

“The Fantasy itself is the most Real Thing”

Exploring Desire in the 21st Century: Žižek and Ideology

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Abstract

This thesis considers how desire might be theorised in the twenty first century against the backdrop of New Zealand society, culture and film. Methodologically, this exploration is addressed with reference to Žižek's return to a critique of ideology, whose conceptual basis is drawn from Marx, Althusser and Lacan, and which is significant in its analysis of contemporary desire as emanating from social conditions and constellations of power. Žižek's challenge to call for a new Master is one that this thesis responds to enthusiastically. Such a response is posited from a location which intersects Lacanian psychoanalysis and sociological theories.

The method this exploration employed focus groups and individual interviews from which talk of desire is constructed and critically explored. Focus groups and individual interviews were conducted following a viewing of the New Zealand film, *Heavenly Creatures*, which enabled an exploration of how participants offer competing ideological locations which can reveal the hidden and not so hidden mechanisms regulating social relations and ambiguities. The participant profiles of the focus groups were designed around key themes relating to the film: fathers of teenage daughters; those working or heavily involved within the creative industries; young women aged between 18-25; and those who grew up in Christchurch during the 1950's.

Heavenly Creatures is a film interpretation of the actual murder of Christchurch resident Honora Rieper in 1954 by her teenage daughter and this daughter's friend. In exploring both the themes of friendship and the figure of the mother, *Heavenly Creatures* deliberately conflates fantasy with ideology, so that it is from this intersection that possibilities of subjective desire are confronted. When addressing desire set against this particular film, participants confront deadlocks and misrecognitions, in particular the disintegration of those ideological conditions with which they are identifying. These include the limitations of

modern capitalism, concerns about the 'environment', the pervasive engagement with cynicism, and frustrations with the inability to intimately and socially self-express. In order to understand and articulate desire various locations are posited in the guise of subjective truth. These points of fixation are structured by the conditions of dominant social and cultural ideologies, which the participant seeks to symbolise in returning to the ambiguity of the promise of the Master's discourse as proposed by Lacan. This thesis critically explores three of the modalities through which Lacan's construct of the Master is revealed in participants' talk about desire: these are the precarious position of belief, the fragmented body, and love as an ideological act. It is argued that these modalities work within discourse in such a way as to offer participants ideological personification as well as a complexity of circumstances from which they can designate the *objet a* (the truth of one's desire in psychoanalytic terms) insisted by the superego. In this way these three modalities are configured as enabling a speaking, or a saying, from a position of knowledge. This position in turn insists that the subject does not have to abandon the problem of desire but rather engage with knowledge attained through confronting and developing a literacy of desire. Desire read alongside the modalities of belief, the body and love posit a contemporary ontology in which the gaze commands an ethical and somewhat moral dimension from which the subject can construct a Master which not only seeks to recognise and speak about desire, but also manage it within daily life.

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Lacey, C. & Zeiher, C. (Forthcoming June 2014). *Love is a Piece of Cake*. Écranosphère: Traversing Screen Fantasies, Canada.

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In the end one loves one's desire and not what is desired.

Nietzsche, F. (1886, p. 175). *Beyond Good and Evil:*

Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future.

Part 1: Framing desire

Engaging contemporary Lacanian theory with empirical components such as focus groups, interviews and the media can offer insights into how desire is shaped in contemporary times. This exploration of desire is divided into two parts: the first part focuses on how desire is framed and understood to date and the second part provides an analysis of contemporary understandings of desire as taken from the empirical data, concerning social and political events, the media and legislative changes. The concluding comments present how desire can be further analysed against three specific discourses of belief, the body and love in contemporary times.

Specifically, the first part of this thesis explores relevant literature and theoretical positions to understand desire throughout our historical and social times. I introduce and explore the question and the multiple locations of desire in which the contours of desire are initially shaped by a sense of what can be considered, *longing* into to a position of action and mobilisation. Part 1 consists of three chapters and will concentrate on how various fields, such as philosophy, Lacanian psychoanalysis, sociology, theories of film and Žižek's return to ideology have attempted to theorise the desiring subject. Specifically, the literature review outlines the historical and social contexts of such theorisations, while the theoretical chapter is heavily focused on how desire is understood in Lacanian psychoanalysis with specific attention given to the work of Žižek and the importance of film. Lastly, the method and methodological chapter brings together critical social theory and Lacanian psychoanalysis by focusing on how a study of desire was undertaken for this thesis. Together these chapters provide the foundation for the analytical section of this thesis.

Chapter 1: Exploring theorisations of desire



Illustration 1. *The Lovers*, Magritte, R. (1928).

...so that indeed if we pronounce the word desire, the final benefit of this full usage is that we will ask ourselves what desire is (Lacan, 1958, *Sem. VI*, p. 3).

Desire is an effect of language and the unconscious (Grosz, 1990, p. 67).

Introduction

As depicted in *The Symposium*, during ancient Greek times, Socrates and Apollodorus conversed about the possible bases of a transformative and meaningful life. Apollodorus was a materialist and valued the pursuit of wealth and comfort as possible paths to happiness. In contrast to this Socrates envisioned life as an ethical quest in which amongst other things, we

learn from our lovers in that our attraction to them has the potential to teach us what we desire (in Sheffield, 2006, p. 11). We ought not to profess or presume to know anything, maintained Socrates, but our lovers can be a source of revelation. Although in the musings of these scholars the function of desire remains ambiguous, an ethical inquiry into desire is nevertheless asserted by both men as central to achieving a valuable life.

From past to present, speculation about desire has been a focus for philosophical thought, in particular how, in everyday life, one can approach the intriguing problem of desire. Plato claimed that “what one desires is always what is not the case: he who desires something is lacking in that thing” (cited in Oddie, 2005, p. 70). The Platonic premise that one desires what one perceives as lacking has provided a foundation for further explorations of desire (Plato, in *The Symposium*, cited in Oddie, 2005, p. 533):

And when you say, I desire that which I have and nothing else, is not your meaning that you want in the future what you have at present? He desires that what he has at present may be preserved to him in the future, which is equivalent to saying that he desires something which is nonexistent to him, and which as yet he has not got.

Thus desire points towards an object of possible fulfilment. Objects in this context can be understood as symbols, subjects and social artefacts which “serve not simply as personal mnemonic, in relationship from its particularity in the present to generalities of the past, but also as an agent of cultural construction” (Whincup, 2004, p. 85). Objects can be generated “social texts” (p. 86) or images for understanding subjective desire as a lived experience.

Drawing predominately from Slavoj Žižek’s return to the theories of Lacan, as well as from those scholars who employ Lacanian psychoanalysis in social theory, this thesis explores particular social and subjective processes which today underlie attempts to recognise and articulate desire, drawing on interviews, visual images and film. These processes are

examined by focusing on the way different social groups in New Zealand talk about desire in the context of responses to a specifically chosen film. Using this method for interrogating desire reveals various social and ideological encounters and constructions, some of these having more traction for the subject than others. To experience and understand human desire is to engage in an intimacy with our perceptions of ourselves, of the world and of our relationships with others. Such activities and explorations capture and frame a series of social encounters which engage sets of discursive beliefs, attitudes and behaviours in order to create potential subjectivities. Through the experience of desire the subject is immersed in forms of subjective and social knowledge, although this knowledge is only provisional and contingent on what is perceived as socially visible and of value.

Thesis background and breakdown

This thesis provides an analysis of discourses on desire by deliberately addressing desire as an opaque and undiscovered enigma, as Salecl (1998) eloquently describes: “[t]he [subject] will do anything to keep the figure of the Other intact” (p. 45). Although addressed in more detail later, the Other is an important feature for understanding the complex nature of the subject and the process of forming subjectivity. The Other¹ is central in understanding the subject in that it particularises, through language, the scene of desire. It promises the subject an illusion of subjective wholeness and takes on many forms throughout a particular subject’s life. For participants in this research, young people discuss and critically explore the importance of contributing to the world in a meaningful way and at the same time create a subjectivity which is unique to them; older women talk wistfully about child-rearing and the embodied desire of wanting a child; those in their mid-life talk about the desire for meaning

¹ The Other in Lacanian psychoanalysis is a complex and nuanced concept which will be further unpacked in Chapter 2. Briefly, the Other represents the ‘truth’ of one’s desire, both as a subject and as a relationship.

and of lost opportunities; older men talk with intense reflection and emotion about their life experiences. Each participant in this study brings a series of complex images, relationships and intimacies which are partially unveiled through discussions. The Other manifests through art, work, family, love, the body, friendships and a need to believe that the promise of the Other does in fact offer the potential for fulfilment of one's desires.

Methodologically, I chose film in order to imitate and facilitate discussion about desire, with participants from four focus groups following a viewing of New Zealand film, *Heavenly Creatures* (Jackson, 1994). Film offers the viewer to step outside themselves, to become another and imagine a different 'reality', if only momentarily. At the same time, film offers impressions which viewers can identify with. Such is the case with *Heavenly Creatures* which is based on an actual incident of matricide occurring in Christchurch which most New Zealanders are familiar with. The focus groups are: young women aged between 18-25, those involved within the creative industries, fathers of teenage daughters and older residents of Christchurch. My data collection was undertaken during the September 2010 and February 2011 Christchurch earthquakes and this provided an unexpected traumatic kernel from which the structures of desire and trauma were simultaneously recognised and articulated. New Zealanders, broadly speaking, hold the landscape and potential of the land in great esteem. Many Christchurch residents are keen gardeners and enjoy a wide range of outdoor activities. Mountains, rivers, the sea and the weather have an enormous impact on day to day life in Canterbury and provide important cultural reference points. These capture both physical features and notions of life, growth and restoration. The earthquakes however were devastating for Christchurch; many people lost their homes and livelihood, the central city was largely demolished, thousands were injured and 185 people died. Thus earthquakes provided a violent and traumatic encounter both with the land and people with each other.

Peter Jackson's film, *Heavenly Creatures* is set in 1950's Christchurch and depicts the actual murder of Honora Rieper by her daughter Pauline and Pauline's friend, Juliet. The motive for

the murder was that Pauline and Juliet, sharing an intense friendship based on fantasy and desire, were fearful they were going to be separated. Both the original murder and the film version remain horrific and perplexing to New Zealanders. Given the factual basis of this film, its depiction of 1950's Christchurch and the play with fantasy, *Heavenly Creatures* was chosen to be shown to different focus groups in New Zealand in order to generate talk about desire.

My exploration of desire, therefore, is framed and understood in two distinct parts. Part one focuses on how desire has been understood through the ages, on theorisations and understandings of desire, specifically of Lacan, Žižek and particular scholars who employ Lacanian psychoanalysis, and lastly on the method and methodology used in my research. Part two consists of substantive and analytical explorations of desire which arise largely from participants' talk, but although interweaved with critical considerations arising from global and political events, visual art, literature and recent New Zealand legislative changes. The analytical chapters explore three main themes which also arise from participants' talk about desire. The first focuses on Žižek's postulation of how belief frames desire, the second on how the body is implicated as an ideological object in understanding desire and the third on how desire and love are understood as intrinsically yet problematically interweaved. I argue that these three orders of naming desire are a return to the Master's discourse by the Hysterical subject of the 21st century. In the light of current political, economic and environmental uncertainties, such a return to a Master provides a governing even if less defining discourse which nevertheless holds traction for the contemporary subject and which is therefore important in the process of subjectivisation.

To begin the discussion on desire this chapter focuses on the relevant literature and theorisations. Interpreting desire is an enormous field covering scholarship in literature, psychoanalysis, film, visual arts, feminism and sociology to name just a few. I focus

specifically on scholarship which contributes to the intersections of Lacanian psychoanalysis, psychoanalytic film theory, feminism and sociology.

Cultural, historical and social conceptualisations of desire

There exist many interpretations of desire. Some religious and eastern spiritual discourses offer statements about the status of desire for the subject; for example, the prohibition of giving way to those desires which lead towards unfulfilment, in particular, sexual and material desires (McDougall & Dalai Lama, 1998). Some Buddhist teachings assert that the desire for pleasure, material possessions or immortality manifests as suffering.² The Buddhist ethic of giving up desire is for some no easy matter because giving up is influenced by the level of suffering one attributes to any particular desire. The subject may seek a compromise, that if one must desire, then it should be purposeful and for the good of a future condition (Oddie, 2005, p. 70).³ Notwithstanding its problematic position in relation to humanism, there are aspects of some Buddhist philosophy, (particularly when examining constructions of the ‘self’) which challenge how the function and form of desire can be recognised and understood.⁴ Similarly, Christianity positions desire as thoughts and actions which may be

² The first of the *Four Noble Truths* which identifies the cause of suffering.

³ Laurence Rosen (1955) offers scholarship into how ‘desirelessness’ is most desirable as a future subjective condition. He posits desire as “at least apparently evil” (p. 58), although the object one desires can be for an apparent good. He tends to make little distinction between the supposition of reality and that of appearances.

⁴ A. L. Herman (1979) discusses the paradox of the “desire for desirelessness”, that being the desire to eliminate desire itself. He has been rebutted as confusing need with desire by W. Alt (2001) who suggests that desire is lusts or cravings and therefore possible for the subject to eliminate. Conversely, Benton (2006) focuses on images of Indian deities which embody desire and thereby explore the intersection of Indian culture with desire alongside notions of illusion and power.

sinful barriers to the ultimate goal of union with god and therefore to be resisted. Within such frameworks desire is understood as a contradictory, somewhat paradoxical ethic, both selfishly motivated and 'natural' or essentialised. For the religious believer desire must be harnessed and controlled by a higher authority, a transcendental Other, in order to avoid attachment to the material world, suffering, pain and separation from god. Desire in these religious contexts possesses an unyielding ideological function and can thus manifest as a position of anxiety for the subject in that any attempt to extinguish desire serves only to stimulate it. For psychoanalysis, this is the kernel of desire.

On the other hand, theorists such as Schueler (1995) take a more pragmatic approach by understanding desire as a process and experience controlled by reason and intention of action. Desire, he maintains requires justification: "there must be some strong, perhaps logical, connection between having a good reason to perform an action and wanting to do so" (p. 3). For Schueler desire is not only recognisable, but also deliberate and rational. Goldman (2009) similarly attributes understandings of desire to a conscious subjective recognition interwoven with observation and phenomenology (p. 90):

In ascribing desires to other people, I identify their desires by how they say they feel about various objects, how they evaluate various states of affairs, what they seem to pay attention to and take pleasure in, and above all by how they act, which behaviours tend to repeat themselves in pursuit of various goals.

Indeed, it can be argued that desire is a state of motivation or drive for pleasure seeking. However, in critically examining theorisations of desire alongside psychoanalysis, it can also be argued that desire is not so clearly or so easily reasoned and certainly desire is more chaotic and complex than something involving merely undertaking a process of evaluative judgment.

Desire is thus an ongoing problem regardless of whether it is considered to be clearly articulated or whether it is thought to be merely a manifestation of the imagination. Desire, its function and its form is undoubtedly open to interpretation, which in turn presupposes that it is an experience conditioned by discourse. As noted by Wilkerson, “desire cannot be known entirely on its own terms. Desire in itself remains unknown, and the experience of desire is desire for all that can be known” (2007, p. 52).

Drawing on the empirical work of social psychologist, G. H. Mead, Wilkerson claims that desire reveals itself through relatedness to others because its meanings are constructed as somewhat recognisable. Mead (1934; 1964; 1982) maintains that for desire to be meaningful and potentially satisfied, it needs to be recognised by other subjects. Desire as conceptualised by Mead can be measured as an expression based on the anticipation of another’s response. In this way, “in seeking to compel the other to satisfy me, I must regard the other as an *other in relation to myself*” (Wilkerson, 2007, p. 61). Although Wilkerson recognises the developmental process of subjective recognition and interpretation of desire, he accepts this to be highly socially contextualised and thus somewhat predictable. He terms ‘otherness’ as a pivotal stage in relatedness to others (p. 60). The other is reflected in the subject’s desires as “a temporal gap that meets social response” (p. 65). Within this process desire for the subject is understood in relation to how a more generalised and future focused Other is perceived and structured.

The contemporary desiring subject: from Althusser to Žižek

What is meant by the ‘subject’? Social theorist, film and feminist scholar, Teresa de Laurentis (2007) suggests that subjectivity is a cultivation of the process of experience. By this she means a person is subjected to social processes, rules, regulations and constraints. She views the process of becoming a subject as being anchored within power structures. Judith Butler

(1997) who provides immeasurable theorisations on gender and the subject, asserts that power simultaneously constitutes the subject (1997).⁵ De Laurentis furthers Butler's insistence of the introduction of a linguistic element, commenting that the subject is "one who exists, acts, carries out the actions described by the predicate, a subject or 'I' endowed with existence, capacity to act, to want, and so on" (2007, p. 220). The subject is thus determined by an interweaving of language, social and psychic forces (p. 220):

...the social subject is always also a psychic subject, and thus traversed by conscious and unconscious desires, drives, fantasies or phantasms which constitute another modality of constraint...

De Laurentis illustrates contradictions operating with these modalities by quoting Italian feminist philosopher Cigariri (in de Laurentis, 2007, p. 220): "there are certain nuances of my sensibility that don't coincide with my will to be feminist and the practice I've made in feminism". She highlights how contradiction, ambiguity and ambivalence constitute the subject as reflexive and furthermore have the function of mobilising the subject's articulations of desires, longings and behaviours. Joan Copjec (1989) suggests that the subject is constructed by language which has "historical specificity" (p. 239). By this she means that one "is a product of history without being the fulfilment of a historical demand" (p. 239). Film theorist, Mary Anne Doane (1987) differentiates between the subject and the process of subjectivity by claiming that while both categories are shaped within the domain of language and psychoanalysis, the notion of the subject is not synonymous with the 'self' or with agency (p. 9). Rather, she argues that subjectivity is infused with the discourses of language,

⁵ Butler explores the intersection of power and subjectivity through drawing on Nietzsche, Hegel, Freud, Foucault and Althusser in *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997), to assert that power is internalised and anchored in notions of subjectivity.

and conversely that language makes subjectivity possible (p. 10). Doane notes how Jacqueline Rose problematises notions of subjectivity by “defining it as a failure of identity” (p. 11). Doane seizes upon Rose’s conceptualisation as a problem for the function of desire by claiming that because identity, ideas of agency and wholeness are illusory, the position of desire as formulated within the subject is ensured. Thus the speaking subject is simultaneously a desiring one. Moreover, this connection, notwithstanding all its tensions, is necessary.

Louis Althusser coins the term *interpellation* to mean a process which brings the subject into existence as an identity, by being named (1971). He draws on Lacan’s mirror-stage whereby subjects, usually around the ages of three or four, misrecognise themselves thereby producing a sense of wholeness in their subjectivities. Butler states that “Althusser believed that this social demand of [being whole] – one might call it a symbolic injunction – actually produced the kinds of subjects it named” (1997, p. 95). The function and site of the Imaginary, succinctly described as characteristics of the specular image one generates as part of the ego, is imperative here as requiring to be acknowledged by the subject; otherwise the act of naming is little more than a feeble attempt toward subjectivity. Althusser’s emphasis on the role of language in constituting the subject is influenced by Lacanian psychoanalysis, and this emphasis on language and subjectivity is furthered by Slavoj Žižek in his critical return to ideology. However, an important distinction to note is unlike Althusser, Lacan insists on the function of lack, when the subject is confronted with desire, as being crucial to subjectivity: “The Other is the field of that living being in which the subject has to appear” (Lacan, 1977, p. 204-205). This produces the domain of the Other as the site of fantasy and lack as psychoanalyst, Verhaeghe states (1998, p. 168):

The subject encounters a lack in the discursive Other, in which the desire of the Other ‘crawls, slips, escapes, like a ferret’⁶, producing an enigma to which the subject has to produce an answer.

Žižek employs Althusser’s theoretical position in his approach to the challenge of understanding desire through a critique of contemporary ideologies; this approach has potential for both transformative theoretical development and for the possibility of understanding subjective desire. To associate ideology with desire is crucial to understanding Žižek’s political and philosophical project. For Žižek, the problem of ideology, namely capitalist ideology, is that it is recognised as such less and less, even within the materiality of daily life. Žižek’s approach to ideology challenges this problem and ensures that in presupposing ideology as not entirely visible, it nevertheless remains an ontological problem for those engaging post-structuralism. He maintains that ideology frames fantasy within social conditions and relations. Some have described Žižek as a ‘theorist of the Real’ by emphasising his shift towards those ideological conditions which are usually rendered invisible but nevertheless structure daily life and social conditions.

Rex Butler (2005, p. 32) considers that Žižek’s critical return to ideology is best approached by considering his antagonism towards those social conditions which underpin understandings of what constitutes society. For Žižek ideology presupposes a subject’s experience of the social world and in this way, ideological connections with objects, social artefacts and other subjects have the potential to express repressed desires which in turn underlie interpretations of the social world. This explanation accounts for understanding ‘reality’ as already symbolised. Such symbolisation implies a repression and it is from this

⁶ Taken from Lacan’s *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1977, p. 214).

that opposition and antagonism emerge. For Žižek, a return to uncovering repressive forces must necessarily recognise antagonistic forces as being ideologies which disguise an official ‘reality’. Žižek understands the subject as presenting within two modalities: on one hand he describes it as “a kernel of being” (in Pluth, p. 85) meaning the subject *is as it is*; however, he also maintains subjects must be structured by and within fantasy, particularly with respect to how they consciously think of themselves in relation to the Other. Here Žižek returns to Lacanian psychoanalysis which he suggests is a praxis oriented towards the “real of experience” (in Pound, 2008, p. 11). Žižek employs the term, *subject* in a traditional Lacanian way – the subject is one who is structured by language – that is, without language, there is no subject. Additionally, he understands fantasy to be the ‘truth’ of the subject. Fantasy, Žižek suggests is “an ontological scandal” (2004b, p. 94), and its functions are challenging to articulate because the subject is confronted with the gap between identity (that is, the image a conscious individual has of him/herself as formed within social ideologies and valorisation) and its unconscious foundation, which is desire. In this way the subject is compelled to be disruptive and inconsistent when confronted with desire which for Žižek is bound within drive. Žižek’s conceptualisation of the subject is that it is always a subject of desire that is bound, though inconsistently, within the contours of the Other. It is this very tension with the Other that connects the subject to the social.

Nietzsche maintains that metaphor, that which stands in or is a substitute for another, plays a crucial part in desire in that it locates desire as the wish to *be* somewhere else (in O’Sullivan, 2002, p. 28). The location of desire for the subject is a contentious and precarious one because for any manifestation of desire to be recognised, its recognition simultaneously engages lack as well as trauma. By trauma I mean that pleasure seeking and identity are constructed and constrained around traumatic encounters, both subjective and social. The complex social process of *becoming* a subject (that is, a subject of language) depends on how these encounters are structured and experienced within the social. How one positions both oneself and one’s desires is always in relation to that which one seeks to realise. Desire is

always an anticipation of recognising desire itself; however, specifically, *what do I desire?* is an ongoing unanswered question for the subject of language.

Alexandre Kojève understands desire to be the key transformational force within the process of subjectivisation, a force which is interdependent with and constitutive of tension relative to other subjects. He states (1969, p. 2-3):

Desire is what transforms Being... into an 'object' revealed to a subject by a subject different from the object and 'opposed' to it. It is in and by – or better still, as – 'his' Desire that man is formed and revealed – to himself and to others – as an I, as the I that is essentially different from, and radically opposed to, the non-I. The (human) I is the I of a Desire or of Desire.

Kojève reveals a pivotal problem for the subject of desire – how can desire be articulated as unique to subjective experience and how does one become aware of it as an experience in the first instance? For me, this conundrum certainly arose during field work interviews. When participants were asked to talk about desire, they tended to conceptualise it as opaque, intangible, difficult to pinpoint both in content and in concept. Desire is presumed to have no substance as such, yet its presence is marked with a longing, with suffering, with elation and with subjective potential. How one engages with understanding desire is contingent on social markers or reference points which anchor how one might articulate it. These revolve around sets of social discourses regarding what is permissible to desire, how one ought to desire and how one shapes the parameters in which desire is talked about. In this way desire can be understood as subjectively and socially localised; the spaces and forums for the expression of desire simultaneously provide opportunities to explore how one can make sense of desire. Locating desire can be a contentious, passionate and uncomfortable process because for desire to be recognised, it must be structured through a focus on one's vulnerabilities and sensitivities.

The fields of critical social theory and sociology in general have engaged many complex discourses on desire in areas such as crime, violence, family life, work and intimacies. At this level social theory engages the tangible and the intangible, the obvious and the less obvious processes which are contingent upon patterns of social behaviours. Psychoanalysis offers scholars of social theory other possible ways of exploring the relationship between the subject and the social, especially in those areas of social life which are less easily distinguishable. Although classical social theory has endeavoured to understand desire as a response to social and life circumstances, as a field it has tended to shy away from areas which might be considered emotional, irrational and or even passionate, yet these are the very areas from which intense longing and desire can manifest.

Drawing primarily upon the work of Žižek, I maintain that the experience of desire is entrenched within sets of social conditions and ideologies; it is further shaped and understood as complex encounters from fragments of which it may be possible to recognize and articulate desire. One's beliefs, how one considers the body and intimate relationships, are all parts of how the subject can 'formalise' him/herself within political and social areas of life that are considered to be valorised. One can conceptualise the valorisation of particular realities as being structured around the mediation between internal experiences and external influences. These conceptualisations are fixed in neither the social nor the subjective worlds, thus making an exploration of desire transcend any one concept of social reality.

I maintain that for desire to be articulated by the subject it is necessarily shaped by ideologies, encompassing a range of social codes, structures, beliefs and contingencies. Competing possibilities for desire to emerge for the subject are clustered around the intersection of the social and the subjective. Versions of desire that are spoken are positioned around the restriction that belief, longing and intimacy provide. This impetus towards subjectivisation suggests resilience to how desire is recognised and articulated. Accepted ideological undercurrents to social processes often provide the basis on which particular

desiring stages are thought of as purely biological (notwithstanding that this can be problematic), thus constructing desire as no longer problematic, but an entirely 'natural' function.

Kojève draws on Hegel when maintaining that desire is anthropogenetic, that is to say it is distinct from 'animal desire' "in that it is directed, not toward a real, 'positive' given object, but toward another desire" (1969. p. 6). For Kojève desire is desire for recognition by the Other, that is, one desires to be desired. Feminist theorist, Cynthia Chase reflects on Kojève's position (1989, p. 71):

Kojève conceives of human desire – the desire for desires rather than for things – as the desire to be desired, that is, to be recognised by the other, brought into consciousness and acknowledged by the other as desirer, as the one who has human desire.

Desire, maintains Kojève, is desire for value-based intersubjective recognition. Such values are the "formations of one's characteristics, traits, qualities and features" (Yar, 2001, p. 59). The affirmation of recognition is a demonstration that one's desires are existing and valid. This transforms personal desire into something which is public "and constitutive of other's conceptions of the subject, and correspondingly orient those others in their dispositions, evaluations and actions towards the subject" (Yar, 2001, p. 66). Kojève claims that desire must be mutually beneficial – the Other must also recognise that its desire has the potential to be satisfied by the subject. Hence, desire for Kojève is an interdependent and ongoing dialectic whereby individuals are striving for recognition from each other.

The social institutions of family, wider social networks, gender, paid work, consumption, the law and leisure are all social forces which structure and produce discourses around how people talk about desire. An encounter with desire is an encounter with competing ideological and social conditions in which people live. Thus desire is difficult to define. The attempt to

articulate one's desires is met with frustration and anxiety, because one is seeking to construct a cohesive identity in which desire is unambiguous. The course of constructing a cohesiveness in which desire can be articulated becomes a mediated process understood through social institutions and largely conforming patterns. Yet the relationship between desire and conformity is a disordered and fractured one. One is always in a process of subjective regulation because desire requires management as part of the preoccupation with how one constructs an image of oneself as a subject in the social world.

Desire, when seen as a manifestation of lack, partially unveils the problem of the intrigue of desire. The subject abides by certain social codes which demand that desire be kept in place. The abilities to experience emotions, to reason and to critically evaluate beliefs are underpinned by the need to understand desire as an integral part of human experience.

The tensions and intersection of desire and belief

Whether I belong to a religion, whether I be agnostic or atheist, when I say, "I believe", I mean, "I hold as true" (Kristeva, 2009, p. 3).

The best thing he could do with his surplus income would be to donate it all to charity. But he has little or no desire to do that (Oddie, 2005, p. 28).

Alvin Goldman attributes the causal relationship between desire and belief as a "logical truth about wants" which "tend to cause acts" (1970, p. 112). Desires, he goes on to argue are both a deliberate and an explanatory force for the subject. For Goldman the notion of belief and its relationship to desire is strong. Desire and belief are related states of being. This interconnection presumes discursive signification because the word *belief* carries socially symbolic implications; it is an ideological marker of discursive contingencies and patterns from which subjective and social understandings of desire tend to be recognised and meanings extracted.

Philosopher David Lewis claims that desire manifests as a belief in how a value judgement is implied in an affirmation of *goodness* (1988). He maintains that the proposition of goodness is an experience of desire itself, which therefore gives desire degrees of value. Although Lewis engages belief as an opaque notion, he does so reductively, somewhat uncritically and without acknowledging that people often struggle against socially mandated desires. Oddie reflects on Lewis's argument when claiming that (2005, p. 33):

...beliefs are required to fit the world, and they can be justly criticised if they fail to fit the world – if they are false. Desires, on the other hand, do not purport to represent the world, and are not usually said to be true or false. The content of desire may be true or false... the content of desire does not have to fit the world, or fit the world now, for it to be perfectly a defensible desire ... Beliefs have to fit the world, but the world has to fit desires.

According to Oddie, the relationship between desire and belief is one fraught with tension if they are not characterised clearly and distinctly. For Oddie, the states of simultaneously *desiring* and *believing* are more than mere propositions somewhat contingent on social processes; they are exemplifications of the complexities, irrationalities and ambiguities which exist between the subject and the world he/she inhabits.

Julia Kristeva draws on Lacanian psychoanalysis when she states that, “a truth that keeps me, makes me exist” (2009, p. 3). She attributes the significance of belief in contemporary times to more than just a desire for objects. Rather, she attributes the proposition of attaining truth to a visceral, experiential founding which “holds true”, rather than “holds up” an object of

knowledge.⁷ Belief corresponds to the “translinguistic experience” senses⁸, which support belief (p. 7). Kristeva makes a plea for contemporary secular society to respond to a need to believe but also leaving open the autonomy of the subject for rendering morals as well as joy, pleasure, risk and certainty. She argues that the signifying structure of belief should be authenticated (p. 25):

Clearly the intellectual faces a difficult, historic task worthy of the crisis of civilisation: the task is neither more nor less than to help this new type of knowledge gradually emerge. To make use of technical terms unhesitatingly, but without getting locked into their significations, always too narrow. In positioning ourselves at the interface of diverse “disciplines”, we may have a chance to elucidate, even in a small way, that which remains enigmatic: psychosis, sublimation, belief and nihilism, passion, the war between the sexes, maternal madness, and murderous hate.

Kristeva conceptualises desire as bound within gender and the symbolic order of language (Driscoll, 2000, p. 81) and she derails the assumptions of those who claim desire to be rational by insisting that “desire is essentially a perverse desire” (Kristeva, cited in Penney,

⁷ In *This Incredible Need to Believe* (2009) Kristeva spends much attention discussing the similarities and discontinuities between what she terms ‘faith’ and Freudian psychoanalysis, maintaining that both imply suffering and the opportunity for autonomy.

⁸ At this juncture Kristeva refers to the arts as a way of encountering pleasure (or otherwise) in order to structure belief as a “cascade of metaphors” (2009, p. 8) which is a visceral experience captured via the five senses.

2006, p. 1).⁹ Desire, Kristeva maintains, is always for the immediate connection to the mother, including the illusion of this connection (Beardsworth, 2004, p. 71; Chase, 1989, p. 78; Kristeva, 1983; Meyers, 1994). The subject is divided by language and desire (Beardsworth, 2004, p. 61) to reveal a gap in identification and subjectivisation. Self sustainment and containment of the gap requires that the original desire – that of the mother – is continually returned to.¹⁰ Through this focus, Kristeva attempts to challenge the privileging of patriarchy by signalling the woman or a semblance of the feminine as pivotal. Kristeva maintains that the satisfaction of desire is impossible, although the subject acts *as* if it were possible, thereby becoming and remaining a symbolic being of desire (p. 61). She states, “The famous, ‘what does a woman want?’ is perhaps just an echo of a more fundamental interrogation: What does a mother want?” (Kristeva, cited in Chase, 1989, p. 78).¹¹ Penney

⁹ There is a difference between perverse acts and perverse structures. Evans states (1996, p. 138) “while there are certain sexual acts which are closely associated with perverse structures, it is also possible that such acts may be engaged in by non perverse subjects, and equally possible that a perverse subject may never actually engage in such acts. It also implies a universalist position; while social disapproval and the violation of ‘good morals’ may be what determines whether a particular act is perverse or not, this is not the essence of the perverse structure. A perverse structure remains perverse even when the acts associated with it are socially approved”. Žižek claims that all subjects are perverted in their attempt to occupy the object of another (2006, p. 103). Perversion relates to speech and to truth and has direct access to the Other. He claims that cinema is the ultimate pervert art.

¹⁰ Specifically Kristeva identifies the gap as being the “dissolution distinction between the sign and signifier” (cited in Chase, 1989, p. 78). These concepts are further explicated in Chapter 2.

¹¹ From Kristeva, “*L’abjet d’amour*,” (1984, p. 22).

argues that perversity is the disavowal¹² of “the essential perversity of desire” (2006, p. 1). It is upon this reflection that Althusser’s ideological subject can be considered a subject of perversion, which is also the claim of Žižek.

As a critique of humanism and more specifically, of idealism, Althusser upholds the subject as “endowed with a consciousness [that] must act according to his ideas, [and] must therefore inscribe his own ideas as a free subject in the actions of his material practice” (Penney, 2006, p. 89). Belief, Althusser maintains, is an ideological mechanism or a system of representation which is performed via rituals. These rituals allow for recognition of an ideological function in what he terms ideological state-apparatuses (1971).¹³ These refer to sets of social conditions and processes (including family, the media, technology, religion and modes of production) which construct and direct the subject (Althusser, cited in Ricoeur, 1994, p. 53):

There can be no question of attempting a profound definition of ideology here. It will suffice to know very schematically that an ideology is a system (with its own logic and rigour) of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts, depending on the case) endowed with a historical existence and role within a given society. Without embarking on the problem of the relations between a science and its (ideological) past, we can say that ideology, as a system of representations, is distinguished from science in that in it the practico-social function is more important than the theoretical function (function as knowledge).

¹² Freud introduced the term as *Verleugnung*, which refers to modes of defence in “the refusal to accept the reality of a traumatic perception” (cited in Evans, 1996, p. 43). This means the subject *knows* of a traumatic reality, but simultaneously *denies* it.

¹³ Althusser maintains that these rituals structure the big Other of ideological apparatuses (cited in Žižek, 1994, p. 128; Yar, 2001, p. 61).

Žižek's return to and critique of ideology is heavily influenced by Althusser in that for Žižek belief is also posited as an exterior, rather than the interior set of viewpoints which convention propagates. For Althusser individuals are always subjects of ideology and any attempt at self recognition is therefore no more than an ideological endeavour, for instance, the rituals of religion. The Other for Althusser is the process of and impetus for self justification from such rituals, which are easier for others to recognize and know in that they are deeply ensconced within frameworks and conditions which lend an immediate and often unquestioned understanding. Althusser maintains that those ideologies, such as the family, state, education and so on, which structure the interpellated subject appear ahistorical and therefore exist as a naturalised element in the process of subjectivisation.

Furthering Althusser's interrogation of ideology, Lichtman theorises desire from a Marxist perspective, maintaining that the division of self is a manifestation of historical and social processes (1982, p. 179). For Lichtman the process of alienation is an experience whereby the individual is treated as a "commodity" (p. 9). However, the subject seeks to consciously resist this although capitalism has this specific social function which renders it difficult for the subject to resist (p. 134). Lichtman goes on to argue that the function of desire in this context is to maintain social order because it is constructed in ways which comply with authority and power, rather than initiated by the individual. Desires conforming to socialised processes in this way appear distorted and contradictory to the subject's increasing understanding of personal and social discourses (p. 135). The subject's perceptions of desire are not entirely conscious. The psychoanalytic concept of the gaze is crucial in enabling the subject to recognise and articulate desire. The gaze is important in film theory, particularly when employing psychoanalytic criticism and is best described by Evans (1996, p. 72):

When the subject looks at an object, the object is already gazing back at the subject, but from a point at which subject cannot see. This split between the eye and the gaze is nothing other than the subjective division itself, expressed in the field of vision.

For Žižek, such (in)visibility of the gaze renders ideology opaque to the subject and this is crucial to his critique because basing interpretation of ideology on an economic basis alone is insufficient as being causal of any kind of subjective experience. Žižek understands this by both employing and critiquing the notion of ideology by positing it as a force that both captures desire and constitutes it as belief. Drawing upon an intersection of Lacan, Hegel and Marx, Žižek suggests that desire is an ideological obligation and that the only compromise for the subject is to be guilty of not following desire. Desire has the important function of sustaining and articulating itself (Žižek, 2001a, p. vi). Beliefs are cultivated, according to Žižek, by what one *does*, rather than what one *says*, *thinks* or *feels*. Such *doing* provides an illusory ideological conviction of belief. In *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) Žižek provides examples of this -- Christmas cards, Tibetan prayer wheels, candles at a funeral -- all these representing acts which situate belief within objects that represent the material practice of belief itself. Understanding an *act* of ideology is for Žižek heavily influenced by philosopher, Alain Badiou. Badiou problematises the political act in suggesting it to be understood as truth. He specifically focuses on remedying social injustices through a departure from existing conventions and rituals, this departure being a different act which nevertheless formalises another ritual and provides a transformative event which can, however, lead to further injustice. Žižek seizes upon Badiou's theorisation of the act as constituting a commitment to the political investment (and potential) of the subject, on the proviso that the subject is willing to surrender to desire, an infinite passion to continually resurrect the field of experience as having the potential to organise another experience. This constitutes Žižek's description of the important process of *traversing the fantasy*. By this he means that subjects are willing to accept the destruction of their symbolic supports (that is, those that govern the social systems which are deemed to be in their interests) and also of the ideological conditions which circumscribe them. Žižek explains this process of traversing fantasy with regards to the ideological super-ego (1999, p. 265-268):

Traversing the fundamental fantasy can be in two gestures: it can be an ‘empty gesture’ or an ‘authentic Act’. The latter is more ‘radical.’ In the act of taking the empty gesture, the subject suspends the symbolic Law by choosing the impossible option – one that violates the symbolic Law. It appears first that the individual is free to choose, as if the superego tells: ‘you should do it if you really want to, if not, then don’t!’ Between the lines, the superego further orders to ‘enjoy’ what one has to do. Whatever the individual chooses, one basically is guilty of not taking the other choice. A double-bind actually takes place, which involves the ‘paradox of the superego’ in following the demands of the ego ideal (offered by the symbolic framework, which retains one’s symbolic identity), the individual is in effect guilty of rejecting his/her (from Butler’s concept) ‘passionate attachment’ to the Thing; the same goes when one follows the fundamental desire (‘passionate attachment’), as a consequence, one’s socio-symbolic existence is shattered.

Lacan’s matheme for traversing the fantasy, $a \rightarrow \$$ indicates that where the subject (\$) identifies with (\rightarrow) the traumatic cause of desire (a) is also where the Hysteric orients his/her fantasies towards desire. Žižek maintains that we need to traverse the fantasy in order to avoid fantasies clashing, which entails acknowledging and recognising that fantasies exist as a way of covering up the inconsistencies and failures of the big Other. An example that Žižek often cites is the demotion of god from the order of a being offering a transcendental promise to that of a law which regulates, defines and sustains a system of ideology. There is nothing behind the fantasy of god as spiritual, and fantasy masks such *nothingness* thus the temptation to elevate it to another, more social status (Žižek, 1989).

It can be argued that the ideological function of desire is one of resistance to the signifying structure of belief from which fantasy is staged as an ethic: “the goal of psychoanalysis and its contradictory nature, Žižek offers, reproduce the fundamental social antagonism, the tension between the individual’s urges and the demands of society” (Penney, 2006, p. 205). The ethic of fantasy, that is when social forces and ideologies fully identify with the Imaginary Other as a subject (such as the racist figure, the humanitarian, the guru and so on)

entails that the fantasy needs to be maintained in order to continue ideological illusions. Fantasies are produced as a defence against desire. Penney asserts that the social processes which both structure and repress desire are far more insidious and opaque than Althusser would have us understand. Rather than striving for the desire of the Other as coherent with one's belief structure, Žižek embraces the imperfection and discontinuous logic of belief as a challenge to the contemporary subject. Belief, he maintains, subjugates desire, and the manifestation of how this is practised is also a conviction of capitalist ideology (Žižek, 2001a; Meyers, 2003).¹⁴ Subjects are in a constant state of disavowal¹⁵ – acting as if they believe and thereby producing the illusion of belief.¹⁶ Belief in this context is a conviction that may or may not be substantial or necessarily grounded in *doing* those rituals which support it. When confronting ideology, one is confronting myth, “the Real of *logos*: the foreign intruder, impossible to get rid of, impossible to remain fully within it” (Žižek, 2001a,

¹⁴ In *Enjoy Your Symptom!* (2001c, p. 171), Žižek offers an example, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1903) which highlights how ideological social conditions in which belief operates supersede desire: “we deprive the subject of desire and in exchange for it we send him back to the market where he becomes the object of general auction”.

¹⁵ Pascal refers to this as *automation*, that is, “the tendency to act unconsciously on the basis of habit of convention” (in Penney, 2006, p. 87).

¹⁶ Žižek discusses this in Taylor's documentary, *Examined Life* (2008) in relation to the ecological imperative. He argues that there is a tendency to continue to behave as if global warming is a fiction (such behaviour being a form of political rhetoric) rather than to accept the reality of it.

p. 11).¹⁷ The myth of belief itself provides the basis for which (false) belief is signified. Žižek gives an example from Shute's 1955 novel, *Requiem for a Wren* (p. 14):

...the heroine survives her lover's death without any visible traumas, she goes on with her life and is even able to talk rationally about her lover's death – because she still has the dog who was the lover's favoured pet. When, sometime after, the dog is accidentally run over by a truck, she collapses and her entire world disintegrates...

Žižek claims that belief (and similarly, the claim of non-belief) is fetishised or eroticised by the social conditions which cultivate it and which stand in for the Other. He structures desire through a materialist discourse and the institution of commodities that are discursively fetishised. For one to exist and function as a subject who relates to other subjects, one must accept and be inscribed within Lacan's three registers of the subject: the Real, Symbolic and Imaginary as a way of positing the subject of language within society and culture. These registers are stratifications of the conscious and unconscious subject and construct what Lacan calls the Symbolic Order. The Symbolic Order is the location for where the subject is produced and exists. It is for the subject a site for a meaningful existence.

Desire and lack must coexist in order for a subject to subjectivise, otherwise a subject is, as Žižek asserts in his metaphor for narcissism, merely “a pair of lips kissing themselves” (2001a, p. 95). The truth of one's desire lies in objects, subjects and social artefacts which signify the logic of the Other's desire for the subject. The structure and logic of belief, Žižek

¹⁷ Here Žižek is referring to a discursive logic, as Aristotle and Plato applied it to the field of constructing philosophical reason or argument. However *logos* extends to linguistic parameters, which Žižek is alerting readers to – one is compelled to repeatedly speak that which is difficult to know, revealing it to manifest as a state of rhetoric.

maintains, can always be traced to not only a *thing* or object which represents it, but the underlying ideology that gives it conviction (Myers, 2003, p. 70-71).

Žižek links Althusser's notion of interpellation to the space of desire and to the process preceding ideological recognition (2005, p.58-61). By this he is claiming that there is a theoretical moment of surrender to alienation before one attaches to an ideological subjectivity. Žižek terms this notion of 'beyond interpellation' as a movement of desire which subverts the fixation of the *points de capiton* and which oscillates around these floating signifiers (1989, p. 139). How these floating signifiers are "transformed into nodal points" (p. 139) is through critical analysis of ideology which serves as a social bond. By this Žižek means that ideology "holds us" to the network of signifiers (p. 140). He connects this process to the modern subject (2009, p. 40):

The first lesson of psychoanalysis here is that this 'richness of inner life' is fundamentally fake: it is a screen, a false distance, whose function, is as it were, to save my appearance, to render palpable (accessible to my imaginary narcissism) my true social-symbolic identity. One of the ways to practice the critique of ideology is therefore to invent strategies for unmasking this hypocrisy of 'inner-life' and its 'sincere' emotions.

A way toward a semblance of truth according to Žižek is not within the internal narrative of the subject, rather is it "outside, in what we do" (2009, p. 40). From this emphasis on action and materialism Žižek maintains that one is taught *how to* desire in a society which 'permits' particular rights and authorities but without necessarily having any real power or agency. This is what he terms the "permissive society" (p. 59). The constant pressure of negotiating the coordinates of being a subject in a permissive society leads to the speculation that desire is further complicated and distanced. Žižek returns to Lacan to make sense of the lost object of desire (p. 64):

When Lacan defines the object of desire as originally lost, his point is not simply that we never are what we desire and are condemned to an eternal search for the “true” object, which is the void of desire as such, while all positive objects are merely metonymic stand-ins. His point is a much more radical one: the lost object is ultimately the subject itself, the subject as an object; which means that the question of desire, its original enigma, is not primarily ‘What do I want?’ but ‘What do others want from me?’ ‘What object – objet a – do they see in me?’

The function of the superego in understanding contemporary ideology is imperative to Žižek as it provides the injunction to enjoy that which is deemed socially permissible (2005, p. 66). The superego provides and maintains this as an ideological fantasy via “a matrix of different ethical attitudes” (p. 60). This fantasy which is “larger than life” (p. 60) tantalises and purports ideological cohesiveness. Žižek alerts us not to neglect or dismiss the importance of illusion in the regulation of social processes and desires. Acts and material realities are not a spontaneous or autonomous expression of social relations (Žižek & Salecl, 1999, p. 314). One is dealing with a mask of how social relations appear, rather than with structures of unconscious illusions (p. 316). For Žižek, embedded in the problem of understanding desire is the significance of social relations and the structural function of the superego; these both promote and oppose ideological mystification.

That desire is connected with notions of value is a central feature for many who theorise about desire. Structuring desire as a manifestation of lack highlights subjective vulnerability: *might such recognition for the Other of desire be privy to failure of such recognition?* The assurance of belief “becomes part of the very practice for ordering and regulating subjects according to pre-established norms” (Butler, 2010, p. 141). Belief constitutes the subject as articulating a process of abjection and individuation: “that is not me” (p. 141).

Thus far desire in contemporary scholarship is understood to be a complexly debated psychosocial and philosophical process worthy of further exploration. Specifically, the

relational explorations and possibilities between the social and the subject are both contentious and tantalising. It is apparent that desire is neither easily articulated nor recognisable, although particular discourses of desire seem to play a part within different aspects of subjective and social life, such as the pursuit of love, the politics of choice and the structures of belief. I claim that social patterns and contingencies provide precarious scaffolding for the problematic structures on which discourses of belief and desire intersect and rest. Such ideologies of belief inform and regulate how belief and desire are recognised and understood, within the context of desire being fraught with trauma and lack. The scaffolding of desire, the social, serves to reveal desire as a complex question for social theorists.

Psychosocial and cultural explorations of desire

The production of desire and ‘desiring-production’: Deleuze and Guattari

Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack an object. It is, rather, the subject that is missing in desire or desire that lacks a fixed subject; there is no fixed subject unless there is repression (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972 [1984], p. 26).

Deleuze has spent much time theorising desire with Guattari (a former student of Lacan) by critiquing psychoanalysis as institutionalised and structured within capitalist ideology (Holland, 2005, p. 55). They reject the psychoanalytic claim that desire is structured by lack and return to Kantian philosophy and a process of historicisation as being responsible for processes of desire (p. 53): “Kant defines desire as “the faculty which by means of its representation is the cause of the actuality of the objects and those representations (1911: 16).” Kant argues that it is the process of how representations of the object are made real which provides the basis for human desire – subjective agency and the motivation to produce desire for an object ensures that desire is traversed from fantasy to reality. In this way Deleuze and Guattari define desire as “the production of reality. *Desire produces and its*

product is real” (Holland, 2005, p. 54). They explicitly reject Freud’s insistence on the libidinal basis for desire and instead argue “for the unrecognised potential of desire as a transformative and creative agent in individual and social lives” (Rustin, 2010, p. 46). They agree that that relation between the object and the subject of desire structures subjectivity, but go on to criticise psychoanalytic foundations of the ‘self’ (Driscoll, 2000, p. 76). Deleuze and Guattari conceptualise the “desiring machine” as one in which identity is simultaneously empirically produced via objects (1972, p. 7). Wright explores this concept specifically in relation to the body (1989, p. 164):

Bodies are ‘desiring machines’, because machines arrange and connect flows, and do not recognise distinctions between a person’s organs, material flows, and semiotic flows. According to Deleuze and Guattari, unconscious desire tends to one or the other of two poles, a schizophrenic one or a paranoiac one... At the paranoiac pole there is an incessant pressure to territorialise, to mark out and maintain the direction of desire.

Thus, the functioning of social order is integral to how desire produces ideas of reality under capitalist ideology. For Deleuze and Guattari, the flow and construction of such objects of desire are considered ‘assemblages’ in which there is no deviation between the subject and the object (1972). Desire for them is a source of truth, a reality for subjects through their connection to objects. Desire and its signification to the subject result from concomitant assemblages and acts (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Deleuze and Guattari often refer to the “private sphere” of the family as perpetuating and maintaining desire for economic production (Holland, 2005, p. 56):

Social life outside the family is rife with variegated social roles, which the nuclear family reduces just to three: child, mother and father; subject of desire, object of desire and castrating mediator of desire.

In their reading of the Oedipus complex, Deleuze and Guattari return to a critical understanding of desire as intrinsically related to death, embodiment and sexuality. They argue that psychoanalytic notions of desire produce images which further restrict or “enslave” the subject to the terms of social duties rather than independence and individuation (Colebrook, 2002, p. 94). Goodchild cohesively explains this (1996, p. 122):

Following Freud, Deleuze and Guattari make desire, the activity of a specifically sexual energy, universal to all social, political and psychological processes. Marxist production is reterritorialised on desire. Desire is neither a biological impulse, nor a metaphysical energy, nor a symbolic structure. Desire is a plane of immanence: production does not rely on external agents or materials, but is an autoproduction – it produces itself when certain machinic parts are brought into relation with each other.

Through a metonymic analysis of the ‘machine’, Deleuze and Guattari specifically draw upon post-structuralist ideas to theorise desire outside the conventional mind/body dualism. They organise the recognition and configuration of desire as repression, but reject the notion and concept of an unconscious by maintaining that psychoanalysis ideologically reinforces an authoritarian order structured around implicit contradictions (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972, p. 68-192; Rustin, 2010, p. 46); the most important of these is the order of the Oedipus complex, which they reject as being reductionist and unable to capture the nuances of subjective desire (Goodchild, 1996, p. 123). In their critical theorisation of capitalism they go on to argue that psychoanalysis does not transcend ideology as it purports to. Rather, they claim that it perpetuates a signifying social structure through the repression of desire from which paradoxically desire can be theorised (p. 124). Psychoanalysis, they argue in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) is “indeterminate and abstract” (Holland, 2005, p. 57). They claim that for meanings of desire to be recognised and take place, desire needs to be inscribed within the conditions of capitalism. Desire is “a machine and the object of desire is another machine connected to it” (1972, p. 28):

The truth of the matter is that social production is purely and simply desiring-production itself under determinate conditions. We maintain that the social field is immediately invested by desire, that it is the historically determined product of desire, and that libido has no need of any mediation or sublimation, any psychic operation, any transformation, in order to invade and invest the productive forces and the relations of production. There is only desire and the social, and nothing else.

Deleuze and Guattari go on to argue that psychoanalysis merely conforms to the processes and modes of production, rather than seek to transform it, as it claims.¹⁸ The unconscious, which they understand as being akin to a conforming social logic, is similarly structured as desiring-production. That is, the “desiring-production will determine the conditions of social production, instead of being determined by them” (Holland, 2005, p. 59). For Deleuze and Guattari desire is a motivational and productive force which does not reside within the domain of the Imaginary.

Critiquing Deleuze and Guattari’s work as unsettling, Elizabeth Grosz claims that “the notion of a stable subject” is not necessarily distinguished by sex and lifestyle as Deleuze and Guattari purport (1994, p. 141). Goodchild furthers this by insisting that Deleuze and Guattari fail to link unconscious desire more intimately to “the social field” (1996, p. 124). In this way, he claims that Deleuze and Guattari structure desire negatively and for the most part,

¹⁸ Just as side note, many theorists have criticised Deleuze and Guattari for reflecting a topology of desire and subjectivity as being located within the modes of production, value and consumerism. In her book, *Baudrillard’s Challenge: A Feminist Reading* (2000) Grace considers these criticisms in light of Baudrillard’s critical view on psychoanalysis with particular attention between the relation between desire and power.

able to be readily recognised. This recognition manifests as commodity fetishism¹⁹, a term coined by Marx to explain the value relationship between objects whereby relations having particular social value are attributed and therefore desired. However, as Goodchild (1996, p. 125) suggests, Deleuze and Guattari do conceptualise desire as, “not a pre-existent instinct, subject to repression, but something which must be produced within social production”. By this he claims that desire is an effect of the power, social labour and sexual social relationships which serve the dominant classes. Žižek (1997c) has critiqued Deleuze by maintaining that for desires to manifest, the social order must always be altered and readjusted “between the old and the new” (1997c). This constant state of vacillation renders it difficult for the individual to identify any source of desire: “it is there, but we can only perceive and state this retroactively, from today’s perspective” (1997c). Desire, Žižek claims is ideological. Here Žižek is maintaining that the subject strives to identify the source of desire and through this obtain difference and individuation, which allow for a possible literacy of desire.

While Deleuze and Guattari offer an analysis of the function of desire, they reject the possibility of an unconscious which is not determined by social codes. Furthermore, they make no explicit relational link between desire, trauma and lack and they actively reject these concepts as psychoanalytic. This rejection can be attributed to Deleuze and Guattari’s insistence that desire is linked to objects for the purposes of satisfaction, maintaining that desire “is opposed as much to gratification as it is to repression” (Holland, 2005, p. 61). Fixation to objects merely serves to “shut down desire” (p. 61). Thus loss of an object for a

¹⁹ Doane (1987, p. 12) defines fetishism as “the ability to balance knowledge and belief and hence to maintain a distance from the lure of the image”.

subject is considered somewhat natural and to be expected and provides a way in which the subject can resist attachment.

Whereas Žižek argues that the subject unreflexively adheres to the spectacle of ideology thus masking the split between libidinal and social experiences, philosopher, Joan Copjec argues for a more nuanced and reflexive literacy of desire by asserting that people are more than merely subjects of discourse (1994; Penney, 2006, p.211).

Cultivating a literacy of desire: engaging Copjec

In order to free the subject's speech, we introduce him into the language of his desire, that is to say, into the primary language in which, beyond what he tells us of himself, he is already talking to us unknown to himself, and, in the first place, in the symbols of a symptom (Lacan, 1966, p. 81).

Philosopher and psychoanalyst, Monique David-Ménard (2004) understands desire as structured by gender and the sexed body and insists that speculations about desire have been bound up with experiences of guilt and notions of universalism which make understanding desire an ongoing focus for inquiry. She distinguishes between the sexed subject and gendered identities and maintains that the function of desire operates differently for masculine and feminine sexualities, arguing that this cannot be attributed to either gender, since "the pathways between fantasy structures and concepts are fixed in neither their nature nor their essence" (p. 252). She is critical of attempts at universalism and argues that this is a process of rationalisation which fails to grasp "the connections between fantasy and theory" (p. 264).

Copjec deliberately troubles assumptions between sex and gender identities, as described by David-Ménard, through employing classic Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. Copjec brings to the foreground a dialogue which explores Lacanian and Foucauldian theories as

complementary, though necessarily in tension with each other. She suggests that discourses in relation to systems of institutional power fail to account for the unconscious and in this way the subject is “invisible to power” structures (Copjec, cited in Penney, 2006, p. 211). In privileging Lacan, Copjec highlights a failure for critical social theory to pursue and investigate Lacanian concepts when stating (1994, p. 13), “...that the argument which maintains the structures are real is psychoanalysis’s greatest challenge to the historicism that pervades much of the thinking of our time.” Following Lacan, Copjec insists that one ought to cultivate a *reading* of one’s desires – that is, the subject must attempt to articulate desire and “must refrain from imagining something that would not be registered in the single surface of speech, and that desire *is inarticulatable*” (1989, p. 14). Copjec asserts that it is the domain of the Real “that unites the psychic to the social” (p. 227). She links this to Lacan’s understanding of desire as intrinsically linked to language and specifically to the function of speech. Lacan states (1977), “I identify myself in language... but only losing myself in it like an object” (p. 86). This process of identification produces *necessary* desire, misrecognition and lack.²⁰ For the subject, desire manifests as linguistic metaphors through which meaning is both articulated and deferred. Copjec problematises the notion that desire for the Other is a somewhat unreflexive process wherein the subject attempts to emulate the image of the Other (1989, p. 238). Further, she maintains that unsatisfied desire frames the subject as “one that is not filled up with meaning” (1989, p. 238), also that “what is aroused instead is the desire for non-being, for an indeterminate something which is perceived as extradiscursive” (p. 238). For Copjec, desire is unsatisfiable and is secondary to its structure within lack. Penny (2006, p. 211) understands Copjec’s postulation as being that the subject does not manifest from mechanisms of discursive surveillance that discipline desire, but rather, that the subject is

²⁰ I emphasise *necessary* because it is crucial for the divided subject to interrogate desire as a means for self recognition.

structured by lack and never fully recognises itself, hence the opacity in recognising desire and articulating it within the realm of social relations. Here Copjec offers that it is specifically woman's desires that are comprehended through the male gaze of gendered subjectivity. She goes on to highlight how Lacan structures lack as integral to desire (1989, p. 288):

Lacan's answer to this mistaken interpretation of his formula is simply that we have no image of the Other's desire (it remains indeterminate), and it is this very lack which causes our desire. It is first of all an unsatisfied desire that initiates our own, one that is not filled up with meaning, or has no signifier.

Copjec's argument that the domain of the Real unites the psychic with the social (1994; Penney, 2006, p. 211) is somewhat in contrast to feminist scholar Judith Butler, who maintains that the subject manifests as an embodied entity from social relations.

Psychoanalysis and embodied inscriptions of desire: feminist theorisations

The body is written, it is constructed by language and not pre-given... (Copjec, 1989, p. 235).

There is nothing in the unconscious which accords with the body. The unconscious is discordant. The unconscious is that which, by speaking, determines the subject as being, but as being too crossed through with that metonymy by which I support desire, in so far as it is endlessly impossible to speak as such (Lacan, 1975, cited in Mitchell and Rose, 1982, p. 165).

Psychoanalytically informed feminist theorists have explored desire in terms of particular symbolic and subjective encounters. In *Bodies That Matter* (1993) Judith Butler explores desire as a gendered embodied experience which calls into question the regulation of the

Lacanian Phallus as dominant.²¹ Butler draws upon Foucauldian understandings of sex, gender and desire in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). These understandings are constructed through signifying and performative repetition of historical and political investments, rather than through presumed prescriptions of biology (p. 164):

Is 'the body' or 'sexed body' the firm foundation on which gender and systems of compulsory sexuality operate? Or is the 'the body' itself shaped by political forces with strategic interests in keeping that body bounded and constituted by the marker of sex? The sex/gender distinction and the category of sex itself appear to presuppose a generalisation of 'the body' that pre-exists the acquisition of its sexed significance. This 'body' often appears to be a passive medium that is signified by an inscription from a cultural source figured as 'external' to that body.

