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Where Did the Unconscious Go? An Approach to Freudian Metapsychology

Keywords

Freud, metapsychology, topography, unconscious, capitalist discourse, ChatGPT, pain, analytical experience

Abstract

It has been suggested that due to AI-technology-generated gadgets, a digital unconscious enables the probable annulment of the Freudian unconscious. The purpose of this article is to delve into Freudian topography as a way to demonstrate that this foreclosure of the unconscious was somewhat present in Freud as of 1920. In addition, regardless of solid attempts at the extinction of the unconscious by contemporary demands, I will focus on how the capitalist discourse and AI-generated technology propose a different form of social bond. Finally, the conceptualization of pain (*Schmerz*) is important for ascribing a different modality to the Freudian unconscious than in recent dissertations, but most importantly, it is a significant element for analytical experience to function properly where it must not be aligned with suffering. An era without an unconscious may foretell a time where enjoyment, as a form of subjectivity, is effaced.

Kam se je izgubilo nezavedno? Pristop k freudovski metapsihologiji

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Ključne besede

Freud, metapsihologija, topografija, nezavedno, kapitalistični diskurz, ChatGPT, bolečina, analitično izkustvo

Povzetek

Pojavile so se ideje, da je zaradi naprav, generiranih s pomočjo tehnologije umetne inteligence, digitalno nezavedno omogočilo skorajšnje izničenje freudovskega nezavedne-

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ga. Ta članek se poglobi v Freudovo topografijo, s čimer želi pokazati, da je bila izključitev nezavednega pri Freudu na določen način prisotna že v letu 1920. Poleg tega se bom ne glede na utemeljene poskuse izničenja nezavednega s strani zahtev sodobnosti osredotočil na to, kako kapitalistični diskurz in tehnologija, ki jo ustvarja umetna inteligenca, predlagata drugačno obliko družbene vezi. Končno je konceptualizacija bolečine (*Schmerz*) pomembna za pripisovanje drugačne modalitete freudovskemu nezavednemu kot v nedavnih disertacijah, predvsem pa je pomemben element za pravilno delovanje analitičnega izkustva, kjer ga ne smemo enačiti s trpljenjem. Doba brez nezavednega lahko napoveduje čas, v katerem bo uživanje kot oblika subjektivnosti izbrisano.



Introduction: Freud's Topographical Obsession

If we could dare attempt an introduction to Freud's metapsychology with an encompassing term, inevitably a single word, something to pull the spirit off its bone, this would most likely be laid under the name of "topography." In *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse*, this entry is defined as a "theory which implies a differentiation of the psychical apparatus into a number of subsystems [. . .] so that they may be treated, metaphorically speaking, as points in a psychical space which is susceptible of figurative representation."¹ Although the etymology for τόπος, which literally means "place," bears resemblance to various "common-places," Freudian topography must be understood as purely a theory of spaces or localities. Unlike Plato's *ὑπερουράνιον τόπον*—the world of ideas or, more precisely, "place beyond heaven"—or the Aristotelian τόποι considered as rubrics with logical or rhetorical value, Freudian topography hits differently. In psychoanalysis, there is another "scene" to view.

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Freud's topographical intentions were never fully dictated with an anatomical target in mind. He made this quite clear in *The Interpretation of Dreams*² and

¹ Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Quadrige, 1984), 484.

² "I shall entirely disregard the fact that the mental apparatus with which we are here concerned is also known to us in the form of an anatomical preparation, and I shall carefully avoid the temptation to determine psychical locality in any anatomical fashion." Sigmund Freud, "The Interpretation of Dreams (1900)," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete*

furthermore, fifteen years later in “The Unconscious,” where he adamantly expressed that “[the] psychical topography has *for the present* nothing to do with anatomy; it has reference not to anatomical localities, but to regions in the [psychical] apparatus, wherever they may be situated *in the body*.”³ Here our italics are not meant to be taken lightly as we will situate part of our analysis on the existing localities that a body has to offer. Contrary to what many psychoanalysts, influenced by an overruling neurological tradition with the aid of mental mapping, have instigated on a deviation from Freud’s metapsychology by “confirming” the location of particular psychical functions (i.e. the superego) in concrete entities within the brain, this “new” materialism seems incomplete. For the most part, Freud is not necessarily interested in advocating for cerebral locations as such, thus his work on aphasias, written in 1891, is a clear example of this zealous criticism. On the contrary, the place of interest—the sought out psychical scene—is indeed the unconscious.

As such, I do not intend to overlook Freud’s purpose in defining his witch-metapsychology tripartite—topography, dynamic, and economy—nor to undermine the potential of neuropsychology. However, what I truly want to unfold in this article is that as a result of his topographical sketching, which covered most of his professional life, Freud committed an omission, a minor hiccup in his scientific pursuit, since it was by way of his most eccentric adventure at formalizing abstract models of the mind, a daring conjectural achievement at framing the unconscious, that he offered us a legitimate appreciation of the *seelischer Apparat*. In spite of that, he did commit a fine slip of the tongue by leaving the locality of the unconscious (after 1923) exclusively to the domain of the id. All in all, in psychoanalysis, a mark left by an erasure is never to be taken lightly.

Thus, we must ask: a) What consequences remain from such oversight?; b) Is the rising advocacy in favor of a new unconscious appearing with the dawn of technologies such as ChatGPT?; and c) Which paths could this topographical adventure take us on by providing a comprehension of psychoanalysis as not only a tradition of the mind, but also, most importantly, of the body itself.

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Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74), 5:536.

³ Sigmund Freud, “The Unconscious (1915),” in *Standard Edition*, 14:175.

