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On Love as Comedy*

In Lacan's seminar *L'angoisse* one finds the following, rather peculiar statement:

“Only love-sublimation makes it possible for *jouissance* to condescend to desire.”¹

What is peculiar about this statement, of course, is the link it establishes between love *as sublimation* and the movement of condescending or descending. It is well known that Lacan's canonic definition of sublimation from *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* implies precisely the opposite movement, that of ascension (that sublimation raises, or elevates, an object to the dignity of the Thing, Freudian *das Ding*²). In this last definition, sublimation is identified with the act of producing the Thing in its very transcendence and inaccessibility, as well as in its horrifying and/or inhuman aspect (for example, the status

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of the Lady in courtly love, which is, as Lacan puts it, the status of an “inhuman partner”). Yet, as concerns this particular sublimation that is called love – which is thus opposed to courtly love as the worshiping of a sublime object - Lacan states that it makes it possible for *jouissance* to condescend to desire, that it “humanizes the *jouissance*.”³

The quoted definition is surprising not only in relation to sublimation, but also in relation to what we usually call love. Is love not always the worshiping of a sublime object, even though it doesn't always take as radical a form as in the case of courtly love? Does love not always raise or elevate its object (which could be quite common “in itself”) to the dignity of the Thing? How are we to understand the word “love” in the quoted passage from Lacan's seminar on *L'angoisse*?

Lacan himself provides a way to answer these questions when he states, in *Le transfert*, that “love is a comic feeling.”⁴ Indeed, instead of trying to answer these questions immediately, we should perhaps shift our interrogation and examine the one form of sublimation that incontestably fits the first definition quoted above (as well as the condescending movement it implies), namely, the art of comedy. This might then make it easier for us to see how love enters this definition.

Concerning the art of comedy, we can actually say that it involves a certain condescension of the Thing to the level of the object. And yet, what is at stake, in good comedies, is not simply an abasement of some sublime object that thus reveals its ridiculous aspect. Although this kind of

abasement can make us laugh (consistent with the Freudian definition according to which laughter plays the part of discharging the libidinal energy previously invested in sustaining the sublime aspect of the object), we all know that this is not enough for a good comedy to work. As Hegel already knew very well, the genuine comic laughter is not a scornful laughter, it is not the laughter of *Schadenfreude*, and there is much more to comedy than just a variation on the statement “the emperor is naked”. First of all, we could say that true comedies are not so much involved in unveiling and disclosing the nudity or emptiness behind appearances as they are involved in *constructing* emptiness (or nudity).

Good comedies lay out a whole set of circumstances or situations in which this nakedness is explored from many different angles, constructed in the very process of its display. They do not undress the Thing. Rather, they take its clothes and say, “Well, this is cotton, this polyamide, and here we have some pretty shoes – we’ll put all this together and we’ll show you the Thing.” One could say that comedies involve the process of constructing the Thing from what Lacan calls “elements *a*” (imaginary elements of fantasy), and from these elements only. And yet, it is essential to a good comedy that it doesn’t simply abolish the gap between the Thing and the “elements *a*,” which would come down to a “lesson” that the Thing equals the sum of its elements and that these (imaginary) elements are its only real. The preservation (or, rather, the construction) of a certain *entre-deux*, interval, or gap, is as vital to a good comedy as it is to a good tragedy. But, the trick is that, instead of playing on the difference or the discordance between the appearance of the Thing and its real residue or its Void, comedies usually do something else: they reduplicate/redouble the Thing and play on (or

