

Novelistic Mimesis; or, Modalities of Cultural Modernity

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This essay is an attempt to give a theoretical articulation of novelistic mimesis as the narrative form of modernity. With the passage to modernity, what assumes the locus of the symbolic authority is no longer God, Father, or tradition, but the cultural gaze or the ego-ideal. At the same time, this gaze paradoxically coalesces with the "spectacle of the world," on the side of the reified "other": the gaze is both the desexualized ego-ideal and its instantaneous transmogrification and resexualization in the opaque world of objects. The imaginary ego or the eye on the side of the subject of representation is held at abeyance in a state of perpetual fascination and desperation in relation to the gaze as the world of "others," which lies always at one remove from the purview of the imaginary ego. This understanding of the inadequation of the ego to the cultural gaze of the reified world provides a critical fulcrum upon which I base my theory of the modern narrative mimesis as the "perverse" field of spatial arrangement, in which the split of the subjectivity into the imaginary ego and the ego-ideal is suspended over the phantasmatic world of bodies and territories.

[space/culture/novelistic mimesis/modernity]

I. INTRODUCTION: MIMESIS, SPACE, AND THE NOVEL

The inquiry into the novel's representational mode has traditionally been the cornerstone of the theories of the novel. From Auerbach to Watt, Lukács to Bakhtin, theorists of the novel have dealt with this particular obsession under the varying names, or theoretical topoi, of mimesis, realist reflection, or narrative representation. In *After Bakhtin*, David Lodge has managed to rekindle the old debate surrounding the function of novelistic representation by proposing a new way of looking at the question of mimesis. According to Lodge, what characterizes the modernity of the novelistic genre may not consist in its

mimetic representation of reality (as has been commonly presumed); rather, the singularity of the modern discourse of the novel may be best captured in terms of a “mimesis of an act of diegesis.” As he puts it, “[t]he rise of the English novel in the eighteenth century began with the discovery of new possibilities of mimesis in prose narrative, through the use of characters as narrators--the pseudo-autobiographers of Defoe, the pseudo-correspondents of Richardson--thus making the narrative discourse a mimesis of an act of diegesis, diegesis at a second remove. These devices brought about a quantum leap in realistic illusion and immediacy ...” (p. 30).

Attempts at understanding the novel’s narrative mode in terms of a synthesis of mimetic showing and diegetic telling may not be entirely new, the most well-known version of which having been proposed by Bakhtin/ Vološinov’s notion of “reported speech.” But Lodge’s treatment is perhaps unique in the way it suggests an implicit connection between the deployment of the new formal devices of mimesis and the historical event of generic innovation known as “the rise of the novel.” However, the main thrust of his argument concerns a formalistic consideration of narrative styles, and, as such, the critical implications of his initial insights regarding the discovery of new mimetic devices remain largely unexplored. One might want to ask, for example, why the mimesis of a telling rather than of reality? Further, why did the spectacle of someone’s act of narration become something worthy of telling at that particular historical moment? (After all, the practice of oral storytelling had long been a favored literary device in the pre-modern period rather than the modern one.) In short, with regard to the novel and modernity, the question may arise as to why the novel takes on this particular narrative form at the specific historical juncture of modernity.

I suggest that the reason why the act of storytelling became the interesting object of narrative mimesis has to do with the fact that the storytellers in modernity were the ones who had seen the “other” worlds that were inaccessible to most of the ordinary people. Faced with the other reality of the “New World” and that of the increasingly secretive privatized realm of domestic others, one is bound to admit that the reality within the reach of one’s own perception is extremely limited. Through a telling of the stories about the spectacle of the “others,” the storytellers became the purveyors of the hidden but factual truth that lay beyond the field of perception. Obviously, the fact that truth lies beyond the purview of one’s perception is a radically unsettling proposition. It means that one has to rely on other people’s supposed reports about the “real” facts, of whose truth-claims there is no verification. But those stories, pretending to be a true report of the things one has no way of knowing could at the same time be an utter fabrication or falsification.

The choice then would seem to lie in the alternatives of the non-knowledge and the reliance on other people’s story as report, or of the deceptively limited perception and the potentially deceiving, fabricated story which may contain the truth beyond or below the

surface perception. The condition of knowing the truth in modernity is thus internally split, predicated as it is on the disjunctive conjunction between mimetic showing and diegetic content, between a clear but limited perception and the reports of others which could be either fundamental truth or a counterfeit fabrication. (One may thus restate Lacan's famous universalizing dictum that "truth is structured like fiction," by giving it a whole new historicizing twist: the condition of truth in modernity necessarily takes on the structure of fiction.) This essential oscillation between the two opposite poles radically calls into question the possibilities of determining truth based on the single term of either perception or of reality. Instead, modernity's narrative forms seem to emerge straddled on the poles of both possibilities simultaneously insofar as narrative desire is susceptible of taking on both forms at once. That is why the novel form is neither mimesis nor diegesis alone but "a mimesis of an act of diegesis."

