other on the basis of analogy with the self is tantamount to a reduction to the Same wherein the other would not be experienced as other as such.

The dialectic of the Same and the Other, conceived 'ontologically' under the dominance of self-identity [*identité-à-soi*], ensures the absence of the Other in effective thought, suppresses all genuine experience of the Other, and bars the way to an ethical opening to alterity.

(Ibid.: 19)

This impossibility of adequately thinking the other from the basis of a system of thought predicated upon a notion of self-identity necessitates the adoption of another mode of thinking, one which does not rely upon the prioritising of the same but, rather, conceives of any posited identity as necessarily posterior to the encounter with the other. Levinas, according to Badiou, finds such an alternative in the Talmudic tradition wherein the law describes, not the presence of identity but the demand of and, thus, responsibility towards the other which would thus be necessarily prior to any conception of identity, whether the identity of the self or of the other. The quintessential or ultimate mode of so experiencing the other is, on Badiou's reading,

what Levinas has termed “the face to face” (Levinas, 1969/1961: 202), the encounter with the other as “the epiphany that occurs as a face” (Ibid.: 196). Levinas’s point in his invocation of the face of the other is that such an encounter, the appearance of the other as absolutely other, the epiphany of the face, is that which cannot be reduced to the logic of the same.

The face resists possession, resists my power. In its epiphany, in expression, the sensible, still graspable, turns into total resistance to the grasp.  
(Ibid.: 197)

From this encounter with the face of the other, with that which would be indicative of the ungraspable, Levinas argues that we find ourselves in a position of irreversible responsibility for the other.

In his use of the term ‘face’ and his insistence on its resistance to recuperation or comprehension, Levinas is clearly not intent on evoking the mere corporeality of the human face as we understand it in its everyday or biological sense. At the same time, however, the term ‘face’ cannot easily be reduced to a mere metaphor. Rather, Levinas’s use of this term should be understood as inclusive, signifying the empirical presence of the other as other person and transcending any attempted reduction to such a presence. The face marks the appearance of the other and announces the epiphany of that in the other which could not be reduced to a mere object of experience.

The face is present in its refusal to be contained. In this sense it cannot be comprehended, that is encompassed. It is neither seen nor touched – for in visual or tactile sensation the identity of the I envelops the alterity of the object, which becomes precisely a content.

(Ibid.: 194)

In this emphasis on the impossibility of comprehension, the fact that the face is such that it cannot be subsumed within the 'I', we should understand that the face is not the disclosure of the other, an unveiling of that which had hitherto been inaccessible. The face marks the advent of that which will remain beyond comprehension and yet insists.

The presentation of the face, expression, does not disclose an inward world previously closed, adding thus a new region to comprehend or to take over. On the contrary, it calls to me above and beyond the given that speech already puts in common among us. What one gives, what one takes reduces itself to the phenomenon, discovered and open to the grasp, carrying on an existence which is suspended in possession – whereas the presentation of the face puts me into relation with being.

(Ibid.: 212)

It is insofar as the face can neither be refused nor grasped that, for Levinas, it demands a response. Such a response cannot be reduced to the kind of reaction one would give towards an object of comprehension precisely insofar as the response is a response towards that which cannot be grasped. Where one reacts to an encounter with that which is familiar by identifying it, by compartmentalising it with its type, such luxury is not afforded by the epiphany of the face which announces that which would have no compartment, which is beyond typification. As such, for Levinas, the response invoked in the encounter with the face of the other cannot be maintained in a straight-forward one-to-one relation. That which cannot be grasped cannot be assigned to the other exclusively. To do so would be to assume to know, precisely to grasp, or comprehend it and thus to assign it a place in one's world. As ungraspable, the beyond evoked in the face of the other remains beyond and thus is irreducible to *that* other as an object of my interest or perception.

*The existing of this being*, irreducible to phenomenality understood as a reality without reality, is effectuated in the non-postponable urgency with which he requires a response. This response differs from the ‘reaction’ that the given gives rise to in that it cannot remain ‘between us,’ as is the case with the steps I take with regard to a thing. Everything that takes place here ‘between us’ concerns everyone, the face that looks at it places itself in the full light of the public order, even if I draw back from it to seek with the interlocutor the complicity of a private relation and a clandestinity.

(Ibid.)

The indeterminate and over-determined status of the face points to the fact that it is the name for one of those border concepts, a marker for a limit point ‘between’ the familiar and the unfamiliar. The face marks that which refuses comprehension and yet manifests as an appearance. As comprehension would entail comprehension in language, that which could be conceptualised within, in Lacanian terms, the symbolic order, the face, as that which refuses comprehension, marks the limit of language. In so doing, for Levinas, it marks the origin, the very possibility of language. In Levinas’s formulation, the face-to-face is the “primordial event” of signification which “makes the sign function possible” (Ibid.: 206). That is to say, the face marks not only the limit of the comprehensible and thus the limit of the signifiable – where the possibility of comprehension entails the possibility of signification – but also, in so doing, and because it does so, indicates the very possibility of language or signification in the first place. For Levinas, the subject cannot be reduced to a ‘transcendental consciousness’ such as Husserl propounds, a consciousness which would be constitutive of the phenomena of its experience and, in terms of intersubjectivity, as we have seen, constitute the other on the basis of an analogy with its own apperception of itself. Rather, for Levinas, the subject can only be conceived after and on the basis of the encounter with the other not because the other would somehow provide a model in which the subject might recognise itself or from which it could constitute its own identity but because it is in encounter with the other that

the very possibility of language and signification, that which would allow the possibility of comprehension, arises. For Levinas, the “primordial essence of language is to be sought ... in the presentation of meaning” (Ibid.), the advent of the possibility of such meaning would be contemporaneous with the advent of the other and the face to face encounter. This is to say, that the other both precedes language and announces the possibility of language.