with) the difference between its two doubles. In other words, the difference that constitutes the motor of the comic movement is not the difference between the Thing in itself and its appearance, but, rather, the difference between two appearances. Suffice it to recall Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, where "the Thing called Hitler" takes the double form of the dictator Hynkel and a Jewish barber. As Gilles Deleuze pointed out, this is a Chaplinesque gesture par excellence: we find it already in *City Lights* (Charlot the tramp and Charlot supposed to be rich), as well as in *M. Verdoux*. Chaplin's genius, states Deleuze, consists in being able "to invent the minimal difference between two actions" and to create a "circuit laughter-emotion, where the former refers to the little difference and the later to the great distance, without effacing or diminishing one another"⁵. This is a very important insight that will help us specify the mechanism of comedy as well as that of love. But, first, let us determine more precisely what this "minimal difference" is. We could say that it stands for a split at the very core of the same. In order to illustrate this, let us take another comic example, a punch line from one of the Marx Brothers' movies: "Look at this guy, he looks like an idiot, he behaves like an idiot – but do not let yourself be deceived, he IS an idiot!" Or, to take a more sophisticated example from the Hegelian theory of tautology: If I say "*a* is *a*", the two "*a*"s are not exactly the same. The very fact that one appears in the place of the subject and the other in the place of the predicate introduces a minimal difference between them. We could say that comic art creates and uses this minimal difference in order to make palpable, or visible, a certain real that otherwise eludes our grasp. One could go even further and state that, in the comic paradigm, the Real is nothing else but this "minimal difference" – it has no other substance or identity.

The comic line from the Marx Brothers also enables us to feel the difference between the act of taking a (sublime) Thing and showing the public that this Thing is, in fact, nothing more than a poor and altogether banal object, and the act of taking the Thing, not to the letter, but, rather, “to the letter of its appearance.” Contrary to what is often believed, the axiom of good comedies is not that “appearances are always deceiving”, but, instead, that there is something in the appearance that never deceives. Following the Marx Brothers, we could say that the only essential deception of appearance is that it gives the impression that there is something else or more behind it.⁶ One of the fundamental gestures of good comedies is to make an appearance out of what is behind the appearance. They make the truth (or the real), not so much reveal itself, as appear. Or, to put it in yet another way, they make it possible for the real to condescend to the appearance (in the form of a split in the very core of the appearance). This doesn’t mean that the real turns out to be just another appearance; it means that it is real precisely *as appearance*. A good example of this is to be found, once again, at the beginning of *The Great Dictator*, when Chaplin gives his momentous impersonation of Hitler (in the guise of Hynkel) addressing the crowd. If, in the case of such speeches, we usually have to ask ourselves what the speaker was *really* saying, that is, what was the true significance of his words, Chaplin shows us this underlying meaning in a most direct way – and, he does it precisely by eliminating the very question of meaning. He speaks a language that doesn’t exist, a strange mixture of some existing German words and

words that sound like German but have no meaning. The scene is interrupted from time to time by the voice of an English interpreter, who is supposed to translate and sum up what Hynkel is saying, but who is obviously trying to make the speech sound quite innocent. These sporadic translations make us laugh as much as Chaplin himself. They make us laugh because they are so obviously false and full of omissions. Yet, the very fact that they make us laugh is in itself quite funny, since we could not exactly be said to *understand* what Hynkel is saying (and to compare this with the “translation”). In other words, we understand nothing of what Hynkel is saying, but we know perfectly well that the translation is false. Or, to put it in yet another way, we never get to know the Thing in itself, but we are perfectly able of distinguishing it from its false appearances. What we get are two fake speeches, and yet somehow we know exactly what Hynkel is saying.

In one of his best movies, *To Be or Not To Be*, Ernst Lubitsch provides another very good example of how comedies approach the Thing. Once again, the Thing in question is Hitler. At the beginning of the film, there is a brilliant scene in which a group of actors is rehearsing a play featuring Hitler. The director is complaining about the appearance of the actor who plays Hitler, insisting that his make-up is bad and that he doesn't look like Hitler at all. He also says that what he sees in front of him is just an ordinary man. Reacting to this, one of the actors replies that Hitler *is* just an ordinary man. If this were all, we would be dealing with a didactic remark that transmits a certain truth, but that doesn't make us laugh, since it lacks that comic quality having quite a different way of