Freud uses the term, "disavowal" (*Verleugnung*), to describe one of the specific mechanisms involved in such a split conjunction of perception and reality. According to Freud, "disavowal" is a mechanism specific to psychosis. Although both psychosis and neurosis "originate in the ego's conflicts with its various ruling agencies," the former involves a conflict between the ego and the external world whereas the latter involves a conflict between the ego and the id.¹ He distinguishes disavowal in particular from the neurotic mechanism of repression (*Verdrängung*): the neurotic represses the demands of the id in favor of the demands of reality, while the psychotic disavows external reality.² The external reality is analogous to the superego in that it acts like an independent psychical agency which directly opposes the ego. The result is a rupture between ego and reality, in the interstices of which a new delusional reality is to be constructed according to the desires of the id.

But it should be noted here that what is repudiated from consciousness in psychosis is in fact an idea or *perception* of reality, rather than the reality *per se*.³ The perception of reality according to Freud is already a reconstruction, overdetermined by a principle which structures such a field of perception in the first place, namely, the castration threat and the anatomical distinction between the sexes.⁴ Therefore it could be argued that what is disavowed in psychosis is not the external reality as such but the reigning symbolic function which simultaneously grounds and ungrounds the field of factual perception. The so-called "loss of reality" in psychosis is then in fact a disavowal of a specific way of perceiving reality as mandated by the dominant symbolic apparatus. Psychotics pose a

¹ Freud, *Neurosis and psychosis* (1924): 152/149; emphasis in the original.

² See Freud, *Fetishism* (1927); *Splitting of the ego in the process of defence* (1940); and Chapter 8 of *Outline of psycho-analysis* (1938).

³ See Freud, *The neuro-psychoses of defense* (1894): pp. 58-61.

⁴ See Laplanche & Pontalis, *The language of psychoanalysis*, p. 120.

direct challenge to this presumption of the normal order of reality by insisting on going through the space of a fracture between perception and reality in order to radically destructure the normative world of reality--and create an other reality in its stead.

Žižek has argued that fetishistic disavowal structures our reality no longer at the level of a false consciousness, as in the Marxian formula, "I do not know it, but I am doing it," but at the fundamental level of "ideological fantasy," "I know it very well, but still I'm doing it."⁵ But once the category of perception is itself radically destabilized so that reality is suspended in the state of uncertainty, what is at stake is the status of knowing itself. The situation therefore may seem to require yet another formulation: "I do not know whether I know it, therefore I have no choice but to suspend my disbelief and keep doing it." In other words, it is the disjunctive gap between the deceptive proximity of perception and the alterity of reality which perverts the structure of reality, turning the latter into the order of simulacra⁶ on which all truth-claims henceforth seem to hang.

To return to the question of novelistic mimesis, it is clear that what gives rise to the modern mimetic impulse or drive (*Trieb*) is the spatial rearrangement following Western cultural and economic expansionism. Narrative desire for mimesis was set in motion, in other words, by the lure as well as the threat posed by the spatial expansion of the modern world⁷ for the subject's perception of space. If the object world of the environment undergoes drastic transformation, the change also effects a corresponding restructuring of the intrapsychical topography of the subject. The mimetic act may be seen in this sense as an anticipatory symbolic operation developed in response to the experience of out-of-placeness or the dislocation of identity correlated with the dissolution of traditional bodily boundaries and territorial integrity in the new spatial dynamic of modernity.

The novelistic mimesis may be seen as an exercise in establishing a relation to space faced with the inapprehensible "spectacle of the world": namely, how to configure a narrative field in such a way that the subjects might be able to insert themselves into the field, and thus enact their own disappearance paradoxically by finding and establishing their relative positions or identities vis-à-vis the represented space. What is determinant of the novelistic mimesis then is not the subject's desire but the higher principle of spatial organization determined by desire's indeterminate relation to the affective spatial fields of/as others--other places and territories, and differently sexed and colored bodies. We

⁵ See *The Sublime object of ideology*, esp. pp. 30-33.

⁶ The term derives from Jean Baudrillard's paradigm-setting work. See his *Symbolic exchange and death* as well as *The mirror of production*.

⁷ The expansion of the modern world also entails a profound change in the conception of the world and of the universe as direct and indirect consequences of Western expansionism outside Europe and of internal strife and instability within. For an illuminating study of the transformation of the patterns of European thinking brought by the "revolution" of the seventeenth century, see Alexandre Koyré, *From the closed world to the infinite universe*.

might thus dislodge Lodge's thesis on the novel as "mimesis of an act of diegesis," rereading it in terms of the process of subjectivation, effected by mimesis as the allegory of a spatial panopticon which encircles and defaces the subject, by folding back and superimposing the subject of utterance onto the subject of statement. What is on trial in the novelistic mimesis is a subject stripped of its familiar surroundings, out of place and dis-embodied. Not only is the subject threatened with the experience of dispossession; but at the same time he/she is enthralled to and spell-bound by a world which thus dis-embodies and dis-places him/her.