Clearly, Levinas’s argument here does not attest to a conventional chronology. To insist on such a conventional chronology would be to assume that language comes once and for all. That is to say, the commonsensical view which would uphold that when one encounters another person one already has language at one’s disposal and thus that Levinas’s insistence on the constitutive status of the face to face clearly misses the ‘fact’ that in any encounter with another person one is already furnished with linguistic armoury or saddled with linguistic baggage, is ignorant of the pulsative status of the subjectivity described here. The encounter with the other is, as the primordial point, not something which could then be relegated to the past but must insist again and again through every encounter with the other, through every appearance of the face of the other. Every instance of language, as discourse, as thought, is, for Levinas, invocative of and dependent upon the instantiatory face to face encounter.

Meaning is the face of the Other<sup>2</sup>, and all recourse to words takes place already within the primordial face to face of language. Every recourse to words presupposes the comprehension of the primary signification, but this

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Other’ with a capital ‘O’ is Lingis’s translation of Levinas’s ‘autrui’ (the personal other), distinguished from ‘autre’ (the impersonal other) and should, thus, in no way be understood as commensurate with Lacan’s big ‘Other’, the field of language. See translator’s footnote, Levinas, E. (1969/1961), p.24-25

comprehension, before being interpreted as a 'consciousness of,' is society and obligation.

(Ibid.: 206-7)

It is for this reason that Levinas can claim the primacy of responsibility. If "the essence of language is the relation with the Other" (Ibid.: 207), then this relation with the other cannot be reduced in any way to an already constituted consciousness as such consciousness would necessarily depend upon language for its conception. In this way the encounter with the other calls into question the fragile identity of the subject and necessitates its being constituted again. As Levinas states earlier in *Totality and Infinity*,

To be I is, over and beyond any individuation that can be derived from a system of references, to have identity as one's content. The I is not a being that always remains the same, but is the being whose existing consists in identifying itself, in recovering its identity throughout all that happens to it. It is the primal identity, the primordial work of identification.

(Ibid.: 36)

Identity is not something that can be fixed but is better understood as a process. What defines the subject, for Levinas, is not its identity in the sense of knowing what it *is*, but rather its identification in the sense of its perpetually constituting itself. Such constitution is necessarily subsequent to the encounter with the face of the other.

If the very possibility of language, of thought, of comprehension relies upon the encounter with the other, then all thought, including any thought of oneself, is only possible on the basis of a relation with the other. Language, for Levinas, is not the tool of consciousness but, rather, that which arises as a possibility only from the other and thus consciousness or self-identification can only be posterior to the encounter

with the other. Not only would this suggest that the traditional view of recognition of the other on the basis of their identity with the self is misguided insofar as there is no identity of the self before encounter with the other on the basis of which the other might be recognised but also that, in locating the encounter with the other prior to any self-identity, we would locate an openness to sociality before and as a condition of any self-conception, a self-conception which in turn would necessarily be reliant on this sociality. As the other, in the encounter one would have with them, puts into question one's identity, this encounter can be understood not only as a beginning but also as a demand.

The encounter with the face of the other, for Levinas, is characterised by 'expression'. Such expression cannot be reduced to any conventional notion of language in use insofar as what is expressed in expression is not the articulation of terms which would somehow already refer to a meaning within the totality of a system. The expression evident in the face of the other precedes any such "circle of understanding" (Ibid.: 201). The expression in the face of the other is rather the limit point where the system of language can no longer offer a guarantee, where the assemblage of inter-referential signs of language can no longer hold. It is for reason of this 'lack', this failure of language, that responsibility manifests in the face to face encounter. For Levinas, the demand entailed in the encounter with the other, constitutive of language and, thus, outwith any recourse to the guarantee of language, necessitates bearing witness to oneself and, crucially, providing or becoming, assuming oneself as, the guarantor of this attestation. Where the confines of language can no longer provide the security of identity, one must assume one's identification upon oneself. Such an assumption cannot, for Levinas, be a solitary assumption insofar as the questioning and command

which would give rise to the necessity of assumption, which would render the assumption possible in the first place, only comes from the appearance of the other. One is thus responsible for oneself but only insofar as one is already responding to the other. Response and responsibility are thus conjoined and one is, insofar as one is called upon to respond, responsible in this responding not only for oneself but, before this, for the other.

Crucially, for Levinas, the encounter with the other in the face to face cannot be reduced to or maintained as a simple relationship of one for the other. Insofar as the face of the other, understood as the epiphany of that which would be beyond comprehension, cannot be reduced to a monadic entity, the face of the other is indicative of humanity.

It is not that there would first be the face, and then the being it manifests or expresses would concern himself with justice; the epiphany of the face qua face opens humanity.