transmitting truths. So, the scene continues: the director is still not satisfied and is trying desperately to name the mysterious “something more” that distinguishes the appearance of Hitler from the appearance of the actor in front of him. He is searching and searching, and, finally, he notices a picture (a photograph) of Hitler on the wall, and triumphantly cries out: “That’s it! This is how Hitler looks like”! “But sir,” replies the actor, “this picture was taken of me”. This, on the contrary, is quite funny, especially since we ourselves as spectators were taken in by the enthusiasm of the director who saw in the picture something quite different from this poor actor (whose status in the company isn’t even that of a true actor or a star, but of a simple walk-on). We can here grasp very well the meaning of the “minimal difference,” a difference that is “a mere nothing,” and yet a nothing that is very real and in relation to which we should not underestimate the role of our desire.

But, what is the principal difference between the tragic and the comic paradigm? How do they situate the Real in relation to the Thing, and how do they articulate it?

The classical tragic paradigm is perhaps best defined in terms of what Kant conceptualizes with the notion of the sublime. Here, the Real is situated beyond the realm of the sensible (nature), but can be seen, or “read”, in the *resistance* of the sensible or of matter, its inflections, its suffering. We are dealing with a friction that results from a relative movement of two heterogeneous things, one being determinable (as sensible) or conditional, the other unconditional and indeterminate. The subject experiences this friction as pain and violence done to his sensible nature, and yet, it inspires her respect for this unconditional/unknown Thing in which she can recognize her practical destination, her freedom. What results from this

friction is the sublime splendor. (In his analysis of *Antigone*, Lacan insists upon this dimension; he insists that Antigone's *ethical* act produces this *aesthetic* effect of blinding splendor.) So, if we take this classical example, we could say that, in *Antigone*, death appears as the limit of the sensible, its extreme edge – an edge that one can surpass in the name of some Thing in which the subject places her true or real being. The death is the place *par excellence* of this friction that we talked about before, emphasized, in the play, by the transformation of death as something that happens to us into a *place*: Antigone is condemned to be buried alive in the tomb, which thus becomes the place of the surpassing, the scene (or stage) of the sublime splendor that Lacan evokes in relation to the heroine. What is important is not so much that the death takes place, but that it is a place, a place where certain things become visible. It is as though one were to spread the extreme edge of a body, the skin, so that it would become the scene for the encounter of two things that it usually separates, the exterior and the interior of the body. What is at stake in the case of *Antigone* is not the difference or the limit between life and death, but – to use the words of Alain Badiou – the limit between life in the biological sense of the word and life as the subject's capacity to be a support of some process of truth. "Death" is precisely the name of this limit between these two lives; it names the fact that they do not coincide, that one of the two lives can suffer or even cease to exist because of the other. In the case of Antigone, the other life (the unconditional or real life) becomes visible on the scene of death as that something of life that death cannot reach or get to, that it cannot abolish. This other or real life is thus visible *per negativum*; it is visible in the bedazzlement, in the sublime splendor of the image of something that has no image. The Real is identified with the Thing, and is visible in this blinding splendor as the effect of the Thing on sensible matter. It is not visible or readable immediately, but only in this blinding trace that it leaves in the

word of the senses. In the case of tragic or sublime art, we could speak of an *incorporation* of the Real, which makes the latter both immanent and inaccessible (or, more precisely, accessible only to the hero who is supposed to “enter the Real”, and who therefore plays the role of the screen that separates us, the spectators, from the Real).

The comic paradigm, on the other hand, is not that of incorporation, but, rather, the paradigm of what we could call *montage*. In this paradigm, the Real is, at one and the same time, *transcendent* and *accessible*. The Real is accessible, for example, as pure nonsense, which constitutes an important matter of every comedy. And yet, this nonsense remains transcendent in the sense that the miracle of its real effects (i.e., the fact that the nonsense itself can produce a real effect of sense) remains inexplicable. This inexplicability is the very motor of comedy. One could also say that nonsense is transcendental in the Kantian sense of the word: it is what makes it possible for us to actually *see* or *perceive* a difference between a simple actor and the picture of Hitler (which is, in fact, the picture of the same actor). This difference that we “really” see is pure nonsense, but it has a very palpable material effects.