II. GAZE AND THE FIELD OF REPRESENTATION

This line of speculation finds perhaps the strongest resonance in Lacan's argument about the dialectic of gaze and eye in *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. I showed earlier how the psychotic disavowal provides a mechanism through which a resolution of the schema of tension between the ego and the external reality is attempted. I also indicated above that what is disavowed is not reality as such but the reality understood as a function of the dominant symbolic. This opens a way to transpose the opposition between ego and reality, that between perception and (symbolic) reality into the Lacanian dialectic between the eye and the gaze insofar as the gaze is precisely the symbolic side of reality. Such a dialectic, moreover, sets up a field of vacillation between the deceptive perception and the potentially higher principle of reality with which we have been concerned here.

According to Lacan, what is unapprehensible in the visual field is precisely the gaze. The gaze is what determines the subject in the field of the visible as its constitutive outside. As he puts it, "[t]he gaze I encounter ... is, not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other" (p. 84). That is to say, the gaze constitutes the symbolic side of the reality which determines in advance the imaginary field of the eye or the ego's perception. This function of the gaze is imagined as a point of light, which turns one into a picture: "the gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which ... I am *photo-graphed*" (p. 106). Conversely, from the point of the view of the imaginary ego, the gaze that the eye looks at corresponds to the side of the object: "in the [subject's] illusion of the consciousness of *seeing oneself see oneself*, ... the gaze is elided" (p. 83). However, this latter possibility is conceivable only when we postulate what Lacan calls the "geometral" dimension of vision, which is defined by the "point-by-point correspondence of two unities in space." Such a perspective is therefore essentially about "the mapping of space, not sight" (p. 86). He illustrates this point by suggesting that even a blind man can perfectly reconstruct as well as imagine this space.

Lacan seems to suggest that in the end the complete picture of the field of vision emerges only when we put together the diametrically opposite schemata, represented by the two inverted triangles, in which either the eye or the gaze is elided, and superimpose them onto each other. In this new synthesis of the two triangles, the dialectical tension between the eye and the gaze is retained, and neither is canceled by the other. Thus, the side of the gaze embodies both the point of light and the object, while that of the eye (which is now reposed as the “subject of representation”) embodies both the geometral point and the picture. Most notably, through the superimposition of the two triangles, a new diamond shaped space is created, which functions as a mediatory field between the gaze and the subject of representation. The mediative function of this field is represented by what Lacan calls the “screen,” which cuts through the field right in the middle.

The function of the screen implies an essential ambivalence or duplicity like that which is found in the psychotic mechanism of disavowal. It implies the possibility of the subject’s symbolic mapping of him-/herself into the picture where the latter is understood as “the function in which the subject has to map himself as such” (*Four Fundamental Concepts*, p. 100); “if I am anything in the picture, it is always in the form of the screen, which I earlier called the stain, the spot” (p. 97). At the same time, the screen implies the dangerous possibility of the subject’s “imaginary capture” (p. 107), which could reduce him/her to the “stain” or “spot” in the picture. The screen embodies the disjunctive gap between the imaginary and the symbolic, an unsettling site of cultural struggle at which the myriad lines of the conflicting dialectical relations contend, cross one another, or play themselves out. To the extent that the insertion of the element of play takes place, we are no longer in the “geometral” field in which the subject either emerges annihilated or undergoes specific anamorphosis. With the introduction of the screen, we effectively enter the domain of the dialectic of desire.

Lacan’s theoretical insights concerning the screen or the relation of the subject to the picture draw upon a rather unusual source, namely, the French sociologist Roger Caillois’s work on the phenomenon of mimicry in the insect world. What Lacan finds most interesting in Caillois is the latter’s claim that mimicry in insects, contrary to what is commonly supposed, has no practical survival value, but that its deployment has to do with the relationship it produces between itself and its environment. For instance, an insect mimicks its environment by way of inscribing itself as a “stain” or “spot” in relation to its surroundings, becoming a “picture.” What seems to be at play in mimicry is then the element of excess or superfluity, almost approaching a formal need for elaboration. This seemingly excessive element in the phenomenon of mimicry Caillois describes leads Lacan to rethink mimesis in terms of “the inscription of the subject in the picture” (*Four Fundamental Concepts*, p. 99). Or, as he puts it, “[to imitate] is, for the subject, to be inserted in a function whose exercise grasps it” (p. 100).