(Ibid.: 213)

The encounter with the face of the other can be understood as evocative of justice, a responsibility which exceeds the duality of the one for the other, precisely because the face of the other cannot be reduced to a comprehensible singularity. Always, for Levinas, in the face of the other is a reference to a third party, a third party which would be understood as “the whole of humanity which looks at us” (Ibid.).

For Levinas, this “whole of humanity” cannot be understood in the logic of a genus wherein individuals would be united in resemblance or already constituted points of definition or identity. Biologically defined, *homo sapiens* may constitute a genus but

this is, by definition, only a biological genus. Humanity understood as community is, for Levinas, a fraternity of unique parties. If identity, as we have seen, can only be understood as a process of identification wherein there can be no self-contained and stable identity which would precede the encounter with the other, then there can be no identity which could be understood as already common on the basis of which community might be founded. The very possibility of identification and thus of community arises from the encounter with the face of the other but at the same time, it would appear, the very possibility of encountering the other qua other, in order to be recognisable in any way, arises from the possibility of a human community.

This possibility of a human community would be such that it would necessitate individualities whose very identity is constituted in their singular response to the other. However, if the possibility of such a constitution of identity, albeit identity as process, is reliant upon the encounter with the other qua other, then something else, beyond the response commanded by the face of other encountered must be understood to initiate the possibility of the fraternity to which this would attest. That is to say, if the possibility of a human community relies upon the unicity of individuals whose identity would be constituted in the response to the face of the other and the epiphany of the face of the other evokes the whole of humanity, then, without the instantiation of an exterior point of reference, we can be understood to have resumed the very 'circle of understanding' Levinas sought to escape. This exterior point, for Levinas, is suggested in the very term he chooses to describe the community which would be a community beyond mere biological identification; fraternity. Fraternity clearly implies a paternity (not to mention a maternity), a single source from which 'we', the community-to-come attested to in the encounter with the

face of the other, would emerge. Levinas is, however, quick to insist that paternity, and this is perhaps what would set it apart from a maternity, is not reducible to a causality. Paternity is, rather, for Levinas, the “establishment of a unicity with which the unicity of the father does and does not coincide” (Ibid.: 214). The father-child relationship is not one which could be reduced to a pure resemblance, an emission wherein the father simply causes the son to be. Rather for Levinas, the father-son relationship “designates a relation of rupture and a recourse at the same time” (Ibid.: 278). The fraternity which would emerge from the paternal, which would have the paternal as its source, entails a double relation with this paternal, a relation both of attachment and disjunction. The son has recourse to the father insofar as the father is that without which the son would not be but the son is also necessarily separate from the father, a separation without which the son would not be.

The son resumes the unicity of the father and yet remains exterior to the father: the son is a unique son. ... The unique child, as elected one, is accordingly at the same time unique and non-unique. Paternity is produced as an innumerable future; the I engendered exists at the same time as unique in the world and as brother among brothers. I am I and chosen one, but where can I be chosen, if not from among other chosen ones, among equals.

(Ibid.: 279)

It is, for Levinas, the existence of the father and, more specifically, the love of the father, the father’s love, which allows for the possibility of a human community. The love of the father for the son, insofar as it is understood to entail the love between unique (separate) but dependent (inseparable) individualities, is, for Levinas, the “sole relation possible with the very unicity of another” (Ibid.).

The very status of the human implies fraternity and the idea of the human race. Fraternity is radically opposed to the conception of a humanity united by resemblance, a multiplicity of diverse families arisen from the stones cast behind by Deucalion, and which, across the struggle of egoisms, results in a

human city. Human fraternity has then two aspects: it involves individualities whose logical status is not reducible to the status of ultimate differences in a genus, for their singularity consists in each referring to itself. (An individual having a common genus with another individual would not be removed enough from it.) On the other hand, it involves the commonness of a father, as though the commonness of race would not bring together enough. Society must be a fraternal community to be commensurate with the straightforwardness, the primal proximity, in which the face presents itself to my welcome. Monotheism signifies this human kinship, this idea of a human race that refers back to the approach of the Other in the face, in a dimension of height, in responsibility for oneself and for the Other.

(Ibid.: 214)

We might here recall the discussion of the significance of the father in Freud's "scientific myth" (Freud, 2001/1921: 135) of the primal horde. There too the father emerges as the figure essential for the possibility of the constitution of a fraternity. For Freud, as we have seen, inherent in the relation of the sons to the father is an ambiguity of feelings, an entwining of love and aggression, a simultaneous bonding and separation. Again, for Freud, it is from this relation to this figure of the father, and the love and aggression which would characterise this relation, that the very possibility of community, of society emerges through the murder and consumption of the father, that is, through destruction and identification as the catalysts for the inauguration of the social pact and the institution of law. What, as emphasised by Lacan, is crucial in Freud's myth is its very status as myth. The scene of the primal horde works as an explanation of the origins of society and law not insofar as it is a historical event which would have happened but insofar as it is a myth which illuminates something of the psychic relations of the subject who subscribes to the myth. The events of the myth, the pre-eminence of and the surpassing of the father, function as a retroactively posited situation, the 'truth' of which resides only in its postulation, not its occurrence. In order for the relationship with the father, in all its ambiguity, to function as the ground of the possibility of a fraternal community for

and from within which the myth can be retroactively posited, the fraternal community must already have emerged. Just as the events of the myth, as we saw in Lacan's reading of Freud, would be inconceivable without the law of which the myth is supposed to have been constitutive, so in Levinas's postulation of a father as constitutive of the community of fraternity which would ground the possibility of the encounter with the other, the community must already exist in order for the paternal origin to be posited as its origin. That Levinas here invokes the example of monotheism might be understood as his appealing to God as the 'missing' ground which would guarantee the fraternity which would be the necessary context for the face to face encounter with the other. If, however, we read Levinas with Lacan, we might understand this less as the unjustifiable postulation of a 'higher entity' than as the assumption of a necessary but necessarily retroactively posited *aitia*. If, as we have seen, the law which would substantiate the possibility of any community necessitates a ground it cannot itself provide, then this ground can only be postulated as prior to that which it would be understood to have founded from within that which is founded. It is only in an appeal to something external that the *reductio ad infinitum* of authorisation can (be seen to) be halted.