In relation to comic art, one could speak of a certain *ethics of unbelief*. Unbelief as an ethical attitude consists in confronting belief not simply in its illusory dimension, but in the very real of this illusion. This means that

unbelief does not so much expose the nonsense of the belief as it exposes the Real or the material force of nonsense itself. This also implies that this ethics cannot rely upon the movement of circulation around the Thing, which gives its force to sublime art. Its motor is, rather, to be found in a dynamics that always makes us go too far. One moves directly towards the Thing and one finds oneself with a “ridiculous” object. And yet, the dimension of the Thing is not simply abolished; it remains on the horizon thanks to the sentiment of failing that accompanies this direct passage to the Thing. In Lubitsch’s movie, the director tries to name or show the Thing directly (“That’s it! That’s Hitler!”), and, of course, he misses it, showing only a “ridiculous object”, that is, the actor’s picture. However, the Thing as that which he missed remains on the horizon and is situated somewhere between the actor who plays Hitler and the picture of that actor, which together constitute the space where our laughter can resonate. The act of saying “That’s it, that’s the Thing” has the effect of opening a certain *entre-deux*, thus becoming the space in which the real of the Thing unfurls between two “ridiculous objects” that are supposed to incarnate it. Let us be more precise: to “move directly to the Thing” does not mean to show or exhibit the Thing directly. The “trick” is that we never see the Thing (not even in the picture, since it is merely a picture of the actor); we only see two semblances (the actor and his picture). We thus see the difference between the object and the Thing without ever seeing the Thing. Or, to put it the other way around: what we are *shown* are just two semblances, and yet, what we *see* is nothing less than the Thing itself, becoming visible in the minimal difference between the two semblances. This is not to say that, through the “minimal difference” (or through that gap that it opens up), we get a glimpse of the mysterious Thing that lies somewhere beyond representation – it is, rather, that the Thing is conceived as nothing other than the very gap of/within the representation. In this sense, we could

say that comedy introduces a kind of parallel montage, a montage not of the real (as the transcendent Thing) and the semblance, but a montage of two semblances or doubles. “Montage” thus means: producing or constructing or recognizing the real from a very precise composition of two semblances. The Real is identified here with the gap that divides the appearance itself.

Now, what has all this got to do with love? What links the phenomenon of love to the comic paradigm is the combination of accessibility with the transcendental as the configuration of “accessibility in the very transcendence.” Or, in other words, what associates love with comedy is the way they approach and deal with the Real. Already, on the most superficial level, we can detect this curious affinity between love and comedy: To love, that is to say (according to the good old traditional definition), to love someone “for what he is” (i.e., to move directly to the Thing), always means to find oneself with a “ridiculous object”, an object that sweats, snores, farts, and has strange habits. But, it also means to continue to see in this object the “something more” that the director in Lubitsch’s movie sees in the picture of “Hitler”. To love means to perceive this gap or discrepancy and not so much be able to laugh at it as to have an irresistible urge to laugh at it. The miracle of love is a *funny* miracle. Real love, if we can risk this expression, is not the love that is called sublime, the love in which we let ourselves be completely dazzled or “blinded” by the object so that we no longer see (or can’t bear to see) its ridiculous, banal aspect. This