What Caillois brings with his study of mimicry in the insect world is a new understanding of mimesis. If mimicry has nothing to do with the practical ends of self-preservation or of life-instincts, it poses an economic problem, just as masochism does for Freud in that it is an act of pure superfluity and of excess. It therefore suggests that there must be a principle of another kind, which establishes the primacy of play beyond and over against the law of economy or necessity. This is precisely how Lacan reinscribes his notion of the screen insofar as what is involved in the screen is the element of play as a function of desire. First there is the encounter with the real, which corresponds to the disturbance caused by the perception of the surroundings in the insects' world; as a consequence of this encounter, the splitting of the subject occurs, which sets off the ensuing dialectic of the eye and the gaze. The screen is set up as a locus of mediation at the intersection between the imaginary and the symbolic fields. It is here that mimicry comes into play: for the locus of mimetic activities is at the same time the site for the lures, disguises, and masks of mimetic activities.

However, in the end, the play of mimicry becomes ludic: through repetition, mimicry exceeds its original aim of responding to the surroundings and becomes an independent force of the symbolic. Lacan suggests that it is only with the human subject that such a level is reached: "Only the subject--the human subject, the subject of desire that is the essence of man--is not, unlike the animal, entirely caught up in this imaginary capture. He maps himself in it. How? In so far as he isolates the function of the screen and plays with it. Man, in effect, knows how to play with the mask as that beyond which there is gaze. The screen is here the locus of mediation" (p. 107). The ability to isolate the function of the screen in order to play with it already belongs to the domain of the symbolic. However, as I have indicated, the function of the screen as the mediative site of both the imaginary and the symbolic implies its essential duplicity or duality. Therefore it is not possible to single out the screen function without at the same time disturbing the whole field of the dialectical relations in which the screen is imbricated. Nor is it possible to isolate the symbolic pole without implicating in the process the other pole of the dialectic, namely, the imaginary, thereby triggering another round of the dialectical exchanges. Thus, if we push the duplicitous implications of the function of the screen far enough, we come to a conclusion that the screen in fact designates a site of origin or *Ur-sprung* in the Benjaminian sense, that is, a vortex-like force-field, which has become, through repetition, a formidable independent force while standing squarely in the middle of the dialectical currents (of the imaginary and the symbolic). Only in this way can the mimetic site of the screen be finally understood as a matrix of the new symbolic form.

Caillois himself does not seem to make such a sharp distinction between the human and the nonhuman worlds as Lacan tends to do here, however. On the contrary, he seems to detect the phenomenon of isolation and repetition that founds the symbolic not just in the

human world, but almost everywhere, including even the nonanimate ones.⁸ In “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia,” Caillois relates the phenomenon of mimicry in the insect world to that of psychosis in the humans (p. 28). Psychosis is in other words the human manifestation of the phenomenon of mimicry. For Caillois what connects the two apparently disparate phenomena is the common factor of a disturbance in the representation of space.

According to Caillois, mimicry is defined primarily by “a disturbance in the perception of space” (“Mimicry”, p. 28). More specifically, the disturbance lies in the relations of the living creature to the “represented space” because of the way space is perceived and represented: “the living creature, the organism, is no longer the origin of the coordinates, but one point among others; it is dispossessed of its privilege and literally *no longer knows where to place itself*” (p. 28). This sense of dispossession corresponds to a lure or temptation posed by the represented space. In response to this dominance of the space, the creature enacts a morphological assimilation into the surrounding environment (p. 27). Since the surroundings consist mainly of the inanimate material space, however, the result of mimicry or disguise often takes on the quality of matter, resulting in “*depersonalization by assimilation to space*” (p. 30; italics in the original). In its assimilation to the inanimate matter of space, not only does mimicry not serve the function of a defense or protection related to “the instinct of self-preservation” or life instincts, but instead it actually seems to serve “*the instinct of renunciation*” (p. 32), recalling once again Freud’s hypothesis of “death instincts.”

Caillois traces an analogous process of “depersonalization” and assimilation to the material space in the human world. In Flaubert’s *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, for example, Caillois finds what he calls “a general spectacle of mimicry,” a merging of the three different realms of animals, plants and stones through assimilation into each other: “In thus seeing the three realms of nature merging into each other, Anthony in his turn suffers the lure of material space: he wants to split himself thoroughly, to be in everything, ‘to penetrate each atom, to descend to the bottom of matter, to *be matter*’” (“Mimicry”, p. 31). In mimesis, just as in mimicry in the insect world, space takes over “at the expense of the individual” (p. 31), depersonalizing or disembodying each one, which is then “accompanied by a decline in the feeling of personality and life” (p. 30). At this point, Caillois’s description of mimesis in terms of assimilation to the material surroundings becomes virtually indistinguishable from the phenomenon of reification we saw earlier. After all, reification comprises precisely the same twofold process of disembodiment and rematerialization.

⁸ See Roger Caillois, *The writing of stones* for his enigmatic meditation on the form of writing inherent in stones. See also his *The necessity of the mind* as well as *The mask of medusa*.