From Eels to Psychoanalysis: The Sketches

Early in his medical studies, Freud enjoyed drawing diagrams—as a matter of fact, he was quite a talented artist at doing so—thus inserting his practice in the 19th-century tradition of histological illustrations that allowed the enhancement of microscopic cells and biological tissues as well as picturing the internal shapes and contours of various organisms. A true endeavor for a credible anatomist. One of his earliest drawings—and perhaps his most memorable—were those of the testicles of the eel, drafted in 1877, and later those of spinal ganglia of lamprey fish and nerve fibers in freshwater crayfish, both published in 1878 and 1882, respectively, which laid the foundation for the discovery of the neuron doctrine. It is curious to think of how Freud, while searching for the “hidden” gonads of the male eel, which to his disappointment he could not locate successfully,⁴ stumbled upon the fact that the primitive form of the dissected organism was intersexual after all, that is, it has both male and female characteristics, thus promoting not only the early stages to his future sexual theory (bisexuality as a constitutive part of our nature) but also paving the way to one of his earliest manuscripts, namely the *Project for a Scientific Psychology*. From this point forward, his neuro-artistic attention gradually shifted to a more compelling understanding of the mind, thus cells, fish, medullas, and acoustic nerves transformed themselves into abstract figures and outlines. The materiality of the “living” copied specimen now became the development for the conceptual, particularly for a hypothetical and speculative incorporeal entity.

In 2006, the New York based art historian Lynn Gamwell—alongside South African psychoanalyst Mark Solms—curated an art exhibit celebrating Freud’s neurological drawings and diagrams of the mind at the Binghamton University Art Museum, commemorating the 150th anniversary of his birth. This exposition peeked into the evolution of Freud’s scientific reasoning through illustrations that stretched from histology and anatomy up to psychoanalysis.⁵ In such mat-

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⁴ In those years, the reproduction of the European eel was a “dark continent” for science. According to the German anatomist Max Schultze, everything was already known to science with the exception of the “eel question”: no gonad maturation, no egg or sperm laying, no larvae. How then did the eel reproduce?

⁵ See Lynn Gamwell and Mark Solms, *From Neurology to Psychoanalysis: Sigmund Freud’s Neurological Drawings and Diagrams of the Mind* (Binghamton, New York: Binghamton University Art Museum, 2006).

ter, one of Gamwell's arguments addresses the importance for 19th century researchers of finding novel ways to delineate that which "could not be seen"—the microscope being the tool of choice preferably—and prompting them to draw suppositional explanations. Reluctant to accept the authority of British empiricism and French positivism, and re-igniting the age-old philosophical debate as to where reality was to be situated (in the physically visible or in functions that were intangible), Freud consistently fluctuated between clinical observations and his own theoretical formulations, thus confirming a well-known maxim arising from Charcot's lectures at the Salpêtrière that he attended: if theory cannot give a solid account or explanation of a given phenomenon . . . well, so much for theory. Even if an unconscious locality does not meet a "positive" criterion, it must give ground to the observable clinical material beyond any speculative diagram.

Indeed, the place where Freud's diagrams made any sense were precisely in the locality alongside his clinical observations. In such tradition, perhaps we can see a brief parallelism with Lacan and his use of graphs, knot theory, and topology in order to demonstrate the concrete as formal abstractions. As a formulation condenses knowledge, similar to dream formation, it also demands rearrangement for its understanding to be somewhat attained. Precisely this is what Freud earnestly shared in his epistolary exchange, for nearly two decades, with his esteemed colleague Wilhelm Fliess: case studies, dreams, and scientific formulations. This heartfelt correspondence not only triggered Freud's self-analysis, but it also ignited the production of various outlines that he continuously reworked in future years. It was precisely in that moment that his most prominent "metapsychological" transformation took place.

From 1895 to say 1923, Freud built his model of the mind—a complex *seelischer Apparat*—based on two distinct topographies: 1900's topography is best known for its "systems" and 1923's topography is rather positioned on "instances." But foremost, 1895 is a key year for this transition to develop. Firstly, his publication co-written with Josef Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, opened a chapter to their comprehension not only of a new treatment but also of the logical functionality of their patient's ailments, thus a different locality, "another scene," was to be taken into consideration when treating their symptoms. Secondly, although he reluctantly shelved the *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, considering its ideas to be unfinished, it comes as no surprise to find in this text Freud's most

ambitious attempt at depicting the psychical apparatus—emanating from met-abiological inquiries with abstract aspirations. However, the eminent neurologist soon-to-become-psychoanalyst was not very satisfied with this manuscript, thus he locked it away until it was rediscovered in 1950. (Only Lacan seemed to notice the value of such text.)

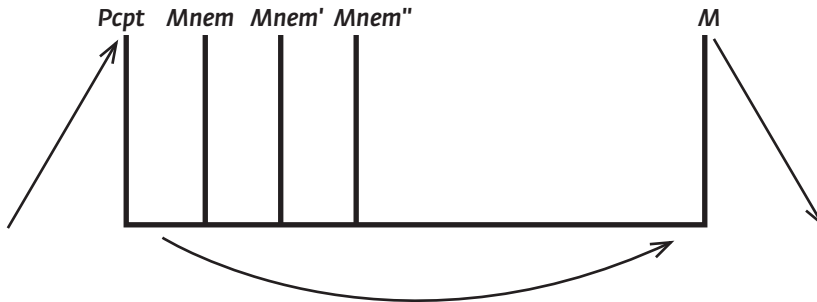


Fig. 1: First topography, 1900, in Freud, "Interpretation of Dreams," 538.

The draft of the first topography raises Freud's concern with achieving a suitable locus for dream formation, the whereabouts of the newly "discovered" unconscious system (*Ucs*). He carefully places the *Ucs* between two vertical lines that cover the grounds for such system. What is *in* this compartment? In such sense, an outline is formalized between two moments of translation (Freud once called this "censorship"), ergo two parallel lines "holding the dam" to form a sort of "bucket of the unconscious." Anything that traversed the second line (to the right) up until the *Pcs* system or motility (*M*, in this diagram) is considered a formation of the unconscious (i.e. slips of the tongue, parapraxes, symptoms, jokes, accidents, and/or acting out). However, dreams (and hallucinations) work differently based on a regressive inclination.