If the face to face encounter is that which would initiate the possibility of subjective identity, if it can be understood to be instantiative of language as that which would refuse the complicity of a self-sufficient one to one relation, if it can, that is, be understood as testimony to the insistence of the wider human community, a community, moreover, which would be understood as a community of equality, a fraternity, then this community and the possibility of language which would bind the community must be inaugurated from outwith the terms constituted in the face-to-face

encounter. It would thus be for this reason that *something* other than the other person insists in the encounter with the other as other person. It is this other than the other which Levinas terms the absolute other.

What this indicates is that the otherness encountered in the other is not reducible to any ‘concrete’, cultural, psychological or even inherent difference between the subject and the other. The otherness of the other is rather invocative of an otherness which would exceed the other in both their corporeality and in any impression the subject might have of them. That is to say, the otherness of the other, what Levinas terms “an other absolutely other” (Levinas, 1969/1961: 218), is such that it would resist any recuperation to identification by the subject. This is, consequently, a strictly asymmetric relation in that the absolute otherness attested to can only be attested to in the first person relating of a relationship.

These differences between the Other and me do not depend on different ‘properties’ that would be inherent in the ‘I’, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, in the Other, nor on different psychological dispositions which their minds would take on from the encounter. They are due to the I-other conjuncture, to the inevitable *orientation* of being ‘starting from oneself’ towards ‘the Other.’

(Ibid.: 215)

As we have seen previously, the approach of the other must necessarily pertain to a particular perspective. There is not available a third position from which the relation of ‘I’ to the other could be perceived objectively. Any claim to such a third position would necessarily become, once again, a particular perspectival position. The absolute otherness to which the face of the other attests must then at one and the same time appear only to the ‘I’ and be differentiated in this particularity. There is, in Levinas’s terms, no available “correlation from which the I would derive its identity

and the Other his alterity” (Ibid.). The relationship of the *I* to the other necessitates the assumption of the position of the *I* from which the relation is perceived. To assume to see the relationship in or as a totality is to assume to adopt an impossible position outwith the relationship. That is to say, there is no position from which the other can be seen to be other in the simple sense of being different from the *I*. Such a judgement would assume to ‘see’ two comparables which could be distinguished on the ground of their similarity or difference. On the contrary, for Levinas, the relationship can only be experienced, and thus be ‘seen’ to occur, from within the terms of the relationship. The assumption of the occupation of a third point is merely a reduplication of the problematic. The encounter with the face of the other thus refuses any totalisation, and thus necessarily opens towards the absolute otherness which would be indicative of the inherent limitation of finitude.

The identity of the *I* comes to it from its egoism whose insular sufficiency is accomplished by enjoyment, and to which the face teaches the infinity from which this insular sufficiency is separated. This egoism is indeed founded on the infinitude of the other, which can be accomplished only by being produced as the idea of Infinity in a separated being. The other does indeed invoke this separated being, but this invocation is not reducible to calling for a correlative.

(Ibid.: 216)

The encounter with the other as other person, as the relationship cannot be recuperated to any totality, is necessarily indicative of an infinity beyond the finitude of the *I* and of any attempt to recuperate the other to the *I* on the basis of identification or recognition. This would be the absolute otherness with which the *I* would find itself in an asymmetric relation.

For Badiou, this absolute otherness is “obviously the ethical name for God” (Badiou, 2001/1998a: 22). It is perhaps, however, not quite so obvious that this is the case. Levinas’s description of the altogether other as that which would insist in the encounter with the other, that which would refuse totalisation in any recuperation to the Same or the ego of the self, is, at best, ambiguous. At the same time, it ought to be acknowledged that Levinas does, as we have seen above, appeal to *something* beyond finite relations which would ground or guarantee the relations of alterity which would emanate in the approach of the other. The question is whether the persistence of such a guarantor, the paternal to the fraternity of humanity, operates as an assumption within Levinas’s thought or whether it rather, as with Lacan and Freud, assumes the place of a theoretical conjecture. That is to say, the question might be phrased as whether or not Levinas is claiming that this primordial father actually exists or whether he is claiming that the postulation of such a figure functions in the psyche as a necessary limit to and thus assumed guarantee or guarantor of the order of relations which would be commensurate with and necessary to the functioning of society. To characterise that which is by definition beyond comprehension would be to impossibly reduce it to a moment of subjective comprehension. To declare that the “Altogether-Other ... is quite obviously the ethical name for God” (Ibid.) is to accuse Levinas of having confused that which is by definition beyond the knowable with something which could be known.