kind of “sublime love” necessitates and generates a radical inaccessibility of the other (which usually takes the form of eternal preliminaries, or else the form of intermittent the relationship that enables us to reintroduce the distance that suits the inaccessible, and thereby to “resublime” the object after each “use”). But, neither is real love the sum of desire and friendship, where friendship is supposed to provide a “bridge” between two awakenings of desire and to embrace the ridiculous side of the object. The point is not that, in order for love to “work”, one has to accept the other with all her baggage, to “stand” her banal aspect, to forgive her weaknesses – in short, to tolerate the other when one does not desire her. The true miracle of love – and this is what links love to comedy – consists in *preserving the transcendence in the very accessibility of the other*. Or, to use Deleuze’s terms, it consists in creating a “circuit laughter-emotion, where the former refers to the little difference and the latter to the great distance, without effacing or diminishing one another.” The miracle of love is not that of transforming some banal object into a sublime object, inaccessible in its being – this is the miracle of desire. If we are dealing with an alternation of attraction and repulsion, this can only mean that *love as sublimation* has not taken place, hasn’t done its work and performed its “trick.” The miracle of love consists, first of all, in perceiving the two objects (the banal and the sublime object) on the same level; additionally, this means that neither one of them is occulted or substituted by the other. Secondly, it consists in becoming aware of the fact that the other qua “banal object” and the other qua “object of desire” are one and the same in the identical sense that the actor who plays Hitler and the picture of “Hitler” (which is actually the picture of the actor) are one and the same. That is to say, one becomes aware of the fact that they are both semblances, that neither one of them is more real than the other. Finally, the miracle of love consists in “falling” (and in continuing to stumble) because of the real which springs from the gap introduced by this

“parallel montage” of two semblances or appearances, that is to say, because of the real that springs from the non-coincidence of the same. The other that we love is neither of the two semblances (the banal and the sublime object); but, neither can she be separated from them, since she is nothing other than what results from a successful (or “lucky”) montage of the two. In other words, what we are in love with is the *Other as this minimal difference of the same*: not the Other as different from us, but the Other as different from her- or himself.

Here we can clearly see the difference between the functioning of desire and the functioning of love, as well as the reason for Lacan’s thesis that love is ultimately a drive. The difference between desire and drive may be discerned in the two different types of temporality involved in them. What characterizes the subject of desire is the difference between the (transcendental) cause of desire and its object, the difference that manifests itself as the “temporal difference” between the subject of desire and its object qua real. The subject is separated from the object by an interval or gap, which keeps moving with the subject and makes it impossible for him ever to catch up with the object. The object that the subject is pursuing accompanies him, moves with him, and yet always remains separated from him, since it exists, so to speak, in a different “time zone.” This accounts for the metonymy of desire. The subject makes an appointment with the

object at 9:00, but, for the object in question, it is already 11:00 (which means that it's already gone). This "immanent inaccessibility" also explains the basic fantasy of love stories and love songs that focus on the impossibility involved in desire. The leitmotiv of these stories is: "In another place, in another time, somewhere, not here, sometime, not now...." This attitude (which clearly indicates the transcendental structure of desire à la time and space as a priori conditions of our experience) can be read as the recognition of an inherent impossibility, an impossibility that is subsequently externalized, transformed into some empirical obstacle. ("If we'd only met in another time and another place, then all this would have been possible...") One usually says, in this case, that the Real as impossible is camouflaged by an empirical obstacle that prevents us from confronting some fundamental or structural impossibility. However, the point of Lacan's identification of the Real with the impossible is not simply that the Real is some Thing that is impossible to happen. On the contrary, the whole point of the Lacanian concept of the Real is that *the impossible happens*. This is what is so traumatic, disturbing, shattering – or *funny* – about the Real. The Real happens precisely as the impossible. It is not something that happens when we want it, or try to make it happen, or expect it, or are ready for it. It always happens at the wrong time and in the wrong place; it is always something that doesn't fit the (established or the anticipated) picture. The Real as impossible means that there is no right time or place for it, and not that it is impossible for it to happen.