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Interestingly enough, Freud's 1900 topography functions primarily according to the reflex arc model revamped by John Dewey in 1896. Indeed, Freud cannot rub away his neurological background just yet. However, what is at stake here is something other than pure physiology. Freud observed in the regressive character of dreams (and hallucinations) the material where unconscious representations are resolved as pure satisfaction (i.e. dreams as wish fulfillment). Although a circumflexed arrow appears showing the direction towards which the psychical apparatus is oriented, this is only depicted to signal the typical movement

that works under the inherited reflex arc: stimuli → response, cause → effect, from perception to motility. Nonetheless, Freud shows that the force of attraction was not given by the direction the arrow displayed, but the opposite. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, he stated: “If we describe as ‘progressive’ the direction taken by psychical processes arising from the unconscious during waking life, then we may speak of dreams as having a ‘regressive’ character.”⁶ Therefore, we can speculate that in order for Freud’s 1900 topography to function properly, it not only situates its degrees of translation in successive epochs being maneuvered by the consistency of “progress,” but rather it also operates by virtue of a dual shifting temporality: P ↔ M.

By 1923, things have drastically changed: it appears that the Latinized id has taken over the entire unconscious scene. In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud marks his second topography with the introduction of three instances: the id, the ego, and . . . the acoustic channel? Yes, Freud’s return to his linguistic diagrams could not be more evident. Stemming from a cauldron of drives (id) confronted by defense mechanisms (ego), his conceptualization of an unconscious system now seems to be at risk. Freud is candidly open about the possibility of splitting the unconscious into two entities: “We recognize that the *Ucs* does not coincide with the repressed; it is still true that all that is repressed is *Ucs*, but not all that is *Ucs* is repressed.”⁷ This is a pivotal point in Freudian theory where the unconscious splits into two subsystems: the primal and the repressed. According to Recalcati,⁸ these two unconsciouses can also be interpreted as two different archaeologies that address the discovery of truth: on the one hand, we are left with an archival archaeology referred to as the subversion of desire, but, on the other hand, we are struck with a deeper sense of an attestation of the drive directed by the forces of the death drive. Which course does Freud take? In short, both.

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Unfortunately, after his 1923 elucidations, various authors took to arms to abandon his first dissertations in favor of a more theoretical and practical interest in the ego, id, and superego. However, this is where Freud’s omission comes into

⁶ Freud, “Interpretation of Dreams,” 542.

⁷ Sigmund Freud, “The Ego and the Id (1923),” in *Standard Edition*, 19:18.

⁸ Massimo Recalcati, *L'uomo senza inconscio: Figure della nuova clinica psicoanalitica* (Milan: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2010).

place. If we look at the 1923 diagram closely, there are some interesting elements that demand our attention.

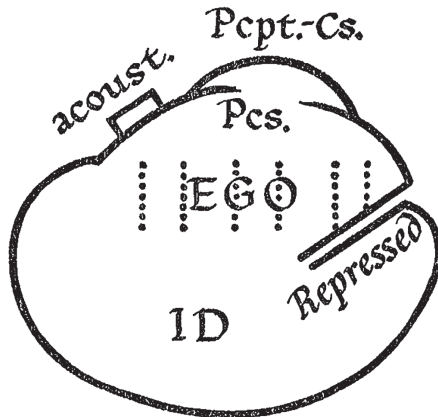


Fig. 2: Second topography, 1923, in Freud, “Ego and the Id,” 24.

It is notorious that Freud opened the psychical apparatus to a sphere-like formation governed by the capitalized letters of the ego and the id. However, we must focus on how the preconscious system (*Pcs*) and the conscious system (*Pcpt-Cs*), the latter linked to perception, are now connected. Also, a special place is granted to an outlet that allows the return of the repressed to occur regularly. Furthermore, another observation leads us to Freud’s appreciation of the acoustic sphere—he even draws what seems to be a hearing-aid for what would later be identified as the superego’s site. But, most importantly, where did the unconscious go? This omission in print led many to think that it was no longer convenient nor admissible to talk about the unconscious. As we shall see, this is not the case both clinically and politically speaking, thus returning to what Lacan said during his second seminar about a generation of psychoanalysts forgetting the dimension of the unconscious, or merely “stitching up the gap” of what was truly at the core of Freud’s discovery. Although a minor Freudian slip, the political implications for today’s assessment of the reaches of the unconscious are still in contention.

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Foreclosure of the Unconscious?

In 2010, Massimo Recalcati suggested in his book *L'uomo senza inconscio* (*The Man without an Unconscious*) a certain alertness springing from our modern

times: the disappearance of the subject left without an unconscious. In his inaugural reasoning, Recalcati posits five distinctive hypotheses for this alteration: a) an increasing tendency for scientific research to be relevant on the parameters of quantification, only statistical figures are taken as valid acceptance of knowledge; b) an ever-growing inclination for the premises of immediacy, an instantaneous experience where there is no longer any time for thought (perhaps our handling of gadgets are to blame); c) further antagonistic claims related to desire and its affiliation to law, hence the encounter with the Freudian unconscious entails coming up against a limit, an interruption of immediate non-castrated enjoyment; d) the mastery of truth being reduced to the expanding use of biotechnological knowledge leaving the judgement of being out of the equation; and e) the unnecessary requirements for a cure, which establishes a novel relationship to the unconscious, while favoring other forms of contemporary “relief” in the guise of well-being or a feel-good society. While these five hypotheses claim to be at the epicenter of modern culture and its discontent, there is the following critique to be resolved: Are these solid attempts at the extinction of the unconscious or merely anthropological mutations of our times? Whatever the allegation may be, one does not exempt the other.

According to Recalcati, the experience appropriated by the subject of the unconscious is three-fold: it is the concurrence of truth, difference, and desire. At the risk of losing its efficacy due to the fact of how contemporary demands have managed to unfold new forms of liaisons between subjects, peculiar modes of discursivity have permeated our social bond. In a time of standardized well-being, any kind of ailment and/or psychological distress must be considered a deviation from this norm, up to the point of nullifying any articulation of singularity. While psychoanalysis examines the uniqueness of each symptom as a ramification of a more complex historicity within the subject, as a mode of a particular existence, our modern times contribute to achieving exactly the opposite: the erasure of any form of psychological symptomatology in support of preserving a social norm. Thus, we are left with two questions: 1) What sort of discourse is promoted for such a calamity to be materialized? and 2) What remains of the body?