Arguably, it is the invocation of the term God, both by Levinas and Badiou which might be understood to obfuscate the issue here. Badiou’s claim appears to be that God, as a name for unity, for Oneness, is not tenable. To make a claim for the unity of what lies beyond comprehension is to have claimed that what lies beyond

comprehension can at least be characterised and while it may not be possible to comprehend such Oneness in its totality, it does remain characterised and thus comprehended, albeit theoretically, as a Oneness, as a totality. As we have seen with Lacan, such a claim for totality is only ever a postulation arising from the experience of incompleteness. The very concept of a totalising oneness is self-refuting insofar as oneness must, in order to be thought, be posited against *something* else and thus engender difference.

That which would persist beyond comprehension is described by Levinas as the Infinite, not in the sense that it would be infinity positively experienced and impossibly embraced in itself as infinity but rather as that which would necessarily mark the limitation of conscious experience itself; that which cannot be thought. The limit of the finitude of understanding is indicative of the infinitude of what cannot be understood. It is in the encounter with the other, before the face of the other, that, for Levinas, one would experience infinity as that of the other which would exceed “*the idea of the other in me*” (Levinas, 1969/1961: 50).

Insofar as Levinas’s can be understood to be characterising that which would be beyond comprehension as a definite One, Levinas would be guilty of claiming to know, to have brought within the circle of understanding that which would by definition refuse any comprehension, any understanding. Insofar as this is not the case, insofar, that is, as that we read Levinas in a manner significantly more commensurate with Lacan, and thus understand this beyond of comprehension as insistent but ungraspable, as structurally untotalisable but, equally, irrefusable, then we need not read Levinas’s absolute other as “the ethical name for God” (Badiou,

2001/1998a: 22) but might rather read it as commensurate with Lacan's "absolute Other" (Lacan, 1992/1986:52), that is with *das Ding*.

Consenting to such a reading is not, however, to dismiss utterly Badiou's characterisation of Levinas's ethics as religious or as a pious discourse. The encounter with the absolutely other in the face of the other, precisely insofar as it is incommensurate with comprehension throws into question the totality of comprehension which would have otherwise contained subjective self-identity. Such questioning necessarily demands a response, a reconfiguration of identity. Such a reconfiguration cannot, however, be something given but must always be subjectively assumed. Moreover, insofar as the very possibility of identity is reliant on the language of and encounter with the other, that is, insofar as the throwing into question which would allow the possibility of the process of identification is necessarily preceded by the face of the other, the identity assumed by the subject is always an assumption in response to the other. Such response becomes responsibility precisely because in assuming the weight of the guarantee of one's own identity and thus one's relation to the other, one is also, necessarily, assuming the weight of the guarantee for the other with whom one takes oneself to be in relation. Such an assumption of responsibility is, as we have seen before, to assume the location of and as one's own cause. As such an assumption, following the logic of the cause we have outlined earlier, is such that it can appeal to no ground upon which to guarantee itself, it is what we might rightly characterise as a leap of faith, insofar as we understand such a leap of faith to be coterminous with a pure assumption.

Levinas's idea of ethics would then entail a certain religiosity, not because it invokes, or can be read as invoking, God as the name for that which would exceed comprehension, that which would mark the limit of thought and, thus, that which in the other, as in the subject itself, refuses any recuperation to understanding. Rather, what we might characterise as a certain religiosity would be the pure assumption without ground which necessarily insists at the limit of any system of thought, including any philosophy, including Badiou's philosophy. As we have noted earlier, this is a point that Badiou himself would appear to concede when, for example, he notes that the mathematical ontology upon which he founds much of his philosophy is, itself, established "in the constraint of options of thought whose choice no purely mathematical prescription can norm" (Badiou, A. (1998), *Petit manuel d'inesthétique*, Paris: Seuil, 37. quoted in Hallward, 2003: 312).

It is precisely such a leap of faith, such a decision which "no purely mathematical prescription can norm" (Ibid.), which places the subject in relation with not only the other, as other person, but also with itself. It is the pulsational emergence of the subject in the instance of assumption, in the *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*, which renders any relation, with the other, the Other and the subject possible. Such a leap of faith or assumption can be understood as co-terminous with what we have termed the subjective perspective. This is not, then, to deny Badiou's point that infinite alterity is "quite simply *what there is*" (Badiou, 2001/1998a: 25). It is merely to add the clarificatory note that while infinite alterity is "quite simply *what there is*" (Ibid.), such infinite alterity must still allow for the assumption of an, albeit fragile and pulsative, position from which such infinite alterity might be experienced.

Badiou claims that,

Even the apparently reflexive experience of myself is by no means the intuition of a unity but a labyrinth of differentiations, and Rimbaud was certainly not wrong when he said: 'I am another.' There are as many differences, say, between a Chinese peasant and a young Norwegian professional as between myself and anybody at all, including myself.

As many, but also, then, *neither more nor less*.

(Ibid.: 25-6)

Badiou's assertion here, that there are "*neither more nor less*" differences "between myself and anybody at all, including myself" (Ibid.) should not be understood as an attempt to equalise difference such that difference becomes once again a unity. The One is not. To read Badiou's "*neither more nor less*" (Ibid.) as a recuperation of unity would be to miss the point. It is rather the case that in the pure multiplicity there is no warrant to distinguish the difference between differences. To isolate, separate and prioritise the difference one experiences in the other is to refuse the difference one necessarily experiences in oneself.