In her readings of Butler, Elizabeth Grosz (1994a) attributes sex "to the domain of sexual difference" (p. 139) and sexuality to "sexual impulses, desires, wishes, hopes, bodies, pleasures, behaviours and practices" (p. 139). Grosz concurs with the psychoanalytic privileging of the Phallus as structuring desire as a social force (1994b, p. 57):

...the castration complex and the Oedipus complex, provide an accurate description of the processes which produce masculine and feminine subjects within our western patriarchal

²¹ The function and role of the Phallus will be discussed further in chapter two. However, it is important to note that for Lacan it does not refer to the penis as a biological organ, but rather to what it represents as a symbolic function of sexual difference and discourse (Evans, 1996, p. 140).

capitalist culture. Their disagreements arise regarding... the necessity of the domination of the Phallus.

Kirsten Campbell (2004) concurs with this theoretical conception of the Phallus when she considers embodiment as a metaphor which “represents the sexed subject... In this way, the embodied subject stands in for ‘woman’ and ‘femininity’. In that metaphorical substitution, ‘embodiment’ implies a notion of sexual difference, which operates as an assumed and given term” (p. 19). It is within the structure of the sexed speaking subject that Lacan insists that the domain of the clinic offers subjects the potential to recognise their desires. In Seminar XX (1972-1973), Lacan asserts that the subject can have either feminine or masculine structures, regardless of biological sex (Campbell, 2004, p. 63). It is in the articulation of dissatisfaction with the structure that signifiers of desire come into being and have the potential to be explored, as Colebrook states; “for Lacan, then, no desire is immediate. Desire is structured and articulated in relation not just to others but through the Other of language.” (2004, p. 194).

Cynthia Chase notes that, “Lacan draws his model of subjectivity from feminine sexuality” (1989, p. 66). Other feminist theorists employing psychoanalysis have engaged this position rigorously in their exploration of identity and desire. Luce Irigaray’s commitment to rewriting the relationship between the body and the language of desire suggests that the most potent replacement of the Phallus is a child (1991; 1997). She brings together questions of desire as being linked firmly within feminine sexuality and the experience of motherhood. Feminist theorists have argued that either *being* or *having* (in the case of having taking on the representation of having) the Phallus is the divergent point from which women are problematically positioned in accessing language and thus desire. Julia Kristeva understands the relation between the body and gendered identities as antagonistically reinforced by the Other (Driscoll, 2000, p. 70). For Kristeva, desire manifests according to how the body responds to social and political forces with which it is subsumed. The body is the technician

of desire and can be asserted as a political tool because the signifying structure of desire can potentially undertake a similar investment, an assertion Copjec also propagates.

The body is a location of ontological inquiry into how notions and understandings of desire emerge as an interweaving of psychic and symbolic phenomena (Colebrook, 2004, p. 193). Importantly, the body institutes the function of fantasy as imperative to these understandings, in that the Oedipal stage relies on trauma for desire to be realised (p. 193):

The truth of the Oedipal fantasy is imaginary – that is, it is the fantasy that structures our relation to being. Insofar as we speak, our desires are subjected to a law of language. We therefore imagine: (a) that there was some moment of fulfilment beyond the law and prohibition; (b) that there was one – the Other – who exercised that prohibition and who holds the power and (c) that the origin must lack that law and power, which we all recognise to be lawful.

At this juncture I would like to reconfigure the problem of recognising and encountering one's desire as an interconnection between the Symbolic and the Real, by suggesting that the problem of articulating desire is very much situated within the field of the social. The tactility of the body, together with language, are vehicles in which the structure of desire is socially transported, bringing with it subjective possibilities as well as fragilities. Desire is represented by mysterious fragmentations and broken images for and to the subject. A focus on the social can reveal how the subject encounters the Real of their desires, outside the traditional psychoanalytic clinic. For desire to be interrogated within critical theory, the domain of the social must be considered a site for analysis.

Žižek is an antagonistic force and a challenge for feminist scholars. By all accounts, he has not endeared himself to their politics and epistemologies, describing gender politics as an “upper-middle class phenomena which shouldn't be accepted as the horizon of struggle for

the left” (Žižek, cited in Pound, 2008, p. 111). For Žižek, the manifestation of ‘woman’ is a desire resulting from the male imagination which emerges within a material existence. However, in defence of Žižek, he posits the struggle between the sexes, together with the sexual relation as pivotal to understanding ideology, and hence desire. In the *Metastases of Enjoyment: Women and Causality* (2005) Žižek attempts to unpack the enigma of the woman by arguing that the figure of ‘the woman’ in modern art, literature and film provides a forum for understanding the ideology of violence in contemporary society. Moreover, he argues that the ideology of fantasy provides enjoyment which is important to the point of being an obsession for the subject.

The obsession of desire

...just as nothing we know is enough to prove that something is beautiful, everything we love is always a step beyond our understanding. The pleasures of the imagination are pleasures of anticipation, not accomplishment (Nehamas, 2007, p. 76).

Freud poses the question which ponders feminine desire: *what does a woman want?* when confronted with and attempting to understand the unexpected termination of analysis by his patient, Dora. He attempts to examine this question by foregrounding the relationship between woman’s desire and their subjectivity. In his return to Freud, Lacan understands the metaphors of desire - those which stand in for the *truth* of desire – as being ideas of happiness, attraction and love. These all rely on a confrontation not only with desire but also with its sustainment through a series of detours between silence and struggling to speak. Detours have the function of *keeping love alive* and more importantly, they allow a continuation of desire and of the metaphors which express it. Renata Salecl in *Perversions of Love and Hate* (1998) determines love and art to be at the core of understanding desire as a passionate attachment to the Other (p. 48): “When Lacan said that the big Other doesn’t exist, he stressed that it is the subject who installs the big Other in its place; the subject needs the Other in order to confirm his or her existence.”

Grosz (1990, p. 6) notes that psychoanalysis manifested as an obsession to better understand desire when bourgeois Viennese women talked and Freud listened. The function of desire is important for subjective potential, formation and continuance. It is intrinsic to being human and operating within the social world. An all consuming obsession with one's desires is a contemporary symptom that Salecl has identified (2010, p. 134). She conceptualises this symptom as self-regulated by social orders, codes and rules imposed to control desire and suggests that it privileges an obsessive, predictable and controlled approach to life (p. 134):

Jacques Lacan has characterised an obsessive as someone who constantly asks, 'Am I dead or alive?' Since the obsessive is horrified not only by his own desire but especially by the desire of the Other...by continuously imposing new rules and prohibitions on himself, he instead becomes like one of the living dead, a robotic like creature, drained of desire.

Salecl goes on to highlight that this insistence for the self regulation of desire is ideologically akin to concerns regarding late capitalism (2010, p. 135). In harnessing restrictions around choice, one effectively removes it. The subject is so anxious about having the *right* desires and making the *right* choice, she/he inadvertently limits possibilities. Although desire in this context is no more recognisable, the returns it promises to the subject are obsessively sought. Thus the higher authority represented by the Other is further justified.

De Laurentis (2007) argues that sexual desire can be understood as an ideological subjectivity which is repressed and based on the obsession of locating unity within one's self. She goes to link solitude²² with desire as a "sense of separateness and division" that constitutes the

²² The politics of desire as argued by de Laurentis are taken from Lia Cigarini's writings, *La Politica del Desiderio* [The Politics of Desire], 1995. She argues that the conscious affirmation of silence allows for a political protest and vision of desire.

subject of language and from which psychic dimensions are shaped. She further elaborates (p. 231):

[Desire is] an ecstatic moment of explosion/implosion, in which the I comes apart, crumbles, no longer holds together. Even this ecstatic moment of eclipse, risk or loss of self in the desire of others, male or female, is part of subjectivity, the part that most pertains to sexuality.

For De Laurentis desire has the political motivation of both revisiting and constituting subjectivities, and, more specifically it has the potential to show how gendered relations are defined by social systems and spaces. Thus the desire to desire is not only a mark of enjoyment for the subject, but also situates desire as a locality in which the subject is always in relation to the Other.

Žižek's proposal: desire as an ideological injunction to *enjoy!*

The only thing of which one can be guilty is of having given ground relative to one's desire (Lacan, 1992, p. 69).

Don't give up your desire! (Žižek, 2005, p. 65).

Žižek commits his philosophical project to merging Lacanian psychoanalysis with critical leftist politics and an ongoing critique of ideology. Although Žižek employs the clinical domain of Lacanian psychoanalysis, he also understands the role of psychoanalysis to be that of prompting wider cultural, political and social questions centred on how desire is structured towards particular ideological investments (Parker, 2004). Žižek actively draws on Althusser's definition of ideology as harbouring an element of illusion rather than simply a false consciousness (Althusser, cited in Ricoeur, 1994, p. 54):

So ideology is a matter of the lived relation between men [sic] and their world. This relation, that only appears as ‘conscious’ on condition that it is unconscious, in the same way only seems to be simple on condition that it is complex, that it is not a simple relation but a relation between relations...

The domain of the Imaginary is crucial to desire as Althusser insists (cited in Ricoeur, 1994, p. 61):

All ideology represents in its necessarily imaginary distortion not the existing relationships of production (and other relationships that derive from them), but above all the (imaginary) relationship of individuals to the relations of production and the relations derived from them. What is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live.

While Žižek concurs that ideology and its structures must be represented via a system of images and materiality, he insists that the process of ideology is not as organic as Althusser maintains.²³ Žižek suggests instead that it is social reality whose existence implies lack of awareness and recognition by its participants as to its social effectiveness. The implications of this recall the sentiments of Marx: that individuals *do not know what they are doing* and yet are *doing it anyway*. For Žižek, ideology is not the “false consciousness of a (social) being but this being itself in so far as it is supported by false consciousness” (1994, p. 305). The big Other, the ultimate authority, that is ideology ensures that subjective desires are constituted and managed within the parameters of ideology, rather than being repressed.

²³ Althusser argues (cited in Ricoeur, 1994, p. 56) that ideology “is as such an organic part of every social totality”. Althusser implies a construction regarding ideology and its social function.

Colebrook (2002, p. 92) offers a succinct definition of ideology as “a way of explaining how economic or material exploitation is masked by images”. For Žižek, the object of analysis is social space, more specifically the *points de capiton* that anchor ideology. These are known as the *quilting points* or *anchoring points* where the signifiers and signified are knotted together (Lacan, *Sem. III*, 1955-56, p. 268; Evans, 1996, p. 149). This term is used by Lacan to describe metaphors of desire (*Sem. III*, 1955-56); these refer to the social and cultural coordinates that afford desire its conceptual and symbolic meanings, which in turn both rely upon and perpetuate fantasy. Fantasy can be described as (Williams, 1995, p. 17):

...not wholly fabricated, but an active (creative) construction of an image or fiction never actually witnessed, a patchwork of impressions and desires woven through with direct experience. Upon fantasy the subject [individual] is built (just as, Freud frequently points out, civilisation is built upon myth). Unconscious fantasy is neither real nor unreal, except that it has a paramount reality in the life and construction of the subject.

Lacan’s *points de capiton* are social reference points which, although identifiable to some extent, are illusory, fantasmatic and somewhat mythical. Žižek argues that Lacanian analysis is well placed to provide a model for social and ideological critique. The Lacanian Real - or that domain in which knowledge is impossible to be realised – is very much structured by the function of fantasy, suggests Žižek (1989).²⁴ It is this very ideological dimension in which a subject is free to enjoy his/her symptom in the place of desire, which confuses the relationship between ideology and reality for the subject (Žižek, 1994, p. 305, Myers, 2003, p. 71). In *Looking Awry* (1992) Žižek reveals in his analysis of film that in order for

²⁴ For a nuanced example refer to Žižek’s chapter, *Che Vuoi? Fantasy as a Screen for the Desire of the Other* in *Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989, p. 132-135) which offers an analysis of desire in relation to the Hitchcock film, *Rear Window*.

particular realities to be recognised, the discourse of prohibition requires unpacking and exploring, “so that forbidden things are said in ways that are untrue but satisfying enough...” (Parker, 2004, p. 59). Here Žižek focuses on the dynamic function of fantasy and on the super-ego as sustaining the gap between ideology and desire. Rather than renouncing enjoyment “which manifests itself by telling you what you cannot do, the superego orders you to enjoy what you can do” (Myers, 2003, p. 53). The superego permits particular enjoyment, indeed ensures via ideology that enjoyment is obligatory. This injunction has the paradoxical function of hindering other kinds of enjoyment and of managing desire. The analytic symptom reveals itself in the social (Žižek & Salecl, 1999). In *Écrits* Lacan refers to the *symptom* as neurotic symptoms which are the compromise of desires. Evans (1996, p. 203-204) highlights Lacan’s statement that symptoms are signifiers, are identified with the process of signification and can be described as metaphors. Evans (p. 204) states, “in the graph of desire... the symptom is described as a message... which the subject thinks is opaque...”.

Žižek and Salecl maintain that language and culture cannot be separated because they are simultaneously located in the domain of the Real, an area of life which is difficult to *know*. They refer to this as ‘the Marxian symptom’ (1999, p. 306) played out via commodity fetishism and “the social relation between things” (p. 310). This offers a contentious position in their application of Lacanian analysis, hitherto predominately legitimised within the clinical domain only (Parker, 2004, p. 69). Parker (2004) explains how Žižek understands the presentation of enjoyment of neurosis to be a narcissistic over-identification with it (p. 69):

We all love our symptoms so much that something must be going wrong for us to be brought to the point where we might be tempted to take them in for repair, and we may want them repaired so they can carry on performing their function for us... This brings us face-to-face both with how we differ from others – how others intrude on our enjoyment – and with those fantasies we may cling to, fantasies which include certain categories of people who have stolen our enjoyment from us.

The lost object – the *objet petit a*²⁵ – is for Žižek an idiosyncratic political tool. Its specifications are that it employs and draws attention to the function of fantasy. The conditions of social, political and cultural impossibilities are areas where Žižek likes to antagonise, by provocatively weaving between himself, Marx and Lacan, pushing the boundaries of what are legitimately in the domain of the subjective, towards that of the social. Desire for Žižek is formulated as an ideological encounter with objects, systems, institutions and cultural artefacts, such as cinema, art and aesthetics. In this way his concept of desire somewhat resonates with that of Deleuze. However, Žižek’s point of critical departure is his return to Lacanian psychoanalysis, which prompts him to suggest that objects are ideologically fetishised as objects of desire. He notes this when discussing the limits of desire (2008, p. 54):

Desiring property and power is legitimate insofar as it enables an individual to achieve independence from others. Adversaries in a conflict, however, each have a natural tendency always to demand more. Nothing is enough for them, and they are never satisfied. They do not know how to stop themselves; they know no limits. Desire demands more, much more than need.

In *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) Žižek describes the quest for identity as an “ideological quilt” (p. 95), in which the identity of the individual is “sewn to the signifier” (p. 112). The subject captures the struggle for *points de capiton* or what designates the signifier

²⁵ *Objet a* or *objet petit a* is a Lacanian concept developed in seminar *VIII* (1961). It refers to his formula of fantasy from which the *cause* of desire derives. The *objet a* “sets desire in motion” (Evans, 1996, p. 125) and is the object of anxiety and the excess of libido (Lacan, 1962; Evans, 1996, p. 125).

which in turn maintains identity. For Žižek the signification of desire is structured around ideological floaters within the illusion of meaning. He offers examples of *points de capiton* encapsulated in concepts such as *freedom*, *justice* and *peace* which are understood retroactively and within particular political ideological constraints, which themselves presuppose set limits to desire. Within the signifying chain, *points de capiton* assume the place of the big Other or that which fixes desire for the subject, preventing it from being derailed or becoming excessive. For Žižek, mutual recognition is what harnesses and constrains desire, seen as a problematic modern ethic (2008, p. 55-56):

...limited desires [are] in harmony with the world [and] are the ultimate source of our opportunist anti-ethical stance, they sustain the inertia of egotism and pleasure seeking, while our contact with the good is sustained by ‘desires that contain the infinite’, that strive for the absolute.

It is “through fantasy, we learn how to desire” (Žižek, 1989, p. 132). Furthermore, it is the articulation of an intersection between speech and fantasy which pushes desire beyond its socially sanctioned and or proper limits. Žižek argues further that “desire itself is a defence against desire: the desire structured through fantasy is a defence against the desire of the Other” (p. 132). He revisits Lacan’s emphasis on the mother as a fantasmatic encounter from which needs experienced by the subject aspire to be satisfied (p. 134):

...a man falls in love with a woman when some feature of her reminds him of his mother. The only thing Lacan adds to this traditional view is to emphasise its usually overlooked negative dimension: in fantasy, mother is reduced to a limited set of (symbolic) features; as soon as the object is too close to the Mother-Thing... it appears in the fantasy frame, the desire is suffocated... Here we encounter the paradoxical intermediate role of fantasy: it is a construction enabling us to seek maternal substitutes, but at the same time screen us from getting too close to the maternal Thing – keeping us at a distance from it.

The figure of the mother as a metaphoric figure of the Other is a desire for the drive of love, the impetus for which lies in an object or another subject representing the mother. Here a particular transaction takes place, whereby an object of value is substituted for the *real* thing. Although subjects will recognise that the replaced object does not fully satisfy their desire, it will provide a sufficient sustainment of desire by not reducing it to need. Thus the subject must repeatedly return to the lost object of symbolising desire, as Žižek recounts (1994, p. 122): “*Objet a* is a kind of ‘positivization’, filling out, of the void we encounter every time we are struck by the experience of ‘This is not *that!*’”

Film for Žižek offers a unique way in which to encounter the *objet a*, one which renders visible certain objects regulating the social world. McGowan (2007) offers that Žižek reads films as a way of theorising Lacanian concepts reflexively and expressively. Documentaries such as *Perverts Guide to Cinema* (Fiennes, 2006) and *Perverts Guide to Ideology* (Fiennes, 2012) attest how Žižek, through the gaze of the cinematic screen, provides clarity to the opaque concept of ideology.

The spectacle of desire: an encounter with film

The *objet a* is ‘in you more than you’ (Lacan, 1977, p. 268).

This is why, for example, in scopophilic (visual) desire the Lacanian subject finds itself in the traumatic encounter with the impossible gaze (Vighi and Felder, 2010, p. 35).

Psychoanalysis itself is exactly as old as cinema – both developed as distinct forms in the early to mid-1890’s, although both also have roots in practices dating back much earlier in the nineteenth century (Williams, 1995, p. 2).

Film theorists have endeavoured to recognise, articulate and theorise desire by enthusiastically co-opting the field of psychoanalysis. Film provides the opportunity for

social and textual analysis of a “spectre that haunts reality” (Myers, 2003, p. 73), in that the motivation of the gaze can serve as a transformative experience. Elizabeth Wright (1984) suggests that “fantasy-objects within film relate desire to the political economy” (p. 120). Through a critique of ideology, film can potentially antagonise a presupposition of organic social harmony, or, more specifically the yearning and deliberation of a social world where there are no symptoms. Flisfeder (2012) insists that the function of film includes a critique of ideology; he maintains that film analysis has the potential to offer wide opportunities for an engagement with and critique of the ideological conditions in which we live. Flisfeder’s claim is that film theory can be a political tool that contributes to a contemporary theory of ideology. Film also represents sublimated desires in ways that signify social processes. Furthermore, film provides a forum in which the social, the subject and images of desire not only intersect, but are critically interrogated.

Deleuze (1989) suggests that “cinema itself is a new practice of images and signs, whose theory philosophy must produce as conceptual practice” (p. 280). The camera is an apparatus which follows image sequences offering multiple possibilities of perceptions and actualisations. Deleuze refers to high culture when speaking about cinema and suggests that philosophy and art should be anarchic and resistant to method (Colebook, 2002, p. 46), having the function of “creating configurations upon an abstract plane of expression (Due, 2007, p. 155). In this way Deleuze is faithful to the post-structuralist project of critiquing the politics and function of representations and the organisation of narratives by claiming that they are independent signifying structures (p. 159). For Deleuze, film is an aesthetic object of

philosophy, an apparatus that constructs desire through an essence of time.²⁶

In her writings relating to women's films²⁷ Mary Anne Doane (1987) ponders the intersection of desire and subjectivity as "an(other) way of looking" (p. 1). Desire, she argues is misplaced because of the over-attachment to representation and to the cinematic imaginary (p. 1). She ponders Lacan's *objet a* as a cinematic drive in the sense that "desire is always in excess – even if it is simply the desire to desire, the striving for an access to a desiring subjectivity" (p. 122). In this way film can offer to guide desire through sequences of metaphors, which sometimes exceed the limits of desire by emphasising or blocking images to viewers. The realm of fantasy is forcefully evoked and viewers are at times confronted with the discomfort of their own subjective misrecognitions and lack. It is this process of foregrounding desire that can make film a very transformative medium which both confronts and destabilise notions of subjectivity.

Kaja Silverman (1988) claims that "cinema has the potential to 'reactivate' trauma within the viewer (p. 1), particularly as film "is defined by the distance that separates it from the phenomenal order – by the absence of the object or referent. Its pertinent relationships are discursive..." (p. 3). Silverman maintains that although there is a gap between the viewer and

²⁶ Deleuze states (cited in Davis, 2010, p. 70), "what is an essence, as it is revealed in the work of art? It is a difference, the ultimate and absolute Difference. It is what constitutes being, which makes us conceive of being". For Deleuze essence is implied rather than constructed. It is bound within subjectivity which is revealed aesthetically, or between the subject and the object.

²⁷ This term means where women are placed both as the protagonists and primary audience of film readings. In this regard most readings of *Heavenly Creatures*, if one accepts Doane's categorisation, would designate it a woman's film.

the spectacle of the film, it is irreducible and any claim to the contrary is an act of fetishism, a mere stand in for the Real (p. 6): “If crisis surrounds the discovery that filmic construction is organised around absence, that is because the spectating subject is organised around the same absence” (p. 6). For Silverman the function of film is to invigorate desire through a recognition of the lost object with specific focus on the voice as a function of *objet a*, “since the lost object always entails a loss of what was once part of the subject...” (p. 9). In addition to Silverman, feminist film theorists such as Anne Kaplan (2000), Laura Mulvey (1975, 1990), de Laurentis (2000) and Doane (2000) all attempt to subvert the dominant male gaze of the cinematic screen and to identify the female subject of desire through an interrogation of psychoanalytic theory. Copjec (1986) in particular emphasised Lacan’s self parody in *Television* as being akin to the functions of mainstream film representations (Lacan, 1977, p. 3):

I always speak the truth. Not the whole truth, because there is no way to say it all. Saying the whole truth is materially impossible; words fail. Yet it’s through this very impossibility that the truth holds on to the real.

Copjec identifies a particular cinematic logic in which the image of the subject is bound within the specificity of social and cultural definitions. The Imaginary plays a crucial role in this recognition, in that “the binding force of social relations is one of the defining tenets of psychoanalysis” (Copjec, 2000, p. 293). She further claims that “it is the *repression* of desire that founds society” (p. 294) and thus the subject emerges “as a desiring being” (p. 302). Given Copjec’s assertion that the gaze is constructed through what is perceived to be most visible for the subject, film offers the potential for subjects to reflexively scrutinise images of

the gaze and thus of desire.²⁸ Žižek on the other hand maintains that film “doesn’t give you what you desire, it tells you *how* to desire” (Fiennes, 2006). By this he means that the cinematic screen is a mirror for the social and ideological imperatives of the processes which constitute subjectivity, thereby distorting the distinction between reality and the gaze. Thus Žižek privileges film as a reflexive way for the subject to understand contemporary social realities (2001b, p. 77):

The ultimate achievement of film art is not to recreate within the narrative fiction, to seduce us into (mis)taking a fiction for reality, but, on the contrary, to make us discern the fictional aspect of reality itself, to experience reality as a fiction.

Certainly, film is an apparatus which can function as a spectacle punctuated by ideological discourses which unveil alienation and desire. Debord writes in his influential essay *The Society of the Spectacle* (1995) that the spectacle is “not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship mediated by images” (p. 12). He continues, “the spectacle erases the dividing line between self and world, in that the self, under siege by the presence/absence of the world, is eventually overwhelmed; it likewise erases the dividing line between true and false...” (p. 153). Žižek reveals that the lure of the spectacle lies in the gaze, although the gaze is, as he calls it, *awry*. Here Žižek refers to Lacan’s scopic drive, the pleasure derived by the gaze from looking, as being the location of desire (Lacan, 1977, p. 103):

²⁸ Copjec states (cited in Kaplan, 2000), “the object-cause of desire is the object-cause of the subject of desire in the field of the visible. In other words it is what the subject does not see and not simply what it sees that founds it” (p. 201).

When, in love, I solicit a look, what is profoundly unsatisfying and always missing from what is seen, is that its absence looks through its wished-for presence – in the following way: You never look at me from the place which I see you.

The act of *looking awry* “saves us the effort of thinking” (Žižek, 1992, p. 3) about how reality does not correspond with the subject’s wish. The imperative to *look awry* is related to the aim and location of fantasy for the viewer when in the act of viewing as Žižek states (p. 6):

What fantasy stages is not a scene in which our desire is fulfilled, fully satisfied, but on the contrary, a scene that realises, stages desire as such. The fundamental point of psychoanalysis is that desire is not something given in advance, but something that has to be constructed – and it is precisely the role of fantasy to give the coordinates of the subject’s desire, to specify the object, to locate the position the subject assumes in it.

What is missed during the act of looking *awry* stages the reality of the gaze just as much, if not more, than what is seen by the subject. Fantasy stages desire for the subject in a way that is open to distraction and postponement, and which is tantalising, frustrating and anxiety-provoking. In film desire is constantly being staged and when desire is absent, anxiety sets in for the viewing subject (Žižek, 1992, p. 8). The risk of this occurring is when one is fully immersed in a film, rather than when merely encountering it (Davis, 2010, p. 113). The screen is a space in which to project desires; however this is done by *looking awry*. For Žižek viewing film entails “looking at an angle, i.e. with an interested view, supported, permeated and distorted by *desire*” (1992, p. 12). This gaze distorts the *objet a* and from this desire is triggered and materialises. Looking *awry* has the function of both structuring and playing with desire, of tantalising possibilities whilst at the same time, keeping them at bay. This is crucial when confronted with a horrific event portrayed in film in that we can understand it as a “surplus space” (Žižek, 1992, p. 16) which is not an everyday reality for us. Žižek criticises Deleuze for not recognising this space as being that of the ideological big Other manifesting

as the relationship between fantasy and perversion (2004a). This surplus space is crucial in that film images on the one hand escape desire, but nevertheless perpetuates its enigma through fantasy. *It's only a film, it is not reality* is a sentiment we might tell ourselves when film confronts us with the surplus space of social catastrophe and human fragility. Film insists that viewers *look awry* in order to manage desire, even when viewing the most ordinary events, which may nevertheless harbour undercurrents of illusion and trauma.

For Žižek the search for the truth of one's desire is akin to being a detective who is trying to solve a mystery. Unfortunately to attain any truth and thereby solve the problem of desire, the culprit (being those ideologies which stage desire) is never obvious. One must first confront an eruption (and the aftermath) of previously assumed truths, subjectivities and realities. Film, Žižek claims, is the perfect medium for confrontation with the Real, in other words, with the injunction to *enjoy!*

Concluding comments

It is within a Lacanian psychoanalytic and theoretical foundation, together with an emphasis on the work of Žižek and particular feminist theorists that this thesis explores how people understand desire at different stages of their lives, here located in contemporary New Zealand. Specifically, how they recognise and articulate what desire means for them, how they might negotiate the process of such recognition and how they envisage and manage the process of understanding desire as having the potential to be or not be fulfilled. Desire can be understood as a confirmation of one's existence as an alienated subject in the social world particularly when confronting life's joys and challenges as well as everything mundane.

It can be asserted thus far that desire does not exist to be satisfied, but rather to exist unsatisfied in perpetuity; furthermore it can be argued that desire has the function of resisting and unravelling meaning rather than creating it. Desire comes into existence when the subject identifies with an object of special significance (Dean, 2000, p. 137). As Lacan states,

“Desire is only grasped in the interpretation” (1966, p. 623). As will be discussed more fully in Chapter 2, desire is configured in particular ways for the Hysteric, that is, desire is the subject’s desire for the Other to recognise him/her, to return the subject’s gaze. This vantage point presupposes the Other’s desires and subjectivities as constituted within a fantasmatic wish. The process of attempting to recognise desire as unconscious knowledge is both frustrating and anxiety provoking because it does not necessarily demand that we become a replica of the Other whom we desire. To maintain subjectivity we have to generate autonomy between ourselves and our Other, a process which inevitably creates tension in that it opens up a world of difference between what we perceive our desires to be and what we think we might want. Although Deleuze and Guattari express criticism of psychoanalysis, their theorisations of subjective desire have been instrumental to Žižek, particularly in his critical interpretations of ideology. Žižek (1992) reconfigures desire as posited within a cultural symptom, that is, we imagine ourselves as subjects of lost enjoyment of desire. The state of *desiring* is a socially discursive and libidinal process. Fantasies of nostalgia, love and trauma, all of which represent the Other, are essential for us in imagining ourselves to be meaningful subjects in the world.

Desire according to Lacan is impossible to satisfy and is therefore structured and regulated not only by non satisfaction, but also by non-realisation. For Žižek however, this subjective conundrum is the heart of ideological reflexivity. In the next chapter I wish to explore more fully Lacan’s formulation of desire together with the function of film in constructing ‘the pleasure of looking’ at desire.

Chapter 2: The language of desire: between the subject and the social



Illustration 2. *The Treachery of Images*, Magritte, R. (1928-29).

Once in language, there is no way out (Pluth, 2007, p. 26).

We can have no relation to ourselves, to our gender and to society without a capacity to imagine these relations and represent them to ourselves and others (Moore, 2007, p. 56).

Behind every action is a wish, behind every thought an unreasonable desire (Frosh, 2002, p. 17).

Introduction

Psychoanalysis could be characterised as a theoretical field devoted to understanding how the subjective unconscious can reveal hidden discourses circulating in everyday life. Lacanian psychoanalysis in particular penetrates the body of ideas circulating within society and culture to reveal unconscious motivations and desires. How we operate as both subjective and social beings is contingent on multiple and competing psychic and social structures in which the repression of representations of desires, affect and drive underlies conscious motivations. Nevertheless, the field of Lacanian psychoanalysis, both within the clinical and theoretical domains are alive with debate which draws attention to the polyvalent construction of many Lacanian concepts. Golding identifies the relationship between individuals and their ideas about culture as understood within psychoanalysis (1982, p. 545):

Psychoanalysis can enhance our understanding of the way in which the individual is formed by and through culture. It also cautions us against making simple generalisations about the impact of culture upon the person, showing that the individual never submits unequivocally to its demands and interdicts.

The realms of media, literature, art, politics, popular culture and consumerism provide psychoanalytic theory with a nexus of ongoing insights and debates (Fiennes, 2006; Lebeau, 2001; Richards, 2004; Žižek, 1992) which invite the question, how do we know *what to desire*?

This chapter explores relevant Lacanian analytic concepts and particularly the approaches of those theorists who employ Lacanian psychoanalysis in their social research. The specificities and nuances of these concepts will be unpacked as they relate to the project and analysis of my thesis.

How does Lacan understand subjective desire and the function of the unconscious?

Lacan contributed to the discourse of psychoanalysis through his own clinical practice, by returning to the writings of Freud and so integrating the structure of language that “language becomes the single paradigm of all structures” (Evans, 1996, p. 97). For Lacan, the clinical experience is fundamentally constituted and experienced through an engagement of the unconscious with language. The purpose of the psychoanalytic encounter is to bring the analysand closer to the truth of their desires (Lacan, 1988, p. 183). However, for Lacan desire is always within the realm of the unconscious and constitutes what the subject craves (Lacan, 1977, p. 142), as Bailly states (2009, p. 110), “desire is the mainspring of all creativity: without desire, there would be no human advancement... [Lacan] saw desire as a condition that plays a structuring role in the Subject ...”

At its most rudimentary, desire can be understood as the image an individual projects about what he or she perceives as longings which are simultaneously out of reach. To be a human who speaks is to desire; we are desiring beings, constantly striving to fill our projected lack or find our missing piece. Bailly (2009, p. 110) indicates that desire is a “component of other affects”, meaning that because of the structuring role desire has for the subject, it is symptoms and sublimated acts that emerge, rather than desire itself. Desire produces experiences from which a multitude of shifting subjectivities can be simultaneously negotiated and constructed. Our desires are always located in the context of how the subject approaches and relates to what Lacan calls the Other. Lacan’s Other is that subject or object which, substituting for desire, holds a promise of subjective wholeness. By this I mean that desire is always a manifestation of and confrontation with subjective lack. For Lacan, this lack is always in relation to the Phallus – that is, one can neither possess it nor represent it. The Other comes into being through the mother, the original object of desire and first confrontation with one’s lack as Kirby et al consider (2003, p. 61-64):

It is through language that the subject seeks to evoke the presence of the absent Other or the object of desire... This lack can be masculine or feminine. Lack is what makes the subject decentred for Lacan.

The images people have of themselves and of others are constructed and represented by the demands of the Other and are therefore (mis)recognitions of desire. The conscious images people form of themselves (ideal ego) precisely detour what might be the (unknown) desires of the Other. In order to attempt to conform to the demands of these desires, we construct ourselves as the object of the Other's desire which forms the illusion of subjective wholeness.

In his reading of Freud, Christopher Bollas conceptualises the unconscious as being shaped by two forms: process and content (2007, p. 72):

For classical psychoanalysts, the dynamic unconscious refers to the repression of sexual and aggressive drives that seek to return to acceptable consciousness in some form or another. This unconscious is, by definition, drive-like; it is a pulsion seeking discharge any way it can and when it ropes in thinking it does so rather expeditiously... Here is the unconscious as an intelligence of form.

The unconscious holds contents which are both repressed and less repressed in the conscious; free association and images of dream states as signifiers are tools which psychoanalysis employ (Bollas, 2007, p. 72). A feature of the unconscious as Bollas describes, is to "creatively fulfil our desire all the time, in daydreams, conversations, relations, creative activities and whatnot" (p. 73). A characteristic aspect of the unconscious is that it has no concept of time or history (p. 74); there is no beginning and sense of development within the form of the unconscious, rather within the processes of releasing the unconscious, it manifests as something more sophisticated, dynamic and creative as Bollas (p. 74) illustrates: "Right from the beginning of life the self is a dream working the primitive, transforming

urges into images”. Such images are considered to be signifiers, that is, they represent the subject for another signifier or another substitute (Lacan, 1977, p. 210). Here Lacan is saying that there exists a play between signifiers and that meaning is produced both by how this play is metaphorically understood and by how signifiers overlap in speech. The element of fantasy is crucial because meanings are developed through an unavoidable experience of enjoyment.

Contemporary Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis is concerned with how the order of the Phallus is represented and related to. The biological order of the Phallus is not emphasised by Lacan. Rather he attributes to the Phallus Imaginary and Symbolic functions. The Phallus is necessary in understanding the management of the Oedipal Complex. This is where the child must accept or reject castration resulting from the realization that the mother desires the father (representing the Phallus and third term), and not wholly the child. According to Lacan, the subject takes a position in relation to the Phallus, this position providing a place within the Symbolic Order. As a field for subjective inquiry the Phallus also addresses how the sexed subject becomes a social being, as Frosh elaborates (2002, p. 6): “how the human subject becomes a part of culture, whilst also holding open the possibility of a practice which is based on the tackling of illusion.” Understanding how desire functions as an everyday practice entails the need to focus on the unconscious forces which operate in our social worlds, as Moore states (2007, p. 57):

Desire constitutes the subject through the demand for the recognition of subjectivity, because what each subject desires is to be desired by an(other), or, as Lacan says, each subject desires the desire of the other as its object. However, the other is also a subject founded on lack, and what the image of society sustained in ideological discourse seeks to do is to suture or cover over the lack on which both the subject and other are founded.

The Other, represented by the Phallus as that which the mother desires, has a complex function of structuring the subject within the Symbolic Order. The Other is understood as

where speech is constituted and as that which the subject tries to occupy. The Other is the reflection of the ego, that which forms the *objet petit a* or *objet a* and which is also the cause of subjective anxiety (Salecl, 2004, p. 82). The *objet a* is further understood as the cause of desire in that the subject seeks in the Other that object towards which desire is directed. Because of the fundamental lingering dissatisfaction created from castration (lack), the subject is in a permanent state of ambivalence and uncertainty regarding investment in subjectivity. The Other is also another subject within the Symbolic Order (Evans, 1996, p. 133) and is similarly mediated through its relationship with other subjects. In that the “unconscious is the discourse of the Other” (Lacan, 1966, p. 16), the closer one comes to the truth of one’s desires, the more fantasies start to fade. Frosh understands the content of the unconscious as (2002, p. 13):

the existence of ideas which are not thought about (hence not in consciousness) but which are radically unavailable to thought – they cannot be brought to awareness even if the person tries really hard, or at least it is more of a struggle than one person can manage on her or his own. These hidden ideas, however, have a profound influence on psychological life.

A function of the unconscious is, as Frosh elaborates to “carry out work” and “make things happen” (2002, p. 13). Desire fuels the unconscious. The challenge of psychoanalysis is to bring into consciousness images from the unconscious. What this means is that, in order for images to hold traction in the Symbolic, they must be named in speech to either unfix or to problematise a fixation on the Imaginary. Lacan considers that it is within the process of clinical psychoanalysis that unconscious desires can be named. It is through this articulation of anxiety-producing desires (conscious repression), that it becomes possible, albeit unsatisfying to name them.

The first Other and object of desire experienced by the subject is that of the mother or primary care-taker (Salecl, 2004, p. 83). Lacan’s mirror stage is crucial to conceptualising

how the subject comes into being via the maternal. The gaze of a baby is entirely on its mother who provides the first mirror as Bailly states, “the child’s identity or notion of itself as a whole being is first formed in that gaze; it is a narcissistic manoeuvre that underpins the development of identity.” (2009, p. 37). Similarly, the process of subjectivity is enacted through perceiving oneself in the Lacanian mirror both as the Other and as an object of desire. Bailly explains this process (p. 40):

The Subject is the Symbolic part, unconscious but active, which produces unity, although not wholeness; it thinks itself at the source of everything, but is in reality the product of successive images, of language and its signifiers. The signifiers are not produced by the Subject, they constitute it.

The image and experience of the body under the condition of the mirror stage is fragmented and in pieces. However, the image of the body as a whole is bound within an Imaginary sense of a unified self from which the subject self-identifies. The desire of the Other gives signification to this image of the unified self. In order to enter the field of the Other, the subject is required to make a subjective sacrifice to the Other of this image of the unified self, a sacrifice which makes possible a Symbolic relationship with the Other (Strauss, 2011). The desire of the subject is captured through how he/she perceives the desire of the Other, a desire which the Other does not in turn express to the subject (Strauss, 2011.) Furthermore through the image of the Other the subject attempts to *be* the desired object *for* the Other (Lacan, 1958).

Lacan’s Symbolic Order is determined by the registers of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. The Imaginary contains the mirror-stage which highlights the ego and reflects discrepancies between individuals’ sense of selfhood and that of their image. The Symbolic is the dimension of language through which subjects are inscribed into the Symbolic Order. The Real is that which is difficult to be represented, said or known and is “carved up by

language” (Myers, 2003, p. 25; Žižek, 1991). What binds the Symbolic Order together is referred to as the sinthome, as illustrated by the Borromean Knot. Bollas (2007, p. 77) understands Lacan’s Symbolic Order to be an act of listening within a theoretical orientation, which he suggests is a “metasensual phenomenon. It allows one to see something not seen by other theories; to have an unconscious possibility should clinical need for it arise” (p. 82). In the figure below Lacan demonstrates the interdependence of the three orders as depicted in the Borromean Knot (*Sem. XX: Encore*):

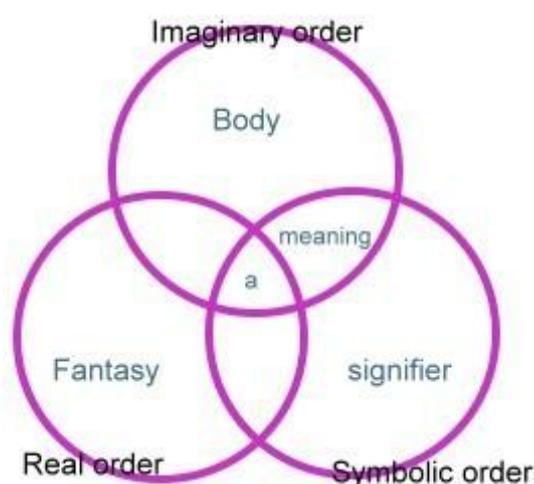


Figure 1. The Borromean Knot

• In order for one’s desires to be manageable, there needs to be compliance with social and cultural norms and discourses. As Copjec maintains (1996), it is the repression of our desires as social subjects that determine how desires are understood and negotiated. Frosh elaborates on this phenomenon when outlining the mechanisms of repression (2002, p. 24):

One effect of repression is to institutionalise the split nature of the psyche; repression produces the unconscious; unconscious material is, broadly speaking, repressed. This model works clearly in everyday life and in social analyses, not just those produced by a variety of

political and social theorists interested in psychoanalysis but more generally as an image of how a social order might work – an image based, as Freud’s own social thought was, on the idea of an essential opposition between the needs or wishes of individuals and what society can tolerate.

There are links between repression, alienation and loss for the subject who is interpellated through language. For the Hysteric, immersion within the Symbolic Order leads inevitably to alienation and loss. By this I mean that our relationship with the Other becomes such an opaque and seemingly unattainable relationship that the only way to understand our desires is to symbolise them as metaphors or “mental transportation system[s]” (Bollas, 2007, p. 75). The subject is cut off from the Real and dominated by the Other. As lack becomes ever present we see the Other in fragments, and symbolisation of desire is required in order to construct the appearance of subjective wholeness. This construction is necessary because it allows for a full symbolisation of desire (for the Other) which is the very basis of language. Lacan produces a series of linguistic graphs in four stages to convey the emergence and trajectory of the neurotic subject:

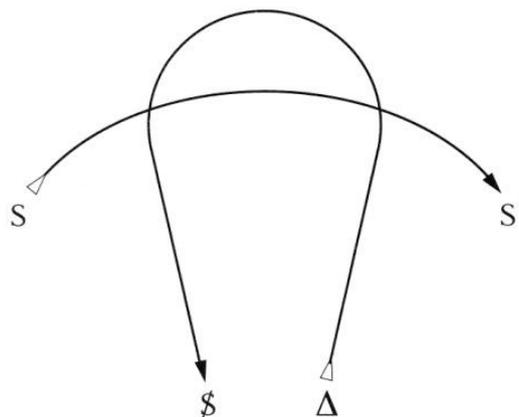


Figure 2. Graph 1 of the Graph of Desire

Graph 1, the elementary cell (Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 681) illustrates the emergence of subjectivity and depicts how fragments of unconscious desires manifest into consciousness through metaphors of lack (the original loss, that being, the mother). It posits the function of the quilting point and traces the chain of signification via the barred subject (\$) (Lacan, 1966, p. 335). The two lines of this graph indicate the intention of discourse. $S \rightarrow S1$ represents the potential for linguistic meaning. Graph 1 of desire is driven by the subject's need as lack which has not been established at this point (Δ). The divided subject (\$) is distinguished within the Symbolic Order from a subject unencumbered by repression and inhibition (S).

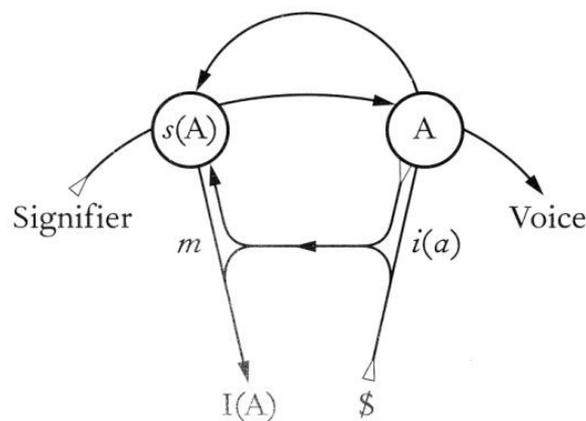


Figure 3. Graph 2 of the Graph of Desire

Graph 2 (Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 684) implicates the subject into the production of meaning, entailing that the subject is interpellated (S) within language and can be best described as the process of naming or a return to the *das Ding*. In this way the Thing is both externalised and linked to the production of identity and meaning. The *points de capiton* is the-thing-itself as misrecognition for the subject. (Δ) has been replaced by \$ which is the subject as the instigator of action, rather than a mere representation of it, as depicted in graph 1. This

directly implicates the subjects as one of language, in that speech is effective as it is being interpreted retroactively within the order of the Symbolic. The discourse of the Other (A) is important to this graph as a vessel of meaning or norms from which the subject is inscribed into and which is represented in the image of the Other and which “punctuates the discourse” (Eidelsztein, 2009, p. 75). Subjection is represented in the $A \rightarrow s(A)$ sequence and takes effect at $s(A)$ which is the point of entry into the signifying chain where meaning is established, recognised and the subject attaches him/herself to this.

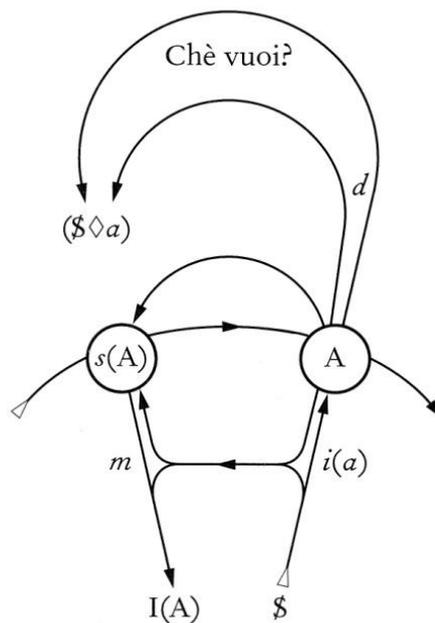


Figure 4. Graph 3 of the Graph of Desire

Since the first object of desire is the mother, it is also according to Lacan the first experience of lack. The child wants the mother to desire only him/her, this posing a significant and rhetorical question which results in Lacan’s third graph (*Écrits*, p. 690), *Chè vuoi?* – a question directed to apprehend the Other; *what do you want from me?* (Lacan, 1958-9). This

question takes place in the third and complete graph (Lacan, 1958-9). What takes place when one realises that this question cannot be answered is a mobilization of forces directing one's life trajectory. Desire enters during the third stage of Lacan's graph. This is represented as $(m) \leftarrow i(a)$, when the subject connects their Imaginary ego with the Imaginary Other. This is important as it allows the subject to form an image of their identity, as constituted in society or the Symbolic system, represented as the big Other, $I(A)$. Conversely, the shift from the imaginary Other to the Imaginary ego $i(a) \rightarrow (m)$ is the process of identification and how the subject would like to *be*. It expresses the fundamental fantasy $\$ \diamond a$. The structure of $A \rightarrow s(A) \rightarrow I(A)$ allows the subject to be a subject of language, culture and society and produces a metonymic process from which the gaze (image) is determined.

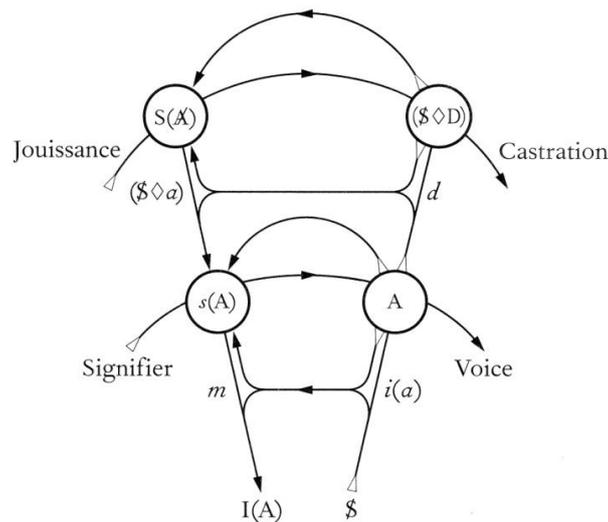


Figure 5. The Complete Graph of Desire.

At this juncture, as depicted in the complete graph (Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 692), the subject fully engages with the object of its desire in attempting to occupy the space of a perceived void through signifiers with which the subject can announce *who* they are through speech. Bailly outlines this quest for the signification of individuation and self determination as emanated from the Other (2009, p. 111):

The Other is first of all language and the set of rules that govern the Subject, but is also represented by individuals. At the start of one's life, there is only one Other, embodied by the mother (and at castration, the father); later, the Subject will encounter other Others, embodied in other Others (usually the Subject's peer group). As the subject is moulded by the discourse of the Other, it will fabricate -its own version of the Other and its own authentic desire...

The role of fantasy is crucial in both constituting and understanding subjective desire. Žižek describes the function of fantasy as (cited in Pluth, 2007, p. 83):

[P]reparing an object for desire: Fantasy makes an empirical object – in itself perhaps of little interest – into an object of desire, as if a kind of screen is put over an otherwise neutral object, making it into something desirable.

Frosh conceptualises fantasy as a “conscious wish, something which is known to be at odds with actual reality; though it is not necessarily impossible (it may be a plausible imaginary scene of future success, for example), it is not really there, it is illusionary” (2002, p. 50). Frosh's claim that reality and fantasy will “always break down” (p. 51) suggests that each is contingent and dependent on the other for existence. The object for the subject's question is precariously positioned only as an object that is a *possible* object of desire. The object can be replaced or reconfigured so that it can produce *objet a* (Pluth, 2007, p. 83). Fantasy makes desire possible; it mediates and structures this process through empirical objects. “Fantasy is the support of desire; it is not the object that is the support of desire” (Lacan, 1977, p.185). Fantasy is always present with the subject. Everything one says and does depends on it for realities to be perceived. Moreover fantasy has the function of enabling particular experiences to be transformational. This provides an important aim for psychoanalysis, which is to address subjective distortions, mistaken perceptions and irrationalities without belittling the subject's experiences. Evans conceptualises Lacanian importance of fantasy as that which makes desire possible by emphasising the importance of its “protective function” (1996, p. 60-61):

Lacan compares the fantasy scene to a frozen image on a cinematic screen; just as film may be stopped at a certain point in order to avoid showing a traumatic scene which follows, so also the fantasy scene is a defence which veils castration (S4, 119-20). The fantasy is thus characterised by a fixed and immobile quality ... Fantasy is always an image set to work in a signifying structure.

Fantasy initiates conscious desires and is at the same time responsible for fantasmatic images which replace the lack. At this juncture subjects can structure their desires in relation to the Other. Lacan's matheme²⁹ for fantasy is $\$ \diamond a$. Here the barred subject (\$) is read in relation (\diamond) to *objet a* (*a*) (Evans, 1996, p. 60). Thus understood fantasy has the function of both imitating and sustaining subjective desire. The subject is able to recognise the image as him/her, although always within a signifying structure. These objects or partial objects are mediated by images, and as Bailly (2009) claims, symbolise the Other that stands in for the Phallus – *das Ding* or the Thing. MacCannell describes the function of the Other as the subject attempting “to identify his [sic] being by his [sic] location in a particular sense, in a particular order, by putting himself [sic] in place of the Other (1986, p. 101). The signifiers of the Other are subsumed by the subject as if they were their own. While desire oscillates the *objet a* is the image generated through alienation. Fink defines alienation as when “the Other dominates or takes the place of the subject; in separation, *objet a* as the Other's desire comes to the fore and takes precedence...” (1995, p. 69). Given the experience of alienation, the subject occupies a space in order to negotiate his/her fantasies within the social. This negotiation is variable and contingent on the experience of anxiety, in that the subject needs to both prohibit and project desires in order to achieve the appearance of subjective wholeness.

²⁹ Lacan developed his own algebra linking the laws of the unconscious, as Freud did with the systems of language.

Alienation has the function of negotiating visibility and representation. This is significant because it entails that the subject demands the *objet a* in place of the Real. As a consequence, the subject is forced to attain a greater accessibility to language, the function of metaphor and metonymy, as well as how he/she can access pleasure and engage the drives. Although subjects always attempt to recognise the demand of the Other, there remains a potential for them to be visible through language. In seminar XIV Lacan (cited in Pluth, 2007, p. 89) describes this as “a transition from the body, *jouissance*, or the Real to language”. Evans conceptualises *jouissance* as “enjoyment”. However, because this enjoyment is entirely libidinal, the English translation is seen to be insufficient. Rather, *jouissance* is accepted and understood to be the “limits of pleasure” (Evans, 1996, p. 91) which “command the subject to enjoy as little as possible” via various prohibitions (p. 91) while still enabling the subject to transcend these and “go beyond the pleasure principle” (p. 92). Fantasy and alienation are inseparable and constitute a symbolic structure. Once language is taken up by the Subject, meaning is inscribed in it. Because desire is unspeakable or unable to be spoken, in that it is always desire to be the complete object of the Other’s desire which is never directed to the subject, it can only be partially brought into consciousness via speech. The Other, paradoxically, does not exist, although the possibility of its existence is enough for the subject to conceptualise its significance. By this I mean that the Other exists precisely as a construct of the Symbolic Order. As Salecl explains, “The big Other as a coherent symbolic order does not exist; however it none the less functions, in that the subject’s belief in it has a significant impact on their [sic] lives” (2004, p. 124). She comments further on the anxieties manifested by the (non)existence of the Other which link contemporary social issues with the subject’s sense of ambivalence, as he/she attempts to achieve the illusory wholeness (p. 129):

One finds in today’s society the emergence of a new individualism. The subject is more and more perceived as creator of his or her identity and less and less identifies with the values of his family, community or state. Linked to this ideology of the subject’s self-creation is the perception that there is in the subject a truth, which only needs to be rediscovered for the

subject to become him- or herself. But if some childhood experience shattered the core of the subject's identity, they will be deprived in the pursuit of authenticity.

Language and the function of speech are essential in understanding the intersection between Lacanian psychoanalysis, social theory and discourses of ideology which are the construct of wider social conditions. The subject is captured by discourse, which is the discourse of the Other, when he/she is born; meaning is achieved through links with the Other and with what constitutes our 'realities' and our knowledge.

The symbolic system of speech

Lacan draws upon a variety of disciplines to argue for focusing on the importance of speech, in particular on how compliance with and resistance to the chain of signification constructs the subject (Pluth, 2007, p. 94). In Seminar *III* Lacan insists that, "the unconscious is structured *like* a language" (1955-6). This sets the stage for examining and understanding the dimensions and domains of speech, and exploring its nuances. However, language alone cannot *tell the truth*, as Lacan states at the beginning of his seminar, *Television* (1977). At the same time, language holds the potential for and possibility of truth. The psychoanalytic mechanism for unveiling this is through the chain of signification.

Meanings resulting from the chain of signification are not stable and are always illusory. Desire is expressed through the chain of signification. All signification shifts between the signifier (S) and the signified (s), and "each sound-image is said to signify a concept" (Evans, 1996, p. 185). The signifier and signified are dependent on each other for meaning and

representation. Lacan based this on the Saussurean³⁰ relationship between the sign and the signifier and developed subjective processes into linguistic formulae to emphasise these distinctive elements. The relationship between them is antagonistic, unstable and constitutive, as represented by the bar and “for Lacan this algorithm defines the topography of the unconscious” (Evans, 1996, p. 184). Figure 6 illustrates the dynamic between the voice and the object:

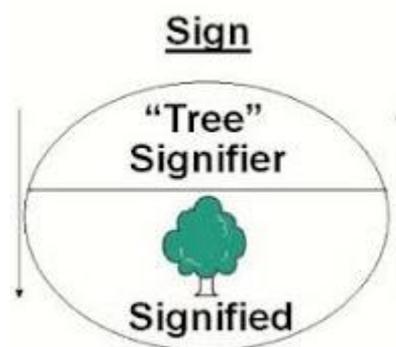


Figure 6. Signifier and Signified

Signification is, in Lacan’s work, not a stable bond between signified (sound image) and signifier (concept), but a process by which the play of signifiers produces the illusion of the signified via the two tropes of metaphor and metonymy (Evans, 1996, p. 185)

³⁰ Ferdinand de Saussure was a Swiss linguist and founder of semiotics (structural linguistics) who conceptualised the sign, the signifier and signified as the bases for language, also maintained that meanings and interpretations of language cannot be separated from the social context in which it is spoken.

$$\frac{S}{s}$$

Figure 7. The Saussurean Algorithm

In Lacanian theorization, the signifier has preference over the signified (that which stands in for meaning) because “the signified is an effect of the ‘play of signifiers’ over the continuum of experience” (Wright, 2000, p. 4). In figure 7, the signifier, S, is over the signified, s (Lacan, 1966). Contrary to understanding the function of words as evoking core meanings, the way the signifier dominates interpretations of the signified is through the chain of signification. Bailly (2009, p. 44) refers to signifiers as the symbolic representations of ideas, [these being] or mental images. The signifier and the signified are separated by a bar, which is crucial to how the problem of meaning for the subject is produced. If the signifier - the more mobile symbol - can be understood as the unconscious and the signified as the conscious, then it is inevitable that the bar has the potential to be crossed, particularly during the dream state, free association or when one engages as an analysand. In day to day life one crosses the bar during the act of a Freudian slip, a slip of the pen or when engaging in jokes. Through the act of crossing the bar non-sense or non-meaning is constituted and a connection to the unconscious might be provided. During the process of signification metaphors and metonymy are substituted for the signifier, the Master signifier always being a representation of the Phallus. In this way desire is best spoken about through metaphors and metonymy. Metaphor is comparison with one sign to another sign; such a comparison must be congruous and is therefore a form of substitution. As a result of this process meaning is produced and symbolized from this signification. As Evans states (1996, p. 112), “[m]etaphor is thus the passage of the signifier into the signified, the creation of a new signified”. Metonymy is that to which the object is closely linked, to which it does not necessarily literally refer (Evans,

1996, p. 113). Signifiers are combined, but the bar which divides the sign from the signifier is not crossed and so no new signifiers are produced. Lacan gives desire as an example of how the metonymic process functions. Desire is limitless and in a constant state of deferral, wherein the subject fixates on an object but she/he will inevitably be unsatisfied. The metonymic process is accessed through what is called *points de capiton* which are those free floating signifiers, or anchoring points, which posit the ideological direction of the chain of signification. This is directly implicated within the order of desire, since on their own, floating signifiers have no meaning. However, where there is no meaning speech entails fixity of meaning which occurs retroactively for the subject and from which meaning is produced.

Lacan states in Seminar *IX* (cited in Pluth, 2007, p. 33) that, “the subject is the consequence of the fact that there is a signifier”, although meaning is not reducible to any one signifier. Rather, a signifier can be understood as part of a chain and it is this chain which produces meaning for the subject. It is also through this signifying chain that metonymy and metaphor create the image for the chain of signification. Lacan depicts the signifier as the mental image of the sound in *Ladies and Gentlemen*. Here the doors are signifiers and the words distinguish meaning from the image (Lacan, *Écrits*).

HOMMES DAMES

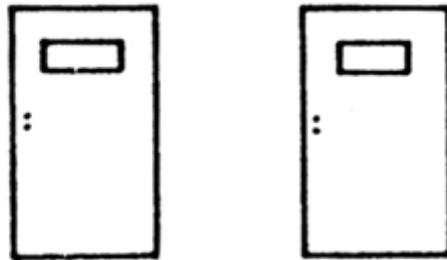


Figure 8. Gentlemen and Ladies

Throughout his work Lacan called rigorous attention to the form and function of signs and signifiers particularly within the clinical domain of psychoanalysis. The signifier possesses the “central features of a sign, which is to refer to a specific thing... [However], unlike signs, signifiers do not relate, point to or refer to a specific thing (objects, meanings or references)” (Pluth, 2007, p. 25-26). The figure 8 illustrates the function and relationship between the signified and the signifier. As Lacan states in *Écrits*, a sign represents something to someone (1996, p. 268). What distinguishes signs from each other is the context in which they are placed and understood. Pluth states, “When abstracted from its referential structure, a sign is just a trace” (2007, p. 25). To distinguish each from the other, one requires the meanings bestowed through the words, *Ladies* and *Gentlemen*. The meaning of each word makes possible an interpretation from which one derives the function of being signified and also from which the signifier hides. As such language operates as a way of speaking that which may hold multiple meanings.