For the first part, the discourse at stake is what Lacan rightly introduced in 1972 as a formalized but unusual type of discursivity: the capitalist discourse.⁹ While most discourses tend to work regularly according to the placement of four relative positions (agent, Other, product, and truth) and their companion terms (subject [\$], master-signifier [S₁], knowledge [S₂], and object petit [a]), these distinct qualities do not seem to differ much from the capitalist discourse. It is the latter's mode of operation that is precisely offbeat. Rather than following a dextrorotatory flow, or even the opposite, a levorotatory action, the capitalist discourse delivers something noticeable: a new form of shifting that is neither progressive nor regressive, since all terms do not necessarily follow the usual operative flow, but it appears to create an endless loop between terms. This, however, does tend to bring about a series of proceedings concerning the actual purpose of this discourse. For example, while the subject links to the master-signifier in the form of truth, it is only there to signal towards the knowledge stemming from object petit *a*: ergo the endless production of enjoyment. Let us remember that while Lacan started to use the term "discourse" as a social bond founded in intersubjectivity, he also stressed the importance of the trans-individual nature of language, thus beckoning the emphasis of another subject through speech. Which sort of social bond is produced by each discourse depends on the way each position is taken by the four terms at hand. This fifth discourse ignites a different approach: rather than formalizing a new bond, its apparent aim does exactly the opposite, it gravitates towards its own destruction—liquefying the social bond between subjects.

According to Lacan, the capitalist discourse casts a surplus turned into a compulsory demand for enjoyment (*jouissance*). Currently, the outdated prohibition established by a superego to cease the ever-demanding enjoyment of say coital relations now turns upside-down and forces the subject into an excess of enjoyment as a lucrative imperative: rather than being prohibited from enjoying sex, now the demand turns into a compulsory exigency to do so. While the classical Freudian superego connoted a libidinal renouncement, nowadays the exhausting impulse to enjoy becomes the new social requirement. Therefore, our modern *saeculum obscurum* of overabundance implied by the endless supply of objects of consumption thrown insistently by the global market are precisely contemporary forms of servitude not to a master-signifier—as the

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⁹ See Giacomo B. Contri, ed., *Lacan in Italia, 1953–1978* (Milan: La Salamandra, 2007).

master's discourse foretells—but to our only aim: to enjoy urgently and continuously. In this case, there is no guaranteed bond with an Other, which can only occur through narcissistic alienation, thus alterity becomes an uncomfortable nuisance.

A useful way to illustrate this is best seen in Brandon Cronenberg's film *Infinity Pool* (2023), where a group of wealthy tourists vacation on the fictitious island of La Tolqa, and, in complicity with local authorities, are allowed to perform any sort of atrocities as long as they pay the customary fees which authorize the officials to cast a double of the perpetrator solely for social "justice." While the clone is brutally punished for the original host's crime, this sort of practice eventually turns into an endless spree of depravity and criminal behavior since there are no permanent consequences for the tourists' actions as they can always pay for another double to take the fall. During the film, the ontological question thus becomes: How do we know if we are truly the "original" subject or just a replica thereof that has watched its own assassination? In other words, does the clone have a conscience, or even better yet, an unconscious? While the protagonist James Foster, a mediocre writer, is drawn deeper into the realms of his own heinous enjoyment, we come to figure out that it is not necessarily a question of the subject or its double, but precisely an unscrupulous effort to view the unending force that drives these figures to such barbaric crimes, thus a capitalist discourse rationale is involved. How many layers of humanity does the subject have to shed in order to expose its true immoral core? In the final scene, we are left with an image of an alienated James Foster determinedly stranded on the island while the monsoon season has begun and the rest of the tourists have returned home: a subject (or a clone) bare to its pure enjoyment.

As Žižek points out, we are living in the end times where enjoyment has become an imperative condition.¹⁰ Therefore, through the appearance of this discourse, we foresee subjects that "relate"—be it through social media, computer-generated AI programs, or unlimited expenditure prompted by a free-flow market to consume. Nonetheless, the capitalist discourse is properly seen here to be a forthright characterization of the subtraction of love, an accurate anti-lover's discourse. Since the experience of love forcefully implies a loss in order to access the field of the Other, capitalist discourse's intentions turn against the self

¹⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso, 2011).

where apparently “nothing” gets lost in a perpetual model of “anti-love” while our own enjoyment leaves us ceaselessly isolated, much like James Foster. Is not the experience of love in modern times such a burden that it is preferably more attractive to remain in an endless loop of narcissistic self-centered bliss rather than taking the risk of actually losing a tiny bit of our own selves? Sometimes although we may perceive the act of not losing as a feeble form of “winning,” it is actually the opposite—thus as a result of taking the leap away from this sequestered enjoyment we may actually gain something by, paradoxically, losing. If entry to speech was achieved when the *infans* was sacrificed, such mystery may also be applicable to love.

So, following Recalcati’s opening argument, our times, fueled by a ceaseless drive prompted by a capitalist discourse, in fact provoke a disengagement between the concurrence of truth, difference, and desire, or, in other words, the experience of the subject of the unconscious is fading amidst the contemporary demands of society. How are these changes, then, modifying our corporeal “topography,” especially when engaged through AI-generated technologies and/or gadgets?

Advocacy for a New Unconscious

In recent times, people have stopped dreaming, or so it seems. An obsessive patient deeply preoccupied with his career and who wanted to find more advantageous ways of being productive with his time and efforts, once told me that he was utterly incapable of formulating a dream, so he turned to ChatGPT to compose one—and it did. Moreover, nowadays it seems that the demand for analysis, commonly praised as a demand of love, has abruptly shifted into a demand for productivity or efficiency. According to Bollas, this “normotic illness” is characterized by a lack of awareness of an interior life, hence no knowledge of dream formation is accepted.¹¹ Usually analysands come into the consultation room with a blank “stare” into their own intrinsic affairs. Turning back to our example, the content of the AI-generated dream is not important for our purposes, but it is precisely the action taken by a speaking subject leaning on the technology at hand that confronts us with an aggravating reality.