This is precisely the point made by Lacan in his discussion of the assignation of evil to *das Ding*.

that which is most myself in myself, that which is at the heart of myself, and beyond me, insofar as the self stops at the level of those walls to which one can apply a label. What in French at least serves to designate the notion of self or same (*même*), then, is this interior or emptiness, and I don't know if it belongs to me or to nobody.

This is what my sophism signifies; it reminds me that my neighbor possesses all the evil Freud speaks about, but it is no different from the evil I retreat from in myself. To love him, to love him as myself, is necessarily to move towards some cruelty. His or mine?, you will object. But haven't I just explained to you that nothing indicates that they are distinct? It seems rather that they are the same, on condition that those limits which oblige me to posit myself opposite the other as my fellow man are crossed.

(Lacan, 1992/1986: 198)

As Lacan makes very clear, the evil “my neighbour possesses ... is no different from the evil I retreat from in myself”, “nothing indicates that they are distinct”, “they are the same” (Ibid.). Again, however, the orientation attested to in such experience is crucial here. The otherness one experiences in oneself may be no different from the otherness one experiences in the other, which is precisely not to say that the otherness the other experiences in themselves and the otherness the other experiences in its neighbour is no different from the otherness I experience in my neighbour and in myself. To seek such a generalisation would be to assume to take an impossible position outwith oneself. The other always remains other and while, as Rimbaud claimed, in quite different circumstances, “je est un autre” (Rimbaud, 1963/1871: 268), it is the perception *from*, the otherness *from*, which renders the experience radically asymmetrical. Just as, for Lacan, there is no Other of the Other (Lacan, 1998/1975: 81), also there can be no experience of what would be the other for the other. In assuming itself as its own cause, the subject necessarily assumes the cause of ‘all’ insofar as this ‘all’, like the law, like the system, like the other, appears only for the subject. Crucial here, however, is that the position of subjectivity remains within the infinite of multiplicity. If the otherness encountered in the other cannot be separated from the otherness encountered in the self, then this is neither to recourse to a position of atomistic individuality nor to recourse to a conception of subjectivity being but a part of an unceasing flux of difference. Where the former would suppose a certain self-sufficiency of the subject which would set it apart from the other, a totality of the self, the latter would suppose the very oneness Badiou shows to be impossible, a totality of the cosmos. In opposition to these two positions, the position of subjectivity assumed is necessarily both other to the other and other to itself

without these othernesses being reducible to a one, insofar as a one would be comprehensible. It is in this sense that we should understand Lacan's characterisation of "*das Ding*, as the absolute other of the subject" (Lacan, 1992/1986: 52). *Das Ding*, as otherness, is extimate to the subject, it is "strange to me, although it is at the heart of me" (Ibid.: 71).

### **3.10 The (Im)possibility of the other**

The other is not, then, *something* which could be adduced in any certainty as a separate and coherent entity. The other is, insofar as the other attests to a subjective experience, necessarily divided between a misrecognition and absolute otherness. That is to say, there is that of the other which the subject can recuperate to an understanding, which is necessarily the other reduced to the terms of the same, and there is that of the other which refuses any recuperation. In neither instance, however, can the other be separated absolutely from the subject insofar as the other is only the other insofar as it is experienced by the subject. This is, however, not to place the subject in some position of absolute priority. The subject's experience of itself is only possible on the basis of an experience of the other both in terms of the language of the other and in terms of the constitution of its own image of itself in response to the experience of the other. One is dependent upon the other in order to be 'called into' subjectivity and, as such, subjectivity can never be reduced to a monadology. Such an encounter with the other, as it is dependent itself on the possibility of the Other, the symbolic network which would facilitate and describe the contours of community, can neither arise nor be maintained in an isolation of one for the other. The subject, as

it is not a monad, cannot be understood to *be* the ground of its own position but must assume this ground.

This is clearly, though, to propound a theory of ethics which does not explain what one must do, how one must act. That is to say, it is not to offer an ethics with any positive contents. In assuming the ground of its own subjectivity, the subject clearly is given no access to the truth of a good which would guide its actions. It is rather to posit a freedom from any such truths. This because there are no grounds available other than the fragile ground of the subject's own assumption, where any other potential ground would properly be taken as logically posterior to the subject's assumption of a position of I, insofar as any other such ground would necessitate beyond it the assumption that *I* accept or endorse this belief, explanation or ground. That is to say, insofar as no system of explanation or system of morality can account for its own constitution, its own justification, the limit point of any such system must lie with the subject.

This is not, however, to posit the notion that somehow anything goes. The subject, as we have seen, even in assuming the weight of its own cause, even assuming the position of ultimate justification for that which it would endorse is bound to the Other (the symbolic order) and the other (in the sense of other potential subjects) without which it would have no position of subjectivity to assume. That is to say, the subject in assuming the location of its own cause is necessarily doing so, to paraphrase Levinas, in the face of the other, that is, in response to the other but also, with Lacan, the subject is assuming such a place in the place of, within the confines of, the Other, the symbolic order, without which no subjectivity would possible.

Clearly then, this is not to advocate a certain conception of the good that one might bestow upon the other. But neither is it to endorse the free reign of any evil we would enact upon the other.