Lacan states that “the function of language in speech is not to inform, but to evoke” (1966, p. 299) and draws on Heidegger to make the distinction between full and empty speech. Full

speech, also referred to as true speech, is close to the subject's desire, as "it is in recognition of one person to another" (Evans, 1996, p. 194). Empty speech is where "the subject is alienated from his/her desire" (p. 124). It is through speech that one can articulate the truth of one's desires, the most unencumbered full speech being during free association. It is important here to understand the difference between the sign and the signifier as the signifier; the signifier always representing the subject for another signifier (1966, p. 164).

Lacan's theory of discourse is important to understand because it entails that subjects exist alongside or as components of ideology. In Lacanian terms this means that ideology is what constitutes the Other. Subjects are born into language and into the field of the Other, as defined by language. That is, access to the Other via language is an interpellation of the subject. Language in this way is central to all the functions of the society in which the subject lives. In Lacanian theory, there would be no society if there were no language. Society is constituted through subjects in language.

Žižek considers it important to understand how language and ideology are linked because the Master signifier, that which stands in for the Phallus, forms the basis for understanding those dominant conditions, institutions, relationships and meanings for the speaking subject. The Master signifier operates as the Other of ideology from which the subject constructs an image of him/herself which is constituted in speech: "I am this because I am not that". It is from this enunciation that desire is apprehended within the gaze of the Other (the Master signifier). As the Master signifier cannot meet all the demands for the subject, fantasy is the stand in for desire and it is within the gaze that desire is elicited for the subject.

Subjective desire as implicated by the cinematic gaze

No one experiences reality without some fantasmatic investment. Which is to say that we fantasise that what we see informs what we do see (McGowan, 2007, p. 16).

The gaze is intrinsically linked to Lacan's mirror stage, which is in turn bound up with subjects' ongoing encounters with their fantasies. The screen has the potential to function as both sides of the Lacanian mirror – to see and to be seen through many discourses, as Copjec highlights (2000, p. 293):

The subject first recognises itself by identifying with the gaze and then recognises the images on the screen. Now what exactly is the gaze in this context? ... The imaginary relation is not, however merely a relation of knowledge, of sense and recognition; it is also a relation of love guaranteed by knowledge.

Žižek describes fantasy as “the kernel of the subject's being [...] in an irreducible way decentred with regard to the symbolic texture that defines the subject's identity” (cited in Pluth, 2007, p. 84). The subject's encounter with fantasy is through “a particular object or signifier desired by the Other” (Pluth, 2007, p. 85). Fantasy provides what Lacan describes as the “window on the Real” (Lacan, 1977, p. 254).

Film uses the gaze as a necessary tool whether it be for psychoanalytic or social analysis. The uniqueness of film is that, as film theorist, Todd McGowan maintains, it privileges time, linking the experience of the image to that of the viewer (2011, p. 4). One can watch a film, be it a western, a historical drama, a futuristic dystopia or a fantasy and be transported to another place as if time were suspended. Psychoanalysis offers a similar suspension of time – one can ponder the image of an incident or fantasy as a way of experiencing being a subject in the world.

By combining psychoanalytic and feminist theory with film criticism, Laura Mulvey (1975) tracks the privileging of the male gaze as the dominant paradigm guiding mainstream cinematic ideology. She is implying that although representations in cinema are insufficient in themselves, cinema has the potential to bring the viewer closer to textual substance, rather

than style. Cinema is a machine of seduction and it is in the nature of cinema to hijack the subject by transmitting sensations, either known or imagined. In her essay, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975) she argues that camera styles of classic Hollywood films, in combination with editing, subordinate and fetishise women's bodies via the male gaze for voyeuristic pleasure (cited in O'Gabbard et al, 1999, p. 195):

One of the most essential – and one of the most controversial – elements in the feminist appropriation of Lacanian psychoanalysis is the suggestion that the female body creates anxiety for men because it represents the possibility of castration.

Lacan's mirror image clearly influences Christian Metz's (1977) focus on the gaze in his analysis of film as Singer notes (1988, p. 11):

...Metz argues that pleasurable looking (scopophilic pleasure), as in voyeurism, depends on the absence of the object viewed, its distance from the looker. This central Lacanian concept maintains that one basis of pleasure in general – in this case, visual pleasure – is desire for, rather than attainment of, an Other; i.e., an unpossessable, external object whose paradigm, for Lacan, is the infant's own reflection in the mirror.

Here, Metz understands voyeurism in terms of an absence of the viewer from the scene. However, such absence is not always the basis for pleasure. Films based on horrific historical events are an example where the emphasis on historicity and visual imaginary suture the past to the present, giving the viewer an illusion (and myth) of temporal continuity. Nevertheless the approaches of Mulvey and Metz's locate the cinematic Real primarily between the Imaginary and the Symbolic (Vighi, 2005, p. 235) and regard the camera as a scopophilic tool, constructed to privilege masculine subjectivity, although both maintain that the male gaze is thrown into crisis by the "fascination of the feminine" (O'Gabbard, et al, 1999, p. 200). Feminist film criticism has challenged these positions by maintaining that cinema

speaks directly of our desires, rather than being structurally bound up within representations of them (Flitterman-Lewis, 1995, p. 2). It is through this fascination with how film deals with desire that masculine and feminine desires are tantalised, and at the same time prohibited, in that the *truth* of these desires is both linked to and a manifestation of an on-going struggle with the cultural super-ego and results in inevitable lack. In the struggle with desire and lack, the logic of the Other is implicated. A cinematic unveiling of lack and thus of desire facilitates an exploration of how to remain a subject of desire in a constantly changing world.

Lacan conceptualises the Real as having an effect that is unknowable. However, it is suggested by Žižek that ideology lies within the domain of the Real as that which is not entirely knowable, but which we think we know nevertheless, and the social is the site of the Other. What Žižek means by this is that the social exists as a necessary means for subjective existence. The Real, those areas of life which are unknowable, is understood as an effect of the Symbolic, although these are not necessarily or entirely locatable. Cinema can provide a logic to understand the Symbolic Order and can be understood as an oscillation of images, a “treasure trove of signifiers”³¹ (Pluth, 2007, p. 59) generated by the cinematic gaze. Even when positioned outside a cinematic encounter, the subject is surrounded by and immersed in signs, symbols, representations and consuming images. Given cinema’s role for arousing desire for the subject, it seems that the role of ideology is complicit in constructing ideas of what is socially desirable. In responding to film, one makes sense of its meaning from a variety of external sources and for this to occur, one must “define in advance the co-ordinates of its meanings” (Žižek, 1994, p. 5). The subject is inevitably left with an internal struggle

³¹ Lacan coined this term in *Écrits* to denote that the subject becomes meaningful through an articulation of the discourse and desire of the Other.

between social and subjective ambiguities and ambivalences: “the stepping out of (what we experience as) ideology is the very form of our enslavement to it” (p. 6).

The viewing subject mediates appearing and disappearing images that are presented to him/her: no one image has any specificity with any one concept of reality. Images rely on the Imaginary in order for the subject to create meaning. The subject is inscribed somewhat antagonistically and precariously within the cinematic Real, which assumes that the Real is an integral part of film ontology. There is a strangeness about film in that it works on the sensory systems – the mechanical and the biological conflate so that visual logic can be attained for the viewer. As an optical device film highlights Flisfeder’s (2012) claim that Žižek’s ontology of film provides a way for ideologies to negotiate and regulate the visible and invisible which for the viewer is fundamental to capturing the social imagination.

Žižek conceptualises the gaze as both simultaneously inscribing and constituting ideology (1994, p. 3):

Ideology can designate anything from a contemplative attitude that misrecognises its dependence on social reality to an action-orientated set of beliefs, from the indispensable medium in which individuals live out their relations to a social structure, to false ideas which legitimate a dominant political power. It seems to pop up precisely when we attempt to avoid it, while it fails to appear where one would expect it to dwell.

Ideology can be a location which operates at the heart of social reality (Žižek, 1994, p. 9). Ideologies often discursively materialise in seemingly free and spontaneous rituals, the negotiation of agency and the activities of daily life. In his comments on Copjec’s claims that subjective desire can be *read* alongside subjective intersection with ideology, Penney maintains that (2006, p. 214):

the demand that the Other recognise our identity, be it ethnic, sexual, or otherwise, forestalls our recognition of genuine political desire, in other words, our apprehension of the consequences of the fact the sociosymbolic order – the very field of political intelligibility – separates us from ourselves, thereby preventing us from seeing ourselves adequately reflected...”

Žižek furthers this by insisting that the relationship between representation and ideology is ambiguous and constantly in conflict. Given the placement of the Other as the social, the relationship between ideology and the cinematic encounter can be a traumatic convergence, revealing those experiences which destabilise the subject. This is particularly so in that film challenge homologisations of the feminine subject not necessarily simply in terms of lack as Gledhill suggests, “[s]elf, speech and meaning can never coincide with each other and fail to provide more than the illusion of mastery” (1999, p. 167). Language and ideas of the self are processes that reproduce one another, although they are always in a state of flux. At this point, ideology has the function of eliciting a seemingly transparent yet illusory unity by exposing power relationships in the guise of specific but apparently invisible social truths (Žižek, 1994, p. 8). Flitterman-Lewis elaborates on this (2007, p. 11):

It is wrong to assume an unproblematic casual relation between psychic life and social reality, or between either of these and their textual representations in film, for this denies the very complexity at the level of psychic conflicts that defines the unconscious as a state of desire.

Given Žižek’s conceptualisation of the Lacanian subject as in part an ideological and political one, how does he conceptualise subjectivity as problematically embedded within ideology? Vighi and Felder (2010, p. 32) assert that the process of subjectivisation “binds us to the other’s desire (Lacan’s big Other).” This process entails a complete embracing of the self’s Otherness, where the subject becomes “alien to itself” (Žižek, 1998, p. 30). It is here that Žižek connects the subject to the social, as Vighi and Felder explain (2010, p. 33):

[W]e are always connected with the social precisely because we are split, that is because we are never really connected with ourselves. The otherness of society, with its irredeemably antagonistic nature, is originally the otherness in me. Ultimately there is no difference between my self-alienation (the fact that my unconscious prevents me from accessing the truth about myself) and my alienation in society, and the point is that precisely this shared impasse allows me to communicate (though of course, communication never fully succeeds).

For Žižek, the big Other is society or the social. Lacan also conceptualises the unconscious as constituted within the social which is sited neither externally nor necessarily internally (Žižek, 1991). The conscious, created out of the unconscious, emerges as a regulatory constraint through which we negate our desires. It is through this very negation of its constitution that the unconscious seeks to rebel and resist (Fiennes, 2006; Žižek, 1991; 2003).

Ideology, much like desire, can be understood in terms of how its function can be more than itself. That is, if ideology has the function of being located as the signified via the social and enunciated through language, then it is because language is the vehicle by means of which ideology inscribes meaning. The symbolic tensions which arise from distancing oneself from the construction of ideological positions can result in pervasive anxiety as Žižek highlights (1994, p.19):

This tension introduces a kind of reflective distance into the very heart of ideology: ideology is always, by definition, “ideology of ideology”... There is no ideology that does not assert itself by means of delimiting itself from another mere “ideology”...

Each ideology speaks the difference of the other (as well as attempting to displace the other), revealing a gap or rupture (Butler, 2005, p. 47). This gap makes possible another ideology located in its place, entailing that the object of ideology will never be fully actualised. Gaps reveal masks and masquerades (for example those of authority) to be the Other and these veil the rupture of social discourses, as Žižek elaborates (cited in Butler, 2005, p. 48):

This other, hidden law acts the part of the ‘Other of the Other’ in the Lacanian sense, the part of the meta guarantee of the consistency of the big Other (the symbolic order that regulates social life). The ‘conspiracy theory’ provides a guarantee that the field of the big Other is not an inconsistent bricolage: its basic premise is that, behind the public Master (who of course, is in an imposter), there is a hidden master, who effectively keeps everything under control.

The gaps between social signifiers provide a function for the *objet a*. Vighi and Felder explore this by politicising the subject through entering it into the “socio-symbolic” network (2010, p. 35):

To use Žižek’s well rehearsed formula, taken from Lacan, *objet a* is ‘in you more than you’ (Lacan, 1977, p. 268). This is why, for example, in scopis (visual) desire the Lacanian subject finds itself in the traumatic encounter with the impossible gaze.

Embedded within the Žižekian subject is the inseparable notion of ideology which Žižek conceptualises as a form of social fantasy: “The fact that subjects are incomplete and founded on lack means that they need to fantasise a society that works for them, and with which they can identify” (cited in Moore, 2007, p. 57). Subjectivity cannot be separated from the symbolic ambiguities ideology implies because it has the function of structuring how desire is articulated and mobilised. Žižek problematises this further (cited in Vighi and Felder, 2010, p. 39) by insisting that the subject is affirmed through “full identification with the core of [an] ideological itself”. Žižek’s concept of ideology is consistent with Lacan’s in that it is not fixed and is articulated through a chain of signifying concepts which provides several possible meanings, as Butler highlights (2005, p. 32):

... ideology is the struggle not only to be one of the free-floating ideological signifiers whose meaning is ‘qualified’ or determined by another but also that signifier which gives those others their meaning, to which they must ultimately be understood to be referring.

Given that ideological meanings are articulated through signifiers, struggles are inevitable since there is no actualisation within the symbolising reality. Feminist theorists who engage with psychoanalysis, critically problematise the theoretical gap between the “textual and social subject” (Gledhill, 1999, p. 168), maintaining that “the psycho-linguistic location of the feminine is repressed” (p. 168). Ideologically it is the masculine social gaze which is privileged. This gaze holds the potential to unveil hidden gendered meanings, moments of resistance and social confirmations. However, resultant tensions pervade the culture industry where notions of particular aesthetics hold the ideological purpose of maintaining socio-symbolic functions.

For a researcher of desire, the obvious question of ideology beckons: *how do subjects identify with those ideological signifiers which are socially imposed?* Butler describes Žižek’s claim that ideological identification occurs in three stages. First, the subject identifies in the Imaginary by “taking on the image of the Other” (Butler, 2005, p. 53). The subject attempts to repetitiously identify, project and reflect how they would like to appear and it is through appearance that the subject perceives the gaze of the Other. Religious and spiritual beliefs are very good examples of how particular social rituals provide for subjective identification of materialised beliefs within the social. Second, identification is specifically expressed through language but at the same time ambiguities in speech function to maintain dialogue with the Other – what is the Other *really* saying to me? Third, these differences or gaps, resulting from ambiguity, which provide for symbolic meanings, hold the subject to the signifier and maintain the Symbolic Order to support ideology. These gaps invite the subject to partially recognise that the Other is also not whole, thus providing a reprieve and a way of accessing desire for the subject (p. 56).

Lacan’s discourses

Ideology, as well as the unconscious, is understood in Lacanian theory as the discourse of the Other, while discourse is understood as the position of the speaking subject. Subjects abide

by the law as an ethic in which desire can be framed. However, ideologies are often in tension with one another, some collapse when under pressure as they do not sustain the power they once had. Consequently, to discern changes resulting from shifts between discourses is no easy matter because this necessarily involves vacillation between the conscious and the unconscious.

The processes of knowledge production lie within four distinctive discourse: the Hysteric, the University, the Master's and the Analyst, with a fifth one, the Capitalist being introduced at the end of Lacan's life. In this context the subject always unknowingly operates as the barred subject, alienated from but bound to the unconscious, as represented by Lacan's use of the metaphor of the Mobius Strip. For the subject of ideology within the University discourse at the juncture of truth (S1) and mistaking the truth (S2) are not so easily discernible. Ideological supplements which trace anxiety for the barred subject become important in the subject's search for the *right* belief. In this way the effect of discourse operates to sustain social ideas and ideals. Such enunciations shift subjective desire from the subject-supposed-to-know (the University discourse, 'the dominant system') to desire wherein the subject seeks to appropriate and master *objet a*. In shifting to the Master's discourse, the subject must sustain the Master in fantasy (or in illusion) so that he/she can be at one with knowledge, even if only momentarily, given all attempts at totalisation will ultimately fail. The University discourse facilitates this to some degree, in that although subjects search for a new Master, they nevertheless remain within the reign of the discourse of knowledge as master signifier (Bracher, 1994, p. 116). However, in making sense of this, the Hysteric's discourse attests that the discourse of the University is insufficient because it does not affirm desire *enough*. Rather, the University discourse rewards knowledge with hegemony, as Mitchell and Rose assert (1982, p. 160-161):

S2/S1 > a/\$: discourse of the university: knowledge in the place of the master; primacy to discourse itself constituted as knowledge (S2) over the signifier as such (S1), producing

knowledge as the ultimate object of desire (*a*), over and against any question of the subject (*\$*).

$$\frac{S_2}{S_1} \rightarrow \frac{a}{\$}$$

Figure 9. The University Discourse

Mitchell and Rose (1982, pp.160-161) also succinctly reiterate the topology of the Master's discourse: "S1/\$ > S2/a: discourse of the master: tyranny of the all knowing and exclusion of fantasy: primacy to the signifier (S1), retreat of subjectivity beneath its bar (*\$*), addressing its knowledge as object (S2), which stands over and against the unacknowledged and lost object of desire (*a*)". Lacan formulated the Masters discourse as a quarter turn of the University discourse:

$$\frac{S_1}{\$} \rightarrow \frac{S_2}{a}$$

Figure 10. The Master's Discourse

An ideological shift away from the University to the Master's discourse apprehends and transforms a subject-supposed-to-believe into the powerful position of assumed knowledge. Bracher (1994, p. 118) claims the field of philosophy to be a clear example of the Master's discourse, since philosophical writings attempt to articulate signifiers, such as truth and knowledge. The apparent mastery of this signification is crucial to how the Master regulates knowledge and its production. It is crucial here to remember the function of the name-of-the-

father, or paternal metaphor. The name-of-the-father is closely bound up with the function of the super-ego and the symbolic order. The superego polices desire, insists on moral restrictions, prohibitions; it has the function of repression, through religious, political and legal authority. The Master's discourse restricts the *objet a* and is oblivious to the cause of his desire and therefore excludes fantasy, being the only discourse that does so. The function of the name-of-the-father signifies the mother's desire. The mother represents pure desire, a state which the subject seeks to attain. Simultaneously the symbolic father, the Law, regulates desire for the subject. Thus the father represents unattainable mastery of the Phallus set within a system of linguistic representation which the subject also seeks to master. It is at this juncture that the justification for belief can be seen as more than an account of having adequate reason to believe; rather a subject's testimony for believing is justified and specified through an enunciation of what it means to be a subject in the world. A return to the Master is a discursive enactment of the theory of the Phallus and also of desire. By this I mean that signifiers such as 'freedom', 'choice' and 'gender' determine what kinds of questions will be posed and what kind of jouissance will be sought.

The location of the Hysteric positions the Other as Master who has knowledge that the Hysteric desires.

$$\frac{\$}{a} \rightarrow \frac{S_1}{S_2}$$

Figure 11. The Hysteric's Discourse

Lacan formalises hysteria into a discourse for the purposes of disclosing the structure of speech and more precisely of symptoms. This is because the Hysteric (\$) demands (*a*) speech from the Other: the Hysteric's injunction is "tell me!" which is addressed to the Master (S1).

This enunciation both resists the Master's discourse as knowing, while at the same time seeking a position of knowledge (S2). This situates desire within a domain of (im)possibility and thereby brings the social bond into the foreground (Verhaeghe, 1995, p.100). For the Hysteric, desire is dominated by the emergence of the symptom, a manifestation of *jouissance*. So long as the position of standing in for the missing object is assured, the development of any literacy of desire entails an attachment to social objects, experiences and other subjects for desire to have potential meaning. For the obsessional neurotic, desire is the fantasy gaze in which the subject sees themselves as constituted for another subject. The Hysteric attempts to *be* the missing object *for* the Other. Fink further distinguishes these two positions (1999, p. 120):

The obsessive attempts to overcome or reverse the effects of separation on the *subject*, whereas the hysteric attempts to overcome or reverse the effects of separation on the *Other*.
[Original emphasis]

The location of desire – tell me *who* I am – is a question posed to the Master in order to elicit the *right* answer. The Master responds to the Hysteric: from *where* are you asking this question? Specifically, the subject position of the pervert believes that he *is* the desired object for the Hysteric as illustrated in Žižek's claim that cinema is the ultimate pervert art as it tells us *how to* desire.

I should like to discuss further the formalisations of the University, Hysteric and Masters discourses and make clear why I claim a shift from the University and Hysteric discourses to the Master's discourse is important in understanding the connection between desire and ideology. Žižek highlights these three discourses by returning to Lacan's, *L'Envers de la Psychoanalyse* (1969-1970), seminar *XVII*, which focuses on the events of May 1968 in Paris. The 1968 uprising was the culmination of protests by students of the University of Paris following the closure of their administration after months of conflict over university

funding and administration. The French trade unions supported the students and a surge of strikes ensued. While these events precipitated the protests, the protests signified anarchism, rebellion, alienation, invoking the death of capitalism and even god. The riots called for and demanded a revolutionary examination of consciousness. Lacan used this pivotal utopian impulse as a way of confronting protesters in the moment of *jouissance* and a desire to step out of ideology, to construct a logic of the Master's discourse, by proclaiming to student revolutionaries, "As Revolutionaries, you are Hysterics who demand a new master! You will get it!" (cited in Butler, 2005, p. 141). Here Lacan makes a most important declaration about enjoyment: That the Hysteric's desire is to be enslaved by *jouissance*, and not the people, is crucial in understanding the function of the Master. For Žižek, the risk of freeing oneself from ideology is a confrontation with violence which inevitably comes with liberation. *Jouissance* derives from the pleasure principle which functions to limit enjoyment through acquiescence to the Law. Simultaneously the subject constantly attempts to transgress the boundaries introduced by the Law, thus confronting the fine line between pleasure and pain. *Jouissance* is the suffering one gains from the pursuit of pleasure. For Žižek *jouissance* and ideology are linked, as one needs to appear to *enjoy* ideology, even if one does not.

Žižek pays particular attention to the Master's discourse as linking language and ideology. The Master signifier is that to which all other signifiers are linked and this provides the basis to social meanings, or what is considered the 'social bond'. A vast number of Master signifiers can occur which connect the subject to the Other. A connection does not mean that there exists a seamless understanding or union between the subject and the Other. On the contrary it implies the opposite – that the subject struggles with full identification with the Other and the image of themselves not achieving such wholeness.

Lacan's capitalist discourse, although not fully formulated during his life, is a discourse worth comparing with Žižek's critical notion of ideology. The most note-worthy point about

the Capitalist discourse is Lacan's topology centres around the object rather than the subject. Lacan's topology for the capitalist discourse is (1978, *Du discours psychoanalytique*):

$$\frac{\$}{S_1} \cdot \frac{S_2}{a}$$

Figure 12. The Capitalist Discourse

The subject commands the Other, (the master signifier, in this case, capitalism) by which he/she utilises knowledge, fully aware that the subject is divided. The subject acts only within a discourse and not outside of it and in this way the subject ceases to be an agent. A contemporary example of this is 'environmental activism'; the Master being the 'natural' discourse of the environment and the subject being the Hysteric maintains the subject in the role of an activist, making sure the subject is always acting in accordance with the Master. Lacan introduced this, his fifth discourse firstly in Seminar *XVII* and then again two years later in his *Milan Lectures* (1972). He subsumes the capitalist discourse under the Master's.

The topologies of Lacanian discourses are not to be interpreted as mere formal representations, rather they are constitutive of the connections and tension between social relations and the subject. Discursive positions are not fixed and subjects move between discourses and position themselves in relation to how institutions, social bonds and behaviours are discursively constituted and operate. Lacan's four discourses can be utilised as conceptual tools with which to engage how the logic of language operates and can be tracked.

The capitalist discourse can be explained in terms of the Master's discourse thus: the Master's discourse insists on the promotion of the Master, that Master being capitalism. It is argued by Žižek that the capitalist discourse replaces that of the Master, in the guise of the Hysteric. To illustrate this Žižek offers his well cited example of buying a cup of fair trade

coffee from Starbucks. This is the capitalist discourse at its purist claims Žižek, since one is literally buying ideology, in fact it is already within the purchase of the object. Starbucks is a multinational corporation yet one is buying from it an ethos of anti-capitalism in that its coffee is fair trade and therefore buying it satisfies the liberal ethical position. Anti-capitalism has become a global marketing strategy, a trend which accommodates the modern 'liberal' subject of choice. Such acts of consumerism offer redemption to guilty subjects, enabling them to feel they have done something good and ethical without realising that they are in fact supporting the very system from which some of the problems of inequality and poverty stem. Žižek maintains that modern charity is imbued with the capitalist discourse and simply preserves the status quo. For Žižek, the capitalist discourse illustrates how social forms (as opposed to content) are being revealed and understood rather than used to instigate social change. The problem of capitalism stems from replacing of one Master with another. Thus symbolic shifts are tied to upholding particular ideological reproductions, particularly those which are disguised as choice, freedom and pseudo-politics (which Žižek deems to reside in certain positions on environmentalism, ethical consumption and spirituality). Salecl (2010) offers that the burden of choice serves to provoke anxiety, because in part choices are ensconced within the unsaid capitalist postulation that the subject is, on its own terms, inadequate. She goes on to state, "and capitalism, of course, has encouraged not only the idea of consumer choice but also the ideology of the self-made man, which allowed the individual to start seeing his own life as a series of options and possible transformation" (p. 19). Such a position renders a choice either 'good' or 'not good' and as ideologically structured. Thus ideology becomes a lure for desire to attain a particular modern liberated subjectivity. The capitalist discourse is directly implicated in this process. A core element of the Žižekian project is described by Bryant (2008, p. 25):

One of the burning questions of the entire body of Žižek's work is that of how a politics of global social transformation is possible in the wake of the rise of the discourse of the capitalist... [C]apitalism is accompanied by the emergence of a new discourse [the discourse

of critical theory], similar to the discourse of the analyst in the universe of mastery, that engages with precisely this problem.

Capitalism posits not only the object to be enjoyed but also the obligation for the subject to enjoy it. Such enjoyment is regulated within an institutional framework. As such the neurotic never really gets very far within the economy of the capitalist discourse as Declerq suggests (2006, p. 78):

The capitalist discourse induces loneliness by coupling subjects to objects. This leaves us with the question of whether the libidinal enjoyment that this discourse supposedly entails counterbalances this loneliness? Apparently this is not the case... As a matter of fact the neurotic never goes very far with libidinal enjoyment – the neurotic mainly fantasises about things the pervert would effectively enact. Unlike the pervert, the neurotic's universe is mainly ruled by desire and love rather than by libidinal enjoyment.

There is a link between enjoyment, desire and capitalism. Although the neurotic is not drawn to the capitalist discourse, he/she must survive within it and make it work. Fisher (2013) offers reasons why capitalist ideologies have continued to gain momentum despite global financial crises:

At least for the moment, it seems that the financial crisis of 2008 has strengthened the power of capital. The austerity programs implemented with such rapidity in the wake of the financial crisis have seen an intensification—rather than a disappearance or dilution—of neoliberalism. The crisis may have deprived neoliberalism of its legitimacy, but that has only served to show that, in the lack of any effective counterforce, capitalist power can now proceed without the need for legitimacy: neoliberal ideas are like the litany of a religion whose social power has outlived the believers' capacity for faith. Neoliberalism is dead, but it carries on. The outbursts of militancy in 2011 have done little to disrupt the widespread sense that the only changes will be for the worse.

Capitalism depends on the lack of enjoyment to self sustain in that enjoyment is both within the discourse's system of play and within the economy of desire. It is no coincidence that Lacan signifies the word 'economy' when describing the function of desire. This usage of 'economy' points towards a method of management involving production and consumption within the construction of wish fulfilment. Capitalism certainly structures desire within the realm of the Symbolic.

The structure of desire

Cinema tells us how to desire (Žižek, cited in Fiennes, 2006).

One cannot conceptualise desire without entering the field of what it means to be a sexed subject. In the acquisition of subjectivity and a social self, the social shapes sexual difference (Žižek, cited in Butler, 2005, p. 56). Social institutions give an appearance of validity to the subject's relationship with them, albeit in an ambiguous and contradictory framework (Moore, 1997, p. 50). Žižek (1991; Fiennes, 2006) understands the core of our desires as not necessarily what we want, but rather, our perceptions, understandings and inabilities (as well as our perceptions of these inabilities) to *possess* what we want. Ultimately, this is an encounter with the Other's desires which only fantasy can accommodate. Žižek ponders this psychic conundrum with this question (2006, p. 47):

The first thing to note about fantasy is that it literally teaches us how to desire: fantasy does not mean that when I desire a strawberry cake and cannot get it in reality I fantasise about eating it; the problem is rather, *how do I know that I desire strawberry cake in the first place?*[Emphasis added]

Here, Žižek means that eating strawberry cake is a metaphor which stands in for the subject's fantasy. Thus fantasy constitutes the subject's desire and in this way offers realisation. Realizing the desire to eat strawberry cake means that the Other is implicated in staging this

desire and is thus a direct response to the question posed to the Other by the subject, *Che vuoi? What do you want from me?*

Mitchell and Rose (1982) understands psychoanalysis as the field pertaining to the relationship between human sexuality and the unconscious. They argue that the role of psychoanalysis is to disentangle how men and women *come into being* and how their subjectivities are (re)constituted through language. Pivotal to this focus are understandings of desire and its relation to alienation and the manifestation of lack (p. 6):

Lacan states that desire itself ... sexual desire can only exist by virtue of its alienation ... [He] uses these instances [of trauma] to show that the object that is longed for comes only into existence as an object when it is lost...Thus any satisfaction that might subsequently be attained will always contain this loss within it. Lacan refers to this dimension as desire.

It is particularly the moments of lack which trigger and heighten desire in a subject and simultaneously reflect the (re)constitution of the self in relation to the Other (Mitchell & Rose, 1982; Žižek, 1991; 2001). Desire can be defined as “the remainder of the subject, something which is always left over, but which has no contact as such ... it is both constitutive and empty” (Mitchell & Rose, 1982, p. 32). In recognising our alienation, and so helping us to understand lack, we construct the Other of our desires as fuelled by lack; this allows us the possibility of *being* (Fink, 1995, p.52). “The subject’s first guise is this very lack” (p. 52) which allows for the possibility for socially ascribed subjectivities, instilled and maintained through the Symbolic Order (Reineke, 1997, p. 18). Fink states, “[I]ack and desire are coextensive for Lacan” (1995, p. 54). In the search for our missing piece, our big Other, we are searching to attain subjective wholeness (Žižek, 2007a; Frosh, 2002). Desire is always and contingently, the desire of the Other, as Žižek illustrates (2006, p. 42):

The subject desires only in so far as it experiences the Other itself as desiring, as the site of unfathomable desire, as if an opaque desire is emanating from him or her. Not only does the other address me with an enigmatic desire, it also confronts me with the fact that I myself do not know what I really desire...

Žižek integrates film with Lacanian analysis, thus seeming to reassemble the Symbolic Order, leaving little or no distance between the cinematic world and the viewer. The viewer and the film are discursively co-producers of desire. By claiming that the cinematic world *tells* us *how to* desire (Fiennes, 2006), Žižek deliberately disrupts presumptions of consumer passivity, a position challenging to mainstream sociological inquiry. In navigating a Žižekian journey of the subjective process as situated within the cinematic world, we are engaging film as a potential mirror-image of ourselves as social and desiring beings (O’Gabbard et al, 1999, p. 201):

Žižek is less interested in the interpretation of films than in the critique of self-consciousness...He sees Lacan’s writings as an appealing response to, and continuation of, this tradition. Unlike many scholars who have wrestled with Lacan’s shifting vocabularies, Žižek has embraced the French analyst’s system because of its supple playfulness. Furthermore, his references to cinema tend to illustrate theories about the intricacies of subjectivity and consciousness...

The potential for theory is realised as Žižek, as have many other cultural and film theorists, invite Lacan into the world of cinema (Fiennes, 2006; Vighi, 2005, p. 232; Žižek, 1991). Lacan states that, “the unconscious is a concept forged on the trace of what operates to constitute the subject” (cited in Vighi, 2005, p. 233). This immerses the process of subjectivity within co-ordinates of the Symbolic Order which seeks subjective unification once repression has been uncovered (p. 233). The unconscious provides the condition for the conscious, a condition which can take “the form of uncanny messages the conscious subject

does not recognise” (p. 233). Žižek offers a cinematic example of the Lacanian unconscious (cited in Vighi, 2005, p. 233):

David Lynch is the director who best exemplifies the paradox of the Lacanian unconscious, for most of his films are structured around an enigmatic phrase (for example, ‘Dick Laurent is dead’ in *Lost Highway*, or ‘The owls are not what they seem’ in *Blue Velvet*) that can only be subjectivised at the price of the hero’s death, or symbolic destitution.

Žižek earned his title, the ‘philosopher of the Real’ by antagonistically positioning the subject at the interface of the Symbolic and the Imaginary (Myers, 2003; Žižek, 1991) and by maintaining that the Imaginary and the Real are constantly in opposition, even contradictory. He argues further that desire is a cultural phenomenon which is constituted, constructed and reproduced in and by the cinematic world. He positions the subject (the viewer) as needing to be taught *how to* desire (Fiennes, 2006; Žižek, 2001) through experiencing and re-experiencing his/her *objet a* – the barred object of desire. Thus desire is an on-going state of non-satisfaction; that is, our ideas about what constitute desire remain unfulfilled and are either terminated or remain in a state of process (Fiennes, 2006; Žižek, 1991). This continuous crisis of anticipating our desires maintains the postponement of the fulfilment of the desire itself. Thus Žižek claims, “it is not whether our desires are satisfied or not” (cited in Fiennes, 2006); rather these desires appear as the anticipation of discovering what they might actually be. Hence, desire itself becomes embodied for the desiring subject.

Whereas Žižek (cited in Fiennes, 2006) posits that our desires are directly sustained by our understandings and perceptions of the lack, Julia Kristeva (1995; Reineke, 1997) understands desire as a process that is always in crisis and intrinsically bound to an instinct to infiltrate language. She locates ideas about desire that are intertextually understood and deliberately disguised so that they can appear to remain pure, and thus preserve subjective identity from eruption by the abject (Kristeva, 1995; Reineke, 1997). In her reading of Lacan, Kristeva

emphasises the feminine in the subject's psychic development. Unlike Žižek, Kristeva specifically points to the maternal as an ontology of the subject. Žižek on the other hand insists that the truth of subjective desire is made up of the tensions between the subject and the Other. For Žižek desire is related to the drive and thus resists any suggestion that the sexed subject can be understood outside of the Phallic order, rather the feminine is fully immersed within and intrinsic to the Symbolic Order. It is here where one can look to particular artefacts of the Symbolic to understand desire.

Cinema as *objet a*: that which stands in for the truth of one's desire

objet a [is] Lacan's formula for the lost object which underpins symbolisation, cause of and 'stand in' for desire. What the man relates to is this object and the 'whole of his realisation in the sexual relation comes down to fantasy' (Mitchell and Rose, 1982, p. 48).

[*Heavenly Creatures*] remains one of the strongest of the all too infrequent cinematic representations of women's interrelationships as capable of passion, intelligence and fidelity, basking in, rather than condemning the extremes of distinctive feminine emotional possibilities, and hauntingly tragic in its revelation of the depth of human frailties when attempting to reach beyond the sublime (Ribeiro, 1995, p. 38).

The *objet petit a* or *objet a* is as Lacan attributes it, the cause of our desire (Evans, 1996, p. 125). According to Evans, Lacan means that the "[o]bj_{et} petit *a* is any object which sets desire in motion, especially the partial objects (which define the drives) which never lose their imaginary status". Evans goes to say (1996, p. 125):

Object petit *a* is both the object of anxiety and the final irreducible reserve of libido (Lacan, 1962-3: seminar of 16 January 1963). It plays an increasingly important part in Lacan's concept of treatment, in which the analyst must situate himself as the semblance of objet petit *a*, the cause of the analysand's desire.

Since the aim of Lacanian psychoanalysis is to bring the subject's desire into existence, then cinema, as Žižek argues, has the potential to function as our *objet a* (Fiennes, 2006). This is a contentious claim given that in the clinical setting, the recognition of the *objet a* must occur through speech and transference. This specific address does not necessarily take place in cinema. However, it is through the cinematic screen that the enigma of our desires is aroused, partially unveiled and confronted. Film offers many opportunities for the subject to explore metaphors through which desires can be recognised and articulated. Lacan states in Seminar I (1953-54, p, 183) that it is only in naming our desires that they are fully recognised. However, Lacan does not employ the term 'naming' in any arbitrary or representational sense. Rather, he uses it as a way of speaking directly to the unconscious, although this is governed by the fraught, conflicting and contradictory relationship between desire and speech (Lacan, 1966, p. 275) Evans remarks on this relationship (1996, p. 36):

Although the truth about desire is present to some degree in all speech, speech can never articulate the whole truth about desire; whenever speech attempts to articulate desire, there is always a leftover, a surplus, which exceeds speech.

To further explore Žižek's notion that film acts as our *objet a*, I focus specifically on the New Zealand film *Heavenly Creatures*. This film offers multiple cinematic readings of how Pauline and Juliet come to acquire their murdering alter-egos, Gina and Deborah. The obvious reading is that Honora Rieper, being poor and somewhat ordinary, is a scapegoat for the social and cultural biases Pauline and Juliet uphold in their imaginary Fourth World. They do not preserve a distinction between reality and fantasy. Thus their murder of Mrs Rieper is a desperate attempt to maintain the delicate, albeit illusionary, balance between the Symbolic and the Imaginary. Even those areas of life governed by institutions require the function of fantasy. Pauline and Juliet position themselves as more than just the protagonists of their own narratives. Their self elevated status reflects directly their perceived lack within the Real. In the Fourth World, Pauline is wealthy and Juliet holds power. Murder is a sport,

fun and frivolous and as no one *really* gets hurt, this allows for slippage into their perceived reality. Peter Jackson's portrayal of female, murdering subjects directly challenges masculine cinematic scopophilia, hence this film can be read as a feminist response to the patriarchal ideologies common at the time. Having witnessed Pauline and Juliet actively attempt to accommodate their desires, might the cinematic world compel us to do the same and cut "across the fantasmatic screen" in taking up the position of our *objet a*, to explore the truth of our desire (Vighi, 2005, p. 408)?

Objet a, the object-cause of our desire, is not only a function of fantasy and imaginary identification, but, precisely as such, a distorting screen responsible for what we see, it extends into the Real.

If the cinematic world has the potential to take up the position of *objet a* then the process of uncovering fragments of truth of our desires might encompass critical engagement in which we are forced to face our own alienation and exclusion in social and political processes. In Seminar III (1955-6), Lacan approaches desire as wanting that which is *impossible*. Through the act of speaking, people are brought closer both to the inconsistencies of their illusions of reality yet also towards the truth of their desires, which paradoxically needs to be kept at bay, for fear that their desires can indeed, become *very* possible. In the case of *Heavenly Creatures*, the intense same-sex friendship is depicted within the heteronormative matrix of 1950's Christchurch where the provision of scapegoats was an inevitable ideological manifestation.

In highlighting desire as a dominant theme in *Heavenly Creatures*, I argue that the position of the "feminine spectacle" (Mulvey, 1975) grapples not only with how female subjectivities are socially negotiated but also with how these subjectivities *teach* us how to desire, yet at the same time *tell* us that our desires can never be fulfilled. Pauline and Juliet actively resist their lived realities during the messiness of developing into young intelligent women. In

reproducing images of desire the viewer can attempt to unravel the truth about it and in extending an invitation to be our mirror, cinema compels us to look at ourselves in order to come to terms with the processes of (mis)recognition. Film both offers and grapples with ideological and social distinctions and tensions, which with the help of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory have the potential to reconfigure understandings of individuals and their social conditions (Conley et al, 2005, p. 287).

The structure of desire as ideologically gendered

As desire always is originated in the field of the Other, it is the domain of the unconscious. The first person to occupy this place of the Other is the Mother (Evans, 1996, p. 39).

Butler (2000) offers a critique of the sexed subject which disrupts essentialist ideas that have often harnessed conceptualisations of femininity and masculinity, by arguing that the relationship between sex, gender and desire is not a causal one. Instead, Butler claims that notions of sex and gender express and reflect each and for the other and are contingent on discursive and regulatory structures (cited in Jagger, 2008, p. 320-312):

The spectres of discontinuity and incoherence themselves thinkable only in relation to existing norms of continuity and coherence, are constantly prohibited and produced by the very laws that seek to establish causal or expressive lines of connection among biological sex, culturally constituted genders and the 'expression' or 'effect' of both in the manifestation of sexual desire through sexual practice.

Butler's (1990) fluid continuum of performativity constitutes gender identities as shifting and dynamic. Moreover, she maintains there is no authenticity or truth in sexual identities since they are being continually socially negotiated. Rather the truth emerges in cross sexual identities, where structures of identities are constantly shifting and being 'performed' or masqueraded. Butler's theorisation of gender differs from that of Freud in that it is not

structured by the Oedipal complex (Jacobs, 2007, p. 11). Rather, sexual identities materialise as sexed subjects given they are indeterminable in that the body is “conceived as a cultural product” as Jagger points to (2008, p. 6):

It is argued that one of the main strengths of Butler’s attempts to theorise gendered embodiment lies in the refusal to accept the notion of sexual difference as irreducible and to conceive it rather as something that is socially instituted to function as irreducible.

The order of the Phallus has provoked resistance from feminist scholars, who are unsettled by it being the Master Signifier of desire for recognition, difference and representation as well as pivotal to the structure of the Symbolic Order (Chase, 1989, p. 65). Butler critiques Lacan’s account of sexed identity as a Symbolic position by insisting that subjective desire is structured on the social regulation and psychic incorporation of norms (Butler, 1997). Here Butler maintains that desire is none other than the desire for subjection (p. 11):

As such, the phallus is not so much the founding moment of the symbolic order, as Lacan would have it, but rather a part of a reiterable signifying practice. This then provides the possibility for change, for the resignification of the imaginary and thus of alternative sexed identifications and body morphologies.

Butler problematises Lacan’s privileging of the Phallus when pointing out that such privileging is a manifestation of masculine power and patriarchal desires. In this way she provides a significant challenge to the privileging of the Phallus as predominately within the domain of the masculine, without actually rejecting or dismissing it. Butler’s challenge destabilizes the installation of pre-existing subjectivities into normative categories and assumptions. It is important to point out that Lacan does not preclude such destabilisation. Butler in her return to the importance of gender in constructing the sexed subject provides for a more resignification of the Imaginary which is constitutional of the very process and the

structure of language. Her thesis is persuasive because, like Žižek and Lacan, she posits the signification of subjectivity to be political and in a state of flux, from which possibilities emerge. In this way, and like Kristeva (1980) Butler considers Lacan's work as contributing to how the subject can self define in a world which structures desire predominately in heteronormative terms. For feminist theorists of Lacanian psychoanalysis desire has a socio-political function enabling the subject of language and of desire to break from social contracts that are deemed oppressive or exclusive.

Positing desire as distant from subjectivity, French philosopher Alexandre Kojève (1969) writes that "to desire a Desire is to want to substitute oneself for the value desired by this Desire" (p. 7). He goes on to state that all desire is desire for a value and for recognition and therefore desire is a pursuit for its own satisfaction. However, Lacan (1977; cited in Chase, 1989, p. 72) constitutes 'femininity' as the desire *to* desire, rather than to be desired, thus displacing value from being meaningful. The order of the Phallus, according to Lacan (1966, p. 692) is privileged as a system of signs and symbols through language. Chase (1989, p. 77) comments: "[I]anguage so conceived is a system of pre-existent positions in which gendered subjects find their assigned place". In her construction of the 'Phallic Mother', Kristeva (1983, p. 41) returns to the desire of and for the mother (as cited earlier):

The famous, "What does a woman want?" is perhaps just the echo of a more fundamental interrogation: "What does a mother want?"

Film theorist, Mary-Ann Doane considers the female spectator as constituting a process of "disguise and displacement" (1999, p. 132) within film encounters. She draws upon Freud when arguing that cinematic images are not outside socially constructed sexual classifications and representations (p. 133):

Spectatorial desire, in contemporary film theory, is generally delineated as either voyeurism or fetishism, as precisely a pleasure in seeing what is prohibited in relation to the female body. The image orchestrates a gaze, a limit, and its pleasurable transgression.

Nevertheless, Doane argues that the male scopic paradigm differs from that of the female (1999). Mulvey (1990; Doane, 1999) links the process of spectatorship with feminine and masculine constructions resultant from dominant paradigms identifying with sexual difference. Thus “femininity is produced very precisely as a position within a network of power relations” (Doane, 1999, p. 143). Silverman (1999) considers that the process of subjectivity is always “mistaken” through lost objects, as when the child during the mirror stage constructs a self via recognition of a perceived lack, the original lost object being the mother. This separation, which offers the illusory promise of wholeness, is where “emotional content” (p. 98) might be located. Silverman maintains that cinema has an important position in reclaiming this lost desire, particularly given that the cinematic Real has the potential to be sensitive to the process of subjectivity.

Engaging sociological inquiry through film

Cinema has a distinct power to shape and fold the contemporary social (non)relations as well as the most intimate and the most public desires and fears of individuals. In a sense cinema functions as a kind of social unconscious: it interprets, invents, displaces and distorts the object of social inquiry. What films offer is not just a reflection on society; they are a part of the society they portray (Diken & Laustsen, 2008, p. 4).

Language and desire constitute the subject within the social world. Moore states that “[s]ignifiers come to stand in for the loss of the imaginary desires and loves and the child seeks to use language to overcome this loss” (1997, p. 52) The subject is always a product of the Symbolic and the Imaginary which entails that meanings are never fixed. The divided subject apprehends that the Imaginary is required to play a part in (mis)recognising itself.

Film has much to convey to sociology apart from the obvious literal and visual meanings. Both stimulate the sociological imagination. Žižek places the cinematic projector at the core of understanding the social (Diken & Laustsen, 2008, iix). The cinematic Real locates viewers in an antagonistic position of exploring the truth of their desires against the shadow of social undercurrents they live by and in. It is these social and cultural undercurrents which sustain our fascination with film, as it distorts, reflects and plays with our desires. Social realities are repeated and legitimised by film (Žižek, cited in Diken & Laustsen, 2008, p. xi):

Herein lies the most remarkable experience that pertains to cinema: it allows one to deviate from oneself, to become another. Cinema allows one to become a nomad on the spot. It deepens the social imagination and may even, in some cases, be ahead of social reality, allowing one to imagine the consequences of actions not yet taken.

Sociology's primary reluctance to engage with the cinematic has focused on questions of representation and how this corresponds to certain realities pertaining to fictional worlds (Diken & Laustsen, 2009, p. 4; Žižek, Taylor, 2009). However, the sociological lens provides potential for exploring the cinematic Real. Both sociology and film are transformed by critical engagement with each other in that relationship between the viewer and cinema is manifested in a variety of social practices and individual behaviours (Diken & Laustsen, 2009, p. 7). This locates cinema in a favourable position for exploring, identifying and reflecting the social imagination³² and, more pertinently, the viewer's *objet a*.

³² I employ the word 'imagination' to better capture the order of the Imaginary rather than Diken & Laustsen's (2009) term, 'unconscious'.

As well as existing as a mirror, the cinematic screen can also be positioned as being the Other - that is those social factors which shape individual experiences and lived realities. The mirror is a metaphor for how the subject experiences the social. Ideology has the function of constituting certain subjectivities in the guise of appearing natural, seamless and worthwhile (Diken & Laustsen, 2009). Ideologies which are repeatedly enunciated manifest from the images they project. Žižek provides an example of belief systems embedded within class structures and in particular discusses the decline of Christianity in the West, coupled with the increase of a confusing secularism, illustrates how ideological structures supplant other ideologies. The contemporary ecological paradigm provides an apt contemporary example of Žižek's critical position; trees and nature replace crucifixes and god-like images (Taylor, 2008; Žižek, 1994, p. 1). It could be argued that a new discursive modernity is developing – that which returns to nature is the new religion. The discursive images arising from this ideological shift allow the subject the appearance of freedom and self-containment unencumbered by ideological constraint. However, as Žižek poignantly alerts us the subject does not necessarily see the consequences of ideological investment; even environmentalists create an enormous amount of waste from overconsumption. To facilitate the illusion of social harmony ideological images are disavowed yet nevertheless persist as resistance to the trauma of the Real, which is literally the excess, the filthy overflow. Too much exposure to this overflow disassembles the Symbolic Order. Within the order of desire, the process of maintaining social order requires negation. Only the subject can make sense of chaos within ideological structures which offer the illusion of negotiating his/her desires.

Because sociology concerns itself with the relationships and social processes which govern our bodies, minds and subjectivities it is worth addressing desire as a sociological problem in that desire is a social force which is ideologically reproduced, influenced and shaped. As Copjec (1996) claims, it is the repression of our desires that is contingent on a functioning social order. This could be expanded into a dialectic where, equally, a functioning social order is contingent on the repression of our desires. It is through the subject recognizing that

the social and its meanings become attached to the Other that lack emerges. Subjective desires are social and ideological; that is they are socialised phenomena which are in an ongoing process of being socially reproduced. As Moore elaborates (1994, p. 19):

[T]he self cannot be reduced to a discursively constituted subject, nor one whose resistance to such construction is confined to the conscious and intentional. The subject does not coincide with herself or her with her consciousness, because the subject's relation to itself and to the symbolic order is an imaginary one.

The problem of anticipating personal desire is very much a psychosocial act. Desire is always socialised and shaped by impossibility and unrealisation. Moore states that “[d]esire is elliptical in its nature, it works by attaching individuals as subjects to its negation or denial, and through that process constitutes both the subject and the social” (1997, p. 20). He continues by claiming that desires are a product of cultural, social and imaginary “circulations and contradictions” (p. 21) in which the individual both ideologically invests and simultaneously resists.

Concluding comments

This chapter has discussed how Lacanian psychoanalysis and in particular those authors such as Žižek and film theorists who return to Lacan in order to theorise the social world, contribute to understanding the subject as part of complex and changing social systems. Desire understood along the lines of political investment and ideology emphasise that it can be a seminal social force. Given that this thesis investigates and scrutinises such political and ideological forces, it is logical to discuss how discourse analysis offers a cogent and situational approach to desire. Language forms the basis for how subjects operate and are bound to a variety of ideological, social and cultural positions. The subject is thus a discursive Hysterical subject, as it relates to Lacan's clinical structures, of social and historical constructions as well as within and of language. The structure of desire for the

Hysteric of the 21st century is, for Žižek, deeply embedded within ideology as desire and truth are related to desire and drive. That is, an interpretation of desire has the potential to provide knowledge to not only *how* one lives, but also *how* a society functions, *how* pivotal historical moments are encountered in current times and *how* one approaches the *objet a* as a motivation to confer a possible literacy and consistency of desire.

In an effort to address these points, the next chapter will explain the method and approach to my data and analysis with particular attention given to how I use focus groups, interviews responses to a specific New Zealand film, *Heavenly Creatures* to situate desire for critical inquiry.

Chapter 3: Method and approach to analysis

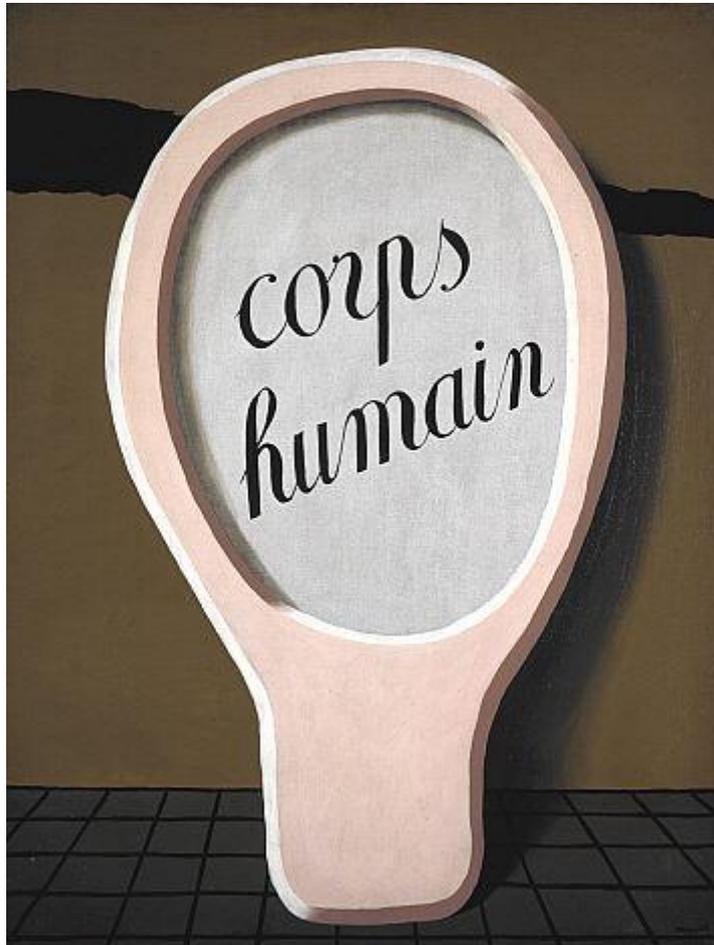


Illustration 3. *Le Miroir Magique* (The Magic Mirror), Magritte, R. (1929)

An explorer can never know what he is exploring until it has been explored (Bateson, 1972).

In order to critically interrogate the problem of recognising and naming desire in contemporary times, this chapter focuses on the methodological design for acquiring empirical findings and in analysing these within a Lacanian theoretical position.

Sociology and psychoanalysis: interrogating the juncture of an antagonistic and potentially rewarding relationship

For the individual there exist experiences of colloquial and somewhat unreflexive desire in an everyday sense. However, when pondering desire as a way of signifying choices and possible interpretations of meaning, desire then morphs into a complicated, boundless, anxious and irreducible fixation from which the subject of language cannot escape. Theorising desire is thus transformed and characterised as an intriguing sociological question. The conundrum of desire is neither easy to articulate, nor even recognise because from a Lacanian perspective, any understanding of desire whether in psychoanalysis or within social theory has its foundation in the unconscious. This means that desire is always related to an object of desire (whether it be another subject, or experience or a social artefact) as well as to the signifying structure of language which regulates the subject's ongoing state of becoming, that is, of subjectivisation. The domain and function of desire as unbounded, shifting and continuous throughout the lifespan further makes it an intriguing problem to theorise. From a Lacanian position, language operates both as a controlling and a restricting vehicle through which one attempts to make meaning. Subjects are caught between attempts to contain their utterances within the restrictions of language and at the same time are compelled to initiate meaning from what emerges from such restrictions. At such critical times and at fixed points language overtakes the subject, binding, regulating and even disciplining subjects' behaviour. This particular ontology of language can be considered outside the logic of mainstream sociological notions of agency and subjectivity. Subjects feel compelled to master the language which is already present and constructed for them and which inevitably regulates their social worlds. However, a commitment to articulate that which may be confronting challenges the subject's supposed mastery and this in turn may reveal obscene supplements which subsume the space where the *right* words struggle to be found and spoken. That a subject may appear to be speaking or writing nonsense does not necessarily imply that this does not make sense. Blubbing, lapses in speech, halting and stumbling over words may indicate the anxiety one is confronting; an anxiety derived from a perception that one can

after all make sense of desire by conveying exactly what one means, despite not fully knowing what this may be. Swearing, slips of the tongue and being caught between words can also reveal much about the discontinuity between subjects and the language they use of necessity in attempting to express the meaning which eludes them.

Theorising discordance in speech in terms of a psychosocial act which attempts to validate desire, provides a methodological challenge within the field of sociology that centres on how one might encourage another to speak about that which is impossible to articulate or define. More fundamentally, the question arises as to how a researcher sets up a study which can theorise the problem of trying to *say something*, indeed *to say anything*. The methodological and theoretical approach to and position of my research favours Lacanian analysis, with specific attention paid to the writings of Žižek. Specifically Žižek's approach to understanding desire through a return to and critique of modern ideologies has transformational potential both for theoretical development and for the possibility of understanding subjective desire.

Researching human desire through discursive speech provides methodological, ethical and theoretical challenges to the field of critical social theory. Lacanian analysis within the clinical domain, an 'individual' pursuit, appears incompatible with and contradictory to the broad brush of sociology, a 'social' pursuit, although I consider both domains to be 'political'. It would appear unsustainable for these two modalities to dovetail in interrogating the question: *how does one make sense of desire in the 21st century?* However, the logic of each discipline offers possibilities to the other through one indisputable connection premised in poststructuralist ontology: the proposition that people construct their lived experiences and create meaning within the field of discourse. It is at this juncture that inevitably each discipline can encounter the other as distinctive, yet intersecting. Both critical social research and Lacanian psychoanalysis involve epistemological processes of knowledge production, of assumptions and discursive limitations. Many of these processes pivot on the particular and

nuanced circumstances required for identifying research validity within each field thereby creating tensions as well as possibilities for the researcher. Alexandrov asserts this challenge (2009, p. 30):

Each theory of knowledge strives to answer a few fundamental questions: ‘how we come to know what we know, ‘how we know that what we know is true, and ‘what are the limits of our knowledge’. The anxious awareness of the fallibility of our knowledge, which marks the late modern times (Clarke, 2006), makes it increasingly difficult for the student of society to take for granted a set of assumptions about the nature of knowledge and use them as a point of departure for [the] research journey. Critically questioning the foundations of one’s knowledge has become an integral part of scientific research, and increasingly of the practice of living itself under certain circumstances of reflexive modernisation.

Based on an empirical research approach, there have been attempts by some in the field of affective sociology to understand desire, mainly confined within the realms of sexual practice, negotiation and the construction of sexualities (Green, 2008; Laumann & Gagnon, 1995). Whereas ideas about desire are here conceptualised and understood primarily within narrative frameworks of embodied experiences, the explanations of desire are specified within what are termed script theories³³ of sexualities and sexual practice. Although it is acknowledged by authors in this area that desire has a libidinal foundation which understands the unconscious as primarily an “erotic imagination” (Green, 2008, p. 599) this not overly explored as a nuanced psychosocial theoretical position. Rather, script theory can be understood as another prescriptive theorisation articulated within a *sociology of desire*, one which focuses on how desire manifests as primarily socially constructed rather than as being

³³ Sexual script theory is based on the “recognition that sexual practice is a complex composite of rules, norms, meanings, desires and interactions” (Green, 2008, p. 601).

integrated with unconscious forces. Such a theorisation sets discursive parameters in defining a field whose limits both as a methodology and a source of potential theorisation are shaped by and contingent on unquestioned assumptions underlying its view that the subjective psyche is no more than a conceptual scripted framework of embodied sexuality and sexual practice. It is typified by its implication that one can exercise reflexive agency and individuation both within and against political and social systems. While offering some valid comments in the area of sexual negotiation, I claim that script theory alone is overemphasised and insufficient as a method for understanding the negotiation of desire. For, *how one can exercise negotiation and agency when struggling to name what desire might be?* As a theoretical position scripting lacks a psychosocial dimension which can, by foregrounding sexual identities, undo or destabilise discursive ideas surrounding the sexed subject. It is in part this limitation to the theoretical employments of sociology, which directs the focus of this thesis towards desire.

Sociologist, Ian Craib (1989) attempts to enable sociology and psychoanalysis to encounter one another as two distinct theoretical fields which together yield knowledge without reducing one into the other. For the sociologist, knowledge production results from fixing individual experiences solely on configurations of the social world. However, Craib describes the sociological reflexive process as, “not an obsessive concern with one’s own motives, but rather a watchfulness, and as far as possible an openness and an awareness of what one is doing or seeing” (p. 94).

Articulating the possibilities and limitations of Lacanian psychoanalysis within the field of sociology is a research project which depends on the acknowledgement and interrogation of the unconscious and of the libidinal economy. Lacanian analysis offers a specific discursive interpretation which in many ways unveils ontological tensions surrounding what, for sociology, is legitimately considered to be *the social*. Lacan proposes a non reductive analytical strategy when attempting to understand unconscious formations (Hook, 2008, p.