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¹¹ Christopher Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known* (London: Free Association, 1987).

Is ChatGPT a new form of the unconscious? This thesis has recently been at the epicenter of a vibrant debate between Rouselle,¹² Murphy,¹³ Žižek,¹⁴ and others.¹⁵ If we look at such arguments, most of them agree that ChatGPT stands in as a new unconscious, in the Lacanian tradition, as a novel form of the social bond. If this is their supposition, evidently pointing at the definition provided by Lacan that “the unconscious is the discourse of the Other,” then these claims are absolutely correct. However, my first critique would be to think outside the Lacanian box and try to figure this out from a Freudian perspective. Indeed, only Rouselle’s reasoning seems to take the time to point at this direction by taking into consideration dream-work as the *via regia* to the unconscious, where censorship is precisely needed for the continuity of sleep (thus satisfaction). However, what apparently looks like an honest Freudian hint is only a limited suggestion since it merely draws on one of Freud’s topographical diagrams. In alliance with a linguistic effort that establishes the division of a subject through speech, the Lacanian unconscious is displayed. This is accurate even from a Freudian perspective, but only up to 1920. However, I believe that what is actually missing from this debate is an essential element provided by Freudian theory. If the repressed unconscious is established through castration, then a division is installed in the subject, but what about that “other” scene which Freud neglected in 1923?

According to Žižek,¹⁶ a concise definition of the Freudian unconscious is “knowledge which doesn’t know itself,” or, in other words, his infamous “unknown knows.” Which unconscious are we talking about when we claim that ChatGPT is “an unconscious without responsibility”? Yes, the digital unconsciousness that Žižek and Rouselle aim at cannot be a bearing for the subject’s

¹² Duane Rouselle, “Escaping the Meta-Verse, Or ‘Forgiveness for the Artificially Intelligent?’,” in *Psychoanalysis and ChatGPT*, ed. Alfie Brown (London: Everyday Analysis Free Press, 2023), 9–14; Duane Rouselle, “ChatGPT, From a Window in Baltimore,” in Brown, *Psychoanalysis and ChatGPT*, 51–58.

¹³ Mark G. Murphy, “E-scaping Responsibility and Enjoyment Through ChatGPT: A New Unconscious?,” in Brown, *Psychoanalysis and ChatGPT*, 15–20.

¹⁴ Slavoj Žižek, “ChatGPT Says What Our Unconscious Radically Represses,” in Brown, *Psychoanalysis and ChatGPT*, 21–25.

¹⁵ Katherine Everitt, “Does ChatGPT Enjoy?,” *The Philosophical Salon*, May 15, 2023, <https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/does-chatgpt-enjoy/>.

¹⁶ Slavoj Žižek, “Philosophy, the ‘Unknown Knows,’ and the Public Use of Reason,” *Topoi* 25 (September 2006): 137–42, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-006-0021-2>.

dismissal of his or her own responsibility for their unconscious formations. Like both authors like to underline, “That wasn’t me! It was my AI” suggests a trend not only regarding uncompromising forms of sociality, but also concerning distorted ethical positions where subjects disregard any responsibility for their own accountabilities. Similar to when a first-time analysand who once dreamt that he was stealing money from the firm he worked at immediately directed his attention towards me and unashamedly confessed: “Do not think that I am able to perform something like that! On the contrary, I am a fully responsible employee *incapable* of such fraud,” but after two months into his own analysis and he was “incapable” of making his first payment arguing that he had forgot. Such forgetfulness needs to be called out accurately as a subjective position. Accordingly, this is precisely the sort of symbolic dimension that ChatGPT brings into question. Now, we must focus on the “the unconscious without the paternal structuring point,” as Murphy argues.¹⁷

Evidently, this observation is already found in Freud as of 1920: an unconscious that is not repressed but continues to function without an intermediary such as castration or speech. Since there is no metalanguage, how can we display the presence of an unconscious that is not traversed by language itself? One way to look into this problem is by delving into Everitt’s rebuttal: Does ChatGPT enjoy? Her answer is “no,” since ChatGPT does not experience anxiety.¹⁸ In addition, she also signals that since ChatGPT cannot be taken as an externalized unconscious, it is perhaps most likely to be understood as “a mirror for our own enjoyment.” Even if her claims are accurate, there is still something missing in her counterargument. As Rouselle rightfully brings forth as an immediate response, we must ask: “Enjoy, but with what body?”¹⁹

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Let us pause here for a moment. As Rouselle’s contention focuses primarily on gadgets such as ChatGPT understood as extensions of the body, an argument extracted directly from Freud’s *Civilization and Its Discontents*, “demonstrating that the ideological environment is itself embodied,”²⁰ there is a clear view of the position taken by the subject and its relation to gadgets as forms of enjoy-

¹⁷ Murphy, “E-scaping Responsibility,” 16.

¹⁸ Everitt, “Does ChatGPT Enjoy?”

¹⁹ Rouselle, “ChatGPT, From a Window in Baltimore,” 51.

²⁰ Rouselle, 51.

ment—say the invention of a prosthetic unconscious.²¹ This perspective is obvious when we come to think about the impact these technologies are having upon our bodies. For example, how many times have we felt the vibration of an incoming call in our pockets only to be duped by the fact that we were not actually carrying our mobile phone at the time, or the expectant anxiety that is produced by the mesmerizing circular movement of the “refresh button” while we await a webpage to bring forth new content—say an email, a comment, or merely recently uploaded material (it feels like being halted in front of a slot machine in a casino). I will not contest all the multiple quivers that our bodies encounter constantly, since they are examples which we agree (sadly) are true; consequently, language could not have been conceived if such a collision was not supposed. However, what I believe is utterly essential to underline is the fact that there is a dimension in the body itself which will remain unrepresented.