The good is not some given which could be received and made available for all. Rather the good is that which is posited as what would ultimately motivate one's desire, as the impossible beyond. What the subject chooses to locate in the place of this good, that which the subject nominates, in assuming responsibility for the desire that is in them, in naming their desire and thus specifying their desire, is the good configured for and by that subject. Any such attempt to generalise the good is unwarranted insofar as to do so would be reduce the other to a pure point of imaginary identification, an object. To do so would be to refuse the very otherness of the other, that in the other which would refuse any such recuperation. In this sense, we do not know what the other's good is.

Similarly, to impute evil to the other and, thus, to seek to justify the aggression one might enact upon the other is also to assume to have somehow impossibly gained access to the very otherness of the other which is by definition beyond comprehension. As we have seen, the evil I detect in the neighbour "is no different from the evil I retreat from in myself" (Lacan, 1992/1986: 198). To justify the aggression one would take out on the other on the basis of the evil one detects in him or her is to, again, reduce the other to an imaginary object, the object of a fantasy in which the other would be taken to be the cause of and thus proper object of one's aggression. That is to say, the aggression the subject would 'take out' on the other is

always misdirected insofar as the other, as other, is never *it*, never the proper cause and thus proper recipient of such aggressivity. This point is illustrated in the Hegelian master-slave scenario and in Lacan's formulation of the mirror stage we have discussed above. The threat of the other which might be taken to give rise to aggressivity is only ever taken as such on the basis of an imaginary relation. This is not also to suggest that aggression arises only as an imaginary effect and should or even could somehow be relinquished. What it is to suggest is that the cause of aggression, like that of desire, can only properly be assumed by the subject. To assume that the other is in some way responsible for the evil one would impute to him or her is to deny oneself as the cause of one's own position of subjectivity. To justify one's aggression towards the other is to blame the other for what is properly one's responsibility.

Returning to the question of the love of one's neighbour and, particularly, Freud's questioning, "how shall we manage to act like this? How will it be possible?" (Freud, 2002/1930: 46), we can see that the question is misplaced insofar as it assumes that the narcissistic love predicated on identification is somehow the norm from which love for the less proximate other would be a deviation. Love for those closest, those with whom one might forge a bond on the basis of recognition is precisely that which would reduce the other to the status of an object of identification, an alter-ego, that is, a reduplication of or conjecture based on one's own misrecognition of oneself. Such love is not predicated so much on positive differences, but rather on positive similarities. Moreover, as the so-called 'self', as the measure against which such similarities or differences would be judged, is none other than the ideal ego, the ego's idealised image of the self, not the subject, and such an ideal image is only ever

founded on the basis of a mis-identification with the other in the first place, then any such identification is necessarily illusory and alienating. Put simply, such an identification on the basis of similarity or, on the flip side of this, such difference adduced on the basis of a lack of similarity, necessarily fails to account for both the otherness which would be proper to the other, that of the other which cannot be recuperated to an already constituted image, and the otherness which would be central to the constitution of the subject itself.

It is only in moving beyond such imaginary ego identification that the subject can assume a position of subjectivity and, in so doing, assume a position in relation to the other which is not one of recuperation and dismissal. That is, a position wherein the subject assumes both the weight of responsibility for its own position and opens itself to both the absolute otherness of the other and the absolute otherness in itself; there is nothing to suggest that they are distinct (Lacan, 1992/1986: 198).

The logic here is one of impossibility and it is only as such that we can understand the movement necessary here. If the other, insofar as the subject encounters them, is inevitably split between that which could be recuperated on the basis of identity and that which refuses any such recuperation, this is not to refuse the unicity of the other. That such unicity cannot be accounted for or understood, or precisely insofar as this unicity cannot be accounted for or understood, is to suggest that the only position the subject could entertain towards the other is one of perpetual openness. Such openness should not be understood as a positive moral imperative, *thou shalt be open to the other*, but rather arises from the very impossibility of totalising the other, of capturing what the other *is*. Beyond the imaginary other configured on the basis of one's

misrecognition, one encounters the otherness of the other which refuses any identification. What is imputed to this otherness, what is imagined to lie beyond, can, clearly, neither be verified nor assumed to be exhaustive. Moreover, in transcending the imaginary relations with the other one necessarily acknowledges at least the potential unicity of the other. To refuse such a potential is to immediately recuperate the other to a limited understanding.

It is in this sense that Badiou is quite right to dismiss the culture of “‘right to difference’” (Badiou, 2001/1998a: 24) on the grounds of its underlying and deep rooted hypocrisy.

the self-declared apostles of ethics and of the ‘right to difference’ are clearly *horrified by any vigorously sustained difference*. For them, African customs are barbaric, Muslims are dreadful, the Chinese are totalitarian, and so on. As a matter of fact, the celebrated ‘other’ is acceptable only if he is a *good* other – which is to say what, exactly, if not *the same as us*?

(Ibid.)

The problem with such “‘respect for difference’” (Ibid.) is that it precisely assumes to objectify the other, to distinguish the other on the basis of positive differences, characteristics which can only be differentiated from the same on the basis of identification or lack thereof. As such, any difference adduced is only the difference between one’s image of the other and one’s image of one’s self. That of the other which refuses comprehension is precisely not respected but is rather reduced to an object of thought, an object which is, properly, the responsibility of the one to whom it occurs.