399) which for some theorists, such as Žižek, extends beyond the parameters of the clinic. However, theoretical ideas of the social are always articulated in relation to historical developments and discursive manifestations initiated and premised in the clinical domain. Within everyday social discourse what is permitted to be expressed during psychoanalysis might otherwise be considered obscene. It is probable that this supposition has contributed to the tainted reputation of psychoanalysis both within and outside intellectual communities. Although obscenity may be denied by society, this does not inhibit its circulation within social life. It is obscenity in its many guises and in its manifestations through repressive processes that are intriguing to investigate as legitimate sources of intellectual and social knowledge.

The dialectal tension between theory and practice in Lacanian psychoanalysis is not to be glossed over. Lacanian psychoanalysis offers not only theoretical possibilities for social research, but also a space where psychoanalysis can be fully possible, the latter being a most Žižekian interpretative project. This project legitimates Lacanian psychoanalysis as a means of exploring and analysing social phenomena. Furthermore, this intersection understands an important gap – that sociologists and some critical social theorists struggle with – namely, the gap which seeks to bridge the social and the individual by acknowledging the inscription of what Žižek calls, the big Other, that is, those invisible ideological conditions which constitute the everyday experience of being in the world. How one comes to understand this gap is a distinguishing feature of knowledge production.

Employing psychoanalysis in sociological research takes one further into *unknowing*, or even *undoing knowing* the limits of knowledge and although this is exciting, it is not an entirely comfortable place for the researcher. My research tracks the discursive processes of articulating desire and it explores the tensions and intersections between sociology and psychoanalysis. Specifically I am interested in how to address a theoretical encounter between sociological questions and Lacanian analysis with particular reference to the

speaking subject as a subject of discourse; more succinctly how sociology can make sense of the obscene experiences of social life as manifesting from ideological conditions. It is here that the individual project of psychoanalysis connects with the social project of sociology.

The social production of knowledge

Linguistic declarations can be steeply embedded in ideological investment. Moreover, such declarations epitomise the structures and theoretical positions in which the researcher is entangled. The social researcher's gaze, conventionally speaking, observes and theorises the social world, while at the same time maintaining a type of reflexive distance. This process presupposes that certain systems and patterns lie within discursive formations from which particular social arrangements between individuals and their social worlds are foreground and reconfigured. A critical social researcher proposes that it is from discursive formations that research is conducted and which constitute (provisional) parameters of the field of inquiry. Implicating psychoanalysis furthers this critical approach by questioning the nature and function of knowledge, by probing the limits of discourse, and by suggesting that language can offer a semblance of truth through the metonymic structures of fantasy and alienation. Discourse in this context is an important concept to define.

Social theorist, Torfing understands the concept of discourse as a “differential ensemble of signifying sequences in which meaning is constantly renegotiated” (1999, p. 85). Laclau and Mouffe traces the shift to discourse as being within the “transcendental turn in western philosophy” (1985; Torfing, 1999, p. 84). Laclau and Mouffe focus on the structures from which meanings are derived, maintaining that they already lie within the pre-existing and perpetuating discourses which permeate social life, empirical objects, history and linguistics. Discourse theory and analysis focus on interrogating the structure of text, meaning and theory as intersecting, evolving and fluid whilst resisting totalisation from a purely empirical standpoint. The attention to structure is paradoxical – discourse theory decentres those assumptions from which knowledge can emerge and evolve but which remain unquestioned.

As Torfing states, “the process of signification within the structure extends infinitely” (1999, p. 85). Specifically in this thesis I focus on how articulations of desire struggle to be conveyed within pre-existing discourses and how ideology structures, inhibits and reflects discursive postulations.

There have historically been discursive explorations in the area of Marxist theory revisited by Lacanian social theorists, Slavoj Žižek, Renata Salecl, Bruce Fink and Ian Parker. These theorists return to the function of the *objet a* (the object in place of the truth of one’s desire) as crucial to understanding the relation between the subject, capitalism and pleasure. Prior to this recent scholarship, whether intentionally or not, such an intersection foregrounded Marxist theory over psychoanalysis and thereby conferred on Marxism an exaggerated legitimacy. Whereas Marxism legitimately remains one of the theoretical foundations of classical sociology, such sociology has failed to largely explore undercurrents which are bound within the unconscious of social relations and processes of repression. Classical sociology has overlooked these crucial elements when undertaking both theorising and empirical research; it seems that in assuming social relations and formation derive solely from organic naturally evolving processes, sociology is guilty of doing exactly what it attempts to resist.

At times in sociological theory, discourse assumes a defensive position by adopting a phenomenological inflicted empiricism. The everyday discourse of *doing* is so prevalent within sociology that it presumes a somewhat unquestioned and intrinsic empirical connection between social structures and individuals. The discourse of *doing* does not fully interrogate the invocation of misrecognition, discontinuity, radical breaks, subversion or those areas of life which can be considered invisible or difficult to grasp. Broadly speaking sociology, particularly in New Zealand it seems, has in many ways been a closed circuit. One *does* subjectivity, motherhood, work; or negotiates *doing* family, caring and so on. These kinds of *doing*, it can be argued, are discursive signifiers which transmit empirical knowledge

which in turn presupposes a reality to exist irrespective of the unconscious forces which structure subjectivisation. With the exception of some types of psychosocial led research, the process of subjectivisation as pivoted on unconscious forces is generally not foregrounded in sociological discourse and is even considered operative from and reducible to external forces alone. It tends to be structured within the binary of social conformity and resistance. *Doing* is a discursive condition often considered performative, instinctual and akin to Goffman's front and back stage operations. The function of *doing* is grasped (whether intentionally or not) in the actions people *do* and the social relations they foster in undertaking such actions. It is presumed that *doing* in the social field emphasises the function of the social as primarily operational for the subject. Moreover, such *doing* is presumed to apprehend the subject and thus becomes the dominant discourse for the constitution of subjectivisation. How one engages in intimate relationships, participates in consumerism, organises one's leisure time or would like to function in the world, are all located in the visible spaces of social realities and relationships which pivot around the subject. In this way sociology has concerned itself with focusing on those areas of life which govern and structure rules, regulations and permissibilities. Understanding *doing* from this angle does not take into account manifestations of subjective repression and inhibitions as confronting incoherent fantasies, or as the struggle and inevitable failure to articulate oneself in the face of subjective alienation and displacement. Grappling with these facets of a different and somewhat opaque social experience is better aligned with Lacanian analysis and entails an *undoing* of the knowledge which sociology assumes. It is this dimension of *undoing* between the subject and the social world that interests me most as a researcher notwithstanding that it presents ongoing ontological tensions.

Lacanian analysis as a tool for social analysis

Desire desires desire. It is the lack which constitutes desire, the lack that is in the Other as a desiring subject, the lack that could be filled by desiring through the Other's desire. This is what sustains the object petit *a* (Sheehan, 2012, p. 20).

Critical discourse analysis is best described as understanding language in use. Locke (2004, p. 15) explores the functions of critical discourse analysis in social research, characterising language as utterances set within social conditions and purposes. The context from which language is used configures its structure, composition, conventions and expression. Discourse theory posits a ubiquitous orientation and also highlights particular assumptions (Locke, 2004, p. 25-26):

Discourse theory assumes inequality and that language is structured and mediated by power relations;

Knowledge is produced alongside ideological inscriptions of value and essentialism which may be problematic;

Language is neither fixed nor stable and is mediated by social relationships;

Mainstream research often (unwittingly) reproduces systems of oppression.

Critical psychologist, Ian Parker (2010b) asserts that some researchers who engage the operation of psychosocial³⁴ notions and interpretations have neglected to address how the use of psychoanalysis can critically interrogate concepts theoretically. For Parker, psychoanalysis can be a “tool to open up a text in such a way as to draw attention to connections without simply replacing the text with psychoanalytic explanation” (p. 157). In critically reading text in the form of, for example, an interview transcript, he proposes clusters of analytic concepts which interrogate the text by moving between text and theory to reveal unconscious

³⁴ Parker notes British researchers such as Hollway and Jefferson (who positions their writings in the object relations field) insist on hyphenating psycho-social, thereby implying that individual experiences lie within the binary of essentialised “truth and constructionism” (2010b, p. 157). This ontological presupposition is criticised by Parker, Stephen Frosh and Baraister (2008) as reductionist and therefore problematic. This debate is also taken up by Walkerdine (2008) who criticizes Hollway’s “normalising” discourse as problematic and privileged.

relationships, defences and constitutions which as unfolding during the process of the research encounter (p. 158):

... [M]y starting point is the assumption that an interview in a piece of research is also framed by a complex series of relationships, and it needs to be located in those relationships and in events preceding and succeeding it to make sense of what is going on. As with the contextual framing of any research interview, the reader needs to know something about the conditions in which it took place.

Parker's theoretical framing provides a method for undertaking Lacanian discourse analysis, revealing fluid dimensions to both text and its place within the research encounter. This approach by the researcher, of interweaving between interpretation and data collection, is close to the method of analysis employed by Lacanian psychoanalysis, where each text is always read in relation to another text. Text is, as Parker asserts, "ready made from a certain context" (2010b. p. 157). In this way Parker is wary of privileging the researcher and the conditions of research which might be conducive to intellectual liberties not extended to the reader. He designs his methodological tool under specific headings in order to produce from the research encounter, psychosocial knowledge for the purposes of social research and for the benefit of both the participant of research and the researcher (2010b):

The interview frames a particular encounter between subjects, the context and the researcher.

The formal qualities of text are concerned with the structure of the interview, the content of what is said and how signifiers function and come into being.

The anchoring of representation are the fixed points by which the text circulates and gives it logic.

Agency and determination trace what Parker emphasises as the “creative contestation of meaning and the reworking of signification” (2010b, p. 163). Specifically he is referring to the difference between that which is imagined and that which is experienced as a lived reality. Such differences manifest within the structure of the text, where the operation of desire and the unconscious might possibly be traceable.

The role of knowledge motivates an understanding of how the subject is positioned in relation to knowledge. In this way the subject assumes the function of both offering articulations and interpreting them. At this juncture the production of knowledge is not only theoretical, but also includes tacit knowledge which for Parker are obsessions, hysterisations, neuroses and “ideological characterisation of femininity and masculinity” (2010b, p. 165).

Positions of language provide that “no metalanguage can be spoken” (Lacan, 2006 cited in Parker 2012b, p. 166). That is, it is impossible to speak as a subject if already ensconced in discourse. One enunciates both from a position of discourse and of difference, revealing contradictions, tensions and misinterpretations.

Deadlocks of perspective specifically refer to those moments in which the subjects question the social structures in which they are embedded, those ideological and ontological investments which provide an oppositional basis for making discursive meanings from concepts. Parker states, “[t]here is another impossible dimension at work... the eruption of the *real*. Here is a third register interwoven with the imaginary and the symbolic, but one that cannot directly be grasped. It flashes into view and can then be articulated only through the other two registers (Lacan, 1975, p. 2)”.

Interpretation of textual material alerts the researcher to not be lured into discourses of fixed meaning.

Parker's discourse analysis provides an excellent checklist for what needs to be apprehended and analysed both during data collection and during the analysis stages. His approach structures associations of knowledge acquisition and production and, importantly, how it is directed and explored within the entirety of the research process. As a researcher, I hold no investment in what participants say; to me what is said by them has to do with transmitting a certain discursive knowledge about what belongs to them as social beings. The more they speak, the more the contradictions, problems and reproduction of the signifying ideological conditions are rendered problematic. Crucially however, the more subjects speak, the more they realise their own alienation and the failure of words. In this way this research seeks to interrogate what could be considered a crisis of meaning; the subject is expected to respond to an event which is created or constructed, despite the subject not necessarily grasping the event itself. Rather than pursuing the ontology of validity, which is traditionally upheld, I shift the emphasis to fidelity to thought and critical inquiry. This entails that participants in my research are encouraged to re-open thought in those domains they associate with desire, such as art, politics, love and so on, and which intersect but are not so easily articulable. Because the subject must construct something, the question of desire here becomes ontological in that any reference to the truth is precarious and the problem becomes one of inquiry, where new positions are established, new logics are posited and revealed. These provide what can be considered signposts of the time which orient how desire can be explored.

Žižek approaches a reading of Lacan as a social act, in that specifically, he continually *talks back* to theory, constantly evoking a dynamic relationship between theory, method and text. Žižek aptly undertakes this function and purpose of social analysis and it is his energy and willingness to put the subject in an uncomfortable context which is most satisfying and tantalising for a researcher exploring desire. Lacanian psychoanalytic ideas are subjected to praxis, and although ideas are only ever provisional, their intersections create interesting contradictions and paradoxes. Žižek embodies the desire for knowledge which is critically

engaged in what is theoretically engaged and intelligent communication. By no means do I as a researcher intend to emulate Žižek's idiosyncratic and nuanced approach – that would be exhausting! Rather, my position is to specifically interrogate his claim that a critical return to ideology can provide insight into understanding desire in current times.

Lacanian analysis regards any meaning-making as a retroactive process. Specifically, Parker emphasises the importance of analysis taking place *after the event*, also very crucial in Lacanian analysis. Meaning and sense are usually effective only in the fantasmatic revisitation of the event, in retrospect and when “dialogue is reworked and transformed” (2010b, p. 162). Parker goes on to state the importance of such retroactive mindfulness when reality is constructed (p. 163):

The retroactive determination of meaning is important for every attempt we make to grasp the meaning of a text, or for that matter, a Lacanian concept. Again we need to keep in the research frame the acknowledgement that we have a ready-made text here in which the ‘punctuation point’ that retroactively reframes what has occurred up to that point is a construction of the analyst. This is the case, of course, in every text including interviews actually carried out by a researcher, for there is always a decision about when the interview begins and how the extracts from an interview will be selected and represented to make analytic points.

The process of my method and analysis were constantly evolving and informing each other during focus groups and interviews. Of course, it is acknowledged that what participants say in one context may differ in another and so any discussion of desire can be understood as a snapshot in time. However, such snapshots carry links, struggles, understandings and meanings which hold ideological traction and resonate with what it means to be a subject in the world here and now. Once transcribed by me, the transcribed data of the groups and individual interviews were analysed by tracking different dominant discursive threads. Specific attention was paid to the particularities of what participants said, what they

emphasised, how they responded to each other and what they struggled with speaking about during formulations of their ideas and understandings of desire. Many participants referred to local, global, political and social events, their observations of particular social groups, the media and personal experiences. Desire was articulated and understood within the wider social context of film, politics, art and intimacies. Because of this I use similar transcription pieces in different analytic chapters so as to elicit multiple approaches to desire. In addition to the transcription material I engaged political commentary, literature, art and film as ways of exploring and emphasising contemporary, complex and ideological constructions of desire.

An analyst of the social

Žižek utilises Lacanian psychoanalysis uniquely and with the appearance of spontaneity rather than the deliberate methodological design of Parker. Žižek constantly interrogates his chosen text, whether it be film or a political event, from both sides of the Lacanian mirror; he positions himself as both the subject who analyses the event and as the one who is involved in it. Each requires a certain amount of subjective distance. Such distance is a deliberate reflexive tool employed elsewhere by Žižek. For example, in his documentaries, *Perverts Guide to Cinema* (Fiennes, 2006) and *Perverts Guide to Ideology* (Fiennes, 2012) recognisable scenes from popular films are recreated during which Žižek literally assumes two distinctive subjectivities, those of particular film characters and simultaneously that of the analyst. In these documentaries he interrogates those ideological undercurrents which produce ideas relating to the politics of desire and enjoyment. He portrays himself in the film segments as akin to a Mobius Strip, whereby objects, subjects and those conditions in which they exist, are so constituted, as Parker explains (2010a, p. 158) to be understood and revealed through representations and mechanisms of expression and defence.

The Mobius Strip does not have a point where it ends or begins. There are no fixed points of reference, rather it is gazed upon as a whole, from which locations for meanings are

generated. Although the whole strip is not visible from any one point, the subject knows that it is a whole piece, notwithstanding it can be viewed only in fragments.

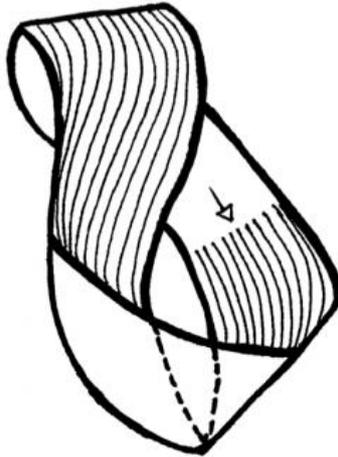


Figure 13. The Möbius Strip

The Möbius Strip simultaneously holds and challenges the subject's gaze in that, at closer inspection points of differentiation are difficult to recognise, thereby revealing the internal and the external as a continuous surface. One looks at the Möbius Strip from the outside, as in the gaze of another subject, yet at the same time a process of developing subjective meaning occurs and this is recognised in one's own acquisition of meaning.

For Žižek, the acquisition of meaning comes from objects of ideology being also reflexive subjective declarations: "Even the most down-to-earth objects and activities always contain such a declarative dimension, which constitutes the ideology of everyday life" (2006, p. 16). The role of objects in sociological inquiry is discursively saturated within the operation of the social world. Žižek, however, utilises objects to not only pin down ideology, but also to reveal ideology as a consistent function within the structure of social relations. For the sociologist, objects and social texts have the function of structuring empirical inquiry and thus they induce a type of ontological empiricism. Objects are inscribed into the social to

support the *doing*, the performative injunction that some trends within contemporary sociology propagate. Nevertheless, the ambiguities of these performative utterances, whether in speech or embodied in an act, are sometimes neither unintentional, out of the blue, transparent nor so easily comprehensible, as some schools of contemporary sociology would have us believe. How the subject emerges from these unintentional utterances of disruption constitutes both the subject and the social in a different order of the real – a Lacanian Real of unknowing. Lacan states in *Écrits* (as cited in Bailly, 2009, p. 97).³⁵

The Real expects nothing, especially not of the subject, as it expects nothing of speech. But it is there, identical to its own existence, a noise in which one can hear everything, ready to submerge with its splinters what the reality principle has built under the name of external world.

The composition of the Lacanian Real is opaque and challenging. The Symbolic are those areas in life which govern institutions, daily practices, attitudes and what is determined as ‘reality’. The Imaginary is best described as the specular image of the ego. The Real is the areas of life which cannot be known and are “carved up by language” (Myers, 2003, p. 25; Žižek, 1991); the Real refers to something unrepresentable and outside the symbolic matrix (Sheehan, 2012, p. 25); it functions as a limit to our knowledge and is represented by empirical objects which make fantasy possible, which in turn stages desire. In order for desire to be manageable, there must be compliance with social and cultural norms and discourses; this is the injunction of the superego which the subject simultaneously complies with and resists.

³⁵ This quote is Bailly’s own translation from ‘Response au commentaire de Jean Hyppolite sur la “Verneinung” de Freud’ in *Écrits*.

The signifying structure within areas of contemporary empirical sociology is in some respects an attempt to explain the notion of a functioning, present and observable reality. This is problematic as the role of knowledge is reduced to the explanation of things, events and objects as determinist. By contrast, realism focuses on those social forces and processes which are invisible and yet structure people's lives and choices. Marx's thesis on the modes of production provides an example of this. Currently, there are some strands of sociology, particularly those which employ psychoanalytic theory, which are considered critical realist, in which our understandings of the world are socially produced and constantly shifting. It is arguable that Žižek's scholarship falls into this category.

Bailly states that for Lacan "the Real is what is expelled when a signifier becomes attached to some morsel of reality: it is the bit that the signifier fails to capture" (2009, p. 98). Because the Lacanian Real resides close to subjective trauma, horror and complete submission to enjoyment, engagement with it means confronting those areas of life which are partially structured by these elements in the manifestation of conscious forces. Sociology, particularly those contemporary strands within some forms of social constructionism and empiricism, appear to be more comfortable taking a phenomenological middle ground which glosses over the eruption of the Real by anchoring analysis or interpretation within empirical representations, pivotal social moments and notions of multiple truths. A strand of sociology that is framed by the Real is conceptually embedded within the function of speech, that is how one *talks about* the relationship between oneself and the world one inhabits. However, from a position informed by Lacanian psychoanalysis, the easier it is to articulate a phenomenon or experience, the further away it is from the Real.

Arguably, it would seem that subjective desire under the gaze of certain strands of empirically based sociology is understood as being more or less recognizable and able to be satisfied, once social systems, values and practices are clearly and critically articulated. For those sociologists who consider and analyse desire, it is largely understood as desire *for* the

other rather than *of* the Other. This difference in domain reflects an investment in the real and presupposes Althusserian or Deleuzian notions of desire as traced and transmitted through the modes of production, able to be accommodated and based on value and commodities.

Pavón Cuéllar's (2010) insistence that the researcher should always tackle the unconscious without reducing analysis to obvious signifiers (or what he refers to as "the handling of the signifier") is a challenge for those researching the social world through the lens of Lacanian analysis because it resists the robustness of what is expected when one undertakes research which is supposed to contribute to a field in a comprehensible and original way. The conventional approaches to sociology that maintain the subject/social, external/internal binaries tend to ignore the unconscious, the very mechanism from which social conditions are structured. It might be suggested that a discipline's impetus to travel the middle road is akin to not fully engaging the field of inquiry and in the case of desire, to keep it at bay – in other words, the mandate of the superego's injunction to enjoy knowledge, its production and its acquisition but from a safe distance.

Craib (1989) states that one virtue of psychoanalysis is that researchers bring to the process of research their "own internal conflicts, with all the feelings that they involve, and project them on to what we study" (p. 92). The desire for knowledge reveals itself to the researcher through the processes of enjoying the anticipation of its possible acquisition. In this way language – manifested in speech and writing - is an apparatus for pursuing enjoyment. A similar ethic can hold for participants in research: discussion triggered by watching a film, creating art or music can be considered acts of enjoyment. The transmission of enjoyment between participant and researcher is a fascinating process which structures two fundamental questions pertaining to knowledge production: *what is it possible to know* and *what can I do with the knowledge I have?* These questions posit 'knowledge' – *savoir* – as validated through a discursive process to achieve the status of knowledge. Indeed, thesis research and writing adheres to this process. Although Lacan considers such knowledge to be important,

his criticism of the University discourse is twofold. First, it is assumed that knowledge attained through this process is in fact knowledge and secondly, it is assumed that the transmission of such knowledge is from the *one who is supposed to know*. Such an underpinning to this or indeed, any ontology has disquieting implications as to how assumptions about, limits to and possibilities of a field are constructed and understood.

Of course there are sociologists and social theorists, such as Žižek and Butler who question the status of knowledge and the knowing subject and this is part of the project of this thesis that I take on as an ongoing theme throughout my discussion. Lacanian psychoanalysis has much to contribute to the development of sociological methods and theory. As a way of interrogating Žižek's critical return to ideology as a way of understanding desire in current times, my conceptualisation includes the use of film, focus group and interview material.

Flisfeder (2012) understands the importance of film as a methodology with which to unpack the co-ordinates of the Symbolic Order that attaches us to certain notions of defining knowledge. By drawing upon Žižek's use and theorisation of film as helping to understand the world in which we live, Flisfeder illustrates how Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1995) has power to unravel and reveal the complexities and interweaving of subjectivities, ideology and those unconscious formations which might contribute to how the social world is understood. For critical social theorists film is a most useful medium for apprehending and confronting challenging social questions.

Film as artefact for theorising desire: *Heavenly Creatures*

I should now like to further explore how a research of desire can be undertaken. Social researchers develop an awareness of the social spectacle, particularly in that they are a part of constructing it, but in spite of this awareness, they at times prefer to be distant from what they are attempting to analyse. In order to do this their awareness focuses on the importance of the

gaze. For the researcher of desire (the assumption of) the gaze is a precarious position, because the object does not necessarily return it to the researcher.

New Zealand film reveals much about dislocation and alienation within New Zealand society. Vast isolated space depicted in many New Zealand films provides a metaphor of barren beauty, where horror and unease are sensed but just out of grasp. Nineteen-fifties New Zealand has been described as conservative, conformist or more poignantly as “suffocatingly dull” (Neill, 1995, *Cinema of Unease*). New Zealanders of this time, mindful of their isolation, regarded the rest of the world with its promise of freedom and new experiences as tantalizingly outside a restrictive decency which underpinned their conservatism. *Heavenly Creatures* reveals what it might have felt like to be a New Zealander at this time together with a sense of foreboding unease. This film is based on the actual murder of Honora Rieper (also known as Honora Parker) in Christchurch in 1954. Honora was a working class woman who, together with her husband, ran a boarding house where they raised their children. Over time her relationship with her teenage daughter Pauline, grew fractious and volatile due to a developing intense friendship Pauline had made with her classmate, Juliet Hulme. Juliet then fell ill and the decision was made by her parents that she should live with her Aunt in South Africa, this threatening to separate the girls. Although this decision was made by Juliet’s, not Pauline’s, parents, the girls’ despair and hatred focused on Honora Rieper as being the barrier to overcoming their imminent separation. So much so that Pauline and Juliet lured Honora into Victoria Park on the Christchurch Port Hills where they bludgeoned her to death with a brick stuffed in a stocking. Even today this murder lingers as an undercurrent to Christchurch’s history both for its brutality – after all, who would actually carry out the killing of their own mother – and for the events leading up to the murder. In particular the intense friendship between the two girls has been debated by those attempting to make sense of why the murder happened.

Film maker Peter Jackson and screen writer Fran Walsh provide a film interpretation of the Parker-Hulme case by making fantasy integral to the narrative. The film eloquently exposes that which Žižek posits to be the big Other, “the field of etiquette, social rules and manners” (1992, p. 71) as simultaneously idyllic and horrific sites for sense making and for the construction of fantasy. The big Other - the romantic 1950’s nostalgia redolent of English and European cultural artefacts which found their way to New Zealand - in many ways offered people a seductive sense of difference. This is a most successful aspect of *Heavenly Creatures* in that the illusions the teenage murderers co-construct do not at all mask the realities of the social milieu of Christchurch. Rather, in so far as the girls steadfastly uphold their fantasmatic ‘Fourth World’, in which elevated social classes are revered and ruthless and where there appears to be a lack of social mobility, their illusions also reveal the regulations and structures of social realities that actually exist, but which they are simultaneously resisting. The Fourth World – a fantasy world staged by exaggerated colloquial desires of becoming famous and signified by the obsessive characterisations of saints in shared diaries - could not *exist* without the girls’ confrontation with and resistance to the ideological conditions of the time. Furthermore, the murder of the mother would have had no ontological status without the girls’ demonstration of the tensions between fantasy and reality. Their Fourth World relied on role-playing to sustain itself, as did their daily life in Christchurch. Fantasy had the function of staging those ideological conditions which founded the murder. Žižek unpacks the tension between the social ideological mandate and subjective appearances (1992, p. 74):

By ‘pretending to be something’ by ‘acting as if we were something’ we assume a certain place in the intersubjective symbolic network and it is this external place that defines our true position. If we remain convinced, deep within ourselves that ‘we are not really that’, if we preserve an intimate distance towards ‘the social role we play’, we doubly deceive ourselves. The final deception is that social appearance is deceitful, for in the social-symbolic reality things are ultimately precisely what they pretend to be.

An understanding of desire entails an acceptance of deception and misrecognition as being part of the pretence of the subjective nature. *Heavenly Creatures* is a film which links these experiences directly and indirectly to the structure of desire. The film both stages and speaks back to desire, always revealing to participants in the current research that there are always possibilities about how desire can be spoken about.

During the 1950's cinema and the film industry were among New Zealand's most popular cultural activities. *Heavenly Creatures* depicts the fascination New Zealanders of the time had with film, as a way of escaping a mundane day to day existence and to vicariously experience alternative cultures, ideas and landscapes. The forbidden longing to be somewhere else, both geographically and personally, features heavily in the film, transforming the girls' perceptions of themselves and of the society in which they live, into possibilities of a more exotic and seductive life. This provides both the film's characters and its viewers with ways of imagining and experimenting with a disinvestment in parochial 1950's ideologies.

The Parker-Hulme case had a significant impact on Christchurch and wider New Zealand society which was shocked that two teenage girls murdered one of their mothers for the totally unrealistic reason of escaping to Hollywood to become film stars. Such a radical act for a seemingly selfish and flippant longing fuelled unsubstantiated media gossip of lesbianism, paganism, lust and evil.

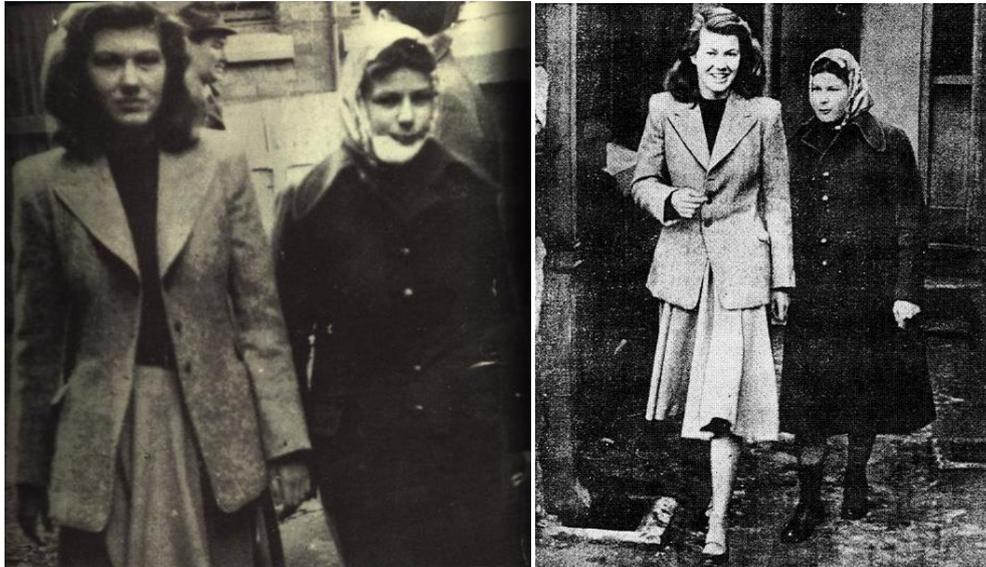


Illustration 4. New Zealand media release of Juliet Hulme and Pauline Parker following their arrest.

TWO TEENAGERS FACE CHARGE OF KILLING WOMAN

Trial of City Girls Opens To-day in Supreme Court

THE Crown case against Pauline Yvonne Parker, aged 16, and Juliet Marion Hulme, aged 15 years 10 months, who are charged with murdering Parker's mother, was outlined by Mr A. W. Brown in the Supreme Court to-day.

The girls were charged, before Mr Justice Adams and a jury, with murdering Honora Mary Parker, at Christchurch, on June 22.

The Crown Prosecutor (Mr Brown) had Mr P. T. Mahon with him. Mr A. L. Hudson and Mr E. A. Wright are appearing for Parker, Mr T. A. Graham and Mr R. McCullough for Hulme.

Pauline Parker was charged with murdering her mother, Honora Mary Parker, on June 22, 1956, at Christchurch, New Zealand. Juliet Hulme was charged with assisting in the murder.

The girls were charged with murdering Honora Mary Parker, on June 22, 1956, at Christchurch, New Zealand. Juliet Hulme was charged with assisting in the murder.

The girls were charged with murdering Honora Mary Parker, on June 22, 1956, at Christchurch, New Zealand. Juliet Hulme was charged with assisting in the murder.

"GIRL LIKED ATTENTION;" N. Z. TRIAL

A.A.P.-Reuter
CHRISTCHURCH, Tues.—The mother of one of two teen-age girls charged with murder told the Supreme Court today her daughter had been "critical of other people and wanted to be the centre of attraction."

Hilda Marion Hulme, wife of the former rector of Canterbury University who retired recently to take up a new position in Britain, was speaking of her 15-year-old daughter Juliet.

Pauline Yvonne Parker (16) and Juliet Marion Hulme (15) were charged with murdering Pauline Parker's mother, Honora Mary Parker, at Christchurch, on June 22.

Both have pleaded not guilty.

Four of 16 Crown witnesses remained to be heard when the trial resumed today.

Mrs. Hulme said that after she (Mrs. Hulme) had returned from Britain in 1953, Juliet had seemed restless. Pauline Parker was coming to her.

Mrs. Hulme said she had seen the night of the tragedy in her daughter Juliet's bedroom.

Juliet had refused to talk about the accident and had wanted the radio on when she was late for her job to sleep. She had wanted to rectify her favourite poems and did so in the morning.

Juliet definitely did not grasp her position today, Mrs. Hulme said.

She had told Juliet that if she wanted to travel she could have New Zealand only with her parents' permission.

She had told the girls to go to the States if they could not get to America.

While staying at Dunedin near the Parker's, Pauline Parker was happy to be with the family.

She told on many times she was not "happy at home and that her mother did not love her obediently," said Mrs. Hulme.

"After a quarrel with her mother she would be distressed. This made Juliet upset."

Mrs. Hulme said she had read the correspondence with Pauline Parker had increased and that Juliet was in a mansion.

Juliet had assumed part of several characters on old Pauline. They were each other as well.

The early part of the girls' correspondence was grandiose and it later became full of rage, spite, and bitterness, and proceeded to a disapprobation of Mrs. Hulme's mother.

The Crown Prosecutor (Mr. A. W. Brown) has alleged a plot to get Mrs. Parker to Victoria Park and kill her with a knife which, he said, Pauline Parker had carried in a stocking in her hand.

He claimed Pauline Parker had requested her mother as an "opiate" because she would not let her go overseas with the Hulmes.

Mrs. Parker was known generally as "Mick. Heper," Mr. Brown said.

Insanity Plea

An indication that the defence would be based on a plea of insanity was given today afternoon.

The case for the Crown opened early in the afternoon and the defence opened later.

The girls were charged with the murder of Pauline Parker on June 22, 1956, at Christchurch, New Zealand.

R. W. Mansfield, who is lecturer in psychiatry at Otago Medical School, said the girls suffered from paranoia of a chronic type in a setting of a disturbed home.

Illustration 5. A depiction of how the trial was reported in the media.

Peter Graham author of *So Brilliantly Clever* (a chronology of the Parker Hulme case) recounts his memories of being a child in Christchurch in the year of the murder (2011, p. 1):

... I was seven years old. I don't remember hearing about the murder or the trial... It would seem my parents hid the news of the vicious killing from my sister and me: such protection of young minds was normal in those days. Matricide by teenage girls was then an exceedingly rare crime, as it is still. The killing of Honora Parker, not to mention the talk of a lesbian relationship between the girls, would have made deeply distressing reading for parents everywhere.

At this time Christchurch offered a moderate degree of social mobility as described by Watson (1994, p.16):

The class structure in New Zealand is not as clear cut as it is in Europe... In New Zealand the aristocracy is not conspicuous and the working class aspires to, and may attain, many of the privileges of the middle class. However there are class distinctions that citizens of New Zealand can recognise, even if foreign audiences might miss them, and it is to Christchurch that one would look for the most obvious manifestation.

Nevertheless, Christchurch society was still embedded in the English aristocratic system in which authority figures inevitably upheld the ideological conditions which managed and administered their authority. *Heavenly Creatures* depicts the revered figures of the girls' fathers, Professor Hulme and Mr Rieper as incompetent, somewhat misguided and absorbed within an early neoliberal and protestant continuum; obedience and focus on hard work that will inevitably pay off. Reflectively and sympathetically the film also locates the same authority figures as trapped within a time and place from which they longed to be differentiated. This troubled reflection of precarious subjectivity is what makes *Heavenly Creatures* so unique and confrontational in its framing of desire. These men are living uneasily, incongruously, vicariously and somewhat innocently, though acutely aware of their

authoritative and patriarchal positions. Professor Hulme takes upon himself the pressure to appear omniscient in the face of scathing scepticism and for Mr Rieper, he is deeply affected with the confrontation with the unravelling of the family structure he upholds and cherishes. In viewing such loss of the dominant gaze of the patriarch, the viewer is confronted with a fundamental question of the desire-lack game: *can others recognise the real object of my desire?*

During the making of *Heavenly Creatures*, Peter Jackson emphasised the importance of capturing the hyper-imaginative quality of friendship between Juliet and Pauline (cited in Sibley, 2006, p. 235):

So much of Pauline and Juliet's friendship was positive, and that is the tone I intend to take with the movie: a celebration of a remarkable friendship, of a remarkable relationship. It has a tragic ending, but to portray it as "doomed from the beginning" would be a mistake. For the most part it was a joyous, exhilarating relationship, filled with humour, intelligence and two wonderfully hyper imaginations..."

Heavenly Creatures examines both desire and ideology, and although set in the past, still resonates in the present and thus provides an excellent film from which to generate talk of desire in the twenty first century.

Generating text about desire

The methodological design for this research focuses specifically on how knowledge is constructed and how this construction determines the ways in which such knowledge is used in analysis. Before participants viewed the film they were told about the research and the theoretical framework which would support an analysis of text. The function of the chosen film, *Heavenly Creatures* is not only a visual projection of desire but also a construction of desire as reflected in participants' accounts of their reactions to the film, in how they relate to

it and how their ideas of desire unfold within and outside the film text. This retroactive process offers a means to recount the ways in which participants' desires are constructed and manifested through speech. While this speech might initially point towards the Symbolic function of the film text, it also identifies with the Imaginary, even in the recounting of past events. *Heavenly Creatures* serves as a most poignant film to elicit knowledge of desire because participants can relate to either memory of the event itself or at least resonate with the incident and the shadow it casts on the historical and social fabric of Christchurch.

Watching a film and talking about it to others is an experience which is uniquely definable to a subject. There is the potential to recognise oneself and identify with particular signifiers of desire. In an effort to reveal and explore these, four focus groups were assembled to view the film, these groups being organised around specific conditions and similarities relating to the film: fathers of teenage daughters; those involved in the creative industries; those who were children and residing in Christchurch at the time of the Parker-Hulme murder; and young women aged between 18-25 years. Each focus group consisted of four to six people. The specificity of the groups was based around key themes of the film and its construction of desire: father figures, young women entering adulthood, the creative processes of self revelation through language and those social conditions which reveal possibilities for subjectivities. As language is the primary symbolic path through which people interact and interpret the world, it has the important function of transmitting the field of ideas as it exists for the subject into a wider group dynamic. The act of talking about film both in a group and individually with a researcher allows for representations and signifiers of desire to be explored, articulated and possibly revealed. Speaking in a group about desire is different to the context of speaking about it with only a researcher. Desire can be conceptualised differently in each context allowing for tensions in speech. In this way participants have the opportunity to scrutinise their own articulations, as Craib points out, "the names we can give to desire are likewise the product of our language [...] everything social is linguistic, a product of language" (1989, p. 122). Craib goes on to make an important statement: "the

linguistic is social” (p. 122) and to then discuss the empirical and theoretical implications (p. 122):

The problem with desire is that it is unnameable: once we have moved into naming desire, we are in language and the desire has been ‘alienated’. Yet the learning of language and the mirror stage itself presupposes some very specific and nameable qualities.

By their recognition of self within the use of language, participants in their quest for knowledge are divided to become both the subject and the Other. Constructions and talk of desire are such that subjects can make sense of the conditions from which they construct them; what offers meaning for subjects in the field of ideas and within the form of speech is constituted against the pressure to assume particular positions regarding desire. This specific location is what prompts the design of my methodology, data collection and analysis.

Once the research proposal was approved by the University Ethics Committee (See Appendix A), group participants watched the film in a comfortable location followed by discussions. To facilitate and initiate discussion, set questions were prepared (see Appendix B). However, it transpired that usually after the first question, the group tended not to require prompting by me as discussion flowed easily, although not all the participants knew each other beforehand. Questions were designed and organised to elicit how different groups configured and interpreted key themes in the film and how they related these to the experiences shared by others in the focus group. The discussions which ensued were considered more than just the collection of, or generation of, empirical data from which explorations of desire could be analysed. They explored a different type of ontology, one which foregrounded subjective inconsistency and incompleteness. More so, these discussions released fragments of fantasmatic support necessary for making sense of desire.

Participants were recruited from a number of networks and largely by word of mouth. The main criteria for participation in this research were that participants had to fit into one of the assigned groups and were willing to agree to the conditions for consent (see Appendix C).³⁶ The film was viewed in a group for two hours. A discussion of no more than one and half hours followed straight afterwards. The discussions were recorded and transcribed by myself. One to one interviews were undertaken usually within a month following the focus group and lasting no longer than an hour. The function of the individual interview was in many ways an extension of the group discussion. There were no set questions, although I had prompts resulting from their contributions in the focus group. As a researcher I prepared by listening to the audio recording of the group discussion so as to pick up on lapses in speech, struggles of articulation and other important aspects which might have revealed conceptual and/or contradictory perspectives. This did not necessarily mean that these inconsistencies were interrogated during the individual interview; rather they provided a starting point for dialogue into *how* participants found the experience of talking about an intimate concept such as desire in the context of a group. Once the one on one interviews were transcribed, they were given back to the participant for review. It is important to note that given the powerful nature of the film and subsequent reflections on the focus group discussion, participants often made contact with me to request a one on one interview. It can be supposed that participants in their grappling with desire, were in the process of considering and reconsidering the staging of desire in quiet reflection which subsequent discussion corroborated.

³⁶ Also included in this appendix is a separate consent form for a participant of the creative industries focus group whose images of sculpture work I have included in Chapter 5. He has given approval that his first name be used instead of a pseudonym.

Participants were encouraged to freely speak and interpret what they and others said thereby invoking meanings and senses of desire. As expected when participants spoke, they struggled with words but nevertheless used them to the best of their ability to convey what they meant. This resulted in lapses of speech and thus often required the revision of what was said. In recognising both the struggle for articulation and the need to pursue it further some participants would request a second one on one interview. I always granted it, transcribed it and returned it to them for their perusal. This act of interrogating one's words in the written form, yet again, was confronting for participants. Some would meticulously ponder every sentence and requested me to be present while they did so. Others took several weeks to get back to me having gone over the transcription in their own time. Interestingly however, not one participant wished to alter any aspect of their transcript, although many elaborated on what they had said. This particular research process signifies more than just a fad in ethical social research: it highlights how participants are confronted with the complexities of being subjects of language. This retroactive process of research demands that facilitating, recording, transcribing and listening to the group discussions and one on one interviews is about constructing knowledge which links back to how participants construct their speech in both verbal and written forms.

Žižek's claim that film teaches us *how to* desire is a radical claim when compared with discourses of essentialism which links desire only with natural instinct. The truth of desire is impossible to express completely because it is founded on the primary repression, the desire of the original lost object, the mother. This incompleteness and irreducibility entails that what is said is repeated again and again. *Heavenly Creatures* depicts desire as constantly emerging and disappearing within the flexibility of supported fantasy. The big Other in this film is those conditions of 1950's Christchurch which structure reality for the subjects and which can be recognised and validated by viewers. Žižek presents the big Other as both mediating and infiltrating language with pervasive social attitudes and values in which subjects configure their identities. Sheehan understands Žižek's site of the big Other as functioning

“ordinarily as a regulatory force providing the subject with a consistent sense of his or her identity” (2012, p. 17). Although supported by fantasy, consistency of identities is complicated by Lacan’s controversial claim that there is no big Other which serves the crucial function of not guaranteeing subjective consistency. Subjective lack is revealed by constituting a fantasmatic big Other into either another subject or object. Žižek explains this with relation to desire (1998, p. 121):

Every time the subject gets the object he demanded, he undergoes the experience of, ‘this is not *that!*’ Although the subject ‘got what he asked for’ the demand is not fully satisfied, since its true aim is the Other’s love, not the object as such, in its immediate particularity.

The specific function of *Heavenly Creatures* in this research is to confront the viewer with the big Other. The film raises various questions as to what is being desired and how the lack of gratification further highlights subjective lack and discontinuity. *Heavenly Creatures* is an intriguing film, as are the actual events which inspired it. Following the film discussions, many participants embarked on further research into the Parker Hulme case, read crime novels or contacted me to talk further about what desire might mean in the film.³⁷ It appears that what participants were unconsciously confronting is the gap between their own embodied visceral experiences of desire – the dominant discourses from which desire is usually understood – and a further dimension of desire; that which is separated from the Other, or *beyond* embodied understandings of desire. Participants also acknowledged the perpetual dissatisfaction of desire: as Žižek eloquently puts it, “no matter how close I get to the object

³⁷ Juliet Hulme now resides in England and has become a very successful crime novelist, Anne Perry. Her novels were read by some of the participants.

of desire, its cause remains at a distance, totally elusive” (2008, p. 56). The film is about many aspects of desire, including fantasy, the body, belief and love.

My chosen methodology included a film viewing of *Heavenly Creatures*. Film can operate as a form of social critique, yielding political, ideological and cultural insights. I consider film to be under utilised by sociological method and inquiry especially since it can be a creative and engaging medium through which to observe the intersection between private and social worlds, how these worlds conflate and coexist and what they reveal about how the subject functions in a complex and changing society. Film provides a stimulating way of ‘catching up’ culturally and socially, in that it affirms a world in which new discoveries can be made through a popular and accessible medium. When one watches a film, one does not need to be an expert in any particular field in order to appreciate, understand or provide a response to or a critique of it. I argue that film lends itself quite powerfully to being an apt ‘social leveller’ which for my research makes it the perfect medium through which to explore desire. *Heavenly Creatures* is a powerful film, it magnifies emotion and reveals conflict in passion and desire and more so it is an iconic film for New Zealanders. It affirms human presence and transformation by affecting viewers and compelling them to use both their capacities for rationality together with their imagination. I consider that *Heavenly Creatures*, while obviously tragic, does a great justice to the human subject because it provides a way of reading desire as that which is forbidden yet interwoven between social and political milieus. Although set in the mid 1950’s, the film highlights a more contemporary problem – that of the mother attempting to rectify the failure of the father in the context of late capitalism. Here the discursive risk is not an excess of maternal authority, but the failure of it and consequent implication that a literacy of desire has been overlooked. Here social arrangements are acting as ideological markers which attempt to separate the political from the ethical, a separation from which desire is a semblance; that is, in order to access desire in the context of repressive forces, one must function in the Symbolic. In this way the visual aspect of my methodology constructs a specific gaze from which desire can be talked about: participants in 2010 and

2011 are watching a film interpretation about an actual matricide which occurred in 1954. Here two things are happening together; history is being abstracted and participants are being compelled to imagine this time, the subjects and the horror of what happened. For two hours participants are living in multiple times, all the while situated in Christchurch. This experience of being spread across time is a crucial factor in my research because desire too cuts across time and can be spoken about in similar ways and under the same Masters revealed by participants. In *Heavenly Creatures* the subject of the film is us, the viewers, who take up a position, who critique and who gives expression to how desire is organised and interpreted. In this way the film affirms the subject. In this way too it functions as a generous film which by intersecting social critique with a dash of comedy lends itself well to sociological inquiry.

In order to analyse the group discussion and individual interviews it is important to posit desire as not fixed to any object, experience or person. Furthermore, desire refers to something unrepresentable and demonstrated symbolically through the signifying structure in which the subject is invested, although it might appear contradictory or even nonsensical. Deception, trauma and fantasy are symptoms wherein the staging of desire is an unfathomable *something* which is both constitutive and fragile.

Researching the social: a desire for knowledge and the virtue of being stupid

Desire can be described as a process of unconscious acquisition, although subjects never attain the object of their desire because “[t]he object of desire always remains detached from desire” (Just, 2011, p. 265). For Lacan, the function of desire “is not directed at its object immersed in its own lack” (cited in Just, 2001, p. 265). Thus desire entails that the subject “reaches out for” (p. 265) only to be left, sometimes knowingly, empty-handed. Fantasy enables and fuels desire and in many ways this research examines how fantasy can be understood as socially obtained. Just reiterates this point (p. 265):

It appears that in culture one has little chance of desiring precisely what one could have desired in an environment freed from existing cultural norms, objectives and demands. As such, one does not desire what one truly wants, but instead desires what one is told to desire. Furthermore, when existing in the Symbolic one has only fantasies left and, to borrow from Slavoj Žižek (1991), it is through them that one learns how to desire.

Lacanian psychoanalysts, Nobus and Quinn (2005) assert that it is within the nuanced intersection of *staying stupid* and of sustaining robust and engaged critique, where one can interrogate the limits and possibilities of psychoanalysis in the field of social research. However, the position of staying stupid alerts the researcher not to be seduced by the notion of ‘applied psychoanalysis’, which Nobus and Quinn consider to be a limited epistemological methodology which is reductive, non critical and purely interpretative. In subverting ‘applied psychoanalysis’ Nobus and Quinn attribute virtue to the act of staying stupid meaning acting with “one’s ignorance” (p. 27) and resisting the position of *subject supposed to know*. “Making stupid” (p. 189) is the act of interpretation which creates an “epistemological disturbance” (p. 189) from which notions of fantasy and interconnections with social artefacts can be revealed and analysed. This process, claim Nobus and Quinn, has “allowed Lacan to see an individual compulsion towards the desired object, and the object so desired, as two elements of a single artefact, built from signifiers” (p. 189). They maintain that the research encounter is ultimately a stupid one, that is, in the articulation of the specificity of a concept which includes not only the concept itself but also those accumulated ideological, scientific and social conditions which lie at the interface of any discursive interpretations of desire, the research encounter becomes undone within the process of its articulation. Nobus and Quinn alert the researcher to this particularly in the case of intersecting fields (p. 188):

When a psychoanalytic approach to knowledge occupies itself with other discourses such as archaeology, anthropology or sociology, it tends to expose the distinction between accumulation and fall in some way, however limited the effect might be. This sub discursive or sub disciplinary aspect of psychoanalysis in which the host discourses may be fractured or

disarranged, should be seen as distinct from the problematic status of an applied psychoanalysis.

In his public lectures Žižek reiterates the phrase, “the most stupid obvious explanation is...” as both colloquial common sense absurdity and oversight at one level, whilst also revealing a reflexive theoretical gap in knowledge at another. The practice of being stupid is in some ways a resistance to the subjection of the Other. As a subject imagines a scenario which could be for them, reality, the big Other starts to disintegrate, because fantasy must be in place for a social reality to be experienced. However, at the point of fantasmatic recognition, the Other returns as an ideological spectre, thus revealing its inconsistencies to the subject. Both fantasy and reality are rendered unsatisfying for the subject. My research explores this process and furthers understanding by interrogating the site of fantasy as being a crucial and reflexive location for social knowledge production. Fantasy is a reference and point of suspension as well as an encounter from which the subject imagines and stages meanings of desire.

Discursive positions of meaning

In the ontological struggle between truth and knowledge, Bracher (1994) posits a link between the construction of subjectivity and that which allows for such subjectivity to harbour meaning and gain traction. This is an unyielding link to what Lacan refers to as the Master signifier, the ultimate big Other (Bracher, 1994, p. 111):

A master signifier is any signifier that a subject has invested in his or her identity – any signifier that the subject has identified with (or against) and thus constitutes a powerful positive or negative value.

Through the Master signifier the reflection of the Other’s gaze and the discourse of speech are elevated to the status of idealism. This internalisation of the Other is a process and

function that mediates desire and it can be tracked through one's admittance into the construction of subjectivity. As subjects we cannot escape the demand of the Other as Soler insists (1995, p. 43):

The Other is the locus of language – the Other who speaks – precedes the subject and speaks about the subject before his birth. Thus the Other is the first cause of the subject. The subject is not a substance; the subject is an effect of the signifier. The subject is represented by a signifier, and before the appearance of the signifier there is no subject. However, the fact that there is no subject does not mean that there is nothing because you have a living being, but the living being becomes a subject only when a signifier represents him. Thus prior to the appearance of the signifier, the subject is nothing.

To return to Žižek's ontology, an apt question which guides this research is: what kinds of Masters are subjects obeying in order for desire to make sense for them? By sense making I mean, how does a subject transform the big Other into just another subject using language? The ideologies revealed as intrinsic to the construction of subjectivity underlie that which psychoanalysis anticipates – classic disavowal and repression which prevent desire from being fulfilled and thereby providing tensions and deadlocks from which subjects believe they cannot escape. Modern ideological constructs are revealed in how one struggles to speak of the Other, of the social. Attachment to such ideological investment is both encouraged and prohibited by the superego injunction which informs those social and ideological mandates governing how subjects function. While providing some sort of safety net, ideologies are also frustrating because the imperative of reflexivity – that which supposedly prevents stupidity – entails that subjects fail to say what they mean. Thus participants' compulsion to repeat (manifested in some wanting second and third interviews) together with their attempts to name their desires is inevitably misrecognised within the limitation of ideological discourse. However, such misrecognition has no ontological status until it is spoken or named. Žižek insists that it is the longing for 'it' (that which is difficult to name) to be named which sustains desire (2001, p. 68). During such a struggle naming holds the potential for desire to

be fulfilled but in the meantime in its place are substitutes, sometimes poor and ineffectual and by no means transcendental, but good enough to represent partial signification which can then be revisited and revised.

Parker (2011) discusses the notion of distributed selves as a structure of subjectivity which resists certain ideological conditions, for example, capitalism and neoliberalism. Moreover, he argues that capitalist discourse has given fertile ground and specificity to psychoanalytic concepts, such as alienation, perversion and hysteria, since subjects subvert ideologies which regulate them. Similarly, how subjects make sense of desire is through discursive interpretation of representations which serve to inscribe subjective differentiation and meaning; these have the function of ideologically regulating the split subject and thereby conferring wholeness.

Similarly, beliefs are signified by internalised discursive limitations and are characterised by a somewhat panoptic metaphor; the surveillance of one's beliefs in relation to the beliefs of others binds the subject within an ideological space. Belief plays an important role in the attempt to describe desire and acts as a substitute for the void when the divided subject is confronted with an ethical dilemma, with all its associated idiosyncrasies and friction. During interviews participants adhered to the supplement which belief offered, although at the same time there was a recognised impermanency and fluidity around such signification. Beliefs which surround the function and form of desire are strongly attached to the symbolic and visceral functions of the body. There is a strong connection here with the fantasy function of love; also the promise of what can be considered beautiful, ultimately fulfilling and thus most meaningful, providing a location for what is forbidden and for where desire is permitted to flourish. This location permits a more temporal externalisation of desire for the subject. It is asserted that these externalizations are types of ideologically distributed desire in that such significations attempt to create and recreate a likeness or discipline of desire which is both predicated on and representative of the ideological conditions of the time.

Concluding comments

This methodology section concludes part one of this thesis. It has focused on the importance and relevance of the theoretical position of Lacanian psychoanalysis by those theorists engaged in research methods that structure the process of the design, data collection and analysis used in understanding how subjective desire can be researched and that will be employed in this research. Additionally this focus encounters another important level of analysis, that which scrutinises those ontological tensions which can be unwittingly assumed in social research design pertaining to particular fields. Given this, the use of a variety of methodological approaches which speak in a popular language can be justified: film, focus groups and individual interviews together with the theoretical claims of Žižek move toward a theory of desire in contemporary times. While desire can be said to be already framed for the subject ideologically, the approaches of film, popular media and interviews all speak back to desire, critically or otherwise, in a multitude of manners.

Part two of this thesis focuses on how such a speaking back to desire can be articulated within three discursive themes for the social subject: an exploration around the signification of belief; desire and its relation to the body; and an exploration of love as sublimated desire.

Part 2 – Reframing desire and being desired

This second part of this thesis plays a role addressing the gap in knowledge and theory of desire through an interrogation of participant transcriptions, pivotal global events and film. From these, three modalities of desire have emerged which can be critically engaged. The following three analytical chapters will focus on how the expression of desire emerge through the *objet a*. More attention will be paid to the specific question of what constitutes the *objet a* and how it gains authority through an implementation of the Master's Discourse. What will be examined in the next three chapters is the relationship between the *objet a* and the Masters discourse, specifically where desire holds an ideological authority for the subject. For this to occur the *objet a* must be recognised as not necessarily being within one's reach. In this way desire is recognised as a solution for the divided subject, not of achieving subjective wholeness, but of maintaining the lack so there are possibilities for action and inspiration. Desire for subjects is a form of investigation which is both performative and knowing. Fantasy is directly implicated as a form of support for desire. For Žižek such fantasy is ideologically organised where the subject can enjoy the sublime object. Fantasy for Žižek structures reality. Here lies the relation between the Master signifier, which represents authority and the *objet a*.

The following chapters will focus on three determinations and mobilisations of desire with more focus on Žižek's critical return to ideology: the position of belief; the relation of the subject with its body; and love. The continuum of ideology provides a short circuit from which desire can be mobilised. Belief, the body and love are fields with which the subject, positioned as the contemporary Hysteric in discourse, implicates him/herself in fantasy and through action.

Chapter 4: Desire and belief: an ideological promise

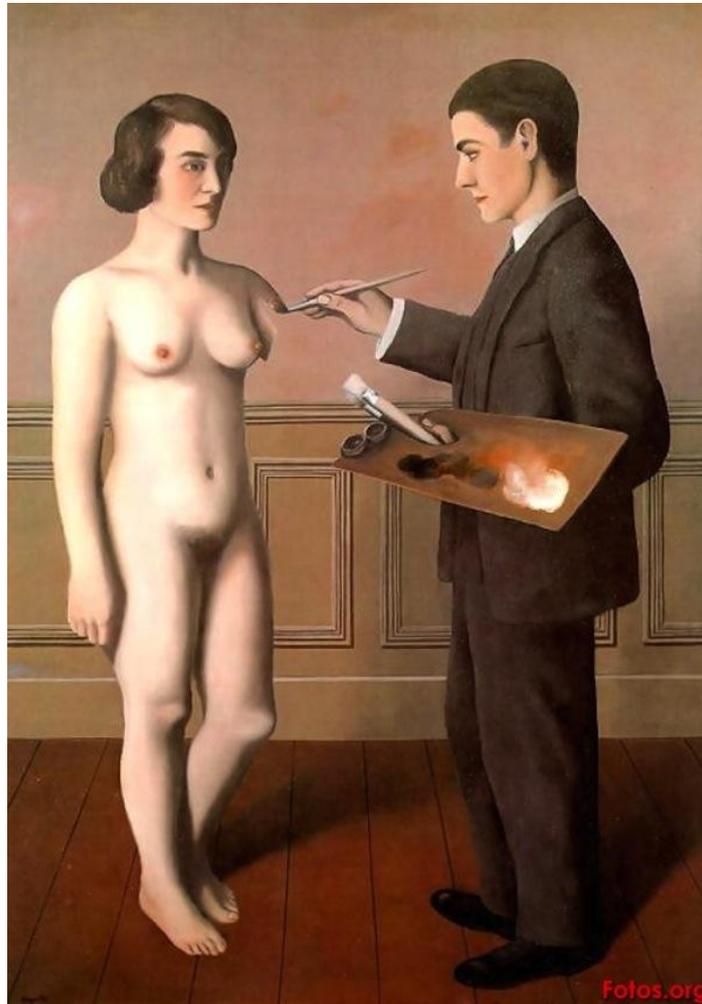


Illustration 6. *Tentative de L'Impossible (Attempting the Impossible)*, Magritte, R. (1928)

One can believe in ghosts without having faith in them (Žižek, 2001a, p. 109)

I can see how girls definitely get – and this is from my own experience – intense. There is a real intensity of relationship that can develop quite quickly with girls. You know? My daughter came home last night and she'd been out with her friends all afternoon. Then she still managed to spend an hour on the phone with one of them afterwards! You know that is

very common with girls. That intensity which can cross the threshold into... umm... fantasy (Dale, fathers of teenage daughters, 2011).

Like what's reality, you know, yeah there was no reality to [Pauline and Juliet] well their world was their reality, so yeah. And then that's where you can't, we, I mean I guess, in my opinion, where I can't relate to them, because like, you know, I, I have got to a point in my life where you, you know, you don't think you can come back to being normal, in a sense, if you're, you know, depressed or infatuated or whatever, and, um, but it's like, yeah, you know, you always know that you can build yourself back. And they kind of, it, it was like they didn't even have that line to come back to, that there was no other world. So that was, yeah, it's just strange. (Kim, young women aged 18-25, 2011).

Introduction

To introduce this chapter on belief, consider Žižek's suggestion on the rights of necrophiliacs (2009, p. 92):

Why are they cruelly forbidden to play sex games with dead bodies? The suggestion is thus: some of us consent to donating our organs to medicine in the case of an unexpected death; why not consent to having my body played with by necrophiliacs, should I die unexpectedly?