To think of a model where the body is represented solely by language in its entirety is impossible. Since his earliest drafts, Freud was fully aware of this “unknown” compartment within the body. For example, in “Draft G. Melancholia,”²² there is a split, two dimensions where the internal (proper) and external (foreign) not only intertwine—some might speculate an early allocation to extimacy—but a division is established only separated by a boundary between the somatic and the psychical. Therefore, a division is accomplished within the body between certain represented states known as predicates (repressed material) and another unrepresented state placed as a core, namely and most properly coined as *Es* in Nietzsche’s tradition. Psyche and soma never fully integrate but also never fully disengage; they easily intertwine. This is the place where the inclusion of a primal unconscious comes to be, but also where I believe Freud blundered by granting too much advocacy to the id. In other words, the body which the body “enjoys” beyond the usage of gadgets is not the extension granted by such tools, but foremost it is a location within its own intrinsic quality. Lacan was quite decisive when he expressed that another name for *jouissance* was precisely the “second body,” or the “more body within the body.” This latter addition bears resemblance precisely to that foreign quality that the Freudian unconscious has always depicted beyond its own repressive scope, which is implicitly associated with the sexual.

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²¹ Murphy, “E-scaping Responsibility,” 15–20.

²² Sigmund Freud, “Draft G.—Melancholia,” in *Standard Edition*, 1:202.

In order to add a bit more complexity to the on-going debate that has fueled various disputes, I ask: Can ChatGPT not only enjoy, but also, more precisely, can it experience pain? Rather than focusing on the constitutive split of an outdated subject (the repressed unconscious, in Freudian terms), it is still worthwhile highlighting the formations of the unconscious, as Rouselle has rightfully claimed that “the slip of the tongue is not the ultimate measure of an unconscious formation,”²³ since AI-generated programs can actually emulate such wobbling. For the unconscious to operate, repression is indispensable, but I will argue in favor of another path chosen by Freud in an attempt to draw upon topography.

Freud and the Perks of *Schmerz*

On 22 August 1938, Freud wrote the following entry in his journal: “Space may be the projection of the extension of the psychical apparatus. No other derivation is probable. Instead of Kant’s *a priori* determinants of our psychical apparatus. Psyche is extended; knows nothing about it” (Psyche ist ausgedehnt, weiss nichts davon).²⁴ A year prior to his death, Freud was still concerned with the metapsychological problem of locality, but, in a more concise matter, it is clear that his viewpoint was to examine space as an extension of the subject. No matter how far the psyche can expand without employing Kantian meridians, there is still a place which “knows nothing about it.” According to Nancy, in his exalted *Corpus*, “Bodies don’t take place in discourse or in matter. They don’t inhabit ‘mind’ or ‘body.’”²⁵ Henceforth, with a direct reference to Freud’s posthumous note, Nancy employs a distinct parallelism by situating the “psyche” as being precisely a body in itself which “knows nothing about it”: “The ‘unconscious’ is the being-extended of Psyche, and the thing that some, following Lacan, have called the *subject* is the uniqueness of *local color* or *incarnation*,”²⁶ assertively a body that signifies. By taking this position, a distinction can be made between the classic hysteric, whose body is saturated with signification, too much meaning, construed in itself as part of a repressed unconscious, and today’s psychosomatic patients, where the organs lack signification

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²³ Rouselle, “Escaping the Meta-Verse,” 10.

²⁴ Sigmund Freud, “Findings, Ideas, Problems,” in *Standard Edition*, 23:300.

²⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 17.

²⁶ Nancy, 21.

as such, thus meaning is absent from a primal unconscious perspective; both Freudian unconscious are signaled here not as separate entities but as clear examples of how the body is a fissure of sense. In such matter, the signifier covers the body up to a certain extent, then “knows nothing about it.” In our previous examination, we asked what persisted of our corporeal reality apropos the perils of this “second body.” Rather than focusing on the extension of the psychical apparatus equivalent to a body image that projects surfaces (exteriorities), something amply studied by Freud’s bodily ego and continued with Lacan’s mirror stage, I will examine the function of *Schmerz* (pain) as a collateral outlet for the “second body” to emerge.

Why is the involvement of pain decisive for psychoanalysis? According to Derrida, there is a distinctive quality given by Freud to pain, but, most importantly, to the breaching (*Bahnung*) of a certain force that induces drive facilitation within the body: “It is because breaching breaks open that Freud [. . .] accords a privilege to pain. [. . .] There is no breaching without a beginning of pain, and ‘pain leaves behind it particularly rich breaches’. But beyond a certain quantity, pain, the threatening origin of the psyche, must be deferred, like death, for it can ruin psychical ‘organization.’”²⁷ Without this unpleasant “push,” there can be no beginning—inasmuch as the birth of the subject or the body is concerned. However, there is more to *Schmerz* than just a distressing intensity that can annihilate forms of subjectivity, lest it is compared to suffering. As reported by Freud in 1915,²⁸ pain is considered to be a “quasi-drive” since it is a force (*Drang*) that has an origin (*Quelle*) and an aim (*Ziel*), with the lacking quality of missing a proper object (*Objekt*), thus making its attributes almost comparable to a drive. Furthermore, in *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety*, Freud claims that pain acts like a “continuous drive stimulus” and is akin to an actual reaction to a loss of object, unlike anxiety, which implies a danger, at most a displacement to this possibility. While pain functions similar to the drive, its proper qualities enable various breaches in the psychical apparatus in light of unknown destinations depending on paths broken by previous gaps. That is why, from a Derridian perspective, a special emphasis is placed on the differences between breaches understood as the origin of memory and the psyche. If these collisions

²⁷ Jacques Derrida, “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (New York: Routledge, 2001), 254.

²⁸ Sigmund Freud, “Repression (1915),” in *Standard Edition*, 14:141–58.

were of equal nature between force and resistance there would be no memory involved, thus no subjectivity at all. Considering that the origin of the psyche is placed within these differences, in addition to the deferral of the intensity of pain, this grants us another view away from the threatening forces of suffering; therefore, pain can also function as a pathbreaker for subjectivity.