This is not, however, to conclude that no relation with the other should be sought. The otherness of the other necessarily does insist and, moreover, forms the basis of the possibility of subjectivity. The point would be that beyond any narcissistic and aggressive reduction of the other to a point of identification the otherness of the other still demands a response. Insofar as any recuperation is, by definition, necessarily inadequate to that which would insist, any recuperation necessarily entails a remainder which must then persist.

In assuming responsibility for one's position as subject one is necessarily assuming responsibility for the manner in which one construes the other but one is also then necessarily maintaining an openness towards that of the other which one cannot construe. To assume to contain the other as one's image of the other, to assume to be able to totalise the other is to reduce the other to an object of fantasy. The imaginary identification in fantasy is, as we have seen, precisely that which would support desire. To relinquish the fantasy would be to encounter the abyss of *jouissance*, the unbearable impossibility which would be destructive of the subject. To fixate on the fantasy and refuse one's own place as the cause of desire would be to relinquish one's subjectivity, the responsibility one has for one's choice to be subject.

What is therefore essential here is the fact that we are not faced with a strictly either / or situation. It is not a choice between either the object of fantasy or the renunciation of identificatory distinction in fantasy, but, rather, the assumption of the cause of one's own fantasy and through this recognition of the fantasy as, albeit necessary, fantasy and, concomitant with this, the recognition of the persistence of some *Thing*

both in the other and in the self, which cannot be reduced to or resolved as a fantasy object.

*Das Ding* is extimate to and constitutive of the subject insofar it is indicative of the site of the lack in relation to which the subject's desire would aim. *Das Ding*, then, is, properly, neither of the subject nor of the other. It is, however, also inseparable from the subject in the sense that without it the subject would no longer be subject. It is this necessary, and necessarily, extimate (non-)relation which allows Lacan to formulate *das Ding* as the *same*, as "that which is most myself in myself, that which is at the heart of myself, and beyond me, insofar as the self stops at the level of those walls to which one can apply a label" (Lacan, 1992/1986: 198). *Das Ding* is outwith the realms of both the symbolic and the imaginary and as such can neither be properly ascribed to the other or to the subject. To do so would be to, impossibly, render it in the order of the symbolic or to postulate it as an image of identification. Rather, *das Ding* is that which insists but of which one cannot know "if it belongs to me or to nobody" (Ibid.).

Thus the hostility one perceives in *das Ding* as it persists in the encounter with the neighbour, the hostility beyond the rational(ised) hostility one might conjecture to the neighbour, this former being but another mode of identification, cannot be distinguished from the hostility inherent to the subject. Beyond the symbolic order, the social structures, the law and language which would organise the subject's relations with the other, beyond the imaginary order which would allow the subject to identify (with) the other, *das Ding* would remain and insist as that which is the absolute other of the subject, an absolute other in the subject more than itself.

The paradox here is that this absolute other we encounter in the other, this absolute other which cannot be distinguished, is always our own. The very irreversibility of the subject in relation to the other and the Other necessitates that *das Ding* is always experienced in relation to the subject. As we have seen previously, the very lack constitutive of the subject's position as subject which it experiences in the insistence of *das Ding* is only ever retrospectively posited. As such, *das Ding* is necessarily encountered from a particular perspective. It is always *das Ding* in relation to the subject in all its singularity. This is the irreversibility of the subject's relation towards the other which would necessitate that in its very indistinguishable otherness, in its persistence as unknowable, neither belonging "to me or to nobody" (Ibid.), *das Ding* is still uniquely experienced in relation to the subject.

It is this very indeterminacy which would bind the subject to the other in a fashion that cannot be reduced to a symbiosis. *Das Ding* encountered in the other as hostile and evil and as the promise or suggestion of the good is the beyond towards which the subject's desire would be directed. The fantasy, the other constituted in fantasy, would be that which would support such desire without allowing it to extinguish itself in impossible satisfaction. Traversing the fantasy, and thus reconstituting itself as the cause of its own desire, is for the subject to constitute itself in a relation with the other which maintains the necessary support of fantasy without imputing the lack inherent in itself to the other. Moreover, in this very irreversibility of the assumption of responsibility, the subject necessarily assumes the burden of the other's lack.

This would be the maintenance of an openness which would then necessarily extend beyond the closest, the familial, the beloved, precisely insofar as any such limitation would entail a restriction on the basis of identification and difference. This would also, however, suggest that one cannot respond to the multitude of the other(s) en masse, assuming otherness to be but a category of sameness which would be somehow equally dispersed over all others. The otherness experienced in the other, just as the otherness experienced in the subject itself, cannot be reduced to a unity as doing so would be once again to reduce it to a comprehension. Totalising the other as a (social) category as that which would be beyond the subject is also to reduce the other, each other, to an aspect of fantasy. While the unicity of the other cannot be experienced as a positive entity, neither can it be dismissed as an impossible fiction. The unicity of the other, though it cannot be certified as an actuality, must rather, as it can neither be rejected as an actuality, be maintained as a possibility and responded to as if it were there.

This then both necessitates and illustrates the passage beyond a precarious logic of a generalisation which cannot be generalised. To maintain an openness to the other, all others, is to maintain a certain universal stance in the face of the other but only insofar as in so doing one is maintaining an openness to the otherness of each other idiotically, in their potential for unicity. It is thus a generalisation which functions as the basis of a stance which would refuse generalisation, that would open to the other one by one and again and again, an advocacy of a universality which recognises the impossibility of universality.