Žižek, in typically outrageous style, highlights an important intersection between belief, morality and ideology. Legalising necrophilia would trigger public outrage, based on a widely held belief that engaging sexually with dead bodies is depraved and hugely disrespectful to the deceased and to their loved ones. However, Žižek cautions us not to be deceived by such parameters of a belief because it highlights what he calls "the paradox of today's situation" (2009, p. 91) in that necrophilia is a metaphor for how belief functions as a fetish.

In this chapter I focus on specific ideological foundations to belief as they relate to how participants recognise and develop a literacy of desire. Within this focus I ask the questions: *how might belief shape from where the subject desires? Where do subjects locate themselves within their own gaze of belief and how does this gaze present in language?* These questions seek to deliberately shift the discourse from University to Master, an ontological shift which addresses the challenge of desire I wish to explore in the next three chapters. By doing this I recast the obvious question of desire - *what is the object of my desire* - to a more provocative discourse from which subject's unattainable cravings are instead forced into a relationship with fantasy and with language. Specifically, I draw upon the discourse of the Master as a way of understanding the precarious location of knowledge.

The Master is at one with the knowledge that such a relationship with both fantasy and language and therefore has no subjective investment in it. By contrast, Lacan describes the Hysteric as not having this insight and therefore relying on fantasy for identification. When discussing notions of desire participants in this research are confronted with ideological values and principles which have been acquired over the course of their lives. These ideological structures are psychosocial in process and function, in that subjects recognise awareness of desire as being informed by the world they inhabit as well as by their own psychic structures. Subjects are confronted with the possibility of recognising desire on a daily basis and in the most ordinary of circumstances. What I claim is that the contemporary ideological structure of belief provides a location from which the subject is able to recognise and *keep in check* desire. In examining the connection between desire and belief I scrutinise participants' talk both from focus groups and from individual interviews.

The etymological structure of belief is well described by Grace in her research on bodily pain related experiences (2003, p. 53):

The habitual, and even servile, nature of 'belief' is clear from shifts in its linguistic derivation. Good (1994) discusses the concept to show how it has shifted from an original meaning of 'belove', 'to hold dear', 'to cherish', 'to regard as lief' (where 'lief' in Old English derives from the Latin root 'libet' meaning 'it pleases', 'libido' or 'pleasure'). In mediaeval texts 'leve', 'love' and 'beleuve' are virtually equivalent, and by Chaucer 'accepted my bileve' means 'accept my loyalty... as one who submits to you'. It was not before the end of the seventeenth century that the meaning of 'belief' as 'assent' and 'opinion' became predominant, and in Locke's terms as 'the admitting or receiving any proposition for true, upon arguments or proofs that are found to persuade us... without certain knowledge' (Smith cited in Good, 1994, p.16).

Here belief is revealed as ambiguous, also as an act of interpretation through personal experience and persuasion. The foundation of belief lies in how desire has been situated through the ages, how the Imaginary has been symbolised and how it manages that which cannot be fully articulated. The construction of an ongoing narrative belies belief, and thus posits belief as standing in for the Real (or that which cannot be fully articulated). Belief becomes a reliable symptom because its repetitious location ensures that it always returns to the same place. Whether one believes or not, belief itself is imagined as incorruptible. For Žižek, the contemporary subject believes now more than ever. In suggesting this Žižek not only problematises belief, but foregrounds it as a concept which actively provokes unquestioned ontological positions. Žižek positions modern social conditions together with the practices and organisations which maintains ideologies as structuring the contours of belief. As Žižek states (1994, p.6):

Instead of concrete analysis of external, actual social conditions – the patriarchal family, its role in the totality of the reproduction of the capitalist system, and so on – we are thus given the story of unresolved libidinal deadlocks; instead of the analysis of social conditions that lead to war, we are given the 'death drive'; instead of the change of social relations, a solution is sought in the inner psychic change, in the 'maturation' that should qualify us to accept social reality as it is.

It is useful to commence this discussion with a conceptual understanding of ‘discourse’ and ‘ideology’ and to explore how they are ontologically positioned within Žižek-Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. Žižek draws attention to an ideological fault line from which belief can be distinguished. He maintains that despite the propagation of subjective ‘freedom’ in current times, we are relying on belief more than ever (2001a). This directly implicates ideology as crucial to framing fantasy within social conditions and relations. Rex Butler (2005, p. 32) considers Žižek’s critical return to ideology is best approached in terms of antagonism towards those signifiers which underpin understandings of what constitutes ‘society’. For Žižek ideology presupposes practice and in this way, ideological connections with objects, social artefacts and other subjects have the potential to express not only repressed desires but also those beliefs which underlie interpretations and experiences of the social world. This explanation accounts for understanding ‘reality’ as already symbolised and asserted. Such symbolisation implies a repression from which opposition and antagonism emerge. For Žižek, a return to uncovering repressive forces must recognise such antagonistic forces as ideologies which disguise an official ‘reality’. Žižek refers to this reality as traumatic and horrific encounter with the Real: “[s]omething unfathomable, ‘more real than reality itself’, reveals ideology to be more than ‘mere ideology’, as opaque to analysis as the kernel of a dream” (cited in Wright & Wright, 1999, p. 55). Žižek argues for psychoanalysis as a method from which the Real can be uncovered without ontologising the ideological spectre. This, he argues demystifies ideology and evokes us to reveal and critique the complex circumstances and attitudes which are presented as unproblematic.

It is through the visibility of the signifier that the Real of the social can be seen as both upholding and attempting to break from the ideological conditions which structure it. Žižek disrupts the idea that everyday life is merely an ideological mask whose function is to conspire with the notion of belief through the big Other, which disguises what he considers the hidden or true Master (the one with the true power) away from a public, visible Master – the one we all see.

To recapitulate the concept of the big Other; the mother occupies the first position of the big Other for the child. What is paradoxical is that the big Other disintegrates once one believes in the Other of the Other, or the 'real' Other which promises a better, more fulfilling jouissance for the subject. This surrendering to a perception problematically assumes that there is a real Master which provides the foundation for belief and believing. Belief in the Other is trumped or bypassed by belief in the Other of the Other. Using both systematic and external authority as justification, belief helps to stabilise the confusion and frustrations which accompany desire. The Master guarantees full application of the law as a way of demonstrating authority. Additionally the Master also operates in a paradoxical way from a location outside discourse; if the Master's authority is questioned, then the Master is reduced to discourse and to being an agent or figure of contestable knowledge (Butler, 2005, p. 141). Although the Master's discourse is discussed in Chapter 2, its relevance to belief will be discussed more fully in this chapter.

Shifting discourses of (im)possibility

As the object of our desire slips away and is more and more elusive, so we desire to have it, to master it all the more (Frosh, 1995, p. 168).

Although some psychoanalysts in the clinical field have criticised Žižek for bastardising Lacan's teachings through playing down the importance of the clinical, there is no doubt that Žižek's scholarship and contribution to psychoanalysis displays mastery of Lacanian theory. Moreover, Žižek, along with many other Lacanian theorists, have applied this mastery to push theoretical ideas (heretofore confined to the clinical setting) about the subject and social worlds, into public and intellectual debate. For Žižek, Lacan is considered a Master from whom social knowledge (as well as knowledge of the social) is both developed and critiqued. In keeping with Žižek's ontology, a return to the Master is the location from where I examine the intersection of belief with desire.

Lacan offers that the subject is shaped by discourse in that, “the subject operates upon discourse, and discourse operates the subject” (Alcorn, 1994, p. 27). For Lacan discourse is the process whereby language is related from a subject to another subject, where speech and language intersect. A subject of language occupies various subject positions in relation to the function of discourse which include as Žižek claims, ideology. Žižek posits the domination of ideology as an application of Lacanian theory, by insisting that (cited in Sheehan, 2012, p. 43):

ideology operates at the level of the unconscious and engages the subject’s libido; it is not an illusion masking the truth, ‘but that of an (unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality itself’. What allows people to think they’re ‘so classless, clever and free’ is not to be found in their articulation of conscious beliefs...

As subjects we are always enacting to sustain the illusion of the big Other. The subject is a hypothetical entity (Alcorn, 1994, p. 28) in that it is a result of the effect of systems and beliefs which bear upon the social and linguistic forces of subjectivisation. Ideological interpellations regulate the subject. That is, the subject has the potential to resist discourse because ideology is never absolute (Alcorn, 1994, p. 30). Žižek argues that like ideology, “belief also functions at a distance: it is the thinking that is removed from the ideological identity that enables the ideology to exert a hold on us...” (Sheehan, 2012, p. 44). For Žižek the *objet a* is the great sublime object of ideology in that it presents a promise to the subject of meaning, truth and wholeness. However in order to ‘see’ the ideological contours which structure it as *objet a* the subject needs to look sideways, awry. The distorted *objet a* functions as a fetish, a wished-for state of subjective integration and consistency. From this it can be extrapolated that the gaze from which belief is postulated and operates in the same way.

In examining the connection between desire and belief I claim that subjects are necessarily confronted with their divided subjectivity in that they construct, measure and characterise desire in accordance with how they enunciate their beliefs. When speaking about desire, participants harness ideological beliefs which shift between the discourse of the Hysteric and that of the Master (these discourses are outlined in more detail in Chapter 2). In this way ideology functions as a Law which is assumed by the social world to self sustain and perpetuate. Subjects are subjects of discourse and occupy a multitude of subject positions which are themselves composed and constructed by discourse. Sheehan goes on to elaborate this precisely in relation to Žižek's conceptualisation of the *objet a* (2012, p. 21):

The *objet a* is not a positive entity existing in space, it is ultimately nothing but a certain *curvature of the space itself* which causes us to make a bend precisely when we want to get directly at the object. The metaphor of curved space is for Žižek a way of marking the difference between the object and the cause of desire: 'no matter how close I get to the object of desire, its cause remains at a distance, totally elusive. The little *objet a* is a placebo that enables desire to desire: 'it is this object which keeps the gap of desire open'.

"The question of meaning" Lacan points out, "comes with speech" (1988, p. 286) since signs and signifiers are already embedded in language. As Žižek suggests, "fantasy underlies the public ideological text as its unacknowledged support, while simultaneously serving as a screen against the direct intrusion of the Real" (1997, p. 64-65). Fantasy identifications can be embodied and this embodiment provides a way of tracking desire and belief (Frosh, 1995, p. 235). The function of the speaking subject is to do something; to do anything. This implicates objects as crucial to speech. The fantasy object, that which cannot be possessed, gives rise to a subject's sense of being. The object holds a possibility for embodying that which is indefinable and 'missing'. The question of belief oscillates around the Master/Hysteric dialectic. The Hysteric confronts the Master with the question of subjectivity in which the subject is already inscribed, from which the Master responds, by way of veiling the *objet a*, from which location are you asking this question?

Why the question of belief?

Modern cynics are the most fervent of faithful believers (Žižek, 2003, p. 8).

[I]f god does not exist; nothing at all is permitted any longer (Lacan, cited in Žižek, 2006, p. 128).

If there is a god, then anything is permitted (Žižek, 2012).

It can be argued that belief, in contemporary society, can imply a somewhat optimistic disposition; it can also invoke the revelation of desire as a possibility for the subject from which other subjects can respond. The promise of belief is that one can, in some form of enigmatic attachment or fantasy, confirm subjective explanations of desire through both adherence to and resistance against particular belief structures. Belief can also be used to justify knowledge, when knowledge is understood in any absolute or totalising sense. Indeed, it is argued by some that knowledge is not possible without some element of belief. However, I understand knowledge as meaning those discourses which are supported by robust critique, are rigorously provisional, grounded in action, and which are in the order of neither belief nor non belief. It can be argued that knowledge as critical and ongoing discovery is a challenge to belief. The status of knowledge as a socially discursive form of repetition³⁸ lies in its ideological foundations which imply a constant source of discovery, whereas belief is directly

³⁸ Žižek argues that the status of knowledge can be understood as a repetition of ideology. He illustrates this point in *On Violence* (2008, p. 57) where he offers that the function of repetition is to ascertain an “essence” which guarantees a stable core symbolising the fantasmatic dimensions of reality.

posited in a claim. Both are implicated when a subject articulates at the intersecting logic of “I know...” meaning “I believe” and *vice versa*.

However, how and why one believes is not so clearly defined by the parameters of knowledge and reason. For Žižek, ideology plays a central role in structuring belief from which knowledge is somewhat arbitrarily extracted. Žižek profiles capitalism as exemplifying an ideological structure in which knowledge is suffused with discursive beliefs and social practices but in which capitalist ideology itself remains hidden, intact and hegemonic (Bowman and Stamp, 2007, p. 35). Belief is powerful and in the guise of knowledge can be lethal as it idealises forces which can control large collectives, sanction power and genocide, constitute social systems and promote dominance.

While Žižek’s claim asserts his political position as a philosopher, it also provides an important critique of modern subjects who believe only in themselves since they no longer believe in the world (1999, p. 3):

Today’s ‘postmodern’ political thought [is] against the spectre of the (transcendental) subject... [in order] to assert the liberating proliferation of multiple forms of subjectivity, gay, ethnic... According to this orientation one should abandon the impossible goal of global transformation and, instead, focus on asserting one’s particular subjectivity in our complex and dispersed postmodern world, in which cultural recognition matters more than socioeconomic struggle...

Such a claim can be viewed as implying that the notion of self perception and the locations of desire and morality are analogous. This characteristic shapes not only the social experience for the subject, but also the fantasy ideal as stated by Elliot and Frosh (1995, p. 236):

[A]ll desire is socially repressed and deadened... [T]he distance between the real, the imaginary and the symbolic reflects a specific social condition in which the ideological misrepresentation and delusion have taken over.

The linking of belief with desire implies for the contemporary subject a supporting testimony and experience which passively subsumes the wider social order. The compulsion to believe is tantamount to the Mobius Strip, where for the subject desire and belief become indistinguishable. Within this linkage however there are gaps in which the subject struggles to search for and justify knowledge which may belie belief. The desire-lack game (the discourse of the Hysteric) morphs into a desire-belief game (the discourse of the Master), in which the subject insists on the mastery of both belief and desire despite insufficient knowledge about either. The rationalisation of anxiety resulting from this game manifests as “I believe”, a more potent and less precarious position for the subject than “I desire”. The gap – the irrational or that which cannot be rationalised – does not necessarily need representation since the subject feels that belief for another subject is already structurally supported. This in turn presupposes the kind of knowledge that is to be transmitted; also the promise of what this knowledge could put into circulation. For the hysteric, knowledge lies in response to the Other’s desire and from this the hysteric’s identification can be distinguishably structured in retrospect. For the Master knowledge manifests as the full recognition *over* the Other in the present moment. It is not only that the proximity of belief and desire is not entirely clear, but also that belief and desire are themselves suffused with ideological conditions and contingencies. Belief is not so straightforward, nor is the act of believing, because for the contemporary subject there must be a *good enough* reason to do so. Such a subject might appear well aware that belief can be misleading, even unconvincing. However belief continues to manifest as a powerful ideological apparatus in which desire is complicit and can be staged.

What has arisen from discussion thus far in relation to desire is the recognition that the big Other, the social, must be present for belief to function and circulate. The big Other emphasises and mediates the gap between the subject and their social worlds. Although desire for the big Other is crucial and at the very heart of the subject, it is nevertheless an indigestible and difficult concept to grasp. The big Other has a contradictory function: in one context its existence is vital for the subject to emerge; by contrast in another context the big Other, being an artefact of language which is inherently insufficient, therefore does not exist. Furthermore, desire is often posited in such a way that ideologically it has to be recomposed in a process of *undesiring*. This process of giving ground to desire can be considered an obstacle to subjective and social reflexivity. Faced with this one can harness a mediation process between the social and the subject which introduces what fantasy, memory and identification contribute to a subjective topology of belief. Belief shifts the perception of the big Other somewhat towards the social and thus provides a promise of optimism about one's place in relation to desire (albeit in strict obedience to the social big Other). Such a shift leads to a most crucial question arising from critical discussion about belief: *how does the subject perceive his/her relationship with the social in the context of either accepting or resisting the wider social order?* Johnston highlights Lacan's position on this (2007, p. 68):

On one side, the barred S of subjectivity is conjured into being through resistance generated by and against insertion into the symbolic order's chain of signifiers (i.e.: the subject, although perpetually escaping confinement within determinate representations, is parasitically dependent upon the representational networks of the big Other); on another side, the big Other, supposedly responsible for giving birth to subjectivity, is itself an inexistent fiction or "transcendental illusion", a function reliant upon the manners in which subjects actively-yet-unwittingly alienate themselves by reifying it...

Žižek has extended the logic of belief to include what he terms the contemporary "cynical" subject. When one encounters the Other as a form of *jouissance*, belief is sure to be implicated. Žižek argues that when the modern cynic posits non belief as a location from

which a response to *jouissance* occurs, the claim of non belief is nevertheless derived from a belief system imbued with ideology. Whereas belief remains in the domain of the Symbolic, enjoyment is located within the Real. Such is the externalisation of belief argued by Žižek (2001a). It could be argued that the cynic's claim against belief places it squarely within the individual framework and that belief is therefore a "groundless myth" (Johnston, 2007, p. 67) which shapes the subject's unreflexive obligations to social doxa. This is because the *objet a* is always in tension with the subject's object of desire and thus never reaches fulfilment. Ideology has the function of externalising belief so that the subject can enjoy through the Other. Belief therefore becomes a defence mechanism: that which the subject delegates to the Other also becomes what is disavowed. It is during the process of identifying this tension that belief can be revealed in social circumstances.

Belief is a difficult concept to define and the allied concept of faith has a questionable reputation in contemporary times. Nevertheless it would be naive to suggest that we, particularly in the West are more reflexive as subjects simply because we now publicly challenge the belief systems of other subjects. This is partly because a rather bizarre logic is implied, as Salecl elaborates (2010, p. 10):

We may feel ourselves opposed to 'society' or the 'status quo': however, paradoxically, for a particular ideology to survive, it is not essential that people actively support or believe in it. The crucial thing is that people do not express their disbelief. For them to abide by the majority opinion, all that matters is that they believe it to be true that most people around them believe. Ideologies thus thrive on the 'belief in the belief of others'.

Belief relies on the Imaginary to stabilise the subject through self affirmation in response to confusion resulting from misrecognition. How one approaches belief is submerged in the apparently solid, yet equally illusory location of authenticity. However, belief has wider social and political functions which the cynic cannot so easily dismiss: it is for example, a

mediatory force between illusion and ideology. Furthermore in today's world belief plays the role of imposter; the contours which govern the subjective constructions of belief offer the symbolic appearance of efficiency which covers failure. The big Other is symbolically relied upon to ensure that its ideological authority is maintained. It is helpful in understanding the function of belief to start with Lacan's powerful and paradoxical claim: "There is no Big Other" because it can be argued that there is no big Other which regulates belief. However, as Žižek asserts, we still act as though the big Other does exist to support the social order and the ideologies which suffuse it. The big Other is reconstituted for the subject within the order of the social and is mediated by the Symbolic order. Furthermore, the element of fantasy is part of a political and supportive category from which the subject explores solidarity as a 'subject-position'. As Žižek claims, the subject seeks that the Law fully "illuminate[s] him" (1999, p. 88) and that "for fantasy to work, the everyday world has to be kept separate from the fantasy that upholds it" (p. 88). This begs the question of how an alienated subject makes sense of a nonexistent big Other in order to give belief symbolic traction. What is in place of this void, according to Žižek, are shared fantasises, fictions and a symbolic pact which signifies meaning, commitment or even confusion. The domain of the symbolic occupies the overlap between the barred subject and the barred Other (Johnston, 2007, p. 68). To expand Salecl's claim that belief is enforced by ideology, I assert that desire is the glue that holds this structure in place, particularly regarding belief in the existence of the desire of the Other, for which the subject allows a literacy of desire. Belief has a powerful role and function in qualifying and bracketing particular discourses which are available to subjects wanting to depict themselves to one another. "Belief is displaced" argues Žižek (2001a, p. 110) and the subject-supposed-to-know (their desire), arguably a manifestation of the University discourse, is ideologically suffused with subject-supposed-to-believe (in one's mastery of being able to locate desire), which would appear to be within the domain of the Master's discourse. Such symbolic faith, Žižek claims, is performative (p. 110). Moreover such performativity is certainly within the dimension of language and is characterised by anxiety resulting from the trauma of being recognised as a split subject. Belief is revealed by

participants in this study as a way of understanding and articulating their personal experience, the interpretation of which is perceived as a claim to knowledge which organises the world. The need to organise the world mediated through belief lies in the very frustration of language to posit the big Other. Participants want to feel free, spiritual or authentic because they lack the language to articulate its opposite which manifests in institutions and systems of power. In this way belief operates through ideological realities which are reiterated in participants' transcriptions.

Lacan states that, "what dominates [society] is the practice of language" (cited in Bracher, 1994, p. 107). A relationship with the social world is both traumatic and discursive in that it stirs up unacknowledged desires which come from an external source. For Žižek, belief is part of the spectre of ideology and manifests through social attitudes, conditions, how the media and entertainment industry operate, how knowledge is produced and distributed and so on. According to Žižek (2001a) belief permits the subject to embody that which is disavowed, it allows the subject to function within a less than ideal ideological system. To resist the logic of a dominating ideology one needs to critically engage one's symptom in order to expose it as a lie (Žižek, 2001a, p. 13). Žižek alerts us to attempt to recognise the function of the ideological spectacle in which we (un)wittingly participate. This is particularly so when encountering the traumatic Other which redefines ideological co-ordinates (2001a, p. 107). To those who claim no beliefs (the cynical position for which belief is not desirable is equally a position of belief, without necessarily believing -- the cynic believes as much as anyone else), Žižek makes the challenging inquiry as to what ideological conditions are in place to permit such a declaration of non belief (2001a, p. 15):

[W]hen we are bombarded by claims that in our post-ideological cynical era nobody believes in the proclaimed ideals, when we encounter a person who claims he is cured of any beliefs, accepting social reality the way it really is, one should always counter such claims with a question: OK, but *where is the fetish which enables you to (pretend to) accept reality "the way it is"?*

Here Žižek is addressing the concept of the Real, given that for the cynic there is no such thing as “reality, the way it is”, despite it, ironically, being accepted. Žižek is problematically proposing a reality which subjects consider knowable and perceptible. However, such knowing leaves a train of deception because, notwithstanding that it is believed in, the Real is impossible either to fully know or separate from reality. To interrogate this juncture Žižek insists that Lacanian psychoanalysis is a form of political engagement within which subjects can explore those fictions of self identities which belief insists upon. For example, a belief in god does not entail that god actually exists, thus belief relies on fantasy to stage the ideological gaze of god as the big Other. The Real is difficult to symbolise and the subject has to learn to live with this difficulty by symbolising around its edges. The management of the Real is a constant struggle for the subject and belief is a manifestation of the subject’s struggle. Belief is a symptom which emerges when the subject attempts to make sense of something which could be there but which cannot be fully articulated. What belief does is to make uncertainty empirically knowable, symbolic and an ideal in which the Master is directly and unapologetically implicated as the true expert. What belief also undertakes is to prevent questioning around propositions of certainty as false. Belief is a fetish which enables the subject to repeatedly construct coherence and logic alongside the superego imperative. Žižek takes belief seriously when setting it in modern times by proposing that the post ideological cynic does not escape the frustration of belief. Rather the cynic preserves belief in a claim of non belief as knowledge. The enunciation, “I do not believe” is a location from which the subject responds in order to organise their world. Žižek offers an example in the documentary, *Examined Life* (Taylor, 2008) in which both environmentalists and climate change deniers are challenged to literally find the beauty in garbage when navigating political ecology. For Žižek rubbish is the true Master and it is never really thrown away. Rather, rubbish is relocated, away from the direct gaze of the subject. For Žižek, the cynic is ideological, a luxurious location where one is free from distasteful aspects of another’s gaze.



Illustration 7. Žižek in *Examined Life* (2010)

Heavenly Creatures offers an apt example of the typecast modern cynic, in the scene where Juliet announces to Pauline that “Daddy thinks all religion is rubbish” (Pauline’s family being actively Christian). Mr Hulme (Juliet’s father) is an educated scientist, employing the tenets of enlightenment to dismiss religion. Without pause, Juliet unconsciously states her father’s sentiment, confirming that modern social attitudes are located from a spectre, or *points de capiton* of class consciousness. Ideological anchoring points provide the reality Žižek is referring to; that subjects are victims of political false consciousness. Uncovering ideological anchoring points pins down and reveals the unifying fields of identity which dominate a subject’s sense of reality. Žižek (2001a) draws on the “new spiritual age” fetish as an example of how belief and desire intersect at the ideological juncture of misrecognition. He refers to this as a fetish because of the radical disavowal a believer must consciously embody. Žižek then claims that it is the very denial of the fetish which fuels fantasy and thereby allows such a belief to perpetuate. This disavowal exposes complicity with the ideology of, in this case, capitalism in that it ignores, for example, profitable exploitation of some Eastern ‘spiritualities’ which is masked to sustain the perception that problematising capitalism is not at all involved. The point of these spiritualities is their promise of self transformation. Žižek argues that such withdrawal into a different ‘self’ is an illusion and holds no truth. He maintains truth is better uncovered by social involvement within modes of production, an

approach often dismissed by proponents of new age spiritualism. In this way, far from resisting capitalism, new age spiritualism propagates it, by providing a fitting ideological supplement which does not disrupt prevailing social mores. I specifically draw upon this example to show that although Žižek is a self proclaimed atheist, critical of religion and spiritual claims, he uses belief to posit a social ‘reality’ in a way that considers complete withdrawal from society impossible. He asserts that although he himself is critical of belief, he would still caution the cynic to be ideologically sensitive and reflexive. More so his position highlights an important shift from the discourse of the University, which strives to make sense of knowledge of belief, to the discourse of the Master, where one can assume belief as knowledge and thereby be able to track the twists and turns of belief as social phenomena.

How belief manifests during focus group discussions

The externalisation of belief

I employ the word ‘manifest’ reflexively in that the one reveals that which they are subjected to by another subject. This provides a somewhat ineffable externalisation of belief alongside representations of desire/Other. Belief is distinguished, articulated and justified by identifying with ideological anchoring points. However, recognition of belief emerges from what Žižek terms a “pre-constructed space” of discourse (1994, p. 11). It seems that in specifying a location for belief, its ideological underpinnings are not only proclaimed but also obscured by ideology. This is partially recognised by and illustrated in the transcript excerpt below. The belief in oneself to achieve despite adversity and inexperience is expressed by Tracey, a successful musician:

Tracey: I was just thinking of.. I don’t know.. I was.. I guess it’s just that sort of.. the achievement thing of wanting things in your life and achieving things. And that can sometimes be unhealthy.. and pushing it.. and I probably remember when I was about twenty-two and I went and lived in Paris and I was just by myself and I had no money and.. I just

remember pushing myself to the point where I was actually quite unwell, but I didn't really know it at the time. because I worked by day and then I would go to music clubs at night and had this real need[emphatic] and want of [emphatic] playing music and getting into the thing.. engrossed in the scene. It was actually really, to the point where I lost all perspective because I was there by myself surrounded by this other language, and there was no one else saying, just stop. So it was quite interesting. A completely different environment and.. yeah.. you can totally just go, go crazy and suddenly get lost in this massive fog and not actually be aware that you're sort of lost, possibly actually who you are because you're so.. obsessed about something, you know.. so it wasn't until I got really.. really kind of sick.. and tired, you know that, because I was getting only three or four hours sleep a night, and at work the next day.. it wasn't until I just got to this point where I was..ohhhh... I don't actually know what's going on anymore.

Cindy: Were you quite ambitious?

Tracey: Yeah. Really, really ambitious. [slight pause] But it was just really a complete struggle.. it wasn't really.. it was almost sooo.. and plus being on your own and surrounded in something that is an alien place and everyone else is.. yeah.. it was quite interesting.. quite really.. eye opening experience. [slight pause] yeah, it's sort of unhealthy in a way. You know?

Here Tracey seeks to circumvent desire as within the modality of the law by inserting an ideological ethic of the Other. Experiences themselves often serve as the justification for believing that one can master the language of belief, in Tracey's case, the language of being able to enunciate through music. Ambition, an ideological fantasy which is reiterated through *points de capiton* implicates the Master so that she can attempt to be at one with her chosen metaphor, music. The "eye opening experience" Tracey speaks of signifies the gaze from which she encounters the Real by recognising the split between desire and drive and which shatters the co-ordinates of desire. "It's sort of unhealthy" is an articulation of how she

reconciles the discomfort of her recognition by inserting an ethic of herself in relation to the Other. The need to relate to and function within particular social organisations and practices as an alienated subject provides an enigmatic juxtaposition between the intra-subjective and the social dimensions. In mastering such a nuanced articulation, the belief in suffering alienation is justified and appropriates the need to believe in oneself as an individuated subject in relation to other subjects. “This other language” Tracey speaks of is not only the French language, its characteristics and nuances in which she is immersed – and it ought to be noted that Tracey was at the time moderately competent in speaking French – it is how she positions the big Other³⁹ that constitutes a metaphoric desire well worth recognising and pursuing.

What does it mean to really know another, to speak another language and to understand that which is *not entirely understandable*? More pertinently how do we, as alienated subjects, master our fantasies about what ought to be comprehensible, particularly when faced with social conditions which do fit in with our fantasies? For Tracey and indeed all focus group participants, the notion of truth takes on a nuanced form when confronted with such questions. The dovetailing of desire with belief constitutes the most obvious connection from which to justify judgements and to apprehend choices. The conception of belief and desire as intrinsically connected relies on one’s rational propositions and appraisals of beliefs. Much of this in turn relies on how easily one can articulate propositions such as: “It was actually really, to the point where I lost all perspective because I was there by myself surrounded by this other language, and there was no one else saying, just stop”. Belief in the promise of the Other has the function of rationalising and accepting the intersection of desire with belief.

³⁹ That is the cultural ideological distinctions which constitute her desire to achieve, the super-ego injunction inscribed by the-name-of-the-father, alongside her beliefs shaping her subjectivity.

This “no one else” has the function of the (non-existent) Phallic big Other, the social conditions which put in place the subjective requirements from which restriction, limitation and knowledge can be appropriated. The ideological conditions for one to function successfully as an alienated subject require the subject to surrender to an ethic whereby desire and the Law are synchronous. This requires a mediator, such as that which belief provides.

The example of those participants focusing on objects which externalise belief helps towards exploring how fantasies are realised in the Symbolic Order. Objects are metaphors which allow the subject to participate in the system believed in. A New Zealand sculptor, Chris reflects on his childhood creative processes in the late 1970’s when talking about the scene in which Pauline and Juliet model clay. It is striking how he resonates with the necessity to enter his fantasy in order for meaning to be enunciated:

The film does show the girl who makes the figurines that she kind of slipped into hyper-drive when they were separated, weren’t they? And that was the point where she kind of, really started to construct that world in a palpable sense [slight pause] So.. I used to make sculpture with clay all the time, and Mum used to go and get me these bags of clay. I was constantly building little things, so..



Illustration 8. Juliet Hulme [Kate Winslet] in *Heavenly Creatures* (1994)

The film offers something unique to Chris – an enunciation with which he can connect two scenes: that portrayed in the film and that of his childhood memory of being creative. The fantasmatic support that is here relied upon is not lost on Chris, since he goes on to link the Symbolic with the Imaginary in the following memory narrative:

So, even those images of the trees, that's where I spent my childhood. We were really poor so we had to make our own things and I was constantly in a fantasy world in fact. All my school reports say, 'good student, but always daydreaming'! I was like that definitely.. and um.. so.. there was always places around the university [where the participant grew up] and that. That's where we used to make rafts and things..



Illustration 9. Juliet [Kate Winslet] at Ilam Homestead.

The position here is that of constructing knowledge of one's place in relation to desire by means of preserving and reconstructing the past. Memories are not in themselves knowledge of belief *in* past events, nevertheless one can gain signifiers which are metaphors for testimony to the past. Poverty and solitude for Chris provide performative features set against what he describes as a strict Catholic upbringing.

A more contemporary symptom – that of articulating the desire for the specificity of ideological difference – is a constant dilemma which it could be asserted reflects neoliberalism. Herein lies a significant degree of ambivalence and anxiety for many participants since they vacillate between social conformity and contradiction: one ought to be depoliticised, albeit original and creative; one ought to emphasise independence also abide by permitted social determinants; one ought to exercise moral coherence without being judgemental. Negotiating constant subjective autonomies within and alongside social and moral mandates and in a context which is not completely transparent to participants creates tensions that are recognised and understood by them. In the face of changing social

conditions focus group participants are engaged in an array of social contingencies in which they, like Juliet and Pauline, are required to improvise the creation of autonomy and solidarity.

Žižek's materialist ontology is important in that it links ideology to belief. Belief is made possible through fantasies which are realised and enacted by the subject. For Žižek, ideology is no exception because it relies on fantasy to be externalised and thus to create a moment of subjectivity. Ideology justifies belief and links it to a particular kind of reasonableness which can be apprehended by the subject. Žižek's ideology encourages subjects to consider belief and desire as not in tension, but rather as true propositions which reflect subjective justification of experiences and enunciations. Fantasy, as an ideological link, is supplemented by materialism: as Chris states, "we were really poor... I was constantly in a fantasy world... we made rafts and things" is a counterpoint to the lower-middle class Christchurch lifestyle of the early 1970's. Symbolically this participant states he may not have been in the *right* class, but the experience of being poor justifies the fantasy of believing that he can explore being alienated, a position from which materialistic longings are not compromised. Žižek (2006, p. 56) makes this point clear in his connection between class and capitalism:

[T]he relationship between economy and politics is ultimately that of the well known visual paradox of the two faces of the vase – never both, one has to make a choice. In the same way, one either focuses on the political, and the domain of the economy is reduced to the servicing of goods, or one focuses on economy, and politics is reduced to a theatre of appearances, to passing phenomena which will disappear...

Memory provides the signifying perception that particular events need to occur in order for the existence of a signifying event to be memorialised, not just momentarily remembered. The construction and holding of a memory is an act of interpretation for the subject, where objects are supplemented to yield an attachment to a meaningful belief about an event.

Obviously memories can be inaccurate and false. So the belief in the accuracy of memory relies on the injunction of signifiers which provide the scaffolding for the subject. In this way differences between memory and belief are more vehemently appropriated by the subject in the attempt to alleviate doubt and uncertainty, differences which propagate the ideological anchoring points which structure belief. For example, in Chris's vision of what constitutes cultural capitalism, the creative process is a romanticised set of ideological conditions which create capital. Objects then take on a different value. Here something intrinsic to New Zealand culture and identity is being played out: the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) as a form of cultural capitalism positions the subject in a nostalgic relation to objects from which capitalism feeds.

Capitalism and belief

The DIY (Do-It-Yourself) concept is a metaphor relating to the politics of nostalgia in that it places the longing for ownership within the context of a neoliberalist ideology, providing an object supplement to the ideological conditions of capitalism. *Heavenly Creatures* signifies DIY as cutting across class barriers: the make-shift shrine of celebrities, clay modelling, even the weapons used to murder are found objects refashioned for a specific purpose.



Illustration 10. Juliet [Kate Winslet] concealing the murder weapon.



Illustration 11. Juliet [Kate Winslet] and Pauline [Melanie Lynskey] constructing a make-shift shrine.

DIY falsely promises the subject the possibility of bypassing the master's signifier of capitalism through possessions of their own making. Although still within the same signifying chain of capitalism for the subject objects are actualised differently. The kiwi bach, home cooking, growing one's food and preserving all relate to how the past is revered. DIY co-opts subjective 'know-how' into a mastery. It promises to assert the Master's function by concealing subjective lack through the making of social products. Moreover, DIY is the ideological signifier of the belief that one can practice *good* capitalism which, although capturing the cultural subject, also provides refuge from the perils and trappings of that which is considered *bad* capitalism. *Good* capitalism, DIY, redeems the subject in an ideological representation from which capitalism is split and differentiated. It is viewed as a contingency independent of capitalism, although for it to operate it must rely on the processes of production and reproduction. Objects mean more when they are home produced and *jouissance* can be attained or promised when one breaks with the mainstream economic demands. However *good* capitalism is not necessarily a way out of normative subjectivity. The conditions for DIY to be considered a romantic form of social resistance are somewhat illusory. DIY does not offer the subject a way out of castration and *Heavenly Creatures* illustrates this pointedly: socially valued institutions such as family and education are resisted by Juliet and Pauline in favour of celebrity and fame to the extent that they construct ritual make-shift shrines using images of film stars. However, there is a limit to the number of pragmatic skills one can possess without becoming trapped by *bad* capitalism from which there is no escape.⁴⁰ Rather it is the experience of talking about DIY that is very satisfying for the subject. The superego injunction to enjoy occupies the Master's domain and provides an

⁴⁰ It should be noted here that Žižek's proposes communism as a way out of this trap. He makes it clear, however, that this is not conceived within romantic nostalgia. Rather he posits a new and modern communism, what he calls "egalitarian communism" (2009, 2012) which he places within a radical opening of leftist politics and in opposition to the moralities of liberal socialism and fundamentalism.

identity for the subject through the Law. DIY is a signifier which veils the Real and which hides the function of capitalism: a romanticised nostalgic past is injected into the modern world thereby enabling subjects to better achieve, via enunciation, subjective wholeness.

DIY also offers the subject the option of an aesthetic subjective investment. It privileges objects with an intimate and nuanced attachment. It proclaims an inversion of the capitalist ethos by stating: the less it is worth, the more valuable it becomes because I did it myself. In this way the subject becomes the object of value, the signifier from which the object comes into existence. Without the subject, the object would not necessarily exist.

Confronting death with belief

[A]n individual is paradoxically more present *as subject* in the traces he leaves about himself than in his full presence, 'as in the well known experience after somebody's death when it is by going over his remaining everyday personal objects – his writing table, little objects in his bedroom – that we become aware of who the deceased really was (Žižek, 2008, p. 134, cited in Vighi and Feldner, 2010, p. 36).

Participants articulate specific attachment to the ideas which particular objects represent. In what follows Lulu, an older Canterbury resident participant, projects her fantasmatic desire alongside the fearful and inevitable experience of loss through her death:

And in a way I suppose we are.. we're not.. we haven't been told.. 'someone' [expressively] has given us a definitive ending. But we're all.. probably all aware that.. and the older we get.. Who knows! Tomorrow.. we may.. and yes.. and so.. we have to get past that feeling of.. yes.. and it is sometimes hard to come by. And sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night and think, 'I may not know my little grandchild when he's thirteen years old'. And I don't like that thought! And I won't.. I won't.. consider that thought, that you know.. In my heart I know that is quite the possibility. For any of us! We don't.. we don't like facing it.

The fear associated with communicating the loss of a beloved object is a confronting and horrifying ego state. Part of people's maturing process is an increasing awareness of their turn to grow old and die. Such anxiety awakes this participant in the middle of the night – the signification of one's imminent death is difficult to enunciate, as for the conscious subject it is a moment that is unimaginable: "We... we don't like facing it!". Lulu's animated and anxious speech represents an attempt to reach out to the other participants, as she places herself in the position of a courageous hysteric, turning away from a constructed reality to bring into focus the possibility of another reality. It is the desire to continue being a subject in the world which fuels the need for attachment to the object (in this case, the little grandchild) and for it to remain in a relationship with the subject. Such desire plays an important role in preserving the belief that one ought to hang on to the possibility of being near the desired object which will eventually be lost; fantasy suspends the biological inevitability of death. The ideological projections which allow such a brutal enunciation to take place include not only the potential lost object, but also the potential lost scene staging the desire for love and connection. The present moment, from which the participant encounters her fear of death, connects her belief in love with her desired object. Approaching death, when there are no longer possibilities for desire, there remains a fear of not having fully realised them. Another participant James, also from the older Canterbury residents group talks about the anticipating death:

James: You know that we're all going to die.

Jenny: Do you mean an afterlife? Is that what you're...?

James: Oh no! No! No! That ahh.. [short pause] I don't like that I've been told I'm going to die and I've been given a certain period of time and I've exceeded that... And um.. I don't.. I won't say I'm living on borrowed time! I want to live life to the full! See what I mean? I want to enjoy every moment. I want to enjoy... people. And like you [gesturing towards everyone], and so on and so forth...

[Agreement in the group]

James: And enjoy what I do. And I put those thoughts aside. I don't repress them. I try to suppress them. Subtle difference.

The symptom in the Lacan's graph of desire (outlined in Chapter 2) is a message from the subject to another subject. It is a message unique to the subject's socio-historic experiences and history (Evans, 1996, p. 204). The symptom is closely linked to *jouissance* or enjoyment. To enjoy one's symptom facilitates a performance for the subject, even if it is only enunciating one's intention: "I want to enjoy". It is the relationship between 'want' and 'enjoy' that is most pertinent in structuring the ideological function to enjoy. "I want to enjoy every moment", "I want to enjoy... people" are clear observations for James which stabilises their proximity to the object they wish to enjoy. 'Enjoy' and 'want' are reversed; what James is exactly referring to is unclear as he almost interrupts himself and goes on to enunciate an imperative that he ought not to repress his thoughts. The phrase "And enjoy what I do" implies a more traumatic unfolding, a retreat from mourning. Here is a sense of a logical symptomatic mitigation - if one surrenders to the injunction to enjoy, then life continues through expression. Here James establishes a scene where an attempt at *jouissance* provides the direction and where in order to follow this, one must sustain, not repress, a relation with the scene of one's desire. Herein lies the reason to believe, as well as the promise of belief. However, what remains unclear is how the scene appears to exclude death, in spite of its obvious imminence. For James the value of a life well lived is measured by the ability to surrender to the belief that enjoyment is redemptive. The conditions which allow for such enjoyment lie in the necessity for repression. For one to operate in the social world, to have a relationship with others and to occupy a space of subjectivity, repression must take place. Such repression comes at a cost. James resists these conditions of repression at one level but relies on them at another. The "subtle difference" James refers to is not only conceptual, but also a difference in the location of desire. A shift from the desire to live fully to a belief that

one ought to enjoy living fully, highlights a discursive shift from the Hysteric to the Master in that he is now adopting the position of a subject-supposed-to-believe in enjoyment.

Ego ideals and belief

Participants in all focus groups attempt to present and understand desire and belief as indistinguishable. Here a father, Gary, reflects on his two daughters:

They just develop at different rates, don't they? He's lucky that he's got a daughter [gesturing to another participant] into gymnastics. My two haven't really found anything resembling a passion apart from hanging out with their mates. Oh boy, that is so different from me. It is just something I really struggle with. Because there are things that I have been passionate about all my life, like music, which I am still passionate about. You know... so ... you know... I think they all just develop at their own rate. It's not to say that your daughter who is the wallflower at the moment [gesturing the same participant] is not... you know in five years time might be completely different.

The super-ego mirror image of paternal success resonates here. Although there is a shared understanding regarding the social role of fatherhood and the anxiety of raising teenage daughters, fathers in this focus group struggle to master the paternal metaphor. Gary represents the Hysteric – the passion of music standing in as a signifier for subjective unity. George, another participant in the same group compares his own upbringing with how he observes his daughter:

Yes, I think she is quite adult in her mind and she is always looking around and... she is always perplexed by what all the fuss is about! And she... you talk about music... and her and I have exactly the same tastes. And there are the Doors and things booming out of her room. I think kids are probably more self conscious and more distant from desire. They are not sort of... well, it is like they want to be desired, which is to desire. It is quite nice to be someone's fantasy. So they'd like that. But I think it is almost like... ahhh.... kids don't throw themselves

into it quite as much as we would have done I think. Certainly in my experience things were much more dramatic and romantic because you basically didn't know better. Everything seemed like black and white. Whereas now they do seem to be more like... ummm... kids tend not to commit I guess. Well, they like to play with it but they don't want.... it is actually like, quite a drag on your time if you sort of have a boyfriend, so I've seen quite a few of my daughter's friends having their first boyfriend because it "is time that I had a boyfriend". But over time, he becomes a bit of a pain because he is taking time away from girlfriends. So the boyfriend lasts for a month or two and is a bit of novelty and then gets dumped.

Notably, within the focus group, the images of their daughters in relation to them as fathers differ from each other. George is recognised as being in tension with Gary. George assumes the objective and evaluative subjective position of the Master in relation to his daughter, while Gary assumes the questioning Hysteric. What is crucial here is how the father's gaze stages belief regarding the identities of their respective daughters. For both fathers, knowledge about their daughters is incomplete and untotalised. These daughters are at a stage where they are independent in some respects, yet still engaged in education and other pursuits and developing relationships. Desire and belief are articulated as overlapping and interconnected. However words are never enough and often find themselves *undone*; unable to master language and faced by such dissatisfaction. Gary and George are fathers who do not necessarily need to know anything. Lacan refers to *ce savoir en échec*, or knowledge that one is failing when he discusses the function of psychoanalysis. The crisis for the subject is not the lack of knowledge, but rather the question, how does the process of knowledge sustain itself? (Nobus and Quinn, 2005, p. 102). Gary and George provide guiding principles which circulate around their beliefs. George exhibits awareness from where analysis prevents possible instability. Gary, on the other hand occupies a contrary position, where passion assumes the place of the Master's position: for an experience to be productive, there needs to be evidence of a passion. What this indicates is a tracking of conscious knowledge to *jouissance*. George posits this as a youthful exercise; "we were much more dramatic and romantic...". He implies that something is lost or concealed as one ages. Gary connects

passion and agency as bound together in the pursuit of *jouissance*. His frustration that his daughters have not found a passion (like he did at their age) perplexes him and so fails to resonate with how he thinks the self ought to be organised and to function.

Such coherence in this manifestation of desire relies on an ideology of how young women *ought to* function, as the master signifier of the social. “She is quite adult in her mind and always looking around...” provides a vivid image of how George sees his daughter. Whereas Juliet and Pauline in *Heavenly Creatures* are portrayed as rather fickle and hysterical, they are also presented as intelligent, mature and inquisitive young women. This juxtaposition of the daughter image is crucial; the privileged signifier is that of a young woman who not only *knows herself* but also *knows her location*. Here ideology captures what desire might look like in the form of the father’s belief and this helps to make sense of how the subject and the social *ought to* relate within specific ideologies. Being the father of a teenage daughter is an insightful location from which to talk about desire because fathers are talking about desire in relation to how they perceive their daughter’s desire. They assume, almost unapologetically, the Master’s discourse although they grapple with sexual difference and with the images of their daughters as future women who will embark on sexual relationships. Gary’s position involves anxiety over encouraging his daughters to *find a passion* that will metonymise their inevitable sexual relationships.

It is useful to place these father’s discussions alongside those of the young women in a different focus group. One young woman, Kim recounts her dilemmas surrounding the notion of choice: her commitment to her burgeoning career which sometimes clashes with its social demands is a necessary part of her subjective make up:

It comes down to your feelings – if you don’t go out with your friends, they are going to be like... ohhh. And you get a sense of their disappointment. But the trade off is that I did get what I want because I was doing what I wanted.



Illustration 12. Juliet [Kate Winslet] and Pauline {Melanie Lynskey} at Ilam.

Young women are faced with competing ideological demands through the *point de capiton* of belief which for the subject sews the chain of signifiers into the Symbolic Order. According to Žižek (1989) the subject is stitched in during this process so that ideological images are attached as anchoring points to the subject's narrative – that which can be spoken. The appearance of *being there for others* is a sentiment which is echoed by the young women of the focus group. It is an ideological imperative which young women internalise as desire: they ought to be the Other for those who require them to be an Other, particularly if this is in conflict with their own ambitions and goals. In this way, having the desire to be the Other is somewhat conscious and in conflict with the desire to be productive. Such a sentiment based in humanism provides a perverse doxa for these young women – it demands they momentarily abandon their own interests and engage in the bargaining between belief positions. Good friends are *always there* for each other, even in the most difficult of circumstances. One really *ought-to-know* this.

How belief manifests during individual interviews

Individualism and belief

During the individual interviews belief was enunciated as somewhat more ideologically cohesive, when compared with the focus group discussions. Interestingly the individual context provides a space where participants are more ready to cling on to belief because they are confronted with a deadlock between ideologies which might imply that there are no solutions to the problem of desire. At the same time, participants were not so eager to adopt a passive approach to the connection between desire and belief because many contradictions and tensions arise, particularly in their structuring of individualism alongside related ideological supplements. Subjects acquiescing in social mores and norms are sometimes articulated in line with social desires (the superego imperative to enjoy) but sometimes in confusion with them. The big Other – the social – harbours strong resonance with the fantasy of belief and the enlightenment it promises. Here a young woman, Rose, links desire to a belief which galvanises the social-subjective markers she deems important:

Rose: It could be, um, like, like an experience of something as well, like if you say I want to experience like drugs or something, but, but yeah I guess it's a thing, or you want to experience like marriage, or experience like having a baby or something. I don't know, like it could be a feeling or something, but, yeah.

Yes definitely, yeah. And since my boyfriend's not a Christian he sort of thinks that almost, sometimes he tells me that I'm a bit brainwashed 'cause like he says the mind's powerful and like recreating... sort of like spiritual experiences and all that. So he thinks that from that perspective and I was like, well, you know, 'cause I, 'cause I think it's real but he, he doesn't, so he sort of, he thinks the mind's powerful in that respect as well. But I mean I, I, I guess it goes both ways but I'm not sure, yeah. Yeah but yeah that's also quite interesting.

At this juncture Rose deploys belief as discursively religious. Here belief takes on a more nuanced form, that of submitting oneself to a particular knowledge rather than to a dominant persuasion, the latter being how belief is posited by other participants. For Rose belief in god is a master signifier and this became apparent during the interview process:

Cindy: So, belief is important to you?

Rose: Oh definitely yeah. Well I think partly 'cause I grew up with it and partly 'cause I think it's, I believe it's real anyway, but, um, some people don't, so I find it quite hard to grasp that some people don't but, yeah.

Cindy: Either way it's a belief?

Rose: Yes I think so, yeah that's what they tell me.

“That’s what *they* tell me” is a desire to posit the Big Other as the subject-supposed-to-know. For Rose, desire is supported by a different subjectivity, that of subject-supposed-to-believe. There is an irony within this phrase, however, which marks a distinct shift to one of resistance to the big Other and slightly away from belief. This shift in discourse constructs a different belief in relation to the big Other, that of an enlightened yet realistic modern subject. It also highlights the important gap between knowledge and belief, or the discourse of the University and that of the Hysteric. It is an attempt to totalise one’s identity, provide fixed moral points, a foundation from which questioning the idea of the Big Other becomes incoherent. This is apparent when Rose talks about her boyfriend with whom she has had a long term relationship. The process of signification is challenged by her boyfriend, who insists she is “brainwashed”. He challenges the relationship between the subject and her knowledge by attempting to undo her belief. His analytic resistance reconfigures discourse of the big Other. For Rose, the external invisible big Other is powerful and constitutive, while

for him it is the mind which organises the subject. In spite of this she adamantly maintains that her belief in god is important: “I believe it’s real” is an enunciation of an attempt to not be confronted with one’s split subjectivity. In this way, Rose is denying the forces of unconscious knowledge and the structure of the subject. In this force of repression the participant is tied to her-self image, a certain kind of knowledge is implicated but not completely understood, and the subject unreflexively believes the master’s discourse (S1): “That is what they tell me” is the slave’s position, the one that experiences *jouissance* which belief promises. The master’s direction “believe as I tell you” is eclipsed by the big Other, “believe this as it is what I want”. The position of knowledge (S2) is held by Rose’s dissenting boyfriend, who requests that she resists the command of the big Other (subject-supposed-to-believe) and returns to a more pragmatic position (subject-supposed-to-know) notwithstanding that this position, as he articulates it, is also infused with ideological assumptions. Rose’s boyfriend articulates that he refuses to believe, despite the irony that he appears to believe he knows. This is an example of Žižek’s modern cynic.

Anxiety, jouissance and belief

Jouissance is the mark of the signifier and the desire to obtain difference. *Jouissance* is unreflexive enjoyment and activates the split subject through partial access to the Real. It is an emphasis of the distinction between the symptom and the unconscious. Tensions arise for the subject when they attempt to articulate the kind of *jouissance* they long for, as it “is forbidden to him who speaks as such” (Lacan, 1977, p. 319). The struggle for the subject is to symbolise *jouissance* through enunciation – an impossible task. Belief provides the illusory promise that such an enunciation of difference can occur. In contrast with younger participants, the older Christchurch residents exercise a reflexivity which more strongly connects subjectivisation with ineffable experiences, as Linda illustrates:

Could it come from some sort of feeling of envy? For instance, just thinking about you [gesturing toward Jenny], wanting children and wondering if you could have one, and maybe

looking at other people who seemed to be happy with their lot with their babies.. and with us all.. so we look.. at people.. and so it is sort of.. just an envy maybe.. that is just.. lying there under the surface.. it doesn't necessarily really.. umm.. spoil our lives or particularly drive our direction, but it does have something there.. that is just a little.. we look at.. someone who has achieved, maybe, what we would like.. and umm.. that could be.. umm.. umm.. something that drives that.. comes from within.. starts with envy and then, 'well, we would like that!' [animated]

Linda attempts to confront desire as a way of obtaining a sense of control over the process of subjectivisation. She states: “just.. lying there under the surface.. it doesn't necessarily really.. umm.. spoil our lives or particularly drive our direction, but it does have something there..” . Linda is attempting to reveal those ideological lures born out of the intersection of desire with demand. Linda’s response is to Jenny who recounts her desire to have children in later life and is faced with the potential issues that may arise:

I remember really wanting children.. and umm.. because I was quite old before I had one, I just remember just knowing that I wanted to have children in my life.. umm.. and.. I can remember when [husband] and I were first together and I suppose we were try.. well, I was trying to get pregnant! And I remember hearing this, or perhaps thinking that I wouldn't be able to because I was 35.. maybe I couldn't have a child. And I can remember listening to a program about.. on the radio.. about children and pregnancy and giving birth and so on and just becoming very very distressed and shortly after that I found out I was pregnant, so it changed.. it passed. But just this feeling that I so wanted to have a baby and maybe I couldn't. Everything that came in was reminding me of that.. it wasn't there.. it wasn't happening. I found very hard to handle. Thank goodness I didn't have to live the rest of my life like that. I don't know how I would have been if I hadn't children.. I've no idea.. So that's one thing I suppose.

An interesting shift takes place for Jenny in relation to desire and belief and is signified by a change in discourse. The anxiety of recounting a perceived desire that may not take place

despite the fact that Jenny eventually became a mother of two children is crucial to understanding how the Hysteric's discourse constructs desire. The promise of *jouissance* means that throughout both the known and unknown the Hysteric accepts her position. This position is set against a relationship with the idea of belief in truth. The imposition of truth increases the subject's *jouissance*, even when recounting a memory of 'how it could have been' which implies a less favourable position. The promise of *jouissance* is that there will always be a better *jouissance* imaginable. The response to Jenny from Linda marks an enunciation of the Master's discourse: what "lies just under the surface" does not necessarily have an influence upon the subjects' desires, nor does it drive the direction of *jouissance*. The 'I' in the dominant position⁴¹ maintains the belief that *plus de jouir* is not the desirable position for the production of knowledge. This is despite Linda repeating 'we' which represents the bar of split subjectivity and her intention to speak the truth, notwithstanding the anxiety expressed by the pauses in her speech. Jenny's belief that she becomes a mother is paramount to her subjective identities. This marks a shift from the discourse of the Hysteric (the wanting to be a mother) to that of the Master (that one is a mother). The Master's discourse is set in motion by an injunction of belief.

The truth for the Master is spoken; truth for the Hysteric is intended to be spoken. At times the Hysteric's position appears more coherent because the search for *jouissance* is dominant and castration is not being denied. Being within the slave/master dialectic, the Hysteric can actualise subjectivity. By contrast the discourse of the Master is more precarious than it appears: the subject is simultaneously present and not present because a subject of the Master

⁴¹ The 'I' here poses the psychoanalytic question, 'for whom am I acting?' The answer is always for the Other or that which is the desired master signifier. For the hysteric, she/he is acting for the truth, from which knowledge derives. For the master, s/he acts in the name of his/her position as a subject who justifies his/her mastery.

constructs symptoms. Jenny believes in her symptom and strives to master the truth of her jouissance, “Thank goodness I didn’t have to live the rest of my life like that...” is an ego position and in turn mediates desire and belief into a deadlock. The belief in motherhood as a fulfilment of subjectivity is a socially inserted *objet a* to be enjoyed. Jenny eventually becomes a mother: “thank goodness I didn't have to live the rest of my life like that. I don't know how I would have been if I hadn't children.. I've no idea..” In doing so her jouissance shifts to pondering how she would cope with the anxiety of not becoming a mother.

The shift between discourses entails that the big Other reveals itself through a very human dialectic; this can result in the ideological deadlock of desire with belief. Family connectedness, the ageing process, and especially being confronted with one’s inevitable death all provide the location of the subject seeking to be actualised by the Other, as Lulu’s anxiety illustrates:

And sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night and think, 'I may not know my little grandchild when he's thirteen years old'. And I don't like that thought! And I won't.. I won't.. consider that thought, that you know.. In my heart I know that is quite the possibility.

James reflects on his childhood and talks eloquently about his need to resist what is expected of him by his father:

James: A lot of my upbringing.. I’ve divorced myself from some of it. And become selective in what I believe is desirable as far as behaviour and so on. Rather than having to be originally pushed into a mould. I hoped I’ve escaped by my own volition, some of the things that literally shut down by dogmatic – I’m talking about my father – by a particularly dogmatic parent. Yes. [slight pause] I call that growing up. Pure and simple.

Cindy: How do you think that that has sort of reshaped your understanding of desire?

James: Oh a lot! Yes, but it was a very necessary transition. Umm.. [slight pause] particularly, which had a large emphasis but was necessary for.. [pause] a better direction with my fellow human beings. And get along better with people.. because the original.. ahh.. I'll use the word dogmatic, again. Attitudes which were forced upon me hindered my development as a person. And my healthy interaction with my.. other people. And acceptance by others.

The Master's discourse lays claim to the name-of-the-father, that which reminds the subject of castration. However the desire for a subjective centre, an ultimate central core, is contradictory: words such as "original" and "dogmatic" are spoken unreflexively and interchangeably by James and are able to be signified within a representation of truth. Although this gives an illusion of wholeness, the perception of subjective totality gives rise to displacement and struggle. It leaves little room for identity to materialise and furthermore, galvanises social ideologies as privileged through the demonstration of "acceptance by others". The belief in an ultimate unyielding and anchored core is crucial to subjective and reflexive change, as James illustrates when recounting his childhood. Meaning is, however reached in other ways, including not only individuation from an oppressive father, but also in giving up on belief in the possibility of structuring subjectivity by being "pushed into a mould". The word "dogmatic" is repeated consciously and represents the denial of an imposed identity, thus ideologically invalidating the father's meaning. It appears as if this participant is critical of his father together with the socio-historic conditions in which he was raised. To some extent his father is also invalidated by the transition of the big Other –the-name-of-the-father - to the "acceptance by others". For James the name-of-the-father symbolises the words and actions of the actual father in that the father occupies the position of the Hysteric who is struggling to be the Master.

How is the subject-supposed-to-believe, an ideological location?

The trappings of belief are themselves a kind of belief, just as the priest's cassock is his office (Dee, 2010, p. 25).

The most common of all follies is to believe passionately in the palpably not true. It is the chief occupation of mankind (Menken, cited in Pinker, 1997, p. 554).

I cite satirist H L Menken because he humorously highlights the subjective compulsion to believe in a big Other and furthermore to place belief in the context of knowledge as *savoir*. The subject-supposed-to-know presumes that there is an Other who *knows* and has something to be revealed to another subject. The subject in this case is the one doing the *supposing*. I claim that the subject-supposed-to-believe explicates belief as an imposition. In this way the transference between the subject and the Other becomes ideologically displaced, since the subject is supposed to believe that in the absence of knowledge, the Other will reveal belief. Moreover, this supposition signifies an important characteristic of belief evident in contemporary culture which is duly revealed by participants. Belief both maps ideological locations of the big Other and is oriented towards the gaze.

The gendered gaze

'Having' the phallus attached to oneself is no guarantee of stability of identity; quite the contrary, it forces the man into an obsession with 'getting things straight' and a terror of loss which must seem comic to the penis-free woman (Elliot and Frosh, 1995, p. 177).