Moreover, pain—at least physical distress—acts firstly upon the body. This does not mean that psychical pain is by far the lesser of two evils, although it usually carries a referential content to it, but by placing a certain quantity in the body, Freud offers a favorable approach to elucidating this “second body.” In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry not only situates the dimensions of pain solely upon the premises of expression, but also places in parallel its political implications as well as the material nature of pain proper to creation (i.e. artists’ grief as working through to their oeuvres). In such sense, “physical pain has no voice”²⁹ and thus seems to have no given reality other than the body itself; but “where” in the body does pain enable these three dimensions to align, apart from its aching organs? Can pain really be a directly shareable experience through language or just be mediated through speech acts and a symbolic truce? Pain has a nature unbeknownst to language (at least from its bodily front); throughout his life Freud was well aware of this limitation, even claiming on multiple occasions that “we know very little about pain,” which has remained a conundrum to psychoanalysis. According to Scarry, it is erroneous to think of pain as a realm “beyond” language, but rather it is based more on an alliance with the possibility of making/unmaking our world. Henceforth, pain offers two adjacent outlets to be explored: the pre-language quality of breaching and its linguistic representative successors. Since there is no language for pain to be expressed as it resists verbal objectification, this “second body” materializes into a corporeal reality as enjoyment installs a form of subjectivity.

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Let us recall the addenda in *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety*, where Freud explores different responses to object separation: anxiety, pain, and mourning. It is the second option that grabs his attention in reference to the subject’s response of “nurturing” too much physical pain while installing a narcissistic investiture that breaks away from social bonds, thus an internal shift is de-

²⁹ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 3.

manded: “The transition from physical pain to [psychical] pain corresponds to a change from narcissistic cathexis to object-cathexis.”³⁰ In short, the convulsion of *Schmerz* allows the subject to transfix various unknown breaches in order not to succumb to the scope of iteration within the body; thus enjoyment, as a form of this “second body,” facilitates, through means of valid degrees of manageable discomfort, another reality to be reached, at least beyond the controls of modern well-being ideology. Even if the void left by an insidious painful experience acts similar to an absolute negativity—the core of trauma—it is only there to allow the “second body” to materialize within the body as an opportunity for working-through to commence. Although not enclosed by anatomical references, this corporeal topography is contained within a primal unconscious’s sphere. So, as the body “stops not being written,” and as long as there is a location where quantity mutates into quality, the acts of performativity have as yet to be consolidated.

Furthermore, the nature of Freud’s primal unconscious is not some hidden surface deeper than the repressed unconscious, similar to a lower register of a buried city like the analogy he regularly applied, but rather it operates more akin to an entity that is coalescent to the latter conjunct to pre-verbal phenomena prior to representation. This does not mean that the primal unconscious is located anterior to any form of language; instead, it is imbedded within it with one minor difference: it lacks proper *Vorstellung*; at best we could think of it in terms of vestiges or traces. Following Freud’s second topography, the “overlooked” unconscious is precisely the settlement where *Schmerz* harbors in light of “the breaking of a path” (*Bahnung*). Ergo, pain brought forth by breaching and the primal unconscious may be taken as synonymous categories, since the latter can be employed as another name for enjoyment not arrested by means of repression, even when it turns detrimentally excessive.

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One final note: in his last public talk on 11 November 2000, the centenarian Hans-Georg Gadamer delivered one of his most intimate accounts dealing with the experiences that surrounded his chronic pain which was caused by contracting poliomyelitis when he was 22 years old. As he recovered to some extent from the various effects such illness had upon his body (i.e. partial leg paraly-

³⁰ Sigmund Freud, “Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety (1926 [1925]),” in *Standard Edition*, 20:171.

sis, spinal pain, loss of muscle tissue), this outcome did not come without a certain “incessancy” (*Chronifizierung*) of pain taking over his life as an unaccustomed form of reality. Regardless of the multiple surgeries and palliative care he submitted his body to, he had to learn to live with this pain. Consequently, chronic pain not only turned out to be an agitator of well-being, but it also became an integral part of life as much as thinking: “The real dimension of life can be sensed through pain, if you don’t let yourself be overcome (*überwinden*) by it,” claims Gadamer.³¹ By using the German word *verwinden*, literally meaning “twist,” Gadamer insists on the efforts arranged by the subject not curtailed to acts of resilience or masochistic pleasure, it is rather an experience that “something is dawning on me, something is coming to me (*mir fällt etwas ein*).”³² Although palliative care has advanced in ways that efficiently alleviates the experience of pain, Gadamer insists on the vital dimension that pain brings forth to each subject: the aperture—breaching, in Freudian terms—of life. In fact, according to psychoanalysis, pain is better explicated as a vital force that promotes a certain accession to life, regardless of its deferred and inevitable triumph over the subject. That is why pain must not be equivalent to suffering—while the latter destroys subjectivity, the former ignites it.

Tilting the (Psychoanalytical) Subject

Freudian topography can only take us so far. As it is evidently limited to the rectifications of analytical experience, there is more to straighten out. So, where did the unconscious go? By 1933, “Lecture XXXI—The Dissection of the Psychological Personality” represents one last attempt by Freud to recapitulate metapsychological themes, especially topography. In a corollary sketch to the 1923 diagram, Freud reinserts a proper location for the unconscious alongside the deeper realm of the capitalized id. Therefore, the second topography does not substitute for the previous one; on the contrary, it is due to the first topography that the ground is set. By tilting the diagram below on its side, the sketch from 1900 is recovered.

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³¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Schmerz: Einschätzungen aus medizinischer, philosophischer und therapeutischer Sicht* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2003), 27.

³² Gadamer, 27.

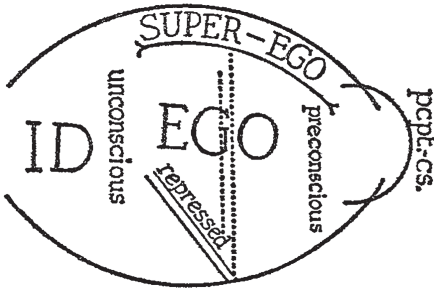


Fig. 3: Further topography, 1933, in Sigmund Freud, "Lecture XXXI—The Dissection of the Psychological Personality (1933 [1932])," in *Standard Edition*, 22:78.