Caillois takes his investigation a step further, however, when he attempts to relate mimicry to psychosis in order to specify the spatial configurations involved in mimetic activities. According to him, psychotics typically find it impossible to locate themselves in a position in space. Thus, for example, to the question, “where are you?” schizophrenics answer: “*I know where I am, but I do not feel as though I’m at the spot where I find myself*” (p. 30). As he explains, the personality is maintained through distinction from its surrounding, in terms of the “connection between consciousness and a particular point in space” (p. 28). It is this connection through distinction that fails in psychosis. With it, the distinction between ego-interest and libidinal cathexis of the surrounding space gives way. It is the latter that eventually takes over. What follows is the fantastic process of “depersonalization by assimilation” into material spaces, which is akin to a kind of transubstantiation in religious mysticism:

Then the body separates itself from thought, the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses. He tries to look at *himself from any point whatever in space*. He feels himself becoming space, *dark space where things cannot be put*. He is similar, not similar to something, but just *similar*. And he invents spaces of which he is ‘the convulsive possession.’ (“Mimicry”, p. 30; emphasis in the original)

The body separates out from thought insofar as thought or consciousness has no corresponding point in the surrounding spaces including the bodily space. Thought becomes one point among many and not the point of coordination through which the spaces are organized. Once reduced to that status of a point within space, thought becomes part of the material spaces, subjected to the spatial agency of organization. What we have here is properly speaking not the so-called “loss of reality,” but the dissolution of boundaries between the body ego (as the ego is primarily a body ego according to Freud) and the material spaces. The final outcome of the schema of tension between the ego and the external reality in psychosis I outlined above implies the dissolution not only of the ego but also of the surrounding spaces and the creation of the new—both the new subjects and the new spaces. But in this new topography, it would still be the spaces which take precedence over the subject insofar as it is a matter of the invention of spaces so that the new subject is securely inscribed into them, held fast in their possession—“spaces of which he [the subject] is ‘the convulsive possession.’” The upshot of the psychotic process is once again the new creation--this time through the reconfiguration of the spaces.

The Lacanian analogue of this ascendancy of spaces over against thought or consciousness in psychotic mimesis is “the triumph of the gaze over the eye” (*Four Fundamental Concepts*, p. 103). For Lacan, the awareness of the gaze as the agency of

“all-seeing” (p. 75) leads to the symbolic act of the subject’s mapping into the picture, whereas for Caillois, it is the perception of space as a “devouring force” which leads to the frenetic feats of mimetic activities in certain animal species. Significantly, in both cases, light plays a fundamental role. As I have indicated, mimicry “depends on vision” insofar as it concerns “the perception of space,” i.e. the “represented space”: the mimetic act does not take place in darkness (“Mimicry”, p. 28). For Lacan, what characterizes the visual field is the introduction of the gaze as a glimmering point of light in contradistinction to the geometral field where the subject’s relations to the objects can be mapped without the aid of light through one-to-one correspondence between to the two points.

The function of vision comes into high relief in the distinction between dark and light space. As Caillois puts it: “While light space is eliminated by the materiality of objects, darkness is ‘filled,’ it touches the individual directly, envelops him, penetrates him, and even passes through him: hence ‘the ego is *permeable* for darkness while it is not so for light” (p. 30). If light is what eliminates space in favor of the “materiality of objects,” the term “light space” may be an oxymoron. Space then properly belongs to, and is best represented by, the domain of darkness, where it triumphs over, by way of eclipsing, the world of objects. The ascendancy of spaces in mimicry must then imply the rise of dark space over the lighted world of objects. Dark space or space as darkness should not, however, be understood in the sense of “the mere absence of light” (p. 30): it is a formidable force of reinscription, reembodiment or rematerialization. Darkness encircles, and infiltrates into the subjects, until they become the indistinguishable body of the space. Light, on the other hand, reveals the material objects in all their spectacular isolation and vivid, glistening particularity, with, however, the paradoxical result of making them ever more mysterious, impenetrable and opaque. The consequence of the introduction of light into the field is the spectacle of the fetishistic objects, in which objects, all lit up and phantasmatic, become imbued with the power of an agency. Light thus signals a movement toward fetishism (of the world of objects), while darkness signals a counter-movement toward reification or (re)materialization (of the human subjects).

I suggest thus that we reformulate Caillois’s definition of mimesis as morphological assimilation into the represented spaces in this way: mimesis is a counter-movement toward the restoration of (dark) spaces lost as a consequence of the introduction of light insofar as the latter eliminates spaces in favor of the spectacle of the world of objects. We are now in a better position to understand why the spatial expansion of the world for example is paradoxically accompanied by the reduction of the (habitable) spaces: it is because the expansion of the world is a process of lighting up the world of objects, thereby eliminating spaces. The lighted world then becomes the spectacle of phantasmatic material objects which takes on the quality of the fetishistic agency. In order to counterbalance the effect of the fetishistic agency of the new world of objects, then, mimesis deploys a process

of rematerialization with the aim of inventing the new spaces in which the dislocated subject can now take up a position as the subjects of representation. With this inexorable dialectic of light and darkness, of fetishism and reification, we are back again in the world of “generalized inversion.”