Gendered subject positions were distinguished during group and individual discussions highlighting another intersection of belief with desire. *Heavenly Creatures* portrays how gendered norms were both upheld and problematised in Christchurch during the 1950's.



Illustration 13. Juliet [Kate Winslet] and Pauline [Melanie Lynskey].

The implications of this portrayal are not lost on participants. Interestingly notions of both belief and of gender expose an underlying moral discourse which shadow Christchurch and also wider New Zealand. The traditional masculine roles portrayed by Dr Hulme and Mr Rieper are commented on by some participants, notably the fathers of teenage daughters and some of the older generation of Cantabrians. The feminine portrayals of Mrs Hulme and Mrs Rieper are considered by some participants to be more complex, as Jenny, an older Canterbury resident, illustrates:

I think the mother, the mother, Pauline's mother. She'd obviously.. well, Pauline was probably quite like her in lots of ways. But she'd obviously run away with the father at seventeen, and they never got married and she probably had a baby when she was very young.. probably had Pauline when she was very young.. umm.. she had this girl who was bright, she was doing really well at school, she was proud of her, and she was thinking ahead that she was going to go on and study and.. and it was like her life.. that she had never done that with her life.. and umm.. she was.. she was.. look.. looking for.. well, she loved her daughter, didn't she? And she just got really upset when it wasn't going to.. that's not the path it seemed to be going along. It started going off in a different direction.. and umm.. just the

way she looked at her daughter, she just loved her and cared about her so much, and just really didn't know what to do. Did she? She didn't really know what to do. I don't know.. .



Illustration 14. Pauline [Melanie Lynskey] and her mother Honora Rieper [Sarah Peirse] in Victoria Park.

Lulu, a participant in the same group, goes on to further contextualise Jenny's statement:

The Professor and his wife's life was quite a tenuous one and she was having an affair with a man she was supposed to be counselling. So, talk about motivation! There's a whole heap bubbling under the surface with that couple isn't there [murmurs of agreement by other participants] in that family!

The dialogue between Jenny and Lulu continues:

Jenny: The idea when they only had two or three weeks before they were going to go off and go to South Africa.. and the father came around and suggested that she could spend those weeks to stay.. Pauline could come and stay at Ilam.. umm.. if Pauline's parents had said then.. Pauline's mother didn't think that was a good idea, but she let it happen.. but she didn't know what to do, did she? She totally, she just sat there crying.. because she just went along with his suggestion.. because if that hadn't happened, probably.. probably it wouldn't have.. what happened.. wouldn't have happened if she had.. when they go together for those last three weeks, that's when everything really went off the rails, didn't it?

Lulu: Just as you said, Pauline's mother wanted her daughter to do well. I think Juliet's parents didn't really, they put their own lives first ...

Jenny: Oh, totally.. totally first. And umm.. they didn't really care too much..

Lulu: They didn't seem to, did they? At all.

Jenny: No. Because she was just going to stay with an Aunt in South Africa.



Illustration 15. Mrs Hilda and Mr Henry Hulme [Diana Kent and Clive Merrison].



Illustration 16. Mr Herbert and Mrs Honora Rieper [Simon O'Connor and Sarah Peirse].

The figure of the ‘good mother/bad mother binary’ is enunciated here and will be explored in more critical detail in chapter six which focuses on problematising the good mother stereotype. The image of the good mother is represented by participants as a confused and

conflicting belief: on the one hand, Honora Rieper's representation is characteristic of the social conditions of the time – a good, hardworking homemaker; on the other hand although encouraging closeness between Pauline and Juliet and even referring to Pauline as her 'adopted daughter', Mrs Hulme is considered by participants to be within the representation of a bad mother. A phallogentric construction of gender dominates how men and women are shaped within Christchurch's cultural and social make-up. Peter Jackson plays with these roles in a kind of soap opera; Mrs Hulme is not focused on the domestic arena of life, embarking on an affair and appearing vain and superficial: her yielding to pleasure, power and control is in contrast to the victim, Honora Rieper, whose maternal role is within the confines of the Christchurch working class community and thus more palatable to viewing participants. Participants grapple with these constructions, both resisting and maintaining them within belief guiding morality, love and fulfilment. The meaning of the Phallus, as Elliot and Frosh (1995, p. 170) assert, is revealed when "the moment [of] passion returns, when it becomes possible to think again about sex and to face the pain as well as the excitement of sexual difference". Passion is a theme running throughout *Heavenly Creatures* and it signifies the human condition of desire. Specifically it is feminine passion which underlines the feature of jouissance: feminine passion is depicted as exciting, energetic and seductive (by Mrs Hulme) and equally perceived to be repressed and offering nothing (by Mrs Rieper). It was challenging for participants to master feminine passion: "she just sat there crying", "she was having an affair with a man she ought to be counselling" are both enunciations which commit to the Law.



Illustration 17. Mr and Mrs Hulme [Clive Merrison and Diana Kent] at their Ilam homestead.

Desire is absorbed into the figure of the mother in a mirage. Because the Phallus is not a fantasy, feminine passion has the ability to see through the mirage and clarify the designation of the signifier: “she just loved and cares for her so much and didn’t know what to do”.

The subject-supposed-to-believe is desired to be recognised in and of the Other. A father of two teenage daughters, Dale, compares his own upbringing with that of his daughters, strongly implying that the impetus to believe in a passion is more readily available to today’s young people:

Unlike Juliet and Pauline, now we have the internet to find things out. Generally in society and in schools, there is a lot more openness about issues... Because society expects that. So, umm... I think that umm... there’s a flipside which umm... is repressed. We all know it was repressed in the 40’s and 50’s – well, up until the 60’s. All sorts of thoughts we repress. Society squashes them. The power of the churches – they squashed it all. So [people of the time] dabbled in a lot of intensity when they could. And maybe now there is a more open climate. And that has removed the mystery of a lot of things. And that is just a part of my daughter’s lives.



Illustration 18. Pauline [Melanie Lynskey] writing in her diary.

Dale nevertheless posits the experience of passion as socially constructed:

Plus there are so many bloody television programmes, you know? At 2am in the morning! Some of the ads you see on morning television which highlights tonight's television dramas! So it's those social messages that come through in a range of ways. I think that my daughter would know about desire. I hate to think what our daughters would actually know about desire and that sort of thing. I don't want to know, but I think she knows more than I realise.

Unlike Juliet and Pauline who used their shared diaries to explore desire, Dale expresses anxiety that modern technology in the form of television is imposing interpretations of desire on his teenage daughters. At the same time such technology is a symptom of the traumatic core of modernity because it provides an "openness about issues" which is otherwise repressed. Repression is akin to "mystery" – "all sorts of thoughts we repress" – as well as to alienation from the Real and from the traumatic sublimation which produces a subject of mystery. Dale's acceptance of alienation naturalises the signification of the capitalist law of

value. He expresses this in juxtaposition with his perception of repressive church teaching which he places within a libidinal framework. In doing this he challenges the stability of supposed knowledge and troubles its rationality and adequacy.

According to Lacan, “the subject is looking for his certainty” (1978, p. 129). Such certainty from participants is derived from those ideological determinants which are justified through the acceptance of beliefs. The figure of the father is certain and *ought to know*. However, this knowing relies heavily on the structure of the *objet a* which implicates the crucial fantasy relationship the subject has with the image of their ego. Desire has the function of representing fantasy and reducing it to neurosis (Fink, 1995, p. 174). In the face of the possibility that his daughter may know about sexual desire, Dale is confronted by the anxiety of his neurosis and so transforms into a subject-supposed-to-believe in that he thinks his daughter *ought not-to-know*. There is an ethic and virtue in remaining stupid as Nobus and Quinn (2005) discuss (see chapter three). They maintain that stupidity possesses a necessary critical edge. I would argue that stupidity is akin to Žižek’s claim that as subjects we are confronted with the limits of ideological conditions and therefore act if as we do not know how such conditions shape subjectivities. Such a discourse is prevalent throughout the fathers’ discussion group. The justified belief that fathers *ought to know* – even if this knowledge is at the level of subjective perception – is also at the level of speech and affect which constitutes the wider context. Their shared histories and English-inspired cultures is discussed by the fathers of teenage daughters and compared with the historical conditions of 1950’s Christchurch portrayed in the film.



Illustration 19. Mr and Mrs Hulme [Diana Kent and Clive Merriman], Pauline and Juliet [Melanie Lynskey and Kate Winslet] at Port Levy.

James, a father of two teenage daughters indicates a contrary position regarding the influence of social mores, when contrasting his own upbringing in the 1960's with that of his daughter:

Young people have more choice these days. I can't think of anything that is repressive. I think you have to make the choice as to whether you are going to be constructive or destructive. And you really have to make that choice quite early. Whereas in the past there was a lot of framework keeping you on the rails.

James is positing a belief that one has the freedom to exercise choice and more pertinently, that one possesses a reflexive freedom of choice, this being a recognisable designation for the subject. The gaze is, to draw on Žižek's concept, parallax: if he can see this for his daughter, then surely she must see it for herself. The choice is between *good* and *not good*. The *good* subject, that is the *good* daughter, is able to locate herself near those social signifiers which constitute subjectivity. James claims that it is a choice, meaning that it lies within the subject's domain and relates to the production of meaning which he, as father, has established. He attributes the forces of social repression and of compliance to the belief that social mores and influences provide competent scaffolding for accommodating reasonable

beliefs. This is contradicted by a participant in the young women's focus group, Layla when she reflects on how, for her, the film portrays belief as a form of resistance which is more individual and singular:

I thought there was resistance to the control of the human world. And that is why Pauline was so attracted to Juliet – because she stood up to teachers. Especially that initial period when she walked down and was correcting the teacher! Brilliant!



Illustration 20. Juliet [Kate Winslet] in class at Christchurch Girl's High School.

Layla focuses on an act of resistance and so identifies with a symptom. In the film *Juliet*, through challenging her female teacher, is enacting her resistance to the constitution of the social order which nevertheless structures her subjectivity. She reacts against the gendered social order by correcting her teacher's mistakes and thereby exercising her notion of free will. More so she embraces the Master signifier by enjoying this identification and obedience to the investment of choice and free will, as if it really exists. In this way she resists the imposed cultural and social signifiers of family, education and religion. Layla enjoys the portrayal of Juliet's *jouissance* and thereby expresses her affinity with the image of a strong and wilful young woman who is subject-supposed-to-know in that she dissents from the

Master's discourse through correcting the teacher's mistake. What is particularly enticing here is how the subject-supposed-to-know shifts from the teacher, who is institutionally positioned as Master, to Juliet. Layla is identifying as the barred subject, an agent of the Hysteric's discourse who is questioning the Master's discourse. This exposes to the Hysteric that the Master never really knows the truth so the Hysteric remains unsatisfied. The teacher is thus exposed as a false Master. The attempt to construct a single and unified identity is proposed as an ideal and this represents a social identity and an instrument of jouissance. At the same time young women participants transform a subject-supposed-to-know into a transcendent desire, one that is posited within humanistic discourse as an attempt to bridge the split subject and shield the horror of the gap:

Rose: I think we probably want some basic want of the whole human – humanity you know? Like the whole – sort of like to belong, to be loved and love... food, shelter and necessities like that.

Layla: Yeah, the basic needs of humanity. And above from that, you have your own personal interests. But I guess what you want first is, you know, to be loved and to love others. But if that goes wrong, you want to put it right.

More specifically young women speak of a compulsion to serve others and be useful, an ideological belief which they have internalised within an essentialised discourse, yet at the same time struggle with, as Kim articulates:

Umm... I'm influenced by others a lot and actually I would not like to have that. It's something I don't want, but there's a part of me that will never change the fact of wanting to make a difference...

It's that letting people down thing, you know? I've only done this in the past couple of years, but I have tried to make decisions for myself, even if it is going to affect another person. And

that is quite a hard thing for me as I am inspired by other people, or you know, affected by other people around me. Like when I was [studying music at university] and everyone went partying and I wanted to work, it was really hard for me to say, “I don’t want to come with you”.

To doubt oneself is an experience which tests belief and takes into account its opposition, which is to be a desirable image for the Other. The uncertain subject is revealed as fallible in the social context which she consciously doubts. Doubting also has the function of critiquing the ego, that is, through doubting the subjective mirage is seen through. Kim expresses her doubt as an assertion of setting up a wish fulfilment of gaining success, against the tension of being with friends.

The creative gaze

During a one on one interview with Chris, he recalls how his creative endeavours impact on his relationship with his father. The projection of the name-of-the-father is inscribed as a more direct desire for the injunction of the Law that one ought to master desire as a super-ego imperative:

Like I know when my father is at a performance, something like *Silencio* [Christchurch contemporary ensemble] which has basically just exhausted me – I know that I am really happy that he’s there. Then afterwards we might talk about it, like he’s happy or not with it and if he enjoys it or not. He would perhaps respond in a way that was missing from my experiences with Dad. Because they separated and he was always coming home late from the pub and ra ra ra.. and so that might be one way it’s related? I might be simply trying to impress my father. You know?

Chris’s positions his father in two ways. Firstly as a symbolic father who governs scrutiny and exercises reason. And secondly, in a more elusive way as a jouissance which is

representative of the participant's measure as a son. Chris extends the paternal metaphor to that of the desire to please his mother:

And it might not just be Dad, you know? It could easily be Mum. I know it's a lot of Dad, because it's always.. even now my relationship with my Dad is still.. it's might be that.. umm.. a CD I really like, I'll give to him.

As a point of both tension and transition Chris extends his reflections to include his alienation from and his resistance to a Catholic upbringing. Furthermore he explores the "confused desires" which relate to his work as composer and sculptor:

My life's pretty lonely. Like, almost intensively so. And no one knows that really. Because people think I am around people all the time. And I am. But it doesn't plug any kind of gap. In terms of maybe an intimate kind of thing. I don't often meet in this city [Christchurch] in this town people who can plug a certain gap that maybe we as people need. So, I would say that I desire that. But it is a bit confusing because I don't know how to solve the problem. And all the kinds of ways that I might have tried in the last ten to fifteen years seem to amount to the same feeling potentially, you know? So it could be that. Umm.. as I said, I'm Catholic, so that was problematic for me, or became problematic because my teenage years, apart from the fact, holy shit, they are more complicated years anyway were dressed with this sort of, Catholic thing of you know, you don't talk about things or umm.. um.. or just a general sort of Catholic outlook. Umm, like that was confusing. And I suggest going back to those sculptures⁴², that there is residue of that in there. Whereas if I made those sculptures now, I've had some time and some processes I've been through to try and untangle that. So I would suggest that if I made those sculptures now it could still be there, but there would be

⁴² The sculptures Chris is referring to will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

much more structure to what I was feeling in that. Whereas in the.. umm.. when I was twenty-one it was almost like it was too big for me. So it's kind of there, but necessarily in control. And not that you need to be in control of it either. I just think that I was aware that it was there, but in terms of making clay, it's just there. It's not like, because I am that.. you know? So umm.. being Catholic creates all sorts of confusion about what it even is to desire. It's almost you are not allowed to desire anything when you're a Catholic, you know?

Chris continues and connects his Catholic upbringing to the question of desire:

Umm.. I can only say maybe.. you know? For me, you know.. I am sort of aware that you are asking directly about me, which is kind of.. I don't know what you are going to do, but that's fine.. I'm happy with that! I'm very instinctual with absolutely everything in my life. For some reason, I'm comfortable when I'm not sure what it is that I am doing. I don't know why it is like that, but as soon as I am kind of aware that.. umm.. you do this and then you do that.. it's not like I am disinterested, that's wrong, it's just where I'm trying to get to in my life, it's beyond. I've already said, it's sculpture and music. And you know it's theatre. But I don't see myself as being either of them. It's something kind of.. maybe a synthesis? Maybe none of it and maybe something else I haven't discovered yet? But I have this kind of feeling, that pretty much every day when I wake up that I haven't kind of arrived [emphasis] at an understanding of how my life can have a sense of kind of resolve. And that could just be the big existential question that never gets answered! [laughs]. I might be ninety-nine and saying the same thing here! [laughs]. Who knows! Umm.. So in that, I'm convinced that there are all sorts of desires and things that are linked. And this is the complicated thing to untangle I think.

Tracey, also a successful creative artist reflects on how belief and her longing to create are in tension:

I was going through a weird sort of umm.. point in my life where I found it really hard to get really worked up about.. just things. Or stuff that makes us tick, you know? Like it was just a

weird..umm.. time. So, but I've often been intrigued by umm.. Buddhism. And found that it is interesting being an artist. A musician because you have got such a desire to play music and desire to create. And that may strike.. has always struck me as quite a clash in terms of the two things we are marrying together. You know? Obviously, we take principles of one thing, but I don't think I could truly be.. ever be.. just one sort of, a Buddhist. Or ever be something, because I have got too many counter-acting parts within me to really make that work.

The creative location offers a promise of an ideal image for the subject who feels estranged from the social world. To contribute in an original way revitalises a drive through of creative work. In this way the subject is revealed to other subjects as apolitical with transformative capacities. Vighi and Feldner claim that, "Žižek insists that we are *always* duped, especially when we believe we are not, because we never subjectivise, or translate into conscious knowledge, the unconscious content that binds us to a given symbolic order of meaning" (2010, p. 31-32). While still binding one to desire, the struggle for recognition is temporarily suspended and the creative expression, though suffused in the belief of creativity as the Master, moves closer towards desire for a common language. Chris expresses an antagonism towards the socio-symbolic field. For him, there is a real risk of encountering others and their desires. He states: "My life's pretty lonely. Like, almost intensively so. And no one knows that really. Because people think I am around people all the time. And I am. But it doesn't plug any kind of gap." The signifier of solitude is an investment in the belief of identifying the romantic ego image of the self as Other. For Chris, loneliness is both a symptom and a revolutionary act and offers the potential for identification with the Real as well as for a retreat from ideology. However, ideology provides the context for this retreat, as ironically he creatively functions because he identifies with his malfunction. His need for belief is premised on the notion that subjectivity can be attained through a desire to create. Social and historical conditions predicate this and provide the conditions for desire. However, his *jouissance* is reinstated through the gaze of seeing his parents satisfied by the spectacle of him creating music. Ideology designates a space from which Chris can recognise himself and construct his identity through socio-symbolic networks.

The traumatic gaze

To abandon one's desire and to submit to recognise the [O]ther is to become a slave; to risk one's life in a bid for recognition is to become a master (Macey, 1995, p. 78).

Tracey, a musician, reflects upon how the trauma of the Christchurch earthquakes interrupted her state of self suspension and provides a way of connecting belief with desire:

I was having real difficulty getting myself.. I don't know.. excited about.. It wasn't like. It just wasn't really like excited about.. you know.. OK.. you know, buying new things or umm.. even going to a market. It was kind of.. it just wasn't.. I wasn't interested. And it was weird. It was a weird feeling because you ended up feeling like you were kind of almost disconnected to.. being a person. You know? And I was also going through that whole thing of you know, the environment thing and everything that we do.. it was sort of.. a whole like, big process. A whole lot of different stuff. But it kind of.. I think I previously said to you, when everyone was shaken into, 'Oh my gosh, life is so.. so small and we are just so inconsequential'. When the earthquake happened. I was kind of the opposite. I was just like, 'thank goodness'. There was just like, something real has just happened to me. And it made me feel even more.. I felt like I should start re-embracing the things that make me human. So it was kind of like opposite ends of the spectrum. I was starting to feel like my feet were coming back to land on the ground again. And I was starting to celebrate, 'Ok, well.. I need to just.. In order for my life and the way I want to be happy, I need to really become and surrender to some things and I can't change them'. Or you know, I just need to find things and there is no right or wrong answer. I just need to be truthful to myself. And sort of, the weird earthquake thing was just kind of like, I was just able to feel like I didn't have to, I guess, well not necessarily save the world. Or just have all these things that I was trying to disengage myself from. In some ways I re-embraced my desire to have like.. and I did want to go to a market and feel excited by it, being human and enjoy the sights and smells. And colours and stuff like that. So yeah, it was just an interesting little umm.. segment.

An important question of ideology is raised through this transcription: *from where is the gaze of belief staged?* Adopting the role of social critic, this participant inscribes interplay between what could be considered the politics of nostalgia (how the ideal life is constructed within historical context) and the earthquakes during September 2010 and February 2011. In this way Tracey is able to frame her presence as both within and apart from this traumatic event. The lack of an initial symptom which she describes as apathy (which can also be considered a malfunctioning symptom) is transformed into the functional symptom of rekindling belief in the attempt to identify desire. The yearning for Symbolic parameters is reinstated through a sudden and traumatic event (the intrusion of the Real) thus reinstating the symptom. Such a logic of belief lends itself to the recognition of choice, as Salecl argues (2010, p. 10). The guilt of recognising that one has choice and can act (particularly in the pursuit of a social or creative movement) provokes anxiety for the participant. It demands that the participant surrenders desire in favour of belief, in the hope that this promise of belief will deliver. In the face of possible failure, belief in possibility is at this juncture crucial to the intricate relationship between desire and belief. Tracey's need to believe in her place relative to her desires is crucially suffused within a consumerist discourse – “I can go to a market.. and feel happy”. The reaffirmation of such a belief is within an ecological discourse – ‘conscious’ consumerism - in which desire and belief are apparently no longer in ideological tension. Tracey grapples with the ideological conditions which structure a kind of active engagement with the Other as being both historical and social:

Umm.. Well, I grew up in.. like.. Anglican. And from a real early age, I'd go regularly to church and stuff and from an early age I just didn't.. [pause] it just didn't ring true to me and the other stuff I used to be fed. And the things that have always rung true to me and I guess from when I grew up, I've had some really difficult chapters in my life, to me, I guess my religion has always been nature. And I have a real sense of strength and being at peace with nature. And I know lots of artists and stuff always have that kind of connection. Umm.. so.. yeah, so I wasn't kind of a question of .. of.. my love of nature, but also just sort of.. my love.. I guess sort of agnostic sense of greater sense of spiritual body. I have.. I've looked into other,

read some other things, looked into other things, but I always felt like there are always these.. so many different rules to apply. To religion. Whereas, for me it's just.. you know.. you got to.. love and it's just.. I guess I fit better with being simple rather than having things like different rules where I have to live by. Umm.. so.. that's why I've never been able to really truly.. you know.. embrace – totally respect for whatever religions people have. But I just can't quite.. I have too much of a.. I guess, I question.. I have a questioning mind to be able to apply myself to a constraint and confines and just kind of surrender myself to that. Alone. Which I can understand a lot of people find safety in that. You know, there's sort of a safety to be in being able to know, umm.. sort of the rules and the confines of structure that people can live with. And I guess in a way that is what was happening last year. It was just like trying to even.. re-establish that there was a construct.. structure that existed for me or existed in the world and what was it? Did it exist or.. you know? I was going through this and these interesting debates within myself. Which has happened before but probably not as strong in such a condensed chapter. But umm.. yeah.. so I guess for me I just come back to the realisation that I'm happy within myself and my religion or.. or.. thing that is just more centred within, you know, sort of an agnostic kind of thing. Rather than a defined thing. Yeah.

Nothing at all is preventing Tracey from obsessively pursuing her pleasures without regard for anyone else. Nothing is preventing her from knowingly polluting the environment by using unsafe products or wasting resources. What does emotionally apprehend Tracey is her moral landscape which determines her belief in curbing one's habits for the sake of planet, a choice entwined with endorsing ideological political correctness. Belief takes on a different appearance, although ideologically is it made up of a similar external authority. Although on the face of it, the current fashionable, politicised, somewhat homologous and singular ecological discourse may have the appearance of fringe, hippy or open mindedness, nothing could be further from the truth. As Žižek states, "Today, nothing is more oppressive and regulated than being a simple hedonist" (2012). Both ecological and religious discourses fall within the domains of the Symbolic and the Imaginary; that which can be articulated and has a name is also not entirely understood and therefore must be compensated through fantasy. Tracey seeks her desire as a *jouissance* of the Real. However, she encounters a vacuum which

she fills by inserting a moral limit signified in the Symbolic. This limit determines how she shapes her convictions and moral order and is fixed within ideology. In this way belief is self imposed and provides an ethical limit to the recognition of desire. It is challenging to articulate a dominant identity because it relies on a literacy of desire which is of the order of the unconscious. Belief provides the perfect mediation to resolve this tension because it offers a fluid and fairly reliable subjectivity. The belief that desire can be approached with authenticity can be understood as recognition for differentiation as Tracey goes on to articulate:

[A]nd I guess that umm.. my desire with my music is to just be.. I suppose I guess.. what we talked about, this religion concepts and stuff. It's not like I have really analysed it. It just kind of comes out of me. But I have a real need to be integral in what I do and for that to be, like, truthful. And, umm.. I like to.. I have a desire I guess to.. coming back to this word - I kind of like that word. It's a challenge! - to take things that exist, and take sounds that exist and play around with them. So there is a desire to be a little bit different in some ways, you know, to be able to umm.. obviously create pleasure and create surprise. And.. and.. do something that is kind of unique and different.

To recapitulate from Chapter 2, a symptom is registered when one wants to articulate something and then fails. Sublimation occurs when the libidinal investment is situated elsewhere, in more socially acceptable manifestations such as the artistic and creative. Alain-Millar cited Lacan in relation to belief (2006):

Lacan says that the symptom is a phenomenon of belief, constituted by the fact that one believes in it: *one believes it*, one believes in it, as one believes in an entity that could say something. I will come back to the term 'belief' for one could think that the symptom imposes itself such that it wouldn't be a matter of belief. I think that the belief that Lacan talks about is like a belief in the 'wanting-to-say' of the symptom.

Performing music is a functional sublimation. However it is not recognised as a symptom by this subject (nor necessarily by other subjects). Nevertheless, there is for Tracey the longing for something original, “to be a little bit different”; some elusive, yet nevertheless productive, form of authenticity resulting from the lack. She is never completely satisfied by the appearance of the symptom – it is never the full story, the whole truth or an entirely reliable indication of what is happening. However, an ideological tension occurs when the demands of earning a living remain at the expense of developing a literacy of desire:

You spend all this time.. you know.. thousands and thousands of hours just even getting to the point where you can play your instrument to a satisfactory level. And then.. you.. find yourself at a time, where obviously you need to earn money and just end up.. ahhh.. and people get sort of s-s-stuck. It's not a judgmental thing, it's just that you end up playing music that you might not necessarily like.. umm.. doing cover bands [not performing original music]. You know, you end up not actually truly finding the.. you know.. the true.. umm.. what's the word I'm looking for? Umm.. oh.. err.. what's, you know? Your ability? Your? Potential! You know, finding your true potential? Of what can do.. and.. So a lot of people go through life as a musician, and they may be a great musician but they are not necessarily listening to what.. you know.. and they might be slightly unhappy. And not sure why. And it could be because they are not necessarily doing any self-discovery or exploration and how they can fit in. So everyone becomes little carbon copies of.. you know.. each other.

Tracey is torn between ambivalence and perfection, both within the structure of the super-ego and the relationship between jouissance, the law and language. Music, like ecology and Christianity provides the location for a displacement of desire and yet at the same time throws desire back at the subject in the guise of belief. These are all material inscriptions which place the subject behind a pane of glass from where one object of jouissance can be viewed displaced by another, for example Christianity by ecology. Lacan states that, “we transcend everything and we simply stay in the same place” (1978, p. 91), meaning that the subject is an effect of the logic of the traumatic location. The traumatic location suggests that

the subject is constituted as its own rival, as Lacan's mirror stage reveals. The Law has not changed, but rather our relationship to it has – it is dispersed differently, depending on how it materialises (that is, in creativity, religion and so on) for the subject and oscillates between keeping desire at bay and attempting to return to it. The captivation of oneself as an alienated subject structures the desire for recognition. This captivation and recognition are simultaneous processes which are expressed through misrecognitions of social relations, thereby plotting the position of the subject. Within the traumatic location there is evident a conflict between power imposed by the super-ego and that of subjective desire.

The ethical gaze

Tracey mindfully criticises cultural and social conditions that regulate desire and belief - these create her own trajectory of choice which, although culturally specific, is at the same time a recognition that choice is posited differently within varying geographical locations:

And then there's the chick-talk with friends, 'do you want a child?' and all that? So there's all those questions that are sort of interesting. We've got the choice whereas a lot of places in the world don't. You know what I mean? So it is kind of.. you get into this really interesting zone where desires are in fact equivalent to choice. Even today I was chatting with [friend] and it was like, 'when are you going to have a kid?'. And it was this constant sort of, you know, people just sort of say it to you, you know? 'Are you going to have a kid?' And then my friend and I were just discussing, did we want one? But then it is kind of like, you know, hard to know what you want isn't it? Because I guess in a lot of other scenarios it just happens and you.. you.. accommodate to the scenario that happens. That being a woman in my thirties, with really, quite sort of interested in the environment and I'm interested in the environment and music. Not a career girl thing going on, but you know what I mean? So it is interesting the debate between desire and procreation because it is like, the older I get the harder it is to make that decision. Whereas probably when I was eighteen I was like sort of love-struck and [laughs] and you know? It is just really interesting. But in lots of other cultures you just don't have that kind of, you don't sit around with a beer and discuss whether you want to have a

child. So it's kind of like, you know, in a way the fact that we can discuss desire of that is a choice thing, you know? Not a luxury for a lot of people.

Tracey elevates belief over desire as a way of both confronting and avoiding the deadlock between them. In confronting the limitations of the concept of freedom, her fallback position is that of belief. However, she pushes the deadlock further in a subjective way revealing ambivalence towards choice when facing a future decision to embark on motherhood:

I mean, obviously there's the pre-conceived idea that people want children. But I mean I know people that don't have children and that has been their idea. And sometimes I meet people who just can't understand the concept that people might not want it. It seems that certain people seem to have this concept that it is in us – which we are all kind of destined to procreate. I know that is obviously how our bodies work. But because we have developed to such a point that we can chose these things these days it can.. it is an interesting question because there are mostly, as clichéd as they are, they kind of umm.. you know, the little life chapters that everyone goes through – you know, high school, university, sort of you know, you know, being, going on trips and always kind of little scenarios that mean.. So I guess people get sort of so used to that, that sometimes if someone doesn't quite want that for themselves, it can kind of ahh.. just even, just upset the belief systems that some people might have. [slight pause] But I just have to, have.. if I'm having the worst day I just have to truly be thankful that I've got freedom of choice. Because that is a great amazing thing. So.. so.. in a way the whole desire thing is such a luxury item. In a lot of ways. From my point of view. Yeah, it just sort of seems like – and that's wonderful and that's how maybe how life should be. Not in an excessive kind of way, but able to have the freedom of choice, you know? And that is fantastic because a huge amount of the population don't have that, you know? From day one they are sort of designated a role that they play for the rest of their lives. So yeah..

It can be argued that a defensive position is not altogether different from one of desire. For both to manifest requires that each is the opposing force of the other. What results is repression and resistance to a position from which belief can be revealed. Furthermore for

belief to be enunciated it must project an ideological position which allows the subject to experience it as an instrument of jouissance. 'Freedom of choice' but 'not in an excessive kind of way' reveals both the desire to eradicate, but also to interpret the symptom through the enjoyment which belief promises. In this way the subject is confronted with the tautology of desire and belief – they are so placed that each can be understood as an opposing force for subjectivity. Such undoing of knowledge is an experience of jouissance. However, jouissance becomes a threatening, yet necessary, location. Enjoyment after all is not unproblematic and circulates at the expense of the subject (Rothenberg and Foster, 2003, p. 4). A space for the construction of an ethical subjectivity is fundamentally a traumatic space because wholeness can never be guaranteed. Might it be that Tracey highlights a very important contemporary symptom: the jouissance of the modern, middle class woman who in confronting the subjectivity of motherhood is bound between the super-ego split, on the one hand, of attaining subjective perfection and, on the other, with an ambivalence concerning identity. Motherhood seems to be regarded as an empty signifier for Tracey, the system's Other which appears as the Other of culture and is furthermore, unmasterable. The belief in motherhood serves as a Master signifier from which human actions can be judged as separate and eternal: Tracey certainly problematises this signification of self justification which endows identity.

Undoing knowledge and resistance to belief

“The resisting subject fails to see what is in front of it” (Alcorn, 1994, p. 35).

Resistance can be understood as a resistance to belief and to the ideologies which constitute it. Such resistance can be linked to a self identity and offers a glimpse into the forces of repression, into the construction of events and into trauma. These glimpses are tenuous but nevertheless offer a promise of discovery for the subject – a possible truth. The subject therefore strives for a particularity of discourse which is uniquely personal. This is despite the very definition of discourse that implicates a social bond.

The Master's discourse can be understood as both a system of representation and of exclusion. Language is always an experience of loss for the subject. However, the Master's discourse can, through the insistence of metaphor, rectify this by promising that trauma resulting from loss is not ongoing. In this way, discourses can rotate from one to another depending on the ideological imperative: for the Hysteric, the Other works *against*, whereas for the pervert⁴³, the Other works *for*. The resistance to belief is a resistance to the structure of the University discourse which promotes dominant subjective *knowing*: resistance is a way of constituting both difference and sameness. The reflexive subject critiques the knowledge of the University discourse in the pursuit for the Master. Such a reconfiguration of the operation of resistance is ideologically complex as Kim, a young woman of twenty-four highlights:

Mmm. [pause] I said this year [laughter], I gave my year to the gods this year, and I went, "Whatever happens happens." And I'm not, you know, like, well I don't think I want marriage and settle down yet, but if Mr Right came along and said, "Marry me." I would have gone, "Okay," because, you know, I gave it, I gave it away, it wasn't my choice. But the other one was travelling. I said if travel comes up then I said yes, and one of them did and we went to Europe, you know, so. I also gave that want to a spiritual realm, which gave me no control over what I wanted, and that was cool. Like I actually really, really enjoyed not having the power, because you, then you don't think about all that other stuff.

The role of knowledge is integral to belief because participants attempt to create conditions from which they construct a master signifier to identify with the elusive Thing. As Kim illustrates, while is not easy, she attempts to demonstrate a belief in the certainty of an Other

⁴³ Although the discourse of the pervert is not a formal Lacanian discourse, it can be argued that it is for Žižek, who maintains that we are all perverse subjects.

and a conviction that the Other somehow *knows*. Kim undertakes this by assuming her castration and the *jouissance* subsequent to it. She decentres belief, understanding that the Thing she desires is a fantasmatic structure of identification and constituted by being a castrated subject. While she poses a variety of super-ego gazes which include travel, marriage, parenthood, she also acknowledges her blind spots, “[it] gave me no control over what I wanted”. She constructs herself as a subject of various signifiers, but at the same time does not fully submit to their knowledge. However, the escape from knowledge is an illusion rather than an escape; resistance is a self reflexive process which can transform subjectivity. For Kim, Otherness does not pose a threat to the particularity of subjectivity as the ultimate act is to surrender completely. Kim highlights a poignant philosophical gesture: in attempting to achieve some sort of transcendence whilst trying to live in an imperfect world, she embraces the Master and its concept of totality: “come what may”.

What belief offers is a false promise of neutrality, in that one believes without necessarily believing, but not without belief. It is a trick played on the subject and the subject to some extent knows this. The ideologies which structure belief make a proclamation that belief does exist and so make it difficult for the subject to contest. Belief is a constant state of crisis for the subject because it cannot be singularly located. What can be located are distorted signifiers through the metaphors of ideology. The trauma of facing desire becomes evident when the subject naturalises belief. For belief to work the subject merely needs to participate in it, without necessarily recognising its ideological function. In order for the subject to maintain investment in belief, a gaze alongside ideology is crucial. Although both desire and belief rely on fantasy to stage a scene of subjective wholeness, desire is always the desire of the Other and therefore more difficult to recognise and explicate. Belief on the other hand is staged through ideological signifiers such as ‘culture’, ‘family’, ‘god’ and can reorient the subject with other signifiers. The decentring nature of belief is that signifiers are unsigned. Participants talk using signifiers which they struggle to fully articulate within current ideological conditions, for example, reconciling capitalist limitations with transcendental

ideals. Both are empty signifiers which the subject fills – Tracey poses a deadlock when she ponders how one lives an ‘ethical’ life while still living comfortably and Gary speaks of his wish for his daughters to find a ‘passion’. Although the struggle to locate oneself in belief may be difficult it is much easier than locating oneself in desire. The belief that in order to achieve subjective wholeness the subject aspires to shared virtues with other subjects, essentialises subjectivity. Beneath the appearance of belief is an emphasis on the split subject and the proposition that the Master knows. This is essential in generating belief from which the ideological conditions are propagated and roles designated: Jenny had a strong desire to be a mother during the 1970’s and Tracey expresses ambivalence at motherhood during present times. The veil of belief is revealed in ideologies which structure the *jouissance* which is pursued and this is traumatic because it upsets essentialised ideas by shifting the solid ground from which belief is perceived to be located. This movement is evident in the realisation that one is not a ‘universal individual of the world’, that one does struggle with language, is alienated and is oriented towards enjoyment. The subject is faced with the confrontation of belief not stacking up, of obligations and sometimes of apathy toward belief. This confrontation both galvanises and derails belief as a defence, but it allows the subject to remain intact. Religion, ecology, the family are all ideological signifiers which promise that one is *normal*. In order to develop a literacy of desire the suspension of belief must entail addressing the very desire which shapes the spectre of it. Desire is the bogeyman to belief; and it is a bogeyman (the signifier) who must be confronted.

The promise of belief as a means to develop a literacy of desire

Belief promises the subject a *jouissance* so that s/he can attempt to characterise desire through objects and experiences constituted through ideology. The tyranny of belief is the illusion of the neo-liberalist self-made subject. The trajectory of the question, *what does it mean to live a good life*, is posited as a self reflexive process through which the subject recognises and regulates desire. The big Other – the social ideological discourses which govern systems – is not always so convincing as a Master. If the social insists, “Do what I tell

you, because I told you to”, the subject has the problematic illusion of choice to resist an opposing set of beliefs. However, these beliefs do not represent radical alterity. Rather the subject needs to be seduced by the true Master: “Do what I tell you because it is right and good for you”. Being right and good are not necessarily ground-breaking seductions. However the ideological meanings that are registered entail that the subject can reshape the existing Master (the social) by reducing its complexities and tyranny. The contemporary Master needs to be coercive, seductive, reflexive and indirect. It is important to maintain a deference to the Great Other, as Salecl (Bracher, 1994, p. 12) observes however, what is more important is that the power of a true Master is an unyielding power which directs the subject to truth. For participants the truth lies in how they construct an identity which co-exists with social ideologies governing the contexts and choices of daily life. Some ideological forces serve to insist that the subject will only ever partially know his/her place in relation to ideology – the University discourse functions in this way.

Pondering the subjectivisation to ideology, Lloyd (2007, p. 146) poses the pertinent question: what is wrong with “desiring the state’s desire?” The desire for recognition from a political entity remains crucial in legitimising the subject. In this way the state normalises ideological structures and contingencies so that the subject consolidates such recognition as being worthy of it. Belief is heavily implicated here and illustrated by how participants in this research structure belief, legitimising ideological phenomena such as consumerism, capitalism and neoliberalism with a partial visibility which perpetuates social metaphors – family, aesthetics, achievement, social activism – which all make the subject durable and ratified. In this way belief operates not only to mediate ideological politics, but also takes on a universality, a means of shaping one’s desire into a custom or practice which can be enacted, even when it can be totalising and somewhat exclusionary. Judith Butler’s poignant phrase resonates: the subject formulates “the melancholic background to one’s social world” (2006, p. 46). The ideological limits to belief and to desire are encountered as incomprehensible and therefore reliant on the big Other/social to constitute them.

The ideological deadlock of belief and desire: frustrating the specificity for subjective difference

Oh! Shit... Oh, sorry... I... Oh god! I had no idea about that! (Layla, young women's focus group).

Most of us swear in moments of surprise or frustration. This poses a curious question: *what might swearing signify?* The above quotation is a surprise response from Layla in the context of a conversation where Kim, who is her good friend, reveals that she grew up attending church. This revelation is in contrast to the shared nature of a friendship fortified by fun, loyalty and closeness as well as an active position of non-belief in god. Layla beautifully reveals through her spontaneous speech how one perceives desire against the background of an opposing authority of belief. In her attempt to deliver meaning, she interlocks *shit* and *god* within the same enunciation. Both words are metaphors for both desire and belief; she unconsciously affiliates them with having the same purpose of expressing ideological deadlock. Here belief and desire are intrinsically connected in that they occupy a position of subjective difference and can act both for and against a moral position. From a position of deadlock, this participant is assuming multiple locations which float unreflexively between Hysteric and Master. Layla does this without necessarily identifying with either discourse, merely with the conflict of the gaze.

Swearing is an unreflexive activity of hysteria and a poignant example of the deadlock the subject encounters on a daily basis. There is an evident discontinuity between the swear word and its utterance. The enunciation of *god* muzzles desire and imposes socially sanctioned sacred ideology. By contrast the enunciation of *shit* reasserts desire, albeit with guilt. Enunciation of the swear word takes place at the limits of *jouissance*. This *jouissance*, symbolic of that which the body emanates, does not invite the Other to respond. Its function is merely to release the vile image of desire. In the quest for ideological obedience Layla

apologises for the enjoyment which her *jouissance* releases and she subsequently reinstates the Law of the *good* subject.

Justifying one's beliefs entails linking them with some form of materiality, action or ritual which accompanies the enunciation of the proposition *to believe*. Any lack of justification is a pleasure to the modern cynic who reveals countervailing reasons which undo belief. However, I claim that a subject's reason to believe is justification in itself and the ideological conditions are already in place for belief to have an appropriate standing for the subject, whatever the context of those conditions might be. In the absence of a reasonable justification for belief, experiences and observations of contemporary ideological co-ordinates stand in for justification, for example, being part of a social movement, reasoning particular life choices and creating a mastery of one's craft. When subjects search for those beliefs which are specific to them, they form analogous relationships with the ideal desire of belief and with its justification. The desire to believe in the big Other is fraught with tension, given an increasingly secular western world, the changing dynamics of relationships, the increasing reliance on technology and the environmental and economic challenges which we are inevitably in the midst of. The current generation is forced to assess belief against these conditions and other contingencies in order to construct and establish authenticity.

New Zealand has had a history of strong Christian tradition as Duff wrote in the 1950's (1956, p. 35-36):

We still go to church to get married. We get buried. We have our children christened. We swear by God and the Bible. We turn back to religion in sorrow and in trouble... building churches and schools and hospitals and orphanages, maintaining through all its lapses and failures the dignity of man, preaching (and generally practicing) charity...

Although it appears that New Zealand society is becoming increasingly secular or agnostic, Christianity nevertheless continues to cultivate along a rather resilient signifying chain. However were god to become an empty signifier, this would be displacing that which hitherto provided the location and context for people's behaviour. Paradoxically it is the promise of freedom which binds subjects to such a belief.

The Master seeks to resolve knowledge, to have an end point. Such a desire for the particularity of this logic provides cogent signifiers. So powerful is the signifier of god or a transcendent, moral Other that rituals enacted to maintain such a belief are still upheld even by today's non-believers. The impetus to be or to appear to be *good* and suffused with an earnestness and righteousness is metonymised within notions of the sacred and of subjective authenticity. The divide between church and state is not so clear as highlighted in the humanistic position, which again, provides an alternative Other. However this divide provides a reliable ideological principle that promises the subject an ethical belief system. Subjects are thereby enabled to enunciate convictions which in turn structure the network or community of people to which they both belong and from which they can be differentiated. The modern Master renounces *jouissance* in exchange for a system of beliefs. One must interrogate desire against the discourse of the Master: the church, the father, class, capitalism and so on.

Nevertheless, ideological reflexivity demands that the deadlock between belief and desire is assessed against the subject's enduring sense of being or self. In order for desire to be literate for the subject, it needs to be spoken to and interpreted by other subjects. Such translation is mediated by how the subject symbolises belief. This is a libidinal position because it relies on the specificity of belief for desire. The belief that one ought to know one's place in relation to desire is, it can be argued, a fundamental position from which the dialectic of belief and desire must be symbolically constituted and operable, in order for the subject to enunciate this position to others. As human subjects we misperceive, misremember and are mistaken

more often than we might think. And herein lies a glimpse of the truth about desire and of the illusion of belief. As one cannot possess absolute knowledge, the justification for believing at times overrides the grounds for such belief. Belief acts as a fantasy screen, it cannot speak back to us and is thus posited mistakenly as truth. The alienated subject can retrospectively make sense of the process of truth, until it is established as a surprising and shocking untruth. This resonates with Lacan's claim that, "there is no metalanguage" (1977, p. 311), in the sense that any moment of epiphany does not imply a truth which lasts. There is no Other of the Other. Paradoxically it is only through making a choice between beliefs that the real choice appears. One can have grounds for believing something in spite of choosing not to. On the other hand, one can unreflexively believe. This process of justification results from a convincing ideological structure. If the ideological conditions are sound, the context in which belief lies presupposes justification. A deadlock between truth, desire and belief occurs when the Real intrudes – a trauma such as the bloodied, bludgeoned dead body of one's murdered mother, an unexpected relationship ending or the confrontation with one's mortality. For the subject the approximation of belief and desire is unstable. The subject is no longer so sure of this relationship, it is not so easily perceived and this shakes and perplexes the subject. In this way belief resembles an act accompanied by disavowal, the subject does not know what she/he is believing or why it is necessarily believed. Following a traumatic encounter the subject recognises the ideological signifiers which structures the relation between belief and desire. At this juncture the subject returns to the benefits of ideological co-ordinates – that is, the subject doesn't necessarily know what to believe but acts as if s/he does. On reflection, trauma signifies a moment of discovery for the subject and for which the importance of appearing to be a subject-supposed-to-believe is a symptom in an age of cynicism. The cynic is the location of the contemporary social subject: warding against excessive moralism while at the same time seeking transcendence. Belief signifies an act which goes beyond simple observation, it is an enunciation of how one positions oneself in relation to desire. In a world which perpetuates the mandate to enjoy without (too much) guilt, this is a position needing ideological support. Belief promises, albeit falsely to the subject, that their designated

signifier is secured from the ideological conditions that might sway it. In this way the subject is able to justify belief as specificity for difference, the difference here being that the gesture of staking one's claim in relation to desire is although distinguishable, very subtle. Belief is an act which enunciates a symbolic pantomime of truth, thereby belying fantasy for the subject. Belief creates a mirage for subjective wholeness. The subject *knows* this and enacts relationships through objects, because she/he *knows* that testimony alone is not enough in the current cynical times to justify the position of belief. In this way the fantasy of belief as mediating one's desires is preserved and organised. More importantly it ensures that the supplementing fantasy is always available to the subject, just in case the Real intrudes yet again. Belief in this way operates as the Master. It teaches the subject and identifies with the ideals of society, the super-ego injunction.

Heavenly Creatures makes an important claim not lost on participants: social reality is an illusion. One can inscribe one's fantasies into the Symbolic Order "through interlocking systems of narrativity [and] continuity" (Flitterman-Lewis, 1995, p. 3). In order to encounter the Real of one's desire, one must develop a mastery of desire. From participants' discussions about the film they appear to understand desire as both inside and outside the traumatic Real. This provokes anxiety because the gaze of the film both supports and blocks a literacy of desire. Belief positions are supplements to the limitations of the subject's experience when confronting his/her divided self.

Like belief, desire is socially constituted and perpetuated. One never looks directly at belief, nor does one at desire. Just as desire is staged and thus mobilised, so is belief. This staging and mobilisation is located through signifiers and positioned within a network of social relationships, ideological undercurrents and representations of cultural artefacts such as those which cinema provides. The logic of the Other implicates belief with desire. I claim that the doubt and uncertainty inherent in this relationship between belief and desire provide glimpses of unconscious desire. Making uncertainty the basis for any sense of certainty provides a

signifier for the subject to master belief through doubt. In order to achieve resolution of the deadlock between belief and desire, the subject needs to resist the fallback position of belief and instead attend to doubt.

Concluding comments

Individuals do not have to be lured into believing they share the same fantasy, the same enjoyment, in order for the social relation to obtain (Rothenburg and Foster, 2003, p. 8).

Belief is a way of imagining an intangible but possible certainty. This might appear to be a contradiction in terms, and in a way this contradiction is deliberate because belief relies on ambiguity in how it represents the Law. Belief is a means of uniting desire with the Law as it endows identity and provides a sense of morality with which the subject is both connected to and alienated from. It also functions as a limiting field which creates space for ideological signifiers of morality to perpetuate a certain kind of logic, such as the humanistic disposition. Belief is also a prohibitive agent that sustains desire and provides access to enjoyment. It is the Real of jouissance as it posits the subject as a slave to the attainment of truth through enjoyment. For the most part, the gaze tracks the dimension of a subject's actions through an ideological installation of how belief operates. However, the domain of belief, while implicating particular objects, relies more heavily on fantasy to construct agreed social values. This problematizes Žižek's binary of belief and non-belief as the dominant signifying chain. Agreed social values obviously alter with time, context and geography, as do the ideological foundations which sustain them. The dynamic between the Master and the Hysteric demands that there is a space outside belief where desire is foregrounded. The prohibition that the Law demands (by virtue of the Master's discourse) regulates desire and integrates belief into a fantasy of an ideal. It is argued that belief has the function of controlling jouissance, thereby creating a system of thinking and action which designates the subject within an illusion of truth making. As Žižek states, "[T]oday's hedonism combines pleasure with constraint" (cited in Butler, 2005, p. 143). The superego functions as the S1

and the Master's discourse is always operating.⁴⁴ One is always seeking reassurance from the Master, the expert who conceals power relations and sustains the guise of neutrality (Butler, 2005, p. 142). One does not need to believe in particular ideologies in order to participate in them. Neither does one need to enact particular social rituals in order to propagate the belief system from which they spring. This emphasises the gap between the subject's experience and the ideological context which ultimately provides an inevitable tension and possible risk to the subject of surrendering to a kind of fundamentalism whereby he/she *knows*, rather than merely believes. Either way subjects *act as if* belief were true, even when it is not or when they are not fully convinced. Desire plays a crucial role here in fetishising belief, as Žižek argues. In designating a scene in which belief and desire coexist for the subject, metaphors need to be provoked. A shift to the Master entails that such a signifying structure renders the location of belief an ethical act for the subject and furthermore provides an inscription for the subject not to abandon desire. The Master in striving to have himself validated relies upon the slave to desire the Master. This signifies a change in discourse to that of the Hysteric. Of course there are many inconvenient forms of ideological *objet a* which the subject can designate – such as money, specific longings or experiences and objects – which are insisted by the super-ego. These kinds of signifiers imply that subjects need to present themselves in a sort of disguise which in turn means they are not able to tell the truth regarding their desires. Belief steps in as a form of testimony and mediation having the function of insisting that one's desires are kept *in check*. Equally interesting is a consideration of the return to non-belief as a form of belief. Žižek's proposes that non-belief is as much in the shadow of ideological recognition and misrecognition and is therefore similarly a quest for enjoyment.

⁴⁴ Žižek's famous example is of decaffeinated coffee, where one can enjoy coffee without the very ingredient which makes it pleasurable. It can be argued that he is disrupting the discourse of the University by insisting that to have pleasure one ought to also constrain it. This for Žižek represents the illusion of freedom and of neutral knowledge.

Both belief and resistance to belief in this sense hold a promise, linking the ideological coordinates of belief to fantasy and posing a possible future, a promise of *real* authority, not some fake fast-food one, to quote Žižek's pertinent phrase. The illusion of this future transgresses the Law and promises the subject jouissance without the demands and commands of the spectatorial and authoritative Other from whom the subject experiences and expects scrutiny.

Belief in the big Other ensures that subjects can never fully identify themselves. However, this further gaze is marred by the *objet a*. Accepting one's alienation at this juncture is an ethical act for the subject because a literacy of desire is mediated through drive. *Doing* embraces a break from those ideological conditions which are perceived to inhibit notions of self-determination. Belief and desire are sutured together to affirm the Master signifier as consistent for the subject, so that identification with ideology never remains fully visible. Belief operates within jouissance because its subjectivities are constituted within the circulation of desire.

The law imposed by the Master promises freedom, a glimpse of desire and more pertinently, jouissance. Both serve as an important bond to social relations: “[W]ithout jouissance the subject has neither the motive for connection nor the means for disconnection” (Rothenburg and Foster, 2003, p. 6). The Master's promise is political and allows subjects to experience themselves within their own gaze and in the guise of belief. This “obscene enjoyment”, as Žižek claims, directly implicates fantasy into the political subject. The status quo is thus consolidated as Mannoni asserts (cited in Rothenburg and Foster, 2003, p. 10): “Belief, shedding its imaginary form, is symbolised sufficiently to lead on to faith, that is, to commitment”. This commitment is to the ideological context in which the subject exists.

Bourdieu (1994, p. 78) makes a compelling claim when he states that: “One of the tasks of sociology is to determine how the social world constitutes the biological libido, an

undifferentiated impulse, as a specific social libido”. Given this curiosity it is compelling to ponder more closely the relationship of desire with a more nuanced position of belief. The body as a semblance *objet a* (or that which stands in the place of the truth of desire for the subject) lies within the domain of the Imaginary. Given the temporality of knowledge, belief is a promise and thus has no present tense. It occupies a space for the subject that is transient and often just out of grasp. By contrast, the body occupies a materiality as something to be displayed and represented within the order of desire. Such conditions of how the body is symbolically articulated and provoked as an object of desire will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: The body as an object which speaks to desire



Illustration 21. *L'Evidence éternelle* (The Eternally Obvious), Magritte, R. (1930).

There's something shameful about admitting that you want something (June, participant, creative industries focus group).

The fantasy itself is the most real thing (June, participant creative industries focus group).

Introduction

This second analytical chapter will focus on how both the body and sexual difference provide for subjects an articulation of desire. It is in this context that I pose the question: *how does the subject implicate the body in desire and in being desired?* Much has been researched and documented on 'human sexual behaviour' and desire largely from assuming a biological discourse, such as the well known research undertaken in the mid twentieth century by Masters and Johnson, or survey research such as that of Kinsey. However, although these researchers have contributed greatly to the field of sexuality, the role of the unconscious was not considered, this unique element being left for psychoanalysis to explore. Specifically, Lacanian psychoanalysis constantly implicates desire in the playing out of sexual difference which is based on Lacan's formulation of sexuation. Although the process of sexuation is entirely distinct from the conscious formation of sexual identities, it is from this vantage point of sexuation that, to desire and to be desired is a condition for both masculine and feminine genders. Given that the concept of gender renders opacity, it is important to give more clarity to this term. There is a clear distinction between 'decided' gender and masculine and feminine constructions of sexuation. Although the word gender can refer to sexual identities, Lacan primarily considers it from a perspective of the sexed subject or masculine and feminine structures. Importantly psychoanalysis foregrounds the sexed subject and sexual difference as imperative to understanding desire as being the desire of the Other. By sexual difference, I refer to Frosh's definition (1995, p. 166):

[B]ecause masculine and feminine are constructed categories, they never hold firm, but are always collapsing into one another. Moreover, because of the centrality of sexuality in psychoanalysis, the ambiguity of sexual difference comes to infiltrate all its domains.

Lacanian psychoanalysis argues that there are three registers from which the body can be approached: the biological meanings of the body which lie in the domain of the Symbolic; the function and experience of libido which is located within the Real; and the relation of the body as an image to the big Other which is projected in the Imaginary. The body *becomes* a reality by way of inscriptions of Symbolic meanings attributed to it. Soler (1984, *The Body in the Teaching of Jacques Lacan*) furthers Lacan's account of the body when she states: "Language is [a] body, and [a] body which gives body, what is more a superstructure." For the participants in this study representations and ideas of the body are implicated in their talk about desire. Participants' talk is consistent with approaching the body within the registers of the Real, Symbolic and Imaginary and this transpires during analysis of their transcriptions.

In this chapter I argue that although for many participants the body holds a promise of understanding desire within the Master signifier, this is nevertheless a frustrating position. Like the concept of belief, the body vacillates between occupying the position of the semblant or agent within the Master and the Hysteric's discourses. The body serves as an elusive and problematic Master because it is primarily from the body that desire is understood and framed. This is not to privilege essentialism because the body also functions as an ideological spectacle from which desire can be staged and possibly articulated. For participants, however, the body is both a curse and a promise of knowledge in that it reveals the very symptoms from which desire is experienced as a problem that is difficult to resolve. In this way the body functions as ambiguous in how the subject articulates the position of being a sexed subject. Drawing upon Žižek's interpretation of Lacan's fifth discourse, the Capitalist discourse, I claim that the body is an ideological and political vehicle or conduit through which desire is staged. The body provides a way of grasping and playing with desire.

This is illustrated when participants implicate the body as a matrix from which they attempt to craft a logic and literacy of desire for themselves. I argue that participants are both enticed and frustrated by the body as a specific location for desire to be understood, and that furthermore the body is of necessity the site of jouissance. This process fetishes the body, from which the subject constructs an ‘organic unity’ from which desire is mapped by those social ideologies which are already in place and constantly repeated.

What is a body?

Much has been theorised about the body and its relationship with subjectivity. The common biological discourse foregrounds physiology as constituting the parameters within which the body can be generally understood. Within the limitations of physiology, the contemporary understanding of desire is principally sexual and libidinal. A foregrounding of these elements suggests essentialist discourses through which the body is fully able to be understood and that the relationship to the subject inhabiting the body is uncomplicated, seamless and regulatory. However, the question of the body and its relationship with the subject is not as straightforward as biological discourse suggests, particularly when the body is conceptualised as not necessarily coherently connecting with one’s desires but rather as being in a state of process and flux. When people indicate that they do not “feel their age” or are living “beyond their years” they can be implying a disjuncture between the chronology of the body and subjective encounters and experiences. The body acts as a kind of cartography with which to map the trajectory of subjective experiences and desires. Although this may provide reassurance, I maintain that for the contemporary subject such life span maps are problematic and frustrating. For the subject the body is not necessarily a site for self determination, but rather always implicated by its imaginary relation to the Other. In this way the body is vulnerable and uncertain. The social construction of the body is in tension with subjective desires, yet remains a provocative force from which conventions, ideals and assumptions about it are understood. Today many challenges exist to fixed, singular and restrictive ideas surrounding the body: women are having children later in life, plastic surgery and body art

are prevalent, people are generally living longer owing to advances in public health, medical science and technologies, bodies that are disabled are given improved mobility and functionality by technologies that assist them. The body is here being embraced by the subject as the ultimate Other and thus as having limitless potential affording both self recognition and understanding of what the body can achieve. Lacan claims that one *has* a body, rather than is born into it. He means that there is a difference between a body and an organism (Soler, 1984, *The Body in the Teaching of Jacques Lacan*):

Lacan said it one day: the animal does not have a body. The animal is an organism. There is a nuance here and that which justifies us in saying “I have a body”-- to take our body as an attribute instead of taking it as our very being is, if I may put it that way, which we, as subjects, can do without it. As subjects of the signifier, we are disjunct from the body, as you can see from the fact that the subject is the one who is spoken about before he speaks. The subject, indeed, is there, in speech, before he has a body, before he is born.

June and Richard, creative industries focus group participants, illustrate how the Symbolic and the Imaginary converge and play an important part in such recognition:

June: For me, that’s why I think imagination is a really important key because as you say, how do you desire something you haven’t actually had before. So I think for me anyway, it’s the combination of what Sam [another participant in the same focus group] was saying about seeing it around, seeing other people experiencing it and seeing what it does to them. And then that imagination of what would that be like for me and my life... And also for me personally, just as a real physiological response to it. It was actually my... almost instinct. And what I was saying before about wanting a child and not being able to have it. It was such a gut reaction. You know... it was really kind of... visceral response to a need I had... yeah, so I... I... so, I under... so... that’s for me... is the seeing it in other people, using my imagination to... be able to put myself in that situation. And then also, probably... originally coming from a point of... just a feeling... it’s like, how do you know whether you felt that... how do you

know that you feel desire... it's a feeling for me. It's a... you know... actual... you know... I can feel it. In my gut. It gets you! [slight laugh].

Richard: Yeah and that feeling can drive another desire...