However, it has been widely noted that Freud's oversight was not necessarily the elimination of the unconscious from the second topography, but, most importantly, the restrictions that came about due to using bi-dimensional diagrams. This is something considered by Lacan in his second seminar,³³ where he poses the problem of regression. It is notably acceptable for our arguments that Lacan refers precisely to Freudian topography, especially the 1900 diagram, in order to critique the intricacy of space. Thus, he insists, in his collaboration with Jean Valabrega, on addressing the problem of space in Freud as a true *temporal* topography—at least from the first topography's perspective—a circular entity in the form of a parallelepiped three-dimensional figure covering the *seelischer Apparat* where entry (perception) and exit (motility) converge, rather than thinking it in linear terms, including a flat direction, as Freud clearly showed: the sphere is, then, an improved model for explaining Freudian topography. However, this "topographic unit" is also understood as a model in which two opposite ends paradoxically imply a beginning, thus the "unit" gets decomposed: it is one but split. As Lacan confronts his audience about the risks of "stitching up the gap" left by Freud's discovery, this split must be referred to, then, as that which *Schmerz* insistently refuses to concede.

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While various attempts at formulating terminologies such as a "third topography" (Dejours) or a "third unconscious" (Berardi) have been conceptualized, I propose to look into the *Project of Scientific Psychology* as it has as yet to offer a final unwavering answer. Instead, it compels us with multiple questions as we read along—especially when conceptualizing what is a body in psychoanalysis. It comes as no surprise that pain has a distinctive place at the very beginning

³³ Jacques Lacan, *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954–1955*, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991).

of this text, especially situated between “The Problem of Quantity” and “The Problem of Quality.” Could it not be best to think of pain—a “quasi-drive”—as the leading hinge-concept between quantity and quality?³⁴ According to Freud, pain is coetaneous with the very beginning of life since the infant’s first cry, and because it accompanies us throughout our lives to a lesser degree, it converts itself into a noted part of our subjectivity. In this text, *Schmerz*, but more extensively “breaching” (*Bahnung*), becomes the central maneuver for the structure of subjectivity: no given path has as yet been predetermined. In neurological terms, Freud explains: “Pain sets the ϕ [permeable neurons] as well as the ψ [impermeable neurons] system in motion, there is no obstacle to its conduction, it is *the most imperative* of all processes.”³⁵ The efforts implied by such agitation require an additional counterforce.³⁶ So, when addressing the formation of the ego, Freud introduces the term “side-cathexis,” which acts as an inhibition to the course of energy, making each “deviation” (or *différences*, in Derridian terminology) a cornerstone for singularities to propel. In short, each body is eventually a display of forces and inhibitions as it will remain inimitable.

As seen before, *Schmerz* also operates as a hermeneutics of life; thus its aperture promotes thinking. Therefore, closure to pain may perhaps boost an additional hypothesis: the lack of certain discomfort may initiate a proper closure to the unconscious. To eliminate pain completely from human life may be inferred to be an eradication of the breaching it brings forth, so its absolute effacement may imply the dissolution of the body likewise. So, without the initial pulsation brought forth by *Schmerz*, thinking—an irritation to modern capitalist ideologies—turns futile. Let us take the example of the opioid crisis, a disturbing epidemic seen throughout the United States and other parts of the globe. Although opioids’ efficiency in alleviating pain in light of an individual’s arrested existence does provide a benefit, when induced alongside the capitalist discourse, subjectivity becomes superfluous. The continuous advertisement of oxycodone

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³⁴ By 1920, Freud shifted his originary sadism theory to a more precise theory of masochism, specifically describing the former erogenous masochism. These views were amply studied in “The Economic Problem of Masochism,” published in 1924.

³⁵ Sigmund Freud, “Project for a Scientific Psychology (1950 [1895]),” in *Standard Edition*, 1:307; italics added.

³⁶ Piera Aulagnier coined “primary violence” as the term for this force, a “necessary” action to get the apparatus activated, unlike the secondary form of violence, which destroys subjectivity.

(OxyContin) or fentanyl-derivative drugs have increased the demand for analgesics in the market. Yes, certain disquieting forms of pain should be soothed urgently. But by doing so, upon the immediacy of dealing with all sorts of ailments (the vast majority of which do not actually need a painkiller as strong as morphine), demand has become a new marketing strategy: eliminating distress above all measures of existence. Does this entail the arrested development of subjectivity? No, it promptly means that our (bodily) breaching drive facilitation becomes limited to stricter and more compressed ideological corsets of appeasement. The “no pain, no gain” slogan is, indeed, its efficient advocate under capitalist discourse.

Still, if the capitalist discourse destroys social bonds, it also dismantles bodies (individually and collectively). In fact, while ChatGPT evidently does not experience pain as a human body does, it formulates novel ways to substitute dreamwork and express our repressed fantasies. Accordingly, what was once the embarrassing experience of acknowledging an “immoral” dream, now turns out to be the displacement of our faults upon the reification of AI technology. But what can psychoanalysis truly offer as a dissident attempt at this contemporary discursivity? It is suggested that this warning is quite startling, but let us be firm about this: a dream formulated by ChatGPT is not a dream. In addition, what psychoanalysis introduces is the fact that *Schmerz* in parallel with love are elements contrary to the capitalist discourse; they are resistances essential for pursuing subjectivity. In fact, both categories can sometimes be taken synonymously as guarantors of the aperture of the unconscious. We have reached a point where there is no turning back since, according to Rouselle, “without love, forgiveness is foreclosed,”³⁷ and if there is something to be drawn from analytical experience, it is precisely its unyielding aim at facilitating different modes of enjoyment not fixed on the premises of capitalist empowerment. Therefore, love as a cure is also defiance. Can there be another way to tilt the psychoanalytical subject? By focusing on the vulnerabilities of the “second body” and its historicity, we just might gain a slight clue to inventing a different future, maybe not a sumptuous one—but hopefully one that is livable.

³⁷ Rouselle, “Escaping the Meta-Verse,” 13.

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