What happens if we transpose the dialectic of light and darkness onto Lacan’s superimposed structure of the visual field? As I showed earlier, the gaze is expressed as both a point of light located at the pointed end of one triangle, and the object which takes up the flat side of the other triangle. This duality of the gaze is the function of light: when the field is lit the gaze takes on the side of the objects; when darkened, it becomes the point of light which represents the subject in the picture at the opposite flat side of the triangle. This is the sense in which Lacan writes: “In what is presented to me as space of light, that which is gaze is always a play of light and opacity” (*Four Fundamental Concepts*, p. 96). Once a degree of light is presumed to be present, the dialectic is then already that between light space and dark space, between, that is, the world of objects and the subject of representation, rather than the one between the point of light and the geometral point. (Or, as Lacan puts it, the dialectic “between appearance and being ... is not in the straight line, but in the point of light--the point of irradiation, the play of light, fire, the source from which reflections pour forth” [p. 94].) Thus, depending on whether you increase or decrease light, either the side of the objects or that of the subject is to be highlighted.

In short, what we have is the world of objects at the left side of a triangle, and the subject of representation at the right end of the other triangle. I may thus rearticulate the Lacanian superimposed structure in terms of the field of representation which obtains between light or the world of objects, on one side, and darkness or the subject of representation, on the other, while retaining zones of contact with the both sides.

III. THE PHANTASMATIC WORLD OF OBJECTS

At first, the agency of the “spectacle of the world” seems to have a radically disembodied effect upon the subject in as much as, as Lacan puts it, “we are beings who are looked at in the spectacle of the world” (*Four Fundamental Concepts*, p. 75). The invention of the new space of representation then dramatically eclipses the dominance of the “spectacle of the world.” Next comes perhaps the most ambiguous part of mimesis: the reinscription of the subject in this new space. Is what is involved “imaginary capture” or “symbolic mapping”? The answer is probably both, which is why the subject of representation should be at once the subject of enunciation as well as the subject of the enunciated. However, once the agency is restored back to the subject as the subject of enunciation, the subject finally seems to emerge as the eye from its immersion in the

“rays” of the gaze. Lacan speaks of “the emergence of something like the search for an unnamed substance from which I, the seer, extract myself”: “From the toils (*rets*), or rays (*rais*) ... of an iridescence of which I am at first a part, I emerge as eye” (p. 82). The emergence of the symbolic I/eye as the “seer” implies that the subject becomes once again the focal point of coordination, which in turn indicates that it is about to light up the world of objects again.

It is important, however, to note that the object world obtained this way is no longer the original objects seen by the punctiform eye of the geometral field, but the phantasmatic objects, sustained by the subject’s desire. Likewise, the subject is no longer the Cartesian *cogito* representing thought or consciousness, but rather the subject of representation held by the objects, in which the ambivalent relationship between the subject of enunciation and that of the enunciated is maintained. The subject is fractured, determined by the very gap that separates the I/eye from the gaze. The intervening mediatory field of representation functions to prevent the direct exercise of “the power of the gaze” through a process of diffusion or refraction. Thus, according to Lacan, “the moment of seeing” constitutes “a conjunction of the imaginary and the symbolic” (*Four Fundamental Concepts*, p. 118) or “the suture, the pseudo-identification, that exists between ... the time of terminal arrest of the gesture and ... the dialectic of identificatory haste” (p. 117). The structure of this mutual imbrication of the subject and the object is represented by the way the two inverted triangles intersect with each other: the wide side of a triangle is suspended over the other triangle through the contact of its opposite pointed end, while its pointed end is subtended by the wide side of the other triangle; and, *vice versa*, for the other triangle.

The world of objects within the field of representation is not the external reality perceived or reflected by the eye, but rather a “virtual” one in the sense Freud uses the term in *The Interpretation of Dreams*: “Everything that can be an object of our internal perception is *virtual*, like the image produced in a telescope by the passage of light-rays.” (*SE 5*: p. 610). In *Seminar III*, Lacan elaborates on the implications of this crucial Freudian insight:

It [the reality principle] expresses precisely this--the subject does not have to *find* the object of his desire ... He must on the contrary *refind* the object, whose emergence is fundamentally hallucinated. Of course, he never does refind it, and this is precisely what the reality principle consists in. The subject never refinds, Freud writes, anything but another object that answers more or less satisfactorily to the needs in question. He never finds anything but a distinct object since he must by definition refind something that he has on loan. This is the essential point that the introduction of the reality principle into the Freudian dialectic hinges on. (p. 85)