The fantasy of “another place and another time” that sustains the illusion of a possibly fortunate encounter betrays the Real of an encounter by transforming the “impossible that happened” into “impossible to happen” (here and now). In other words, it disavows what *has already happened* by trying to submit it to the existing transcendental scheme of the subject’s fantasy. The distortion at stake in this maneuver is not that of creating the belief that something impossible will, or would, nevertheless happen in some other conditions of time and space – the distortion is that of making something that *has happened* here and now appear as if it could only happen in a distant future or in some altogether different time and space. A paradigmatic example of this disavowal of the Real (which aims at preserving the Real as inaccessible Beyond) is to be found in *The Bridges of the Madison County*: What we have here is a fortunate love encounter between two people, each of them very settled in their lives: she as a housewife and mother, bound to her family (immobile, so to speak); he as a successful photographer who moves and travels around all the time. They meet by chance and fall passionately in love – or so are we asked to believe. But, what is their reaction to this encounter? They immediately move the accent from “the impossible happened” to “this is impossible to happen”, “this is impossible”. Since she is alone at the time of their encounter (her husband and children gone for a week), and since he has to stay there anyway in order to complete his reportage, they decide to spend a week together and then to say goodbye, never to see each other again. Described in this way, this seems like a casual adventure (and, I would say, that’s what it is). But, the problem is that the couple perceive themselves, and as presented to us, as if they were living THE love of their lives, the most important and precious thing that has ever happened in their love life. What is the problem or the lie of this fantasmatic *mise-en-scene*? – that the encounter is “de-realized” from the very moment it happens. It is

immediately inscribed and confined within a discrete, narrowly defined time and space (one week, one house – this being their “another time, another place”), destined to become the most precious object of their memories. We could say that even during the time their relationship “is happening,” it is already a memory; the couple is living it as already lost (and the whole pathos of the movie springs from there). The real of the encounter, the “impossible that happened”, is immediately rejected and transformed into an object that paradoxically incarnates the very impossibility of what *did happen*. It is a precious object that one puts into a jewel-box, the box of memory. From time to time, one opens the box and finds great pleasure in contemplating this jewel that glitters by virtue of the impossibility it incarnates. Contrary to what might seem to be the case, the two protagonists are not able to “make do” with the lack. Rather, they make of the lack itself their ultimate possession.

To return to the question of the difference between love (as drive) and desire, we could now say that what is involved in the drive as different from desire is not so much a time difference as a “time warp” – the concept that science fiction literature uses precisely to explain (“scientifically”) the impossible that happens. This time warp essentially refers to the fact that a piece of some other (temporal) reality gets caught in our present temporality (or vice versa), appearing there where there is no structural place for it, thus producing a strange, illogical tableau. Something appears there where it should not be,

and thus breaks or interrupts the linearity of time, the harmony of the picture.

There is yet another way of conceiving the proximity of love (precisely in its dimension of creating a “minimal difference” and of rebounding in the space between two objects) and drive. This other way leads through the Lacanian analysis of the double path that characterizes the drive, namely, the difference between *goal* and *aim*. The drive always finds or makes its way between *two* objects: the object that it aims at (for instance, food in the case of the oral drive) and – as Jacques-Alain Miller puts it – the satisfaction as object (“the pleasure of the mouth” in the oral drive). The drive is what circulates between the two objects. It exists in the minimal difference between them – a difference that is, paradoxically, itself the result of the circular movement of the drive.

The *entre-deux*, the interval or gap introduced by desire, is the gap between the Real and the semblance: the other that is accessible to desire is always the imaginary other, Lacan’s *objet petit a*, whereas the real (other) of desire remains unattainable. The real of desire is *jouissance*, namely, that “inhuman partner” (as Lacan calls it) that desire aims at beyond its object and that must remain inaccessible. Love, on the other hand, is what somehow manages to make the real of desire accessible. This is what Lacan is aiming at with his statement that love “humanizes *jouissance*” and that “only love-sublimation makes it possible for *jouissance* to condescend to desire”. In other words, the best way to define (love-) sublimation is to say that its effect is precisely that of *desublimation*. It could be shown that there are two different concepts of sublimation to be found in Lacan’s work. The first one is the one that he develops in relation to the notion of desire, the one defined in terms of “raising an object to the dignity