Richard and June are talking about their experiences of desire as a bodily one. They implicate the order of the Imaginary as revealing a void or gap that the subject repeatedly attempts to fill. At this juncture where the subject is attempting to fill the void, the Imaginary and Symbolic converge. For June the ideal of motherhood, which she perceives as filling her void, is also important to the structure of her neurotic symptoms, her lack, which she understands as *not* being a mother. To briefly recapitulate, the symptom is best described as the testimony of a relationship with the impossible and it traces the modality of the subject's *jouissance*. The emphasis which Lacan attributes to the psychoanalytic symptom is that the subject *believes* in it and thus the aim of analysis is for the subject to identify with his/her symptom because it holds meaning for survival and sense. Such identification with the symptom holds the promise of accessing the Real as well as offering a way of managing the symptom in the Symbolic. The subject is compelled to articulate his/her symptom and the body holds a possibility for achieving this. Identification with the symptom prompts the subject to act in different ways and to search for possibilities of living with a changing body throughout the life span. It also affords the subject the opportunity to cultivate an ideological imagination which attempts to reconcile the limitations of the body with its possibilities. June highlights this by attempting to reconcile her ambivalence of wanting a child with an anticipation of a visceral experience, or what she describes as a "gut feeling". It is at this juncture that the Symbolic and the Imaginary come together for the subject, although there always remains a gap.

Feminist theorist, Elizabeth Grosz (2005, p. 50) contends that the body can be understood as a series of metaphors, "a possession [and] a property of the subject". For Grosz, the body can

be understood as a signifying structure through which the subject expresses or attempts to communicate something. Grosz goes on to elaborate (p. 50):

As such, [the body] is a two-way conduit: on one hand, it is a circuit for the transmission of information from outside the organism, conveyed through the sensory apparatus; on the other hand, it is a vehicle for the expression of an otherwise sealed and self contained, incommunicable psyche. It is through the body that the subject can express his or her interiority, and it is through the body that he or she can receive code, and translate the inputs of the “external” world.

Grosz offers a particular discourse about the body as a metaphorical construct that is consistent with June and Richard’s articulations of how the body plays a direct role in understanding desire. It is without doubt that the body constitutes how the subject operates in the world and specifically how one might frame desire. Similarly, in *Bodies that Matter* (2005), Judith Butler intersects the materiality of the body with the performativity of gender. This intersection marks a continuation of her thesis on the tensions and relations between cultural understandings of the body and how the subject comes to inhabit the body that is attributed to him/her. She maintains that both sex and gender are constituted by notions of cultural intelligibility, that is, how one understands, operates and performs within one’s body is always in accordance with culturally prescribed notions of how it is signified. Such significations are rendered by a combination of power dynamics, gender constructions, idealisations, sexual identities and subjective disavowal. The body materialises as being constructed from these tensions and significations. Butler maintains that over time and in the context of such tensions the body is obscured by its becoming a cultural understudy for idealised notions of sex and gender. Butler goes on to argue that sex is absorbed by gender, “but that *sex* becomes something like a fiction, perhaps a fantasy” (2005, p. 65). Butler’s postulations regarding sex and gender challenge the regulatory norms which dominate essentialised ideas of how the body is understood. More so they destabilises those cultural, social discourses which iterate differing subject positions as fixed within sex, gender and the

body one inhabits. Grace articulates the link between sexual difference and gender identities (2012, p. 23):

The question of the critique of gender identity as a politically invested construction runs alongside an equally compelling and influential critique concerning the structuring of what is referred to as 'sexual difference'. Where gender identity is subverted from its ontological foundation, sexual difference is deemed to be an effect of the structure of language whereby masculine and feminine are subject positions, one of which is necessary to occupy or take up in the process of becoming a speaker of language, or in psychoanalytic terms necessary to becoming a subject at all.

The body is implicated with desire as Brousee (1996, p. 18) also articulates when drawing on Lacan's seminar *Television*:

To the question, 'what can I know?' [Lacan] responds, 'to produce the real-of-the-structure. The real is understood as that part of the jouissance of the body which can be deduced from the signifying trajectory of the drive, beginning with what is analysed, that is, the subject as effect of its chain of signifiers'.

Sexuality is imposed on the speaking subject through two avenues. The first is through language whereby sexuality is introduced to the subject through the notion of difference, the signifier for such difference being the Phallus. The other way is accessed through jouissance, as Brousee asserts in the above quotation. Although jouissance is impossible to symbolise, a desire to access the Real is available through jouissance: jouissance can be understood as a visceral experience driven by desire.

The body is linked to the 'act' and from this connection subjective and ontological investments are both apprehended and critiqued. One cannot speak about the body without regarding the implication for gendered identities. In Lacanian terms, the act is differentiated

from behaviour which is common to all animals. The act is specific to humans and lies within the domain of the Symbolic (Lacan, 1977, p 40). Lacan insists that subjects carry responsibility for committing an act. What this means is that an act is an expression of desire, and not necessarily controlled by conscious intention. The subject must assume the act as his/her own and in this way the body (including speech) appropriates the carrying out of an act. I argue that the act and the body are ideologically bound to objects which are already constituted within the subject's economy of desire.

***Heavenly Creatures*: the body and subject positions**

Although only ten, Diello has so far killed fifty-seven people and shows no desire to stop. It worries me Charles! (entry by Juliet to Pauline in their shared diary, *Heavenly Creatures*, 1994).

There is an amusing scene in *Heavenly Creatures* where Juliet, in her persona as Queen Deborah, is enacting the labour and birth of her prince and heir, Diello. Pauline, as King Charles is by her side, encouraging and supporting her as she feigns to give birth to no less than a pillow, which represents the imaginary subject of their shared fantasies. Of course the pain and suffering of labour immediately ceases as 'Deborah and Charles' fall instantly in love with their 'son', who grows up to be quite a handful, killing commoners without regard and merely for fun. This symbolic fiction is light-hearted and to the viewer, obviously just a fantasy. However, what it does speak of is a particular ideological reality behind the illusion regulating the relations and circumstances which provided the foundation for the subsequent murder of Honora Rieper. Although in the birth scene there is an obvious relationship to fantasy, this connection between Diello and Honora becomes opaque when perceived as connecting the subject with the formation of their subjectivisation. After all, Diello is purely fictional and no *body* exists. The illusory nature of appearances which regulate an approach to *reality* are crucial in unpacking the connection and tension between fantasy and reality.

The body is directly drawn into this relationship and provides a way for the subject to mediate their symbolic reality.

The scene also highlights a difference between desire and demand. It is through language that the subject sets out in pursuit of satisfaction even before encountering the object which promises it. Desire emerges and is situated as a remainder of the demand which is not expressed. There is a residual aspect to desire. This is expressed in language as lack and represents the subject's interpretation of an unsatisfied need. To literally feign birthing a fantasy subject as a figure of desire (that is, the super-ego injunction ideal of mother and woman) is explained in the somewhat histrionic post birth declaration of 'Charles' when he excitedly expresses to Juliet, "Deborah, you were amazing!" Indeed what Deborah was amazing at was faking her desired subjectivity and thereby hinging her neurosis onto fantasy without compromise. We can all have the potential to be amazing (and this is certainly a crisis arises when one fails to be) but for subjective declaration the amazing act must be witnessed by another subject. The body is directly implicated specifically when enacting a fantasy. Fantasy is crucial in both destabilising and maintaining norms, a contradictory position in that one's body operates through the reiteration of social norms and as well as through escaping them when they are exceeded. Such interpretations of the body and the conditions from which it is understood can be viewed through the lens of ideology. I claim that Žižek's critical return to the significance of ideology itself is a spectacle from which the subject distinguishes distortions of reality as constituted and from which the body is directly implicated. Flisfeder (2012, p. 2) succinctly outlines Žižek's critical analysis of ideology and its function:

[Ideology] allows us to perceive [the] very coordinates of ideology today. Ideology is not only the set of symbolic fictions that regulate external reality, nor simply the fantasy that supports our approach to reality. Ideology is to be located in between the symbolic and the sublime. It has to do with the relationship between the external symbolic order that regulates social

reality and the obscene underside of fantasy (an underside that remains unconscious) that attaches us ever more aggressively to external reality.

To return to the birth scene, the fantasy son, Diello is based on Pauline and Juliet's fascination with James Mason, an image they were familiar with and actively cultivated on a regular basis in their Imaginary Fourth World. Such images of film stars, which represent fame and notoriety, are connections with the ideological fantasy interwoven with external realities. Ideology functions in this way as a weaving between the desired image, the *objet a* and the Master signifier, which is the all-knowing ideal.



Illustration 22. Diello [Andrea Sanders] and his 'father', 'Charles' [Melanie Lynskey].

Diello is none the less a problem child who spends his time killing commoners for amusement and causing havoc with the aristocracy. While the character of Diello is for viewers a joke, he is nevertheless portrayed as someone who completely and unapologetically gives ground to his desires. Furthermore he is a character who undertakes his acts of killing without guilt, so it is no coincidence that he is a fiction, a fantasy. In the Fourth World there is no differentiation between the act and the subject who enacts the *act*. His 'parents' are literally in love with him, and he is in love with them. The incest taboo has no place in the fantasy of the Fourth World and the sexual relation has traction in fantasy because it is not

regulated by an external reality. The justification for Diello to kill is that his victims are not his parents. What remains interesting, however, is that Diello is invariably talked about by ‘Charles’ and ‘Deborah’ rather than speaking himself. What does not speak is his body, which is made from clay. He is one-dimensional, colourless and somewhat uncomplicated. In this way he is a match for his ‘parents’, particularly his father who in the fantasy scene inhabits the body of Pauline but carries the name of Charles illustrating that the body and the subjectivity it inhabits, largely do not fit. The body plays a crucial role in coordinating the space between fantasy and external reality; it distinguishes a false consciousness, another reality which can be played out literally. This space provides a way in which the subject and the body can momentarily be more at ease, or even fit together. Such a space attempts to restore the split subject to an imagined unification and overcome the problem of subjective destitution. However, this space also presents the subject with a choice, one that Pauline and Juliet were eventually faced with. Flisfeder explains this choice (2012, p. 8):

At this point, the subject can act in one of two ways. The subject can either reconstitute the fantasy that structures the Symbolic coordinates of its existence or it can traverse the fantasy and change the objective conditions of its existence.

When we implicate ourselves in a fantasy space, we do not have to adapt our body. However, in a symbolic space, we may need to in order to satisfy those co-ordinates which locate the crucial aspects of fantasy and which maintain the Symbolic fiction. Subject positions are not fixed and are able to change or to be reconfigured so that the fantasy and the Symbolic largely fit together. What is inevitable is that in constructing a materiality of the body as consolidated by fantasy and the Symbolic, a gap opens up. Butler refers to the emergence of this gap as a “temporal process which operates through the reiteration of norms; sex is both produced and destabilised in the course of this reiteration” (2005, p. 65). Here subjects are confronted with their split subjectivity so that their body and the context in which it is inhabited do not necessarily coincide. This positions the body as a crisis that the subject must

try to avert or consolidate. The subject then, as illustrated in *Heavenly Creatures*, attaches to another subject in an attempt to attain ‘wholeness’. Suffering is revealed in the attachment to a subject of authority as is certainly the case for Pauline and Juliet. To create new conditions of subjectivity an alternative subject position must be sought and in some cases be upheld by the ideological conditions which structure how a desirable social subject *ought* to be.⁴⁵ Such a bold act entails what Žižek calls, “the impossibility of the hero encountering himself” (1994, p. 4). Part of this encounter involves sexual difference and the body.

Indeed, the ideological construction of the ‘good mother’⁴⁶ is strongly implicated throughout *Heavenly Creatures*. The figure of the good mother emphasises a construction and experience

⁴⁵ I discuss this point in relation to the aftermath of the Parker-Hulme trial in a book chapter, *How to Kill Your Mother: Desire, Heavenly Creatures and Žižek’s Return to Ideology* (Forthcoming April 2014). Here I draw attention to the legal and social consequences which occurred, from the perspective of re-designating subjective positions.

⁴⁶ The figure of the ‘good mother’ is more than an attainment of socially valued standards of motherhood. It refers also to an aesthetic of maternity. By this I mean that representations of motherhood which pervade popular culture, the media and everyday attitudes and practices, are more dominant now than ever. The figure of the ‘good mother’ is an ideological tool for the social regulation of women, of their bodies and of relationships with their children. This is despite ongoing feminist scholarship emphasising the de-naturalising of motherhood, child rearing and traditional care work. Those social ideologies which construct notions of cotemporary motherhood are a manifestation and spectre of the normative neo-liberal influences as Arendell (1999, p. 3) suggests: “the good mother is heterosexual, married and monogamous... she is not economically sufficient... she is not employed”.

of motherhood which is directly linked to the body which gives birth to another subject. However, the good mother is an ideological enigma and a mirage that is always out of reach. The centrality of female characters in *Heavenly Creatures* highlights the female body as a site for potential pleasure, pain and a way of understanding desire. This specific subject position is frustrating in that female bodies are characterised solely by the acts which accompany them. In this way *Heavenly Creatures* operates like a melodrama or horror show exploring the female body in a state of flux, with child rearing being highlighted as one of its main functions. The film also presents tensions signified by different approaches to the female body: Honora Rieper is a homemaker whereas Hilda Hulme is primarily interested in pursuing social status, personal pleasures and career. I argue that *Heavenly Creatures* positions this binary as problematic for women's bodies in that it foregrounds the fulfilment of maternal practices surrounding the mother-daughter relationship. The killing of the good mother by the daughter presents us with the ultimate victim (who embodies the culturally desirable form of mothering) being murdered by the ultimate ready-made object for a woman, the child. For the subject the positing of desire in this context short circuits the tensions created by being a sexed subject in the world. If the maternal experience is favoured and the figure of the good mother upheld, it is seen to compensate for castration. However, this is not necessarily so straightforward, as Kristeva points out (2010, p. 91):

At the risk of scandal, I would even say that the 'good-enough mother' loves no one: her passion is eclipsed in a detachment that, without necessarily becoming monstrous (which happens, but not fatally), is called serenity. No other link and every link.

Any attempt by Pauline and Juliet to create an identity beyond the maternal, is interpreted by participants as insincere, selfish and problematic for the endurance of the mother-daughter bond. The body is frequently used as a metaphor to express emotions as well as culturally and socially regulated desires, as participant June stresses when considering the conflict between Pauline and her mother Honora:

June: The fantasy itself is the most real thing.

Sam: Reality actually got in the way.

Chris: Yeah, exactly...

June: Which is really what your Mum does isn't it? She brings you up to reality, it's like a slap in the face! I think that is why [Pauline] hated her [Honora] so much. Her Mum was making her.... see... reality.

Kristeva (2010, p. 54) ponders the cultural signification of motherhood as problematic, particularly when the child is posited as an object of need by the mother. This positing represents the mother's attempt to remove herself from the complexities of sexual difference. Kristeva offers instead a new kind of matriarchy which brings "symbolic and political recognition" (p. 56). In *Heavenly Creatures* motherhood is a contentious issue: in some ways, the film portrays the 'good mother' and maternal love as rejected and a new motherhood, as portrayed by Hilda Hulme as only reluctantly embraced. However, this interpretation is not necessarily shared by all participants some of whom express criticism of Hilda's parenting and sympathy with the victim, Honora:

Linda: Juliet's mother in the end wasn't giving her the attention she needed and she didn't seem to know what was happening in the bathroom, when they were always in the bath together, and if she had been a bit more attentive, perhaps it wouldn't have got to the stage of murder.

Jenny: But I think it had started long before that, I mean right from when Juliet was much younger. And they kept sending her off because of her TB, and Juliet felt that as a rejection, and that she was being left alone and that caused such upset. She was, wasn't she? [agreement] She wanted to believe that her parents' marriage was happy. And when she found

out that the mother was having the affair... umm... she was just grief stricken and angry. Her family situation was terrible.

Well, I think the mother, the mother, Pauline's mother. She'd obviously... well, Pauline was probably quite like her in lots of ways. But she'd obviously run away with the father at seventeen, and they never got married and she probably had a baby when she was very young... and probably had Pauline when she was very young... umm... She had this girl who was bright, she was doing really well at school, she was proud of her, and she was thinking ahead that she was going to go on and study and... and it was like her life... that she had never done that with her life... and umm... she was... she was... looking for... well, she loved her daughter, didn't she? And she just got really upset when it wasn't going to... that's not the path it seemed to be going along. It started going off in a different direction... and... just the way she looked at her daughter, she just loved her and cared about her so much, and just really didn't know what to do. Did she? She didn't really know what to do.

Motherhood and the figure of the ideal or good mother is an ongoing theme in participants' talk about desire. It is symbolised by the embodied figure of the maternal, the original desire and it is also an encounter between ideals (the domain of the Imaginary) and biology (the domain of the Symbolic). *Heavenly Creatures* calls the 'good mother' into question; after all she is considered a problem and is killed. As Pauline and Juliet retreat into their narcissistic worlds, the path between recognising the object of their desire and possessing it is clouded by the very ideologies they crave. Such representations of womanhood and of motherhood are ideologically constructed against idealised maternal practices and identities, which politicises the position of women and restricts it to specific conventions which manifest obvious power inequality: women become devalued and father-figures are positioned as ideal regulators of the waywardness of the feminine subject.

The sexed subject: desire and being desired

Women's division is of a hysterical nature, it assumes the form of the *inconsistency* of her desire: 'I demand that you refuse my demand, since this is not *that*'... In the case of men, on the contrary, the split is, as it were, externalised: man escapes the inconsistency of his desire by establishing a line of separation between the domain of the Phallus – that is, sexual enjoyment, the relationship with a sexual partner – and the non Phallic – that is, the domain of ethical goals, of non sexual public activity (Žižek, 1994a, p. 150-152).

The meaning of the Phallus is the moment when passion returns, when it becomes possible to think again about sex and to face the pain as well as the excitement of sexual difference (Frosh, 1995, p. 170).

I begin this section by recapitulating a theoretical explanation of the paradoxical function of the Phallus. Frosh (1995, p. 167) states that “[d]esiring to understand Lacan is like wanting to have the phallus; the fantasy is that it would bring in its wake everything connected with power and authority, because that is what it represents and seems to be”. The Phallus however remains a mystery, as does the mastery it promises. This is akin to the structure of desire: “as the object of our desire slips away and is more and more elusive, so we desire to have it, to master it all the more” (Frosh, 1995, p. 168). To master the function of the Phallus is an exercise in seduction for both man and woman. It is fascinating, contradictory and impossible yet it promises authority and truth. In a similar way Lacan was himself much attuned to his role as Master (p. 168):

Lacan's mastery of the unconscious is what is on display, but the unconscious is also that which eludes mastery, that which is multifarious and seductive, playful and contradictory... Lacan is the more pored over, taken apart, to be desired and if possible owned, and perhaps even loved.

Lacan designates the function of the Phallus as the tension experienced by the split subject when confronted with enjoyment. Žižek (1994a) furthers this claim by insisting that such enjoyment is paradoxical because of symbolic castration. The Phallic function is both signified and limited by the possibilities promised by the Phallus. So, “symbolic castration is ultimately another name for [those] which are essentially by-products: *if we are to achieve fulfilment through phallic enjoyment, we must renounce it as our explicit goal* [original emphasis]” (Žižek, 1994a, p. 153). It is this postulation of sexual difference as non-essentialised and that which departs from universal gendered notions of male and female which forms the background to Lacanian psychoanalysis.

Thus relations between the sexes take place within the context of impossibility and symbolic deadlocks.⁴⁷ The contours of the body and human sexuality are possessed by “a desire which is eternalised and... insatiable” (Žižek, 1994a, p. 154-155). This provides the basis for Lacan’s famous claim, “there is no sexual relationship”. Žižek goes on to elaborate how Lacan designates the Phallic function by insisting that (p. 153):

it is this very splitting between the domain of the phallic enjoyment and the desexualised ‘public’ field that eludes it – that is to say, *‘phallic’ is this self-limitation of the Phallus, this positioning of an Expectation.*

Lacan insists that it is through language that the speaking subject becomes structured. For Žižek too, the spectre of the Other is repeatedly transmitted through otherwise invisible

⁴⁷ The concept of the deadlock is best described as revealing tensions in the Symbolic Order from which language can be tracked. A deadlock occurs when there is an encounter with the Real, thereby revealing fundamental impossibility. Žižek claims (1994a, p. 155) deadlocks reveal the exception to ‘universal rules’, which posits universal concepts, such as, for example, the notion of ‘freedom’.

ideologies which are revealed by the subject speaking. As discussed in chapter four, belief acts as a big Other, an authoritative figure which represses the individual together with aspects of social and cultural life. I contend that the body serves as another Master who belies ideologies for the subject. This speculative image of the Other is both constituted and operated from the body. The Other, the mirror image of the self, is where the body is constructed for the subject, as well as the means by which the body is understood by the subject. The body lies within the domains of both the Symbolic and Imaginary. For example, Žižek links the structures of masculinity and femininity to the production of social identities (1994a, p. 155-156) by claiming that the masculine position “designates precisely the endeavour to resolve this impasse of ‘too many Universals’ by way of excluding particulars” (p. 156). The feminine position by contrast “immediately gives body to the Universal” (p. 156) by propagating the illusion that woman is the ‘whole’ subject for a man. Žižek traces such constitutions back to how subjects perceive social life and culture within the order of sexualisation. That the body becomes an ever present object of desire is perpetuated by certain short circuits, which ideologies of sexual liberation, advertising culture and the injunction to *enjoy!* are constantly reiterating as the promise of the sexed body that can fulfil desire. This injunction is what underlies Žižek’s claim that we are taught *how to* desire, in that desire is already ideologically constituted and postulated for the subject to enjoy. Curtis accounts for Žižek’s analysis of desire (2013, p. 53):

If we take the Subject to be the entity posited to act as guarantor for the world we have created, Žižek (2005) points out that such a guarantor cannot be seen as omnipotent for this would in fact prevent our identification with it. Instead the guarantor is shown to be lacking in some small degree, just enough to require some supplementary action on our behalf, or for us to find a place alongside it.

Here exists a particular desire for the subject - the desire for meaning which is organised by language as a way of accessing knowledge and recognition. What the body offers and promises is a way to access *jouissance*, in that the subject can enjoy the body provided there

is a connection with the Other. At the same time the subject struggles with the obscenity of desire and thus wants to disconnect from the Other and thereby provoke a radical separation. The depicted killing of Honora Rieper in *Heavenly Creatures* horrifically illustrates this radical separation.



Illustration 23. Pauline, Honora and Juliet [Melanie Lynskey, Sarah Peirse and Kate Winslet] in Victoria Park.



Illustration 24. Pauline's [Melanie Lynskey] final glance to her mother.



Illustration 25. Pauline [Melanie Lynskey] just about to strike the first blow to Honora [Sarah Peirse].

For Žižek, a subject's statement about any kind of ethical position concerning the social order and the latter's relationship to the subject, is also a statement about the subject's relationship to desire. Desire is a way of acting not necessarily in accordance with the law. However, any dissent is nevertheless ideological, particularly in the way in which one considers desire and its influence remains within the parameters of social relationships and bonds. For the neurotic subject, desire is the sustenance which carries the promise of finding that which is missing. However, the ideological structure of modern capitalism, Žižek argues, is to *enjoy!* This being within the libidinal framework of enjoyment or *jouissance* does not fit with the neurotic subject. Rather, this is the framework which structures the Pervert. Declercq (2006, p. 78) offers a cogent argument when he suggests that in response to anti-social effects resulting from the capitalist discourse, sociologists recognise the need for subjects to (re)create their own social bonds through such institutions as family, peer relationships and the cultivation of personal experiences. Nevertheless, this kind of approach as Declercq suggests in fact

perpetuates the capitalist discourse as not only structuring social bonds but also hijacking contemporary subjective identities (p. 78):

This obligation is really a new phenomenon that accompanies the capitalist discourse. Indeed, with the non capitalist societies, the problem was quite the opposite. Then the social networks were all prescribed in advance by ideologies, religions, culture, etc. Consequently the preoccupation then was not with creating bonds, but on the contrary, escaping them.

What Declercq means here is that the driving forces for libidinal enjoyment are already prescribed by those social conditions in which we live and specifically the illusive promises of capitalism, which he claims to be the current predominate discourse. Therefore what sustains a subject is unsatisfied desire derived from the ideological failings of capitalism, which is geared toward libidinal enjoyment and the structure of the Pervert. The perverse structure of capitalism insists the subject is complicit in appearing to *enjoy!* even when she or he is not necessarily doing so. It will be argued that such enjoyment extends not only to the body within the economy of desire (that is, how desire is formed and how it manifests), but also that the body implicates and structures desire in an idiosyncratic way by providing a semblance of desire as a way for regulating *jouissance* for the subject.

For the neurotic, desire is foregrounded, whereas for the pervert it is actual libidinal enjoyment. This difference is important to understand when Žižek makes the claim that we are all perverts. Below is an illustration of how perversion and neurosis function in relation to the *objet a*.

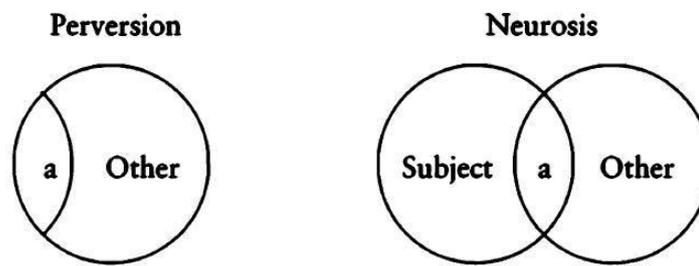


Figure 14. The structure of perversion and neurosis

Fink (1991) highlights that with regards to the cause of desire, the structure of the neurotic and that of the pervert differ. Whereas for the neurotic, the object is in the Other and is consequently out of reach, whilst for the pervert she/he is the Object for the subject and always available. Žižek interprets this difference as follows: the structure of perversion tells you *how to* desire, whereas neurosis tells you *what to* desire (Fiennes, 2006). For Žižek desire is already structured within perverse social conditions which we are bound to obey.

At this juncture it is important to understand Lacan's formulae of sexualisation. For Lacan, there exists no sexualisation, or representation of sexual differentiation in any biological or reproductive sense in the unconscious. For the Hysteric, a choice is prefaced by the subject's question: *Am I am man or am I a woman?* The question of sexualisation is not a conscious choice, rather the confrontation of this question is activated symptomatically. Given that the Phallus is the signifier of symbolic castration, how are the masculine and the feminine to be structured? Žižek follows Lacan's formulae of sexualisation in that he too understands enjoyment to be structured around the deadlock of sexual difference, a deadlock which implies that there is nothing natural about the masculine and the feminine positions. When Lacan states, "the woman does not exist", he does not mean this at the level of the subject. Rather, he is insisting that no universal woman exists in that no specific trait or feature is evident to all women and that 'woman' is a symptom of man and that she can never be fully known. This is a question equally to do with Lacan's formula of sexualisation, where the masculine structure renders the subject fully within the Phallic function. The feminine

structure does not dictate this. Such embodiment of woman is a betrayal of man's desire and Lacan's claim that "man gave way as to his desire" (1966, p. 154) elaborates his thesis as Myers explains (2003, p. 85):

As soon as man recognises this failure and returns to the truth of his desire... woman will disappear. She only exists as a result of the unethical divide in man himself and therefore has no existence in her own right.

For Lacan, the man struggles to represent the Phallus and the woman struggles to possess it. The Phallus is perceived to be that which the woman lacks. This is vital in understanding sexual difference: the woman is not only the object of desire for the man, but she also provides the very lack which structures his identification. The absence of the signifier for femininity does not refer to a lack as such, rather it is a void out of which interpretations asserting the symbolisations of the Phallus can be made. This has proved to be a contentious issue for feminist theorists of psychoanalysis, such as Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler and Julia Kristeva. Writing in 1982 Jacqueline Rose and Juliet Mitchell point to the lack of attention paid to sexual difference in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. They argue that placing the Phallus in the frontier of subjectivity, a frontier posited as difficult or impossible to traverse, further supports patriarchal ideologies which seek to oppress women. However, a little later, feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz (1990, p. 125) takes a stance closer to Lacan's

master/slave dichotomy⁴⁸, in highlighting the ambiguity of the Phallus:

[The Phallus] functions to unite (and disappear) or to separate and divide. This fundamental ambiguity or duplicity in the term will provide a vulnerable, contradictory point within male relations and sexual domination. As signifier, the phallus is not an object to be acquired or an identity to be achieved. It is only through desire of the other that one's own position – as either being or having the phallus – is possible.

The Phallus is a mystery, and mastery of it demands desire from the Other (Frosh, 1995, p. 179). Desire and sexual difference are communicated by the Phallus. In rendering the libidinal economy of the feminine as hysterical and inconsistent, Lacan undermines the Phallus as Master. As Žižek says of Lacan's theory of subjectivity (1994a, p. 151-152):

Lacan does talk about feminine jouissance eluding the Phallic domain, he conceives of it as an ineffable 'dark continent' separated from (the male) discourse by a frontier that is impossible to traverse... In traditional terms, the Limit that defines woman is not epistemological but ontological – *that is to say, beyond it there is nothing*. 'Feminine' is the structure of the limit as such, a limit that precedes what may or may not lie in its Beyond: all that we perceive in this Beyond (the Eternal Feminine for example) are our own fantasy

⁴⁸ Lacan formulated the Master's discourse from Hegel's master/slave dialectic as presented in *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Lacan claims that neither the master nor the slave achieves self consciousness, and furthermore, that self consciousness is a social experience based on both authority and enslavement. Thus the power relations and struggle for mastery which shape the master/slave dialectic are constructed and experienced by the subject as relations between authority and responsibility. For Lacan, a paradox occurs when the division between the master and the slave also marks the division of the subject – that is while the master (S1) struggles to appropriate the *objet a* (the surplus), the slave (S2) is put to work for the master in an attempt to cover up the divided subject.

projections. Woman *qua* Engima is a spectre generated by the inconsistent surface of multiple masks... and the Lacanian name for this inconsistency of the surface is simply *the subject*.

Žižek asks a pertinent question concerning sexual difference which directly implicates the social bond: *for whom is the scene of masculinity or femininity staged?* (Flisfeder, 2012, p. 62). As sexual difference implicates both desire and jouissance, it is important to recapitulate the difference between these terms. To reiterate, jouissance, a French term is best described as unreflexive enjoyment which has a sexual connotation with the experiences of orgasm and pleasure (Evans, 1996, p. 91). Reflexive enjoyment is contained within the domain of that which can be considered conscious, while unreflexive enjoyment is unconsciously driven. Jouissance has a general meaning of enjoyment in French and it was introduced by Lacan into the psychoanalytic field where he gives it a particular meaning of unreflexive enjoyment. This particularity means that the term ‘jouissance’ is not translated into English. Jouissance functions both as a limit to enjoyment and as a command to transgress the prohibitions of such a limit. This limit for Lacan particularises jouissance as suffering derived from the symptom (Evans, 1996, p. 92). An important distinction between jouissance and the order of desire lies in the function of the Other. Jouissance being Phallic, does not relate to the Other as such, but rather a signifying lack in the Other, whereas desire is always the desire of the Other, “since it is impossible to desire what one already has” (p. 38). Desire is a state of lack. According to Evans, (1996, p. 91) jouissance has its origins in the satisfaction of biological needs, although it cannot be reduced to this, as jouissance involves not the satisfaction of need, but of drive. It is crucial to realise that jouissance is not simply pleasure, rather it is unbearable pleasure as Braunstein explains (2003, p. 108):

Jouissance appears in guilt, in remorse, in confession, in contrition, more in paying than in being paid, in destroying more than in conserving. Its essence is the suspension of the reflex act, of the pursuit of satisfaction, of service to the community, of the ‘good reasons’ governing rational behaviour. It carries within it its own reason. Being ineluctably linked to the Other, its existence has an ethical and not a physiological substance. This is why we must

emphatically affirm the dialectical nature of *jouissance*. *Jouissance* is the substance of neurosis, of perversion, of psychosis, and of the *sinthome*. We know it only by the way in which it manifests itself in transference and relation to others.⁴⁹

Put concisely, desire is socially constructed whereas *jouissance* is a bodily subjective experience. However, this is not so simple as experiences of guilt, remorse and contrition can be argued to be socially motivated and mediated, while primarily being articulated in and through the body and language. Grosz (1990, p. 139) suggests that women experience *jouissance* as a mystery peculiar to the feminine and located beyond the Phallus:

Woman experiences a *jouissance beyond the phallus*. But if this enigmatic *jouissance* is attributed to women as the mark of her resistance to the Other, at the same time this *jouissance* is, by the fact, strictly outside of articulation and is thus *unknowable*. Lacan accords women the possibility of refusing a pleasure and desire that is not theirs, but not of claiming one that *is* theirs.

Grosz's reference to Lacan's location of *jouissance* as beyond the Phallic entails that the location of fantasy can also be one of resistance. This location makes it comparable with belief. Belief is focused on and structured around castration, the lack and the problem of filling the void of desire. This specific acknowledgement of castration is within the register of masculine desire. Belief operates within the same register in its attempt to offer a dominant

⁴⁹ To reiterate from chapter two, *sinthome* is described by Evans (1996, p. 189) as that which organises *jouissance*. The *sinthome* is beyond meaning and unable to be interpreted. It is located at the centre of the Borromean knot – where the Symbolic, Imaginary and Real all held together.

authority with clear boundaries which are confirmed by the socio symbolic, political and geographical context from which subjects operate. However, to stand in for the cause of desire, as woman does for the man, makes woman an active resistance to the Phallus. At the same time, the woman struggles to represent the Phallus and takes on the illusion of subjective wholeness, that of being the desired Other; this in turn masquerades as the reality of sexual difference. By being posited as the desired object, the woman plays around with boundaries, subverting them and refusing to pin them down in the Symbolic; the woman reveals that boundaries and what constitute them are fallible and represent no one or nothing at all. The woman reveals the alienated subject who speaks in order to be the object of desire.

The classic screen icon, the *femme fatale* in *film noir* has been written about in great detail by psychoanalytically influenced film scholars such as Todd McGowan, Joan Copjec, Constance Penley and of course Žižek. Copjec and Žižek argue that *noir* is a specific genre which seeks to develop a literacy of desire, love and jouissance. The *femme fatale* comes into existence because the man's desire for the woman is constructed as a belief set against an idealised image. This highlights Lacan's claim, "woman is a symptom of a man" as being a construction of the woman foregrounded by the masculine ideal (cited in Mellard, 1998, p. 397). For Žižek, this arises in *film noir* in two significant ways, the first being that woman is a consequence of the desire of a man, the second is that woman exists only as a symptom of man (2001c, p. 155):

[I]f the symptom is dissolved, the subject itself loses his ground under his feet, disintegrates. In this sense, 'woman is a symptom of man' means that *man himself exists only through woman qua his symptom*: all his ontological systems hang on [sic], is suspended from his symptom, is "externalised" in his symptom. In other words, man literally *ex-sists*; his entire being lies "out there", in woman.

For Žižek, desire is already marked by a drive and it is ‘woman’, the one who cannot be known, who embodies the death drive (Žižek, 1994a; Mellard, 1998, p. 398).⁵⁰ This is highlighted by the Phallic mother, Honora Rieper who must be eliminated and Hilda Hulme who is elevated in status and occupies the position of the *femme fatale*, before Juliet and Pauline can give ground to their desires. However, the important roles the mothers, Hilda and Honora play in constructing desire go unnoticed by the girls. Without constructing the tension between Hilda and Honora, Juliet and Pauline’s cherished desires disintegrate; a scene they horrifically recognise once they have killed Honora as she was the ideological reality which structured their fantasies. Turning to the importance of the Phallic mother in *Heavenly Creatures*, the lesbian motif is very much understated although present. It is a source of interest for participants in the current research, as Tracey, in the creative artists’ focus group, articulates:

Tracey: Part of the thing that was intriguing about the film, not necessarily about any character but... you know... in that era people were unable... you kind of got that presence that people were unable to communicate entirely what they felt.

Other participants: Yes!

⁵⁰ The death drive is best described by Evans (1996, p. 32) as an operation directed towards “undoing connections and destroying things... In Lacan’s first remarks on the death drive, in 1938, he describes it as nostalgia for a lost harmony, a desire to return to the preoedipal fusion with the mother’s breast... (Lacan, 1938, p. 35, in Evans, 1996, p. 32)”. Fink (2013, p. 77) now writes that the death drive in Lacanian theory can be considered a proxy for the Symbolic and, as such, can be considered a defence. The death drive is integral to all the drives which have the function of experiencing *jouissance* as a form of suffering (Evans, 1996, p. 33).

Tracey: Which you know, you had that whole negative thing about homosexuality, which these days we would just take it generally for granted and that's OK. But just that sense of her mother being this person who obviously had her own daughter really really young and like, seventeen or eighteen or whatever it was... and was unable to communicate her own wants for her daughter. So... she would nag her daughter, and I could appreciate both sides.

This image of desire is constructed as a self who has the potential to be articulate with other subjects. The possibility of a lesbian encounter provides a fantasy which resists the conservative, heteronormative ideologies of the time. Tracey draws attention towards inarticulation or the difficulty to speak, posited as a symptom of a specific historical period, together with the immaturity of the subject. Importantly she also highlights the difficulty in identifying with any ideal feminine jouissance portrayed in the film: neither that of the rebellious daughter striving for independence nor that of the mother who is fiercely protective and anxious about her daughter's future. Both positions operate in relation to each other and this is depicted in a particularly surreal part of the film where Pauline's inner monologue about the hatred she feels for her mother is heard in tandem with Honora's angry and frustrated 'nagging' of her.

Kristeva identifies the mother-daughter bond as traumatic when she describes the encounters and tensions between psychoanalysis and biology. Specifically, she discusses the transmission of maternal desire from mother to daughter as a way in which women perceive maternal desire as 'natural': "It is true that we may speak of the link of the precocious object in the little girl and the woman: as if there were always already an object for a woman..." (2010, p. 87). June, (creative industries participant) appreciates this relation when she states of Honora Rieper, "which is what your Mum does, isn't it? Brings you a slap up, face to face... I think that's why she did hate her so much... Pauline's Mum was making her... see... reality". Such Phallic identification, she maintains, is an emancipator for women given the social construction of motherhood in modern times. For Kristeva one can be a mother if one

chooses, as well as embody other identifications. This is not without tensions and pressures as *Heavenly Creatures* well illustrates.



Illustration 26. Honora [Sarah Peirse] expressing her anger at Pauline.

The figure of the mother and its ideation are today prominent in the structuring of desire. June recounts a time when she was attempting to get pregnant. What she reveals is a contradiction within a gendered morality of selflessness – her longing to have the experience of being pregnant coupled with an envy of some women who already were:

I remember when I was... [Husband] and I were trying to get pregnant and we couldn't and it took us five years to get pregnant with Rose. And I still remember that feeling. I looked daggers at pregnant women walking down the street! And on the beach I was like... [snake like noise]! It got to that point where I felt out of control of my feelings. So I remember that. Very very well. And... and... umm... but weirdly enough I always felt hope if someone I knew got pregnant! So that is quite strange, which is probably quite a good sign! [laughs] With some of my friendships! [laughs] And I had two very close friends whose children are only a little bit older than Rose, who rang me up – and I didn't even realise that I had been that obvious, I thought I'd hidden that reasonably well – Uh, I had two of my very close friends to ring me up to say that they were pregnant and they were both really worried about

my reaction in telling me. And I thought that was really interesting because that was.. I didn't know that I had been that obvious about it! [laughs] And it was also funny too, because actually whenever a friend got pregnant I felt really glad. I felt a huge amount of hope whenever someone I knew got pregnant. It was almost like a disease that I could catch! [laughs] You know! Yeah, but, yeah, I remember that feeling really well. It was horrible. And it really affected how I was obviously responding to people too without me knowing it or being in control of it. That would be one of my biggest times.

For June the longing to be pregnant – she went on to have two children – is a defence of the images both of her desire and an imaginable Otherness of jouissance which she has witnessed in the bodies of other women. To return to ideology, it can be argued that in the absence of belief in a greater power, that specific beliefs provide a way of regulating anxiety. The ideological cultural indicators which posit the figure of the mother as an ambiguous ideal can be a prosthetic which compensates for a fragmented sense of self. Modern ideals of motherhood signify a social bond and harness discourses of femininity. Such a specific gaze hinged on ideology entails that the subject regulates desire by focusing on the body as a way of not only fulfilling desire, but also of allowing a kind of cultural acquisition, in June's case that of a specific feminine identity which is bound to pregnancy. Soler makes a compelling claim when she states (1984, *The Body in the Teaching of Jacques Lacan*):

“[T]he duration of the subject, in so far as it is carried by the signifier, outlasts the duration of the body... It is because language assures you of the beyond – which is the anticipation of the subject before his body is born, and which is the memory which remains when he is buried – that the body is disjunct from the subject.

For June motherhood is posited as the Master signifier, beyond cultural and social discourse. The function of the body as a pregnant one establishes this signifier, although it is a signifier that is imposed. This signification is however problematic because, as June suggests, her body was not at the time fulfilling her desire for a child. The space in which she was able to

create a subjective identity was only partially regulated. Žižek maintains that the Other must be eliminated in order for the subject to survive (1998a, p. 195) and yet also the Other is always the image of that which paradoxically both sustains and threatens the subject's identity. In order for June to make sense of this she needed to separate her thoughts from what she perceived to be the limitations of her body. Pregnancy, a desire that she crucially describes as a "disease", is what she associates with her true desire, her Master signifier, so much so that she became envious when she saw other pregnant women. Her term "disease" is revealing because it implies contagion. Specifically, one normally assumes that with most diseases there are signs, symptoms, behaviours and disorders associated with them. Symptoms of anxiety and envy are accepted by June in the hope that such a desire for a child will be fulfilled. The baby is the Phallic object which manifests as an interpretation of June's desire but it signifies a false completeness because the Phallus cannot be possessed. Rather than be fulfilled, desire is sublimated into a socially valorised 'Thing'.

Sublimation plays an important role in the regulation of desire in that it is a process marking the social valorisation and signification of an object (Freud, 1933; Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973). In this way the object is idealised and held in high esteem by other subjects. As Freud claims the object is in place of *das Ding*, 'The Thing' or the Phallus. For Lacan, the object is elevated to the status of *das Ding* because of its promise of freedom from subjective repression (Lacan, 1959-60, p. 111) which might reveal the fundamental desire modelled on the figure of the mother (p. 52). *Das Ding* belongs outside the signifying network, it "is forever lost and impossible to gain" (1959-60, p. 52). The function of sublimation is for the subject to reclaim the *objet a* and thereby become integrated with the Real from which the subject has been separated by language. Lacan attributes to works of art a way of rendering sublimation in the form of social value (p. 293): "[Art] literally means that man has the possibility of making his desires tradable or salable in the form of products". In *Seminar VII: Ethics of Psychoanalysis* Lacan goes on to implicate the importance of fantasy in the process of sublimation (1959-50, p. 65):

Society takes some comfort from the mirages that moralists, artists, artisans, designers of dresses and hats, and creators of imaginary forms in general supply.... But it is not simply in the approval that society gladly accords it that we must seek the power of sublimation. It is rather an imaginary function, and, in particular, that for which we will use the symbolisation of fantasm... which is the form which depends on the subject's desire.

Chris, a participant in this study, is a musician and sculptor in Christchurch who made two distinctive yet related body sculptures which are life size and now located at the Christchurch Polytechnic Jazz School. For Chris, it could be argued that art is a valid form of sublimation and for him the body plays a crucial role in this process. Lacan states in *Écrits* (1966, p. 248), "language is not immaterial. It is a subtle body, but body it is". Adrian Johnston (2008, p. 169) goes on to further Lacan's position when he states that "philosophical consciousness arises out of disruptions encountered by everyday consciousness".



Illustration 27. *Feminine*, Reddington, C. (1999).

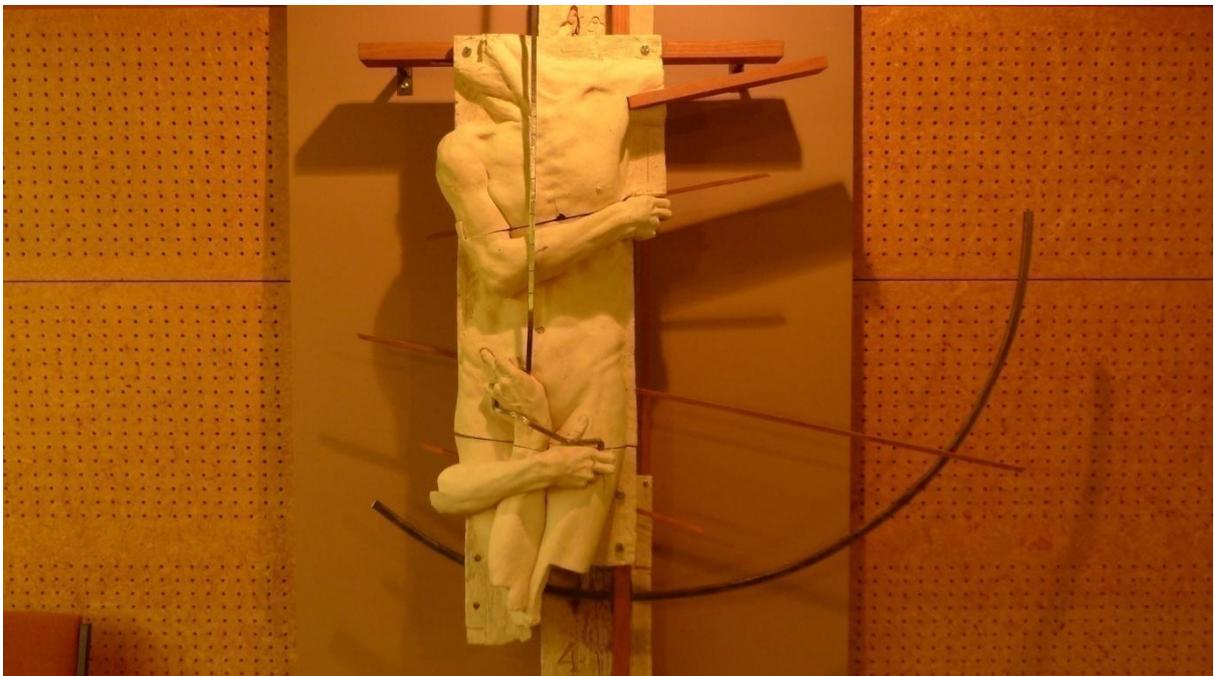


Illustration 28. *Masculine*, Reddington, C. (1999).

Chris explores what it means to be a sculptor and specifically what his *masculine* and *feminine* sculptures mean both in the process of their creation and public display:

Because I was aware that I always used to make things. I was a sculptor and all... I went to sculpture school... and then increasingly it became musical as well. And um... ahhh... I didn't know how to turn that into something like career and these types of things... and I didn't even want to, but I was aware that I kept making things, so that was the sort of thing I had to deal with. And umm... so during my twenties I just had little studios and things and I spent the evenings building things and thinking that through a little bit. I don't even know if there are any great answers, but it was just what was coming out of me to a certain degree... and a lot of ways what did come out and the certain images I did make were readable in terms of a sense of fantasy or desire or whatever now. [slight pause] I did those works at the Jazz school. I am not sure what people think of... or say about them now or appreciate them, or even what I think about them! Yeah and um... anyone who knows the sculptures, you could say that they are basically two figures, one male, one female who are kind of exposed. And there was this sense even when I was that age, when I was twenty-one that I seemed to making things that had this idea of inner-life... I never really understood what that was at the time, and even now I am still kind of aware... that there a kind of exterior and interior and then layers underneath that even... yeah... anyway so... certainly my life now as a musician or a composer and also in the theatre and those mediums.. there's ways to create that can have an inner-life that... can speak in that way... not necessarily a coherent way or easy to articulate way but umm.. but something that allows that kind of side of oneself to have some... some validity... or something.

“They are basically two figures who are kind of exposed” signifies the interconnectedness of sublimation and desire: the form of sculptures, the chosen art form, represents to the viewing subject a “kind of” exposure of a body from which desire is glimpsed. During interviews Chris makes a strong link between desire and drive when he states, “a lot of ways what did come out and the certain images I did make were readable in terms of a sense of fantasy or desire”. To attempt to reveal desire and to try and grasp the unattainable Thing through the

process of sublimation, one must sacrifice *jouissance*. Zupancic (2003, p. 174) notes this when she states that, “Lacan situated *jouissance* on the side of the Thing”. Lacan goes on to further state, “sublimate as much as you like; you will have to pay for it with something and that something is called *jouissance*... you pay for the satisfaction of one’s desire” (1959-60, p. 322). It is evident that Chris’s sculptures can be viewed as an interpretative Lacanian act – both are bodily forms which are modified in relation to the Other to reveal desire, that which seeks to regulate *jouissance* through the process of making art and having it displayed. These sculptures were socially valued even before they were made in that Chris was commissioned to make them for the purpose of producing socially valued objects. These works represent not only the artist’s attempt to sublimate his own symptoms, but also enjoyment by other subjects (viewing subjects) of the artist’s symptoms in their sublimated form.

The function of sublimation can be further explored through Žižek’s return to ideology. Žižek makes an important connection between socio-political/creative engagements and the subject’s encounter with the Real (2006a, p. 311):

Freud’s ‘naive’ reflections on how the artist expresses embarrassing, even disgusting, intimate fantasising in a social context by wrapping it up in a socially acceptable form – by ‘sublimating’ it, offering the pleasure of the beautiful artistic form as a lure which seduces us into accepting the otherwise repulsive excessive pleasure of intimate fantasising – acquire a new relevance in today’s era of permissiveness, when performance and other artists are under pressure to stage the most intimate private fantasies in all their desublimated nakedness. Such ‘transgressive’ art confronts us directly with the *jouissance* at its more solipsistic, with masturbatory phallic *jouissance*. And, far from being individualist, such *jouissance* precisely characterises individuals insofar as they are caught up in a crowd: what Freud calls “crowd/Masse” is precisely not a distinct communal network but a conglomerate of solipsistic individuals – as the saying goes, one is by definition lonely in a crowd. Thus the paradox is that a crowd is a fundamentally anti-social phenomenon.

Žižek's cynicism cannot be denied as he is here depicting the process of sublimation and the ideological attitudes which shape modern ideas of art, as hedonistic and ego-driven illusions. However, although Žižek considers that sublimation occurs under the specificity of certain ideological conditions, his claim that art is merely a reduction of language to a symbolic medium is potentially problematic. His articulation appears too simplistic. It is the task of psychoanalysis to explore desire, but outside the clinic (or conversely, within the clinic of the social) sublimation offers the promise of a way out of subjective frustration. For Chris, desire lurks in the form of making art. The same could be said for ideology in that it achieves its form within the textures of the social values afforded by sublimation. In order to self-sustain both economically and within the order of desire, Chris places himself within the capitalist discourse; he repeats the phrase "inner-life" as if inanimate objects (sculptures) and ideas (performing and composing music) might possibly reveal his desire. In this way the authority of desire requires an ideological basis for these inanimate objects and ideas to have firstly an imaginary effect for Chris and secondly, a symbolic effect on other subjects so enabling them to glimpse his desire. Ideologically, the capitalist discourse provides the crucial mediatory force; within the objects themselves there are ideological forms and textures from which desire can be staged. Chris's art is regulated within an institutional frame and for this to occur ideology must be rendered visible. The body permits this through technological apparatus – those materials needed to create art - through the objects that create the sculptures and through Chris's vision of the body. Sublimation allows the possibility for desire to become visible to another subject. In many ways ideology is a political and cultural map from which the anatomy of the body can be read. Ideology is, furthermore, a regulatory ideal. However, the body is not in a static condition, nor is it a coherent reiteration of cultural norms and articulations. Rather, as one can witness in Chris's sculptures of the *masculine* and *feminine*, the body is understood as incomplete, not entirely intelligible and as literally constructed. Grace (2012, p. 23) considers the differentiation within the terms, *masculine* and *feminine* as incarnations of the Symbolic. Sexual differentiation is a process of becoming a subject in a social context and not of anatomy (p. 26). Chris's sculptures explicitly omit that

which is necessary for speech; the head and mouth are absent. Only the torsos circumscribe the signifier of the body. That this is recognisable as a body is because it is constituted in the social domain and its incompleteness is a spectral challenge to the body conceived as whole, natural and mobile. Chris's identity is as an artist producing bodies in which sexed identifications are not clearly apparent; yet by naming them *masculine* and *feminine* he forecloses other identifications. In this way ideology operates at the level of gendered politics – he produces bodies and the voids that accompany them. The body is thus represented as impossible and fragmented. The bodies are blind and their sex is regulatory in that the bodily forms offer glimpses of male or female organs but these forms are not fixed and rely on a fantasy interpretation. There are extra hands apparent in the absence of genitals. Gender is a constructed notion from which fantasy can be structured. The body as natural is implicated in the sculptures only as an ideological and discursive essential form. If one looks closely enough, one can assess which is male and which is female. However, each could easily be reversed, so destabilising those ideological conditions which structure sex and gender. Thus the natural position is called into question – the first question the viewer asks when gazing upon the sculptors is: *Is it a man or is it a woman?* In other words, what are the symbolic realities of a body which structure the fantasy that supports it? In confronting such representations and structures of the body, the subject is facing an important question about desire – *what is the reality of my subjectivity under the constraints of appearances?*

I claim that these questions structure how the subject approaches desire. For the pervert, the object of fantasy is to be enjoyed by the subject. Part of the pervert's symptom is acting on fantasy. Žižek provocatively insists that “we are all perverts” (Fiennes, 2006). However, I claim that since we as subjects exist in structures that may be considered perverse, Žižek's assertion is worthy of challenge. On the face of it, Chris's desire to create art, an eroticisation of transgressing social norms through the act of sculpting – and in doing so, attempting to locate his *objet a* - appear to be within the structure of perversion. However, a more persuasive interpretation is that the Hysteric who is seeking a Master and yet at the same time

does everything possible to undermine him thereby drifting into the territory of the pervert. It is well established within Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis that the Hysteric as neurotic subject, can possess traits of perversion, enabling both desire and jouissance to remain intact and dynamic. The gap revealed through a discursive shift from the neurotic to the perverse reveals the space between the social and the subject. The modern desiring subject must attempt to fit into a structure where desire is seen to be regulated and met through, for example, technology, the arts, and through intimacy.

Desire and jouissance are in tension but at the same time permit greater access to one another thereby enabling the subject to regulate them. Part of this regulation is commercialised within the hyper-reality of capitalism and here ideology is geared towards the neurotic subject because capitalism tells the subject how to desire and at the same time, offers that desire will never be satisfied. For Chris, art is made for another unknown subject. The capitalist discourse is directly implicated as the big Other, the ultimate social bond which ties subjects to each other and at the same time alienates them. Desire by contrast aims at nothing fixed but rather only at its own expansion. Such expansion is a crisis for the subject and sublimation is a way of trying to manage it. This is in order to consolidate desire into a productive crisis, from which something worthwhile and socially valorised can manifest. What Chris attempts to undertake is to craft a project of the 'social body', the body which has no voice and cannot see, but nevertheless speaks through another subject. This is the ultimate ideological body – one which is gazed upon but does not act or resist. The otherness of the body becomes the logic which the subject seizes upon as a jouissance located within the body as Other. A speaking body can reproduce jouissance in that it fails to say or convey exactly what it desires. The sublimation of art offers a short circuit to this problem of the failure to articulate. The object, in this case Chris's sculptures, in the process of sublimation is not just any object, but one that attempts to remain irreducible and manifest a relationship between truth and the Real. Chris has created two structures that are fantasmic, but also are a construction of human experience. In a sense both bodies are images of a mess, a fragment of

a body, incomplete and yet familiar. What Chris has created presents what subjects are faced with: jouissance and desire being reproduced at the level of the body.

“What is wrong with a bit of a spanking sometimes?”: the mark of jouissance on the body

The body is a place of inscription by a series of signifiers which cannot be entirely articulated. The body is ambiguous – it is indefinable and yet it represents the subject at a Symbolic level. Whereas Chris and June consider the body as a site of ‘loss’ or a loss of being, a loss of subjectivity (meaning that the body is a signifier and that one *has* a body, intertwined with a subject which *is* a body, that is, *being* a body), other participants consider the body to be a site for exploring jouissance. The subject does not necessarily understand what jouissance is, rather jouissance reveals itself as a promise to the subject. Subjects attempt to attain the jouissance they crave. Jouissance is an intuited concept which involves attempts to signify what cannot be signified. For the subject this position is inevitably frustrating. Most often jouissance is described as enjoyment or an excess of enjoyment. This implicates desire directly since the object of one’s desire is also always out of reach. The desire for the mother is never abandoned by the subject, but is problematic in that it promises an unobtainable, absolute imagined jouissance. Such an image resides in the spectre of ideology which poses as all-knowing, for example, religion, the institution of family, modern capitalism, the attainment of material possessions. In addition to this spectral quality, jouissance is an experience of the body and is ultimately connected to the Real, although this connection can be articulated only through the Symbolic.

Desire as ideologically signified in today’s world has been discussed in the previous chapter on belief. Love, power, ambition, money, fame and material possessions have all been articulated by participants in this study as being within the order of how desire is understood as having Symbolic value. However, this study also aims to reveal the more painful, forbidden and guilty desires one might articulate. The research process itself encourages the

traits of perversity of subjectivity to reveal themselves and to be enjoyed. In this way participants' enjoyment becomes in part an ethical function of undertaking research and this fits today's sentiments as Žižek states (2006, p. 104):

[W]e are bombarded from all sides by different versions of the injunction 'Enjoy!', from direct enjoyment in sexual performance to enjoyment in professional achievement or spiritual awakening. Enjoyment today effectively functions as a strange ethical duty: individuals feel guilty not for violating moral prohibitions by way of engaging in illicit pleasures, but for not being able to enjoy. In this situation, psychoanalysis is the only discourse in which you are *allowed not to enjoy* – not forbidden to enjoy, just relieved of the pressure to do so.

Indeed, not all subjects indicated that they enjoyed discussing desire, with one participant even commenting, "I would never spend my time thinking about this topic if it weren't for this group. I just live it". Despite frustrations, participants nevertheless went to great pains to articulate what they meant by desire and how it impacted on their lived realities. As a researcher I actively encouraged subjects to talk about fantasy and the exercise of their *jouissance*, which is a way of taking care of the Real. By taking care of the Real, I mean cultivating a desire for what is possible and making one's life compatible with *jouissance*. An interrogation of desire takes this further in that the subject can develop an understanding of *how to* take care of the Real as a fundamental point of reference. Such understandings of desire and of *jouissance* are only in part for the subject of what has been said; rather, what has been said provides an indicator for what remains in suspension or what remains unsaid. For more recent Lacanians such as Joan Copjec, there is an evident shift in Lacanian scholarship from the ethic of desire to that of *jouissance*. A new subject is revealed in this shift, one where subjects locate, reveal and recognise themselves as a symptom of the Other. However, what remains in suspension for the subject is a question. Indeed, as Gary (participant, father of teenage daughters focus group) states in an individual interview when discussing his "sex life" with his wife, "what is wrong with a bit of spanking sometimes?" Such a simple question was intended to be provocative and was directed at me, a researcher

of desire. It is a very interesting question and points towards the multiplicity and demand of desire. The question can be interpreted as a wish to relieve the guilt of jouissance – given the subject cannot obliterate jouissance, how can one make it compatible with life, what guarantee can jouissance offer and is there a better jouissance out there? Spanking during an intimate moment is repeated and such an urge to repeat becomes an investment in developing a literacy of desire. Here Gary is setting the terms of his desire: it is without tense and no guarantee of satisfaction is given. In striving for jouissance the act of spanking creates a momentum contingent on fantasy and does not have to resist desire. Rather, an access to desire by embracing the object which produces jouissance, that is the body, is posited as a wish fulfilment. Such desire for a better jouissance pulls the subject towards the Master's discourse – the pleasure to come is S1. However the subsequent waiting for the pleasure includes the knowledge that satisfaction is imminent which lies within the domain of desire. For Žižek the function of the *objet a* is revealed as the superego injunction to *enjoy!* The perverse act occupies the Master signifier (S1) in that the subject attempts to recognise him/herself as the gaze for another subject. The structure of perversion offers a way towards a *better* jouissance, a drive directed to mastering jouissance. However, as Klossowski points out, there is a risk with the pervert's discourse in that its aim is to occupy the position of the Other (1967, p. 47):

The representation of having a proper body is most clearly specific to perversion: although the pervert feels the otherness of the foreign body, what he feels the best is the body of the other as being his; and that which is his in a normative and institutional fashion, as being really foreign to himself... He lives *in another person* beforehand so he can manage to conceive the effect of his own violence over others.