The object is virtual not so much because it is a product of fantasy, which emerges “fundamentally hallucinated,” as it is founded on the structure of dislocation, which bars any direct access to the object as such, i.e., the pure object of external reality. Perception of reality does not lead to any better grasp of the object as such insofar as what one finds in a “distinct object” is already a refinding of the displaced object in a disguised form. But the fact that one can only “refind” the object, that what one finds is always already a “refinding,” implies that there is yet another mechanism operating behind the structural dislocation of the object of desire: namely, the operation of *Wiederholungszwang* (repetition compulsion). For the situation in which one must refind something that by definition one cannot (re)find constitutes the condition for repetition. The point is not just that one cannot find the object insofar as the latter is what “he has on loan,” that is, already displaced; the point is that, despite, or regardless of, the impossibility and absurdity of the idea of finding something which is on loan, still you must (re-)find that which is *a priori* forbidden to you. What we see here is a movement that transforms the process of “refinding” into the principle of repetition--a movement from the imaginary (expressed in the vagaries of misrecognized objects of displacement) to the symbolic (in which one acts as if the object of desire were the disguised instance of the displaced object). Mimesis thus comes into play at the level of the emergence of the virtual objects in the operation of repetition which founds the symbolic.

As a consequence of the spatial dislocation of the object of desire, the new subject of representation in its turn is suspended over as well as subtended by the field of hallucinated objects: “the subject remains suspended at the point of what makes his fundamental object the object of his essential satisfaction” (*Seminar III*, p. 84). That is, the subject too is fractured in relation to the displacement of the object. The fracture of the subject constitutes a condition for the play of mimetic disguises: “through the mediation of masks”--through the “doubling of the other, or of myself” (p. 107), the mimetic subject emerges as I/eye from its immersion in the gaze, whereby it attempts to tame the disembodied effect of the world of objects. As I indicated above, mimesis entails initially a play between freedom and danger, between freedom of symbolic mapping and danger of imaginary capture. The “doubling” of the subject here indicates an active synthesis between the imaginary and the symbolic, comparable to what Lodge describes as “mimesis of an act of diegesis.”

In *The Theory of the Novel*, Lukács also speaks of the doubling of the authorial subject in the main character as the focal point of the novelistic representation. For Lukács, the doubling entails “taking up a position” (*Stellungnahme*) *vis-à-vis* the “whole of life” by way of which the subject transforms the latter into a created, i.e., represented, totality. Yet, paradoxically, the subject can assume such a position only by separating itself from the totality thus created, which then operates as its constitutive outside, as the other. The

achieved novel form must by definition fail insofar as the fulfillment of its mimetic intention in the creation of the totality is strictly correlative to the alienation of the subject from the created totality. In that case, its presumed, but no longer effective, totality only bespeaks the precipitating condition of modernity under which it is precisely the impossibility of totality that underwrites the imperative of the totality-creating form.

However, the subject cannot position itself in relation to totality as if the latter consisted of empty atmospheric void. It must first specify the represented space of totality--especially since the representation of space is predicated on the initial perception of the inapprehensibility of the external reality--by lighting up the world of phantasmatic objects, which knows its own representational consequences. Moreover, to assume a position as a subject in order to represent it entails the installing of the subject, not in abstract space, but in concrete places; it also entails the anchoring of subjectivity in a body. Therefore, without morphological specification of the places and bodies in question, the representation of subject risks disappearing into the thin air as a dislocated, disembodied point in empty space. Despite the breathtaking rigor of its dialectical insights, however, *The Theory of the Novel* tends to elide all of this object side of the novelistic mimesis: i.e., totality as bodily and objectal spaces in the spectacle of the world remains largely outside the domain of its inquiry. As a result, the agency of mimesis is ascribed exclusively to the eye/I in terms of its "form-giving" (*Gestaltung*) power at the expense of the gaze which represents the other side of mimesis as the inscription of the subject within the created space. In this sense, Bakhtin's intervention may be seen as an attempt to reverse this tendency in Lukács to inflate the subject side of the novelistic mimesis: his conception of the novelistic as the genre of heterogeneity and polyvalent voices, peopled with the part objects and half bodies of the Rabelaisian world, seems to show an understanding of the mimetic function of the lighted side of the object world, i.e., the gaze as the world of phantasmatic objects.