of the Thing”. And then there is another concept of sublimation, which Lacan develops in relation to the notion of drive when he claims that the “true nature” of the drive is precisely that of sublimation.⁷ This second notion of sublimation is that of a “desublimation” that makes it possible for the drive to find a “satisfaction different from its aim.” Isn’t this exactly what could be said of love? In love, we do not find satisfaction *in the other* that we aim at; we find it in the space or gap between, to put it bluntly, what we see and what we get (the sublime and the banal object). The satisfaction is, literally, *attached* to the other; it “clings” to the other. (One could say that it clings to the other in the very same way that the “pleasure of the mouth” clings to the “food”: they are not the same, and yet they cannot simply be separated – they are, in a manner of speaking, “dislocated”.) One could also say that love is that which knows this, and desire that which doesn’t. This is also the reason for Lacan’s insistence that the *jouissance* of the body of the Other is not the sign of love,⁸ and that the more a man allows a woman to confuse him with God (i.e., with what gives her enjoyment), the less he loves. With this in mind, we can perhaps define more precisely the “desublimation” involved in love: desublimation doesn’t mean “transformation of the sublime object into a banal object”; it implies, instead, a dislocation or a de-centering of the sublime object in relation to the source of enjoyment – it implies that we see the “minimal difference” between them. (This, of course, has nothing to do with the archetypal situation when we love and worship one person, but can only sleep with others that we do not particularly care about. The case of someone worshipping the other so much that he isn’t capable of making love to her is precisely what bears witness to the fact that the “dislocation” [sublimation as desublimation] did not take place, and that he confuses the other with the source of some unspeakable, supreme enjoyment [or a supreme lack of it] that has to be avoided.)

Love (in the precise and singular meaning that we tried to give to this notion) affects and changes the way we relate to *jouissance* (where *jouissance* doesn't necessarily mean sexual enjoyment), and makes of *jouissance* something else other than our "inhuman partner". More precisely, it makes *jouissance* appear as something we can relate to, and as something that we can actually desire. Another way of putting this would be to say that we cannot gain access to the other (as other) so long as the attachment to our *jouissance* remains a "non-reflexive" attachment. In this case, we will always use the other as a means of relating to our own enjoyment, as a screen for our fantasy (the sexual act being, as Slavoj Žižek likes to put it, an act of "masturbating with a real partner"). The two sides of love that mutually sustain each other and account for the fact that, as Lacan puts it, love "makes up for the sexual relationship (as nonexistent)", could be formulated as follows: to love the other and to desire my own *jouissance*. To "desire one's own *jouissance*" is probably what is the hardest to obtain and to make work, since enjoyment has trouble appearing as an object. One could protest against this, claiming that it couldn't be so difficult after all, since most people "want to enjoy". However, the "will to enjoy" (and its obverse side as the imperative of *jouissance*) should not be confused with desire. To establish a relation of desire towards one's own enjoyment (and to be able to actually "enjoy" it) does not mean to subject oneself to the unconditional demand of enjoyment – it means, rather, to be able to elude its grasp.

This eluding or “subtraction”, making desire appear there where there was no place for it before, is the effect of what we previously called “sublimation as desublimation”. If, as Lacan insists, “love constitutes a sign”, then we should say that love is the sign of this *effect*.

Notes

¹ Jacques Lacan, *L'angoisse*, unpublished seminar, lecture from the May 13th, 1963.

² Cf. Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, London: Routledge, 1992, 112.

³ J. Lacan, *L'angoisse*, lecture from the May 13th, 1963.

⁴ J. Lacan, *Le transfert*, Paris: Seuil 1991, p. 46.

⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *L'image-mouvement*, Paris: Les Editions de minuit, 1983, p. 234.

⁶ Which, of course, brings us to the story of Zeuxis and Parrhasios that Lacan evokes in *The Four Fundamental concepts of Psychoanalysis*: Zeuxis painted grapes so vividly that they attracted birds, whereas Parrhasios fooled Zeuxis himself by painting on the wall a veil so lifelike that Zeuxis, turning towards him, said: “Well, and now show us what you have painted behind it.”

⁷ Cf. J. Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p. 111.

⁸ J. Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality. The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, New York and London: Norton & Company 1998, p. 4.