IV. CONCLUSION: NARRATIVE REMATERIALIZATION

What is the relation of the twin birth of the modern subject and of the new modern world of objects I have traced so far to the field of representation itself? And wherein does the representational consequence of the visual field lie? As I indicated earlier, while the new subject emerges from its immersion in the gaze, the new object emerges from the hold the eye has over it. Lacan calls this object as the *gaze objet a*, that is, object held by desire: "We shall ... see emerging on the basis of vision ... the gaze as such, in its pulsatile, dazzling and spread out function" (*Four Fundamental Concepts*, p. 89). But neither the emergence of the subject nor that of the object can establish a direct relationship without opening up to and passing through the field of representation that separates and connects

them. The field holds the condition of the exacerbation of either of the terms: the possibility of the subject's disembodiment and reification; or, that of the object's fetishism. (The spatial origins of the agency of the object world implied by the representational field may suggest a theory of fetishism which goes beyond the Marxian notion of the fetishism of commodities.) Yet, the field of representation also indicates that the terms of the relationship between the subject and the object are subject to change insofar as any changes in the spatial configuration of the field itself require rematerialization: that is, both the subject and the object have to assimilate into the new spatial environments or adopt new bodies.

The rematerialization of the representational field is finally the doubling of the space itself insofar as it is what gives body to form by creating the inscriptive surfaces of the body. It is at this level of the symbolic creation that a dialectical synthesis of form-giving and mimetic inscription, of diegesis and mimesis, of narration and narrative, becomes most apparent. This synthesis does not however lead to a conceptual resolution through dialectical sublation, but rather to a generation of another body. It therefore constitutes a movement of displacement which takes on the form of the doubling or disguise in other bodies. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze gives an insightful account of what such a structure of displacement through disguise may look like. For instance, narcissism, according to Deleuze, is not so much an obsession about the ego itself as the question of inventing a space to rematerialize or to reembody: it is "not a contemplation of oneself but the fulfillment of a self-image through the contemplation of something else: the eye or the seeing ego is filled with an image of itself in contemplating the excitation that it binds" (p. 97). Here, Deleuze in effect repropose narcissism--what is normally taken to be the most congested site of the self-identity through identification--as a site of doubling, of disguise through displacement, insofar as it concerns the realization of the image of a completeness ("the fulfillment of a self-image"), whose idea can only be grasped in "the contemplation of something else," that is, by enveloping and doubling the image in some other, displaced scene or body. The I/eye ("the seeing ego") still operates as the active agency of form-giving yet it thinks in terms of how to fulfill the idea or "image" of pleasure through doubling it in another scene as if pleasure could only emanate from the side of a place or body where the "seeing ego" no longer sees. To that end, the "seeing ego" seeks to reembody the spatial field through imagining "the excitation that it binds"; it innervates the space, so to speak, so that the rematerialized space becomes another body standing next to the seeing ego, generating pleasure in a series of contiguous self-enveloping images which only it (the seeing ego) can then cathect.

Narrative rematerialization is thus an attempt to extend and multiply the inscriptive bodily surfaces through the metonymic concatenation of another body to give form to, which in the process ends up giving body to the symbolic form. Through narrative

rematerialization, the novel gives form to the foreclosed representation of capitalist patriarchy as modernity's monstrous and anomalous Other. In turn, the bodies of the anomalous Other function as a writing surface upon which the modern representational regime of the novel never ceases to inscribe its symbolic injunctions. What constitutes the Other in the passage to modernity is primarily the body of the other sex and that of the other world. For the novelistic project of rematerialization repeatedly impinges upon the domestic and colonial others in order to transform them into spatial extension, upon whose bodily surface languages of white heterosexual fraternity are to be written. It is upon this extended mute body of women and colonies that the new representational regime writes the modern order of spatial relations to replace the premodern order of patriarchalism represented by the vertical or hierarchical relations. The novelistic mimesis overcomes the division between perception and reality by thus composing or rematerializing the rift in the direction of the creation of the order of spatial relations. It thereby transforms the possibility of knowing in modernity into one predicated on the representation of relations among signs that are distributed across the bodily surfaces.

With the multiplication of extended bodies, however, an overexplosion of signs takes place: the novel generate more codes than it can bind, more signs than it can decipher. The status of the others also changes from the mute body that receives inscription into the virtual hieroglyphics in which a myriad of foreign languages and discourses of desire crisscross each other with the result of obscuring the order of spatial relations. Put differently, as a consequence of the multiplication of overlapping and mutually subversive spaces, the letters of the law written into their bodily surfaces become disarticulated and unidentifiable and are then paradoxically transformed into the excess of superfluous signs and the preponderance of the inscrutable and indecipherable part objects. Yet, the body cannot fall without at the same time bringing down its counterpart. For, far from providing the subject with knowledge, the enveloping opacity of bodies now blocks the promise of knowledge which is the source of the subject's identity. The subject cannot reach, much less can it know, the object without being shot back by the gaze of the opaque objects that is refracted into the spatial field. Nor can it pass through the field without itself being subjected to disfiguration. In short, the field of representation holds, in the form of its spatial torsion, the conditions of its own subversion as well as of its own disarticulation. The spatial imperative of modernity thus chances upon an impasse, which the representational regime of the novel may find neither containable nor inscribable on its own terms.

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