To return to Gary's question, "what is wrong with a bit of spanking sometimes?" In short, nothing. Spanking provides the neurotic with a fantasy of perversion and is an attempt at reorienting jouissance towards a desire for what is possible. The act of spanking and of being spanked is one of jouissance: one subject is offering the other their body as an object in the

hope that jouissance will be mastered. It can be claimed that this activity is spoken by a subject who fantasises about a perverse act from the experiencing of which an instrument marks the body and leaves a trace. Moreover, this act institutes a sexual relation which is at the same time an expression of sexual identity: the perversity that enables the subject to believe in the promise of the embodied Other and to therefore act as the Other. For Žižek, jouissance is a political category which regulates the body (2006a, p. 309):

Today, this ideological manipulation of obscene jouissance has entered a new stage: our politics is more and more directly the politics of jouissance, concerned with ways of soliciting, or controlling and regulating, jouissance.

The body of the subject needs to be kept under control, so that any excess is both sustained and contained. For Žižek, current politics dictate that one ought not to deny oneself pleasure; it should, however, be contained within what he terms “homeostatic balance” (2006a, p. 310) which maintains and serves capitalist ideology. Here capitalism operates as the big Other, that which pulls the strings behind the scene. The body is thereby spoken for through the symbolic structures that are already in place.

Frosh (1995) designates the subject recognising the signifier of passion as the meaning of the Phallus. Freud theorised passion through his analysis of Anna O’s hysterical phantom pregnancy. Her desire for her analyst precipitated the onset of her imaginary labour, which she enacted during a psychoanalytic session. Her desire was libidinal in foundation, seeking fulfilment and objectification through her body. Passion is signifiable through metaphoric objects, active signifiers of the body. The body has the capacity to act as a vessel which transforms desire into an act manifesting from libidinal drive or force, such as that which an act of spanking would provide. Desire, on the other hand, is elusive and passion for the signifier, moreover, is part of the subjectivisation process. There are many signifiers of passion, some of which have already been discussed, for example god, family and the

ongoing project of the self. For participants in this research the body is spoken about as offering the promise for passion. Although inhabited by the subject the body is the Other for the subject – the mysterious domain of the Real, that which nevertheless, still provides fragments of the Symbolic for subjectivity. For the subject the body is a question about subjectivity. The body functions as a way to find out, through the effects of the experience of embodiment and of operating within the limitations of body, that one exists. Lacan states in *Seminar VI* that men and women are positioned differently in relation to the Phallus (1958, p. 83-84):

Let us say that these relations [to the phallus] will revolve around a being and a having which, because they refer to a signifier, the phallus, have the contradictory effect of on the one hand lending reality to the subject in that signifier, and on the other making unreal that to be signified.

Lacan is articulating that there is no guarantee for the stability of identity and this is furthered by Žižek. For Žižek, the postmodern superego injunction to *enjoy!* (Myers, 2003, p. 51) is contrary to prohibition. The authority of the big Other insists that we are subjects of choice, notwithstanding that freedom is illusory and mediated by ideological forces. Žižek is indicating that the superego permits *the appearance* of enjoyment without going so far as to insist on an obligation to do so. Here is the direct link to desire which is itself a state of non-satisfaction. The superego feeds on that which is repressed. Myers (p. 53) offers an example of how Žižek posits postmodern enjoyment:

Constantly bombarded with images of, and invitations to indulge in, sexual enjoyment, it can no longer be claimed that sexual pleasure is in any way prohibited. On the contrary, for Žižek, sensual gratification has been elevated to the status of an official ideology. We are compelled to enjoy sex. This compunction – the injunction to ‘Enjoy!’ – marks the return of the superego.

The super-ego injunction to enjoy extends to the body – one ought to enjoy one another’s bodies, to enjoy desire and to strive toward being desired. The body plays a pivotal role in such a striving towards an ideal of the Real of the body, that which is difficult to capture in the Symbolic. *Heavenly Creatures* examines the spectre of the body by incorporating fantasy into both the Symbolic and the Real. Specifically, Juliet and Pauline are depicted as women in fantasy scenes that are interweaved with their lived realities, which leads to matricide.



Illustration 29. Pauline [Melanie Lynskey] in the Fourth World.

Metaphors of the body are used by participants to reveal the close connection between desire and trauma. June, a participant from the creative artists’ focus group, employs an interesting phrase to describe how desire operates in relation to her Other (in this case, her children):

June: I think that's why as a parent you're so desperate to... like when you see the... you know... you're so desperate to give your kid what you can, because it's like someone like, you know.. Ripping your heart out! [slight, anxious laugh]. It's hard to see them suffer because they can't get it, but actually that's life. Isn't it?

“Ripping your heart out” provides a brutal image of the maternal, of being a mother and of the power of the Other. Here the hysterical feminine subject is confronted with the construction of an idealised mother image, one that she is struggling to live up to. The revelation of her heart being ripped out by someone, implies that she is traumatically split. “But that is life, isn't it”? is not an articulation that attempts to hide this. She boldly nominates herself as a split subject, she articulates the traumatic encounter that motherhood brings. She situates herself as not living up to her ideal image. She expresses hurt, pain and disconnection with her body at the inevitable realisation that she cannot be all things to her children. Such a radical separation is articulated by her metaphor, “ripping your heart out” and this anxiety reveals her maternal jouissance. ‘But that's life isn't it’ indicates a gap that she does not want to close since, for the female subject, this gap reveals potential for other subjectivities.

The position of the body as a fertile site for political investment has been debated for decades in feminist theory. The body as a vessel which completes womanhood through the process of pregnancy, labour and birth is a heavily contested idea in feminist scholarship; accordingly, studies on the body have validly problematised essentialised assumptions that motherhood is a ‘natural’ desire. Such social sanctioning of women's bodies leads to the conundrum that the female body is primarily a physical preserve in which reproduction takes place. According to this view, the female body provides an ideological service. However, when considering desire, June, in her early forties, has the benefit of being influenced by three waves of feminist scholarship and thus is not so easily convinced that the body's subjection to motherhood is necessarily a natural desire. Žižek claims (Fiennes, 2006) that “there is

nothing natural about desire. We have to be taught *how to* desire". That some women desire motherhood grips the body and disciplines it within a mode of production that insists on the promise of jouissance. That having a child is considered a culturally ideal semblance of the feminine is, however, problematic; many women do not identify with the idealised position of being a mother with children and with the image of the ideal female body as a pregnant one, particularly when none of these have been experienced. Tracey articulates this difficulty in recognising socially ascribed desires:

It's interesting that... you're talking about kids... I mean that whole sense of people not desiring things they've never had before... you know? So partly some of the experiences we've had in our past maybe that we don't even remember create that feeling. And you want that feeling back. So even like, drinking a nice cup of coffee... if I never had a cup of coffee, I wouldn't desire a cup of coffee, necessarily because I don't have that wonderful feeling of what that cup of coffee is going to do for me. Or taste or whatever you like it to do. Even at the most basic level in some ways, it almost is as though I've got this sort of memory within me that triggers things that make me experience things, that maybe I hadn't previously experienced.

Richard and June from the creative artists' participant group provide an alternative view to the social partition of the body, when they discuss the dovetailing of desire, drive and obsession:

Richard: But also... I was thinking of umm... sometimes being able to see something or finding something that someone else doesn't have can also drive something that I was also intrigued by. How much desire can be driven off, yeah perhaps a previous desire, or something that has become habit that can drive along and... how much it's built up and off... perhaps, partially genetically and through upbringing.

June: There's often obsession connected with that too. Isn't there? There's often obsession connected with desire? It can be? You know that intensity of... ahh... driving... trying to drive your life there or trying to drive something there... you have a huge desire in you, you know you can become obsessive about it. Even if it's something like buying a casserole dish at the homestore!

Here the function of ideology as within the capitalist discourse is important to recognise in that obsession is posited as something beyond one's control. The subject as consumer insists that it would be acceptable to obsess over a benign object such as a casserole dish and such a luxury is one that anyone can participate in.

The body and the capitalist discourse

Power inscribes itself into the body directly – bypassing ideology (Žižek, 1994, p. 13).

The economy of desire and the saturation of jouissance within the current capitalist system are not lost on Žižek when he offers a challenge to protestors at the New York Occupy Movement on October 10th 2011. Like Lacan in May 1968, Žižek cautions protestors in a moment of jouissance, not to lose their focus and fall back on capitalism as an evitable Master:

There is a danger. Don't fall in love with yourselves. We have a nice time here. But remember, carnivals come cheap. What matters is the day after, when we will have to return to normal lives. Will there be any changes then? I don't want you to remember these days, you know, like "Oh. we were young and it was beautiful." Remember that our basic message is "We are allowed to think about alternatives." We know what we do not want. But what do we want?... We know that people often desire something but do not really want it. Don't be afraid to really want what you desire.



Illustration 30. Žižek speaking at the New York Occupy Movement, 2011

While Occupy occurred following my field work, the movement fits with an ethic of desire raised by participants in that there is a certain enjoyment in which the embodied individual becomes part of a wider process, even when such wider processes collapse. In his speech to protesters Žižek proffers that within the capitalist discourse there is an explicit link between drive and desire. He is saying this specifically now because people around the globe, for various reasons, are acting on the basis of their trauma and their fear of uncertainty. Although capitalism is understood as a regulator of the social bond, it nevertheless produces trauma for the subject. Regardless of how successful one might measure the Occupy Movement, its function is that through the body, that is the act of protesting and of being visible to other subjects, this assemblage of bodies might surpass social regulation. Occupy employed both the body and the disgruntled subject in its relation to drive and in its attempt to stage desire (for a *better* jouissance, in this case a *better* capitalist system where capitalism itself can be an ultimate governing and unquestioned Master). The media frenzy surrounding the movement is undeniable. Žižek nevertheless remains somewhat sceptical, maintaining that the appropriation of drive and desire in this social movement leads the subject to a most predictable place. To use the mundane example of June wanting the casserole dish, this staging of a metaphor of desire as the real thing can be understood within two modalities. The

first is Žižek's claim that we operate with a false notion of freedom. The second is that this notion is reinforced by the myth of the permissive society where ideas and relations are presumed to be no longer regulated by authority. According to Žižek such liberalism is false because it leads the subject back to that which is ideologically structured within the modes of production and by capitalism. According to Lacan's capitalist discourse buying a casserole dish at a home store is a direct rejection of desire, in place of which an act of exchange is misinterpreted as choice by the subject. Things have nothing to do with desire and have no causal value as objects in relation to desire. This is because the discourse of capitalism creates objects which are designed specifically not to satisfy, so that we must always be finding something else. The only thing one is contributing to is the power of consumption, which is ideologically configured as being within the order of desire. Of course participants are not stupid, to use Žižek's pointed phrase, and are aware both of the cunning advertising industry and of the ultimate meaninglessness of superfluous material possessions. However, it does seem evident that when discussing desire, participants from all focus groups return to objects, including the body as ways to evade personal elaboration. The materiality of such objects is rendered as holding value – for example, Tracey's claim that pondering desire is an indulgent activity since one would not have such a privilege in poorer, less developed countries. This response can be seen as an extension of western capitalism in which the neurotic subject feels guilty and deliberately implicates this guilt in their articulations in order to retain innocence through confession. Tracey, through an ideology of choice, is positing capitalism as the Master from which desire is already constituted and directed for the subject. Sam (a participant from the creative artists focus group) illustrates this when he states:

That's desire and where the imagination comes in. Because you use your imagination and you think that it's something and when you get it you... sometimes it's not... most of the time it's not... The Canary Islands!.. and you go to bed and you're like...ahh... you've got posters of the Canary Islands on the wall and you're kind of using your imagination and you're fantasising and you actually start fantasising.. like swimming, I mean you know, Bond girls everywhere!

Oh yeah, I want to go to the Canary Islands! And lay on the beach and it'll be great... and then you get there and it's full of Germans and they're all drunk! I still want to go though!

This position occurs in Žižek's claim concerning belief: "I know very well, but still..." as a way of justifying guilt and of avoiding self confrontation. Here belief is a structure which hesitates in that the subject does not know how to articulate desire. Thus in desiring a casserole dish, June transfers her guilt to the Other (those social determinants which construct desire with materialism and she is therefore able to feel a little less guilty). That one can desire buying items such as a casserole dish is common under a capitalist system, after all this is how desire is staged. But this is not the same as freedom of choice. The capitalist discourse presumes that people are not capable of choosing, the opposite of what capitalism postulates in its ideology. It attempts to present the subject as an individual that is not divided, despite the knowledge that no object can be a protection from the internal catastrophes which are a part of being human. The capitalist discourse offers something disguised as an ideological ethic – that of renouncing desire - and this is reinforced when internal anxiety experienced by the divided subject is momentarily suspended. To ponder one's internal desire, that is unconscious desire, does not fit in with capitalism. Capitalism fails the subject who pursues such an ideological ethic because it provides objects which are reference points, or *points de capiton* from which symptoms are revealed and consciously sought. Žižek (2011) continues this argument:

What you see is, 'For the price of a couple of cappuccinos, we allow you not only no longer to feel guilty but even to feel as if you are really doing something about poverty without really doing anything'. We have to get rid of pseudo activities. For example, organic food... is it not true that many of us buy it because it makes you feel good? 'Look, I'm doing something to help the mother earth. I'm part of a wonderful project of humanity'. You know, it's an easy way out. Charity, for me is not the answer...

You know, once I called Soros, George Soros⁵¹ who I appreciate. As a person he's not bad. I call him chocolate laxative. You know you can buy a laxative which has the form of a chocolate. But chocolate is usually associated with constipation. So, first they take billions from you, then they give you half back, and they are the greatest humanitarians. Of course, we should take this kind of money. But what we should fight for is a society where this kind of charity will not be needed.

The body is directly implicated in the capitalist discourse and must be so for the discourse to maintain itself, hence one wears *No Sweat* shoes and organic cotton clothes, buys an eco-trike for the children, one eats organic food and so on. When indulging in the consumption of ethical goods the body is staging an elusive non-desiring stance which implies that such items surpass hyper-capitalism because of their supposed ethical status, a position which becomes the ideological face of desire for the subject. However, notwithstanding its seemingly anti-capitalist stance the body is in fact displaying that capitalism is the answer to finding the truth of one's desire, although this answer will, because of ideological contingencies and fads, inevitably fail the subject. During an individual interview, Tracey articulates her ethical staging of desire:

I've had some really difficult chapters in my life, to me, I guess my religion has always been nature. And I have a real sense of strength and being at peace with nature. And I know lots of artists and stuff always have that kind of connection. Umm... so... yeah, so I wasn't kind of a question of... of... my love of nature, but also just sort of... my love... I guess sort of agnostic sense of greater sense of spiritual body. I have... I've looked into other. Read some other

⁵¹ George Soros is an investor and philanthropist who has gifted millions of dollars to public health, education and the banking industry. Many of his charities are based in Africa and within the poorer regions of the United States.

things, looked into other things, but I always felt like there are always these... so many different rules to apply.

The ethos of 'nature' and religion is an ideological conviction from which the individual stages a particular embodied subjectivity of wholeness. Such a discourse is already ideologically posited – one must act within certain ways in order to reiterate the discourse so that *jouissance* can be attained. Such reiterations are within the order of the Imaginary as June interestingly highlights when she covers up her 'joke' about the casserole dish:

For me, that's why I think imagination is a really important key because as you say, how do you desire something you haven't actually had before. So I think for me anyway, it's the combination of what [Sam] was saying about seeing it around, seeing other people experiencing it and seeing what it does to them. And then that imagination of what would that be like for me and my life... And also for me personally, just as a real physiological response to it. It was actually my... almost instinct. And what I was saying before about wanting a child and not being able to have it. It was such a gut reaction. You know... it was really kind of... visceral response to a need I had... yeah, so I... I... so, I under... so... that's for me... is the seeing it in other people, using my imagination to...

A return to the body as a site for desire yields a more authentic way of understanding desire for both June and the group as a whole. The ideology of the good mother legitimises the plurality she experiences – achieving subjective wholeness in a system in which its mechanisms also seizes her. June recounts an anxiety that her body might fail to grant her desire for a child. Experiencing anxiety is a part of being a person in the world; its affect is linked to existence. It attaches itself to an act from which the body must speak: for June anxiety must culminate in childbirth; for Gary it must produce *jouissance*; for Chris it must create art which speaks to another subject; for Tracey it must create music. However, there is another position from which the subject implicates the body in desire: the position of the melancholic to which the capitalist system renders the subject. In today's world the relation

of the body has been co-opted as a political tool from which personal meanings are created. Writing in 1956, Sartre illustrated this eloquently when he discusses how desire is felt as a bodily experience (p. 387):

Desire is defined as trouble. The notion of 'trouble' can help us better to determine the nature of desire. We contrast troubled water with transparent water, a troubled look with a clear look. Troubled water remains water; but its translucency is 'troubled' by an inapprehensible presence which makes one with it, which is everywhere and nowhere...

In the theorisation of desire, the melancholic position transfers desire from a lost object to the body. Žižek articulates this position when he states (2006, p. 67-68):

According to Freud, the melancholic is not aware of what he has lost in the lost object - one has to introduce here the Lacanian distinction between the *objet a* as the cause of desire and the object of desire: while the object of desire is simply the desired object, the cause of desire is the feature on account of which we desire the desired object (some detail, tic, which we are usually unaware of and sometimes even misperceive it as the obstacle, as that in spite of which we desire the object)...

From this perspective, the melancholic is not primarily the subject fixated on the lost object, unable to perform the work of mourning on it; he is, rather, the subject who possesses the object, but has lost his desire for it, because the cause which made him desire this object has withdrawn, lost its efficiency. Far from accentuating to the extreme the situation of the frustrated desire, of the desire deprived of its object, melancholy stands for the presence of the object itself deprived of our desire for it - melancholy occurs when we finally get the desired object, but are disappointed at it. In this precise sense, melancholy (disappointment at all positive, empirical objects, none of which can satisfy our desire) effectively is the beginning of philosophy.

The loss or the anxiety of potential loss (the imagined loss) provides a way for subjects to return to the site of the body as an agent which promises certainty. This site is constituted politically by the neoliberal identity where subjects are encouraged to promote themselves for the benefit of free will and enterprise. Thus the subject prospers. This location is obviously a problematic and traumatic one and there exists dislocation and fragmentation. Indeed for the subject one's body often is hard to recognise. The market becomes not only an economic force, but a moral one based on the ideologies which best support its perpetuity. Whilst neoliberalism seemingly promotes the body as an agent of change, it simultaneously renders it invisible.

In the case of June, the return to the imagination is a crucial factor in structuring desire in relation to the body. Imagination is not the same as fantasy, although they are closely linked. The Imaginary is based on a fantasy image, in June's case, an image of the body. The concept of fantasy is best described as the specula image that stages desire. In this way fantasy is a protective mechanism which functions to keep trauma at bay. The imaginary has an ego function which is emphasised in the mirror stage: "the imaginary is... the order of surface appearances which are deceptive, observable phenomena which hide underlying structure; the affects are such structure" (Evans, 1996, p. 82). The imaginary is the effect of the specula image. Lacan's claim that the only thing one can be guilty of is to give ground relative to desire, is an ethic of both desire and of its relation to subjectivity. What Lacan means is that in pursuing one's desire, one's guilt is exacerbated by the demands of the social bond.⁵² The melancholic position resists giving ground to desire, feels the pain of being a subject in the world and of exiting it. As Freud argues one is reluctant to abandon the libidinal position

⁵² This is because the co-ordinates of the social are those traditions and institutions which uphold the legacy of the name-of-the-father (that is of prohibition) and structure desire and thus guilt.

even if a metaphor, such as motherhood, that attempts to repress this position is already constituted (Phillips, 2006, p. 311). This tendency offers a subjective appearance which is crucial in that the subject does not *appear* to be divided. The implications are the loss of bodily boundaries and that objects become extensions of the body, extensions of oneself, as Richard, a creative artist focus group participant illustrates:

I was thinking of umm... sometimes being able to see something or finding something that someone else doesn't have can also drive something that I was also intrigued by. How much desire can be driven off, yeah perhaps a previous desire, or something that has become habit that can drive along and... How much it's built up and off... Perhaps, partially genetically and through upbringing.

That one 'suffers for their art' is an example of the melancholic position, in that suffering manifests from lack and subsequent subjective symptoms. There is little distinction between sublimated suffering and the suffering of *jouissance*. Instead of the presence of desire, there is merely a problematic relationship with objects which although desired are not signified certainties. For June, wanting a child is the melancholic position, notwithstanding how she describes it as a visceral "a gut feeling". Here she links melancholy to the site of the body and returns to a state of subjective destitution which is nevertheless a position from which desire manifests itself; she imagines what it would be like to have a child, the child being a semblance of her interpretation of desire. Melancholy is linked with desire in that it keeps the narratives and ambivalence of desire in a continuous form which permits its articulation for the subject. Loss, anxiety and ambivalence are what remain when desire is confronted. Gorton (2008, p. 31) draws an important link between desire and loss when she states, "[o]nce the subject has lost her coordinates of desire, she must remap them... in this way desire is both an individual and social experience."

June structures desire around the mystery of the operation of the body. The body directly links desire and drive through melancholy. One struggles with one's symptoms when the object of desire is not delivered. One feels destitution when there is no act to speak of and no semblance of the cause of desire for the subject to consider. For many participants, desire is a position which they posit uncomfortably alongside the ideologies of capitalism, although subjects would like to consider that they harness choice and are not controlled by the moral sensitivities of the time. For the subject the act redirects desire in many ways in that the object (that is, the child, art work, musical composition and so on) is a production of not only a symptom, but also of a realisation that one is attempting to give ground to desire. The body acts for the subject and attempts to speak to the object of desire regarding both its realisation and its attainment. An encounter with fantasy is crucial for the subject to recognise that he/she exists. Thus the body offers a way in which the subject can consider traversing fantasy.

The body that speaks to the object of desire

I have a desire to stop smoking (Sam, participant, creative industries focus group, 2010).

Ultimately desire is desire for meaning: paradoxically, recognition of this focus occurs when the subject gives up attempting to access meaning from ideas which are delusional. Meaning then becomes a state of destitution, a black hole designated by the limits of language. Even seemingly everyday objects of desire become unattainable or impossible. Initially what June desires for herself is happening in other women's bodies. Her visceral and physiological reaction which she attributes to desire is both biological and emotional. Her testimony is one of suffering which promises the fulfilment of desire. From the position of having had two children June is able to speak about this desire with fluidity and distance. However, her trauma at the possibility of not having had children remains: "I would have become a bitter person. I hate to say it, but I would have". A sense of authorisation comes from being the figure of the mother. Desire is ubiquitous and is without meaning or purpose. At the

fulfilment of her wish, June posits the mother within the Master's discourse, when prior to that it was merely a fantasy. By comparison Tracey, ambivalent about motherhood, questions the authorisation of the mother; for her an internal opposition arises. Her desire to make music and to be involved in environmental activism entails that her body speaks in a different way. The super-ego injunction to *enjoy!* implicates the body – one ought to enjoy one's body, to enjoy desire and strive toward being desired. The body has a pivotal role in such a striving which is to assume the ideal image contained within the Real of the body, or that which is difficult to capture in the Symbolic.

Lacan states that fantasy implies ready-to-wearness: “reality is ready-to-wear for fantasy”.⁵³ By this he means that objects are already constituted and tailored in the Symbolic for the subject to grasp in its attempt to signify and shape fantasy. I claim that this includes the body. Objects are thus ready and present for the subject and are already within the chain of signification for utilisation by the subject. The following is a diagram of Lacanian objects as exemplified in *Encore* (1972-1973, p. 10):

⁵³ This concept was employed by Lacan in his close reading of James Joyce. Lacan returns to the oedipal arrangement when he states that the Symbolic is constituted for the subject through objects. However, in Joyce's case Lacan was exploring how the psychotic structure has the abilities and function to create its own ready objects. In this way Lacan reiterates that the logic of fantasy is akin to the logic of the signifier (1966-67).

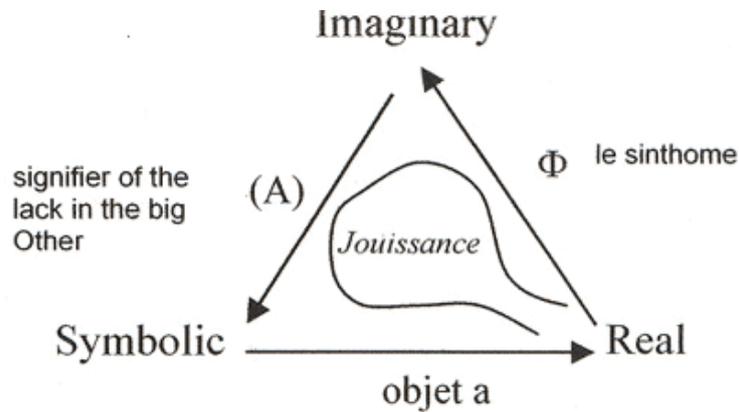


Figure 15. Schema for the Lacanian Object

Lacan’s schema interprets the objects as $S(\mathcal{A})$, the signifier of the lack in the Other as a (the objet a) and ϕ as the Phallic signifier. Objects present Flisfeder (2012, p. 48) argues, are those objects corresponding to the Symbolic which embodies lack (a); Real which embodies jouissance (ϕ); and Imaginary; the circulating object of exchange $S(\mathcal{A})$. The Imaginary status of these objects determine the Symbolic in that the objects are symbolised in the Symbolic register. Objects represent and support the reality of ideological spectre and can be considered the sublime objects of ideology. The sublime object has the function of organising the subject’s enjoyment both *of* and *in* ideology. Žižek offers an interpretation of this schema by paying specific attention on the direction of the arrows, maintaining “that they mark the symbolisation of the Imaginary” (1991, p. 135). Žižek continues by insisting that the absence of meaning threatens the process of symbolisation. (1991, p. 135):

[The] object small a is thus the ‘hole in the real’ that sets symbolization in motion; the capital phi, the ‘imagarization of the real,’ is a certain image that materializes nauseous enjoyment; and, finally $S(\mathcal{A})$, the signifier of the lack in the big Other (the symbolic order), of its inconsistency. . . . The abyss in the middle (the balloon encircling the letter J—*jouissance*) is of course the whirlpool of enjoyment threatening to swallow us all.

For Žižek, cinema fulfils this enjoyment in that it is the connection between the spectre of ideology and the supplementing fantasies that are staged both on the screen and in the viewer's mind. Žižek reiterates this when he states (cited in Fiennes, 2006, *Perverts Guide to Cinema*):

In order to understand today's world, we need cinema, literally. It's only in cinema that we get that crucial dimension we are not ready to confront in our reality. If you are looking for what is in reality more real than reality itself, look into the cinematic fiction.

What is traumatic is the possibility that the ready object might malfunction and therefore not facilitate the movement of the signifying chain. "I would have been a bitter person if I had not have had children" is an example of this. The ready object must work properly for subjects to be able to signify their fantasy and thus their meaning of being-in-the-world. Žižek and Daly explore this particularity of consciousness when they state (2004, p. 59):

Basically consciousness is not something that enables us to function better. On the contrary, I am more and more convinced that consciousness originates with something going terribly wrong – even at a most personal level. For example, when do we become aware of something, fully aware? Precisely at the point where something no longer functions properly or not in the expected way.

Experiencing the Real is also an encounter with uncertainty, speculation and the limits of the ready object. The body is the perfect support for such an encounter with the Real, also of an encounter with fantasy and with desire. The body is the ready object until something goes wrong, namely when the subject and body it inhabits do not fit. The possibility of the body not fitting the subject is a very conscious possibility. For the subject the failure of the body is unsettling, leading the subject to short circuit any possibility of trauma. Here June indicates that the fact of her friends becoming pregnant gives her hope. For Chris, however, the body is

not fully known and a traumatic encounter occurs. Fantasies are tailor-made for the subject. Žižek structures this ready-to-weariness as already existing in the Symbolic of social and cultural values. This leaves the subject with a very important question: *how can I fit myself into my own fantasy?* The gaze of one's body is crucial here, contradictory and fluid.

Ideology has the function of organising repressed desires and is, according to Žižek, akin to a film screen where fantasies can be played out under a protective layer. For Žižek, the spectre of the Other is repeatedly transmitted through invisible ideologies which are revealed by the speaking subject. This speculative image of the Other is constituted both *by* and *of* the body. What this means is that the Other, the mirror image of the self, is where the body is constructed for the subject and also how the body is understood by the subject. The body is situated within the domains of both the Symbolic and the Imaginary. The body is constructed as both desirable and as an ideological 'fall-out'. The logic of to *enjoy!* points to what Žižek describes as a simulated enjoyment: to appear in a certain way (from which other subjects bear witness to your enjoyment) is a more desirable position than actually experiencing enjoyment. The following transcript offers an example of the competing gazes of the body and of how it ought to fit subjectivity. During an individual interview Sam attempts to articulate his competing desires – to both give up smoking and continue to smoke:

I was on my last and then, I don't know, willpower or something it just got to, I gave in, yeah. No, what happened, sorry, was I was, I think I was out at, at the pub having some beers and that's when I, yeah. Because it's the drinking thing, the social, the socialising kind of thing, so, but yeah I will, I will, I mean it's, I just desire to give up this addiction, it's a pain in the, pain in the butt really. You don't get that with nicotine but, um, you get a kind of a sense of emptiness when it's not there, kind of a feeling of emptiness. Um, and so if I go without a cigarette for, you know, an hour then I kind of feel like I need, you know, I need to have another one, you know. And I do and I think, "Okay I'll do this," I smoke it and then it's like, it's so horrible, you know? As soon as you take that first drag the nicotine goes back into your blood, you know, and then it's, you know, okay, and then quite often I won't finish a whole

cigarette, 'cause it's, you know, I don't, it's not really a pleasure to smoke, you know, but I just seem to need to keep doing it. When I'm drinking, um, I smoke a lot more, yeah but, um, yeah. I don't get any pleasure out of smoking and I spend a lot of time doing it. It kind of, well it's, just, I don't know, it feels kind of calming in some ways. Um, and I don't even think, I don't even think to myself, "I'm going to have a cigarette now." I just go, pull it out of my pocket and then light it. I mean it didn't happen straightaway, but when, the body was totally rid of all nicotine and I had no cravings or desire, strong desires to have a cigarette, then the dreams happened [laughter].

Freud's work suggests that within a dream the subject can find a satisfaction, a particular wish fulfilment and a condition in which desire may be discovered. In the field of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the connection between dreams and the smoking of cigarettes is never coincidental. Here the acts of smoking and of dreaming distinguish the modalities from which desire can be realised for the subject. For Sam, cigarette smoking is not necessarily posited as a longing (from which nothing is realised), rather it is a specific dimension of desire where the act is articulated as the realisation of a drive. This illustrates Žižek's claim that there is a direct relation between drive and desire. Sam goes on to elaborate the relation between the decline in his cigarette smoking and increase in the lucidity of his dreams:

And I'm, yeah and it's apparently quite common for people to dream that they're smoking. They don't last forever, I talked to a friend of mine, he's given up smoking, five years it's been now and he said the dreams lasted for the first year and then after that you don't have them anymore. I'd say it'd be the same yeah, sometimes you dream and you think, "Oh yeah that was just a dream," and sometimes you think, "Whoa," when you first wake up you think, that's when you think, "Was that a dream, was I smoking last night or was it..." You know? Um, so yeah they're quite vivid, some of them are more vivid than others, um. Some of them you're smoking and there are other people around you, you know? Um, oh yeah 'cause I remember I had one dream I was smoking and [girlfriend] was there, and then I woke up and she was, I was beside her and I just said, "Did I smoke last night?" And she's like, "No." I'm like ahhhh, "Good I just had a dream I was smoking," and yeah.

When one dreams, surprising things can occur: we can kill people, have sex with whomsoever, undertake great physical endurance and smoke cigarettes without a care in the world. Dreams are indeed the realisation and fulfilment of desire and the guilt which ensues is a manifestation of the dominant superego injunction, the authorisation which comes from the Other. In order to experience a dream one needs to be asleep, so that desire remains in the domain of the unconscious. Sam points out that, the bodily experience of waking from a dream requires an act of regression in the face of anxiety. What is revealed in a dream for the dreamer is that nothing is impossible and that given conducive mechanisms and contingencies desire can manifest itself. The limitations of the body disappear, become invisible to the subject and any act the subject wishes to undertake becomes possible. Regression takes a lot of effort for the subject, because of the subject's self recognition that he/she does not want to have to reach the point of action. Sam's anxiety regarding smoking is a limitation imposed by the super-ego, the real social limits which Sam has stitched into his lived reality. The more anxious he feels, the closer he is to the act of smoking so that the pressure to quit, by inhibiting the desire for a cigarette becomes more apparent. Such is the repression of Sam's desire to quit in spite of continuing to smoke, that he cancels out the enjoyment at the same time that he undertakes the act of lighting up. His bodily movements produce that which causes him guilt. Smokers in New Zealand occupy an increasingly stigmatised status: horrifying images of decomposed bodies and organs are on cigarette packets, advertising of tobacco is banned, cigarettes are hidden from purchase in shops, no smoking signs are placed in public places, and cigarettes are heavily taxed. The cigarette is increasingly an ideological object of taboo. Behaviours such as smoking illustrate how social ideologies are embedded within the order of cultural regulation and consequently of capitalism. In Sam's dreams about smoking he is engaging in the fantasy of both ideological resistance and of fully giving ground to his desire, thereby embracing the subjective destitution smoking affords:

It's not really a pleasure to smoke, you know, but I just seem to need to keep doing it. When I'm drinking, I smoke a lot more, yeah but it symbolises, um, ahh, a kind of, like handcuffs or shackles that I want to remove. It's almost like, it's almost like prison, well it's not, you know, it's, I feel trapped, it's a trap that's what and it's so simple, all I have to do is don't do it ever again. Like now, I mean I'm not smoking now and all I have to do is never pick up another cigarette again, but it's so hard, like I don't know, mentally for me it's quite tough. Um, and it symbolises some sort of snare, or shackles, some sort of yoke around my neck that I can't break free from, um, and I really want to. So I don't get any pleasure out of it, but I just keep doing it and it makes no sense whatsoever. It costs me a lot of money, cigarettes have gone up as the government's increased the taxes, so a packet of twenty is now like fourteen dollars, um, fifty cents, or something like that, for twenty cigarettes. Um, it's got a social kind of, um, stigma to it, you know, a lot of people aren't doing it and it's antisocial, 'cause if we're here in the lounge, say there's a group of us, then I go outside and have a cigarette, you know?

Žižek (bigthink.com) makes a compelling statement regarding the subjectivity of the cigarette smoker in modern society:

The only true hedonists, I think, are today, two kinds: drug users and cigarette smokers. And you see how under total pressure they are... [T]here is something deeply symptomatic in our horror at the chain smoker, as if what bothers us is his/her enjoyment, as if you see there is a guy who has a singular passion and he's ready to risk everything he has for pursuing that passion.

The symptom signifies the division of the subject, whereas anxiety is a form of subjective destitution and very close to the act. Fantasy is the mediatory force between the symptom and anxiety and sustains desire by keeping it inhibited. Thus the support of desire is through the repetitious act to which the subject contributes and which is emphasised by the *objet a*. This object does not fulfil desire, rather it sustains the subject within the modality of desire. The introduction of a moral signifier, an inhibition, alters the way the subject may think of both

desire and the act which structures it. It is important to note that Sam requested an interview with me specifically to discuss his “addiction to smoking”. It is clear that *jouissance* is implicated here – Sam states he does not necessarily enjoy smoking and he wants to give up but despite this, he continues to smoke. He pays for the act of smoking with guilt and with the bodily affects he says he feels as a result of engaging in a socially stigmatised activity. To achieve the fantasy of some bodily and emotional satisfaction he accesses his *jouissance*, “I feel calmer...” and the ‘Thing’ (that is, the cigarette) becomes a barrier that is passed and eventually through the act of smoking disappears altogether. I argue that the term ‘chain smoker’ is of this order: that a symbolic death occurs when one refuses to give up desire. In so far as the subject gives ground to desires, they start vanishing from the signifying chain, thereby eliminating the support of fantasy from sustaining desire. The ‘Thing’ collapses under the pursuit of desire. In Sam’s case the body acts as a faithful witness to desire. The pleasures and functions of the body premise desire only when false consciousness is recognised and transcended. What the body offers and promises is a way to fulfil desire, in so far as the subject can enjoy the body, provided there is a connection with the *objet a*. But at the same time, the subject is struggling with a desire for such connection, the subject wants to disconnect from the Other by a radical separation.

How to kill your mother – the original object of desire

The chain that began with desire and passed through cruelty has now brought us face to face with death (Todorov, 1970, p. 142, cited in Mellville, 2006).

I rang [Juliet] immediately as I had to tell someone sympathetic how I loathed mother. Anger against mother boiled up inside me as it is she who is one of the main obstacles in my path. Suddenly a means of ridding myself of this obstacle occurred to me. If she were to die... (Pauline’s diary, *Heavenly Creatures*, 1994).

Let me now return to the figure of the mother. In *Heavenly Creatures* the murder of Honora Rieper serves as the ultimate traumatic connection to enjoyment and to the subjectivisation of the Hysterical feminine subject via the original image of desire – the mother. The subject's relation with the mother has consequences for how jouissance and castration are approached. The figure of the mother has been contentious within both psychoanalysis and feminist theories. The mother is a bid for recognition of the limit of jouissance, given the absolute failure of the maternal function, given desire for the mother is not entirely with the child (Soler, 2006, p. 111). It is also contentiously the *objet par excellence*, the first object of desire that speaks and represents an imagined unconditional love. Nevertheless the figure of the mother is inevitably returned to in the confrontation with the structure of the symptom. Soler recapitulates the symptom and its relation to jouissance (2006, p. 112):

The symptom was certainly there from the beginning to testify to a certain gap in jouissance, but at first it was possible to believe it was contingent and could be imputed to some individual distortion or (O)ther. Instructed by experience Freud concluded that it is irreducible and even double: something in it is not quite right, partly because of what is lacking – through castration – and partly because of an excess: the imperialism of the drives, which are always partial, but which never give up, even at the price of displeasure. In other words, there is a jouissance that is impossible to reach, but also a jouissance that is impossible to reduce.

In Lacanian psychoanalysis the figure of the mother is always within the order of desire. This is always the case even if desire (lack) is disavowed. In the case of the perverse subject, the mother's castration is disavowed. Soler attributes Lacan to bringing this particular focus to the fore, when she states: [w]here others had been concerned with the mother and her love, [Lacan] reminded us of woman ... [H]e situates woman as barred, as Other, a figure who is not completely occupied with either the man or the child" (2006, p. 113). For the postmodern

subject⁵⁴ this symbolic deficiency leaves the subject seeking their ‘true’ Other, what Žižek terms, the Other of the Other: this by-passing of the Other reduces it to Other, or that which is tied with the image of the Other. A way out of this conundrum is for the subject to insist that *belief* provides access to the true Other. However, Žižek finds this response inadequate in that it is no more than a response to a cluster of ideologies including consumerism, commercialism and specifically, the illusion of self-sufficiency. For Žižek ideology presupposes a subject’s experience of the social world and here, ideological connections with objects, social artefacts and other subjects have the potential to express repressed desires which in turn underlie interpretations of the social world. This explanation accounts for understanding ‘reality’ as already symbolised. Such symbolisation implies a repression from which opposition and antagonism emerge. For Žižek, a return to uncovering repressive forces must necessarily recognise antagonistic forces as being ideologies which disguise an official ‘reality’. At this juncture Žižek refers to ‘reality’ as being traumatic, a horrific encounter with the Real: “[s]omething unfathomable, ‘more real than reality itself’, reveals ideology to be more than ‘mere ideology’, as opaque to analysis as the kernel of a dream” (cited in Wright and Wright 1999, p. 55). The act, he maintains promises a way out of this deadlock (2001c, p. 44):

The act differs from an active intervention (action) in that it radically transforms its bearer (agent): the act is not simply something I ‘accomplish’ – after an act, I’m literally ‘not the same as before’. In this sense, we could say that the subject ‘undergoes’ an act (‘passes

⁵⁴ I approach this term with some apprehension as Žižek has provided much critique of it. For Žižek, postmodernism implies that there is a demise of the big Other, freedom of choice and an inherent reflexivity of the subject. Žižek disputes these claims by insisting that subjects are attached to objects, beliefs and ideology more than ever. Postmodernism, Žižek claims is shaped by capitalism which operates as the big Other, controls choice and restricts freedom.

through' it) rather than 'accomplishes' it: in it, the subject is annihilated and subsequently reborn (or not), i.e.: the act involves a kind of temporary eclipse, *aphanisis*, of the subject.

More than any other figure that of the mother *par excellence* disintegrates once the child realises that she is a lacking and castrated subject. In *Heavenly Creatures* the act of killing the mother is founded on the demise of authority, the big Other. The killing symbolises the very illusion of freedom sought by Juliet and Pauline. The failed mother is replaced with a constructed nostalgia for what she *really should have been*; someone who embodied maternal power more in sympathy with the subject's fantasy. The construction of another Other is paramount here, the substitute of the original desire must be embodied and must speak. Juliet provides such a substitute for Pauline. The embodiment of the big Other and the desire for the mother, manifests as a form of subjective narcissism. The subject that exists after the act of killing is a new subject, which viewing participants are compelled to confront in imagination. They can do this only by imagining killing their own mother, or being killed by their own daughter. From this perspective, it is significant that the film begins with the *act* and its aftermath, and then reconstructs the mother's wholeness. The new subject after the passage to the act is unrepresentable and unimaginable. The (imaginary) act of killing ironically preserves the dignity of the murdered mother. Žižek's critical return to the subject of Christianity highlights this: by sacrificing that which is most dear, a subject ensures its imaginary status thereby enabling the subject to be reborn. This analysis brings with it a fundamental paradox, in sentiment with Jameson⁵⁵, that it is much easier to imagine an ending, than it is to imagine change. The act of ritual operates in this way as a mode of ideology; the repeated gestures of ritual supply meaning or a kind of narrative for the subject. Rituals are presented as naturalised, internalised and even spontaneous experiences out of

⁵⁵ Jameson claims that it is much easier to imagine the end of the world, than to imagine the end of capitalism.

which the subject believes he/she is free to create a subjective conviction of self identity. The conditions for the killing of the body to occur are already in place. In this way, desire is a spectre which is in tension with reality. Tracey highlights this in an individual interview when discussing her conflict regarding motherhood:

That being a woman in my thirties, with really, quite sort of interested in the environment and I'm interested in the environment and music. Not a career girl thing going on, but you know what I mean? So it is interesting the debate between desire and procreation because it is like, the older I get the harder it is to make that decision. Whereas probably when I was eighteen I was like sort of love-struck and [laughs] and you know? It is just really interesting. But in lots of other cultures you just don't have that kind of, you don't sit around with a beer and discuss whether you want to have a child. So it's kind of like, you know, in a way the fact that we can discuss desire of that is a choice thing, you know? Not a luxury for a lot of people.

Tracey articulates the problem of choice which directly implicates how one uses one's body. Choice and desire co-exist for the subject and this is a traumatic encounter. As Tracey implies, the seeming luxury of choice minimises the possibility for loss, but at the same time it locates the subject within a state of ambivalence and guilt.

In one sense the murder of Honora Rieper was for viewers a relief, as Kim, a young woman states as she tracks the gaze of the mother:

I, mine was, um, Yvonne's [Pauline's] mum, obviously. You know, like in that last, in, in the very end bit you did, you know, she's being so sweet and just wanting to take the girls out, 'cause it, you know, they'd gone through all that. The, the thing that really gets me is she's so, I'm not being... you know... 'cause I'm not a mother, so I don't know what having a child feels like, but you can see how much, as, you know, that she's watching her child go crazy or go through all this, and all youth will go through something like, you know, infatuation or a

friendship or whatever, and, um, but you can just see it in her eyes, how she just wants her to come back.

The act of murder distances jouissance from the body. Jouissance is given up for the sake of prolonging desire. What remains however is the jouissance of the image of the mother; the register of the Imaginary becomes everything. The body of Honora Rieper that is left after the murder is a corpse. Pauline and Juliet run away from the body, distressed and horrified at the murder they have just committed. They are completely covered in the blood of Honora Rieper and this indicates that they have failed utterly to remove the Other (mother) from the field of their subjectivities. This is where the film starts and ends and for viewers highlighting a wasteland devoid of jouissance.



Illustration 31. Pauline and Juliet [Melanie Lynskey and Kate Winslet] running through Victoria Park following the murder.

As has been established the fundamental point of reference for desire is the child's desire for the mother. The child as an object is in the position of both understanding and resisting the desire for the mother. However, for this to occur there needs to be recognition of division, as Soler states (2006, p. 117):

To speak of division of the subject – here that of the mother as the child's Other – is to designate both the lack that founds desire – and the object that responds to it in fantasy. Each child is a position to experience and be marked by it. A French proverb has noted one of these connections: for every saintly woman, there is a perverse son.

Holding the potential for jouissance to be given or to be attained within an act, Tracey (focus group participant, creative industries) highlights her alienation which contributes to her ambivalence towards the maternal figure:

Yeah. I mean, obviously there's the pre-conceived idea that people want children. But I mean I know people that don't have children and that has been their idea. And sometimes I meet people who just can't understand the concept that people might not want it. It seems that certain people seem to have this concept that it is in us – which we are all kind of destined to procreate. I know that is obviously how our bodies work. But because we've developed to such a point that we can choose these days... it's an interesting question because there are mostly, as clichéd as they are, they kind of umm.. you know, the little life chapters that everyone goes through – you know, high school, university, sort of you know, you know, being, going on trips and always kind of little scenarios that mean.. So I guess people get sort of so used to that, that sometimes if someone doesn't quite want that for themselves, it can kind of ahh... just even, just upset the belief systems that some people might have. [slight pause] But I just have to, have... if I'm having the worst day I just have to truly be thankful that I've got freedom of choice.

Soler (2006, p. 118) describes the encounter with the barred Other as “the slope of mystery of desire [and] ... the opacity of jouissance”. Tracey is grappling with the dimensions of femininity and the positing of the image of the mother as ultimate Other. What she highlights is the struggle and longing for ultimate freedom from the Other, as well as freedom from the maternal as the only socially sanctioned subjective identification. Soler goes on to suggest there is a shift in gaze from the child as a substitute Phallic object, towards the desire of mother (p. 120):

This is to be understood as the desire of the woman in the mother, a specific desire to limit maternal passion, to make her not completely mother: in other words, not completely concerned with her child, and even not completely concerned with the series of children, the sibling rivals... it is woman’s desire, or more generally, a desire that is other, maintained beyond the gratifications of maternity, that introduces the child, via castration anxiety to a dialectic of contradictory identification.

June illustrates Soler’s point when she states:

Which is really what your Mum does isn’t it? She brings you up to reality, it’s like a slap in the face! I think that is why [Pauline] hated her [Honora] so much. Her Mum was making her.... see... reality.

The figure of the maternal is an ambiguous, ambivalent and frustrating position for the subject – that of returning to the original object of desire which cannot be claimed, combined with the knowledge that the mother too is no more than a castrated subject. What occurs is sublimation of desire or of whatever in place of the mother regulates jouissance and keeps desire alive. Such an object also has the purpose of perpetuating the moral ideological order through providing for the subject links between the social bond and the big Other. Sublimation has the function of exposing the mechanics of discourse (the perverse structure)

to the neurotic subject, from which she/he can attempt self identification. The acquisition of cultural artefacts resulting from sublimation is a mirror to the misrecognition of the self.

Concluding comments

The orienting project for my thesis is how desire can be theorised in contemporary times. For the subject the body provides an authoritative locus for desire, from which symptoms can be tracked and new ones emerge. The subject implicates the body in both understanding desire and being desired. Participants consider the function of the body to constitute an ideological reality lying within the domain of sexual difference. How they represent and understand the body is a way of managing *jouissance* which matches the current hyper-capitalist injunction towards an obligation for enjoyment. The anxiety for the subject is created by positing the body as the *objet a*. This is revealed as participants realise that they cannot fully know their body because they cannot fully know their desires.

The body, the figure of the mother and desire are implicated with each other, although not entirely cohesively. The body is a by-product of language; one can talk about cells, body parts, functions and acts only through language. The *jouissance* of talking about the body as a site of desire is an occurrence principally of speaking and speech. The body is a location for which the subject can enjoy and this extends to the body being a site for social enjoyment. The body as a social object located within the domain of the Symbolic, is intrinsic to such enjoyment, since other subjects have the potential to witness this. Such enjoyment is founded partly on fantasy in which the original object of desire, the Mother, is foregrounded. Desire and the body are explicitly linked to not only the promise of *jouissance* and pleasure, but also to their containment. Desire marks the body and enables the subject to speak about possible desires notwithstanding that for the subject the body is unknown and unpredictable. Desire becomes a *figure* for and of the body; the body is both a spectre of possible desire and a space from which singular meanings of the body can be construed. The body both regulates and contains *jouissance* as it is revealed through the social bond, that is, through social

movements, such as Occupy, social stigmas such as cigarette smoking, and the staging of desire such as the maternal.

The body offers a medium by which the subject can speak of desire in relation to the specificity of an act. The possibilities of desire are contingent on speech and it is at this level that desire functions. When focusing on the link between desire and love, film can depict this relation in its irreducible complexity. This tension is well illustrated in *Heavenly Creatures*. Many participants' speech focuses on themes of love and intimacy and it is in the next chapter that I explore the relationships and tensions between desire and love.

Chapter 6: Dimensions of love and desire



Illustration 32. *Je ne vois pas la cachée dans la forêt* (I do not see the [woman] hidden in the forest),
Magritte, R. (1929).

...being loved makes me feel directly the gap between what I am as a determinate being and the unfathomable X in me which causes love. Lacan's definition of love ('love is giving something one doesn't have...') has to be supplemented with: '...to someone who doesn't want it.' Indeed, are we aware that Yeats's well-known lines describe one of the most claustrophobic constellations that one can imagine?

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half-light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet,
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.'

Žižek (2008a, European Graduate School)

Introduction

For sociologists, there is no opposition between individuals and the social, because the contents of thoughts, desires, and inner conflicts have an institutional and collective basis. For example, when a society and culture promote both the intense passion of romantic love and marriage as models for adult life, they shape not only our behaviour but also our aspirations, hopes, and dreams for happiness. But social models do more: by juxtaposing the ideal of romantic love with the institution of marriage, modern politics embed social contradictions in our aspirations, contradictions which in turn take a psychological life (Illouz, 2012, p. 13).

Love is the greatest ordeal for both the lover and the beloved. It is undoubtedly inspiring, profound and defining. It can also be fickle, stupid, boring and sometimes cruel. “Be careful with whom you fall in love” was some advice passed on to me as a teenager by a school friend’s mother. Of course, at the time this advice went unheeded, the possible meanings and

pitfalls of love being beyond my adolescent radar. However, as I matured her words began to resonate with me and do so now as I ponder love and desire. In particular her advice implies two contradictory messages: firstly, that one may be confronted with romantic choices in love, these being shaped by rationality and freedom; secondly that one has only limited control when confronted by love, a strange phenomenon that could lead to either happiness or misery depending on how savvy one might be at the time. “I have just not met the love of my life” a friend once told me. The implications here are that love is an enigma, being beyond our grasp yet having the potential to strike at any time, thereby providing a rationalisation as to the constitution of self worth and where one can place oneself in the social world. Love is deemed to manifest to us when the time is *right*, yet the elements which structure such *rightness* are hidden from us, thus for the subject love can only be known once it has occurred. Perhaps the most pervasive intimate bond one can encounter is that which love promises. Joining passionately with another, sharing resources and experiences and possibly having children is how love, in both historical and contemporary society is constructed and imagined as the most fulfilling of subjective experiences. The promise of love obfuscates the problematic and enduring question for the subject – *what does my existence mean?* Love is considered to be one of the most important building blocks for constructing and maintaining social relationships (Illouz, 2012, p. 5). Much has been written about the capacity of love to influence for better and for worse. It has inspired great literature, films, art works, bold and courageous acts by anonymous individuals, social movements and so on. Conversely it has also been articulated as agonizing, painful, cynical, privileging sentiment over reason and threatening to individual freedom. Love, the desire to love and to be loved are fascinating areas which unsurprisingly emerge during participants’ talk about desire.

Love is not easy⁵⁶ to practice, to understand or to theorise alongside desire. Love and namely, the desire to love is an opaque concept which nevertheless holds traction for the subject within his or her subjectivity. Romantic misery, presented in literature such as *Wuthering Heights* or *Madame Bovary* suggests that the jouissance of heartbreak, unrequited love or the struggle of surrendering to love is enough to explain one's romantic destiny. *Heavenly Creatures* also examines the connections between love, desire and jouissance. The jouissance which manifests in being unable to articulate love or to experience love's inevitable loss might offer the subject an imaginary order from which to develop or construct a mastery of love. There has recently been a curious approach to love provoking amusement in the media, namely 'object-sexuality people' who decide to form an intimate love relationship with an object, rather than with another subject.⁵⁷ Examples include: a woman from the United States, who has decided that she loves the Eiffel Tower; another woman who loves her vacuum cleaner; a man who loves a particular roller coaster and so on. These people choose to signify their love to their object by means of a ceremony resembling a marriage or a civil union. Like two people deciding to marry for love, 'object-sexuality people' make a life time commitment to an object and this signifies how they define love. On the face of it, object-sexuality love sounds absurd. And perhaps it is. After all, an object cannot speak and therefore cannot insist on the Other for subjectivity. However, this is the very point. As a

⁵⁶ Cherie Lacey and I co-authored a piece entitled, *Falling in Love is a Piece of Cake* (Forthcoming August 2014) which explores how the New Zealand film, *Love Story* (2011) grapples with the complexities and constructions of love in modern times. We argue that love is explored through fantasy and metaphor and maintain that the film raises questions about authenticity and the fantasy of love, particularly given that love is always co-authored with the Other.

⁵⁷ An online support group in Germany has been established for people who identify as object-sexuality: <http://objectum-sexuality.org/>

researcher I have never had a negative response when claiming that I hold a desire and even a love for knowledge. Indeed, Kristeva (2010, p. 167) poignantly states that, “[w]riting seems to be a substitution for erotic desire, a transference of pleasure from sexuality into sensations and, simultaneously, all words.” It is interesting that such opacity for my ‘love object’ sits comfortably with others, particularly since knowledge considered as a vast and expansive concept is, largely, socially valorised. I have, along with many others, also indicated that I love my home and garden. When my partner and I moved into our home we hosted a house warming party which is not considered unusual. I am not however, sexually attracted to the materiality of my home and have not exclusively committed to or declared my undying love for it. Love has many different potentials and capacities for the subject. What the celebration of an object signifying subjective love entails raises questions about the relationship between the object of love with desire, also with how subjects implicate themselves within this relation.

This final analytic chapter explores love together with common assumptions about it. As a continuation of and final comment on my theoretical exploration of desire, I argue that love acts as a Master from which constructions of belief and of the body are also an encounter with desire. By examining constructions of love, as well as exploring Žižek’s exemplification of ideology that to “love thy neighbour” is a problematic love that goes nowhere, I explore how love organises desire. I examine how love provides proximity to desire; and lastly how love can be understood as a desire to and for love.

How can love be talked about? Historical ruminations of love

Desire is rather primarily a desire for love, to be shown essentially in a recognition of one’s identity by the Other. It is therefore designated as ‘the desire of the Other’. (Wright, 2000, 68).

As I wrote *Tales of Love*, the love object absorbs my narcissistic needs, erotic desires and most phantasmatic ideals, like the ideal of eternity. The resulting amorous object is thus a phantasmatic construction, which becomes the subject's absolute pole of stabilisation, magnificence, or exaltation: the cornerstone of enthusiasm (Kristeva, 2010, p. 162).

Love is a central feature for many philosophers, theorists and artists. Freud is the most renowned for putting love on the couch and under scrutiny. However, as Kristeva (2010, p. 223) remarks, "it is not enough to say romantic passion is a neurosis, indeed, a psychosis, to denounce the sentimental impasses in which the speculative bubble has submerged human beings in the globalised world...". Guéguen (1991, p. 59) illustrates Lacan's formulation of desire in the following way: "desire is articulated in the discourse of feelings and is always articulated in love and hate." Illouz offers a sociological explanation of the relationship between love and desire when she states (2012, p. 121):

Love and desire are nodes in a social chain in which one form of emotional energy can be converted into another. Because the experience of love anchors the question of worth, love, in modernity has the capacity to produce and stabilise social value. As Honneth argues, love is the paradigm for the establishment of recognition, a simultaneously psychological and sociological process. Never really either private or public, the modern self establishes its value through processes that are at once psychological and sociological, private and public, emotional and ritualistic. Clearly, then, in modern erotic/romantic relationships what is at stake are the self, its emotions, interiority, and mostly, the way these are recognised or fail to be recognised (by others).

For Badiou (2009, p. 40) it is vital for love that it be attempted to be spoken, be somehow declared and be inscribed into an event. Love has proven to be both a metaphysical and an existential problem for those authors, philosophers, artists and lovers who have attempted to reveal its mysteries. The ancient Greeks constructed a distinction between physical love, 'eros' and the love one might have for an associate, such as a close friend or mentor, 'philia'.

For Plato, love harboured an aesthetic quality and bore a strong connection to beauty or an ideal form. Philosophy itself literally translated is the love and pursuit of wisdom and knowledge. Kierkegaard, in 1847 highlighted the pleasure, vanity, ingenuity and selfishness of love alongside the contrasting value of marriage. More recently Badiou in his essay, *In Praise of Love*, describes how Kierkegaard posits love within a religious framework when he states (2009, p. 14):

Marriage is thus conceived not as a strengthening of the social bond against the perils of wayward love, but as the institution that channels genuine love towards its fundamental destination. The final transfiguration of love becomes possible when ‘the ego plunges through its own transparency to meet the power that has created it’: that is, when, thanks to the experience of love, the ego roots itself in its divine source. Love then moves beyond seduction and, through the serious meditation of marriage, becomes a way to accede to the super-human.

Love for Kierkegaard is intrinsically connected with the other, that other being akin to the biblical concept of the neighbour. In this way love is like a figure of god being without distinction. Tsagdis (2013, p. 93) posits Kierkegaard’s conception of the neighbour as encapsulating a pure and conscious love:

Can this other then not be the neighbour? Cannot a self establish another self? Cannot a self rest transparently in another self? If the commandment of love requires one to help another become a master of [his/her]self and yet without the other knowing, so that such knowledge will not rob him of this self-mastery (Kierkegaard 1998: 279, p. 6), is it not possible that a neighbour, indeed a brother — even if not my brother, is the foundation of the relation that is myself? A brother can even say: “Is it my blood that runs in my veins? No it is the friend’s. But then in turn it is my blood that flows in my friend’s veins. That is the I is no longer primary, but the you —”, still, he must add: “yet the situation, reversed, is really the same” (267). The I-you reversal amounts to nothing, for in neighbourly proximity there is no

distinction, no you or me, only God. One is equal to and indistinct from one's neighbour before God (60).

Being strongly influenced by his Christian belief, Kierkegaard struggles with the inevitable tensions love presents for the individual. These tensions provide a critical point in his thesis on love, namely that while one ought to love without distinction, it is the very distinctions provided by split subjectivity which provide the idiosyncrasies and nuances from which love can be recognised and formed. Badiou (2009) contrasts the super-ego ideological mandate of marriage and its everyday gamut of joys, tedium and dramas with the ideals of enduring and fulfilling love. While Kierkegaard wrote his *Works on Love* as a contemplative piece which attempts to establish secular love as a model for individual behaviour, it seems overly romantic and sentimental to the modern reader, for instance his notion that to love and to be loved ought to bring out the best in someone. Evans (1996, p. 103) points out that despite Lacan's claim that little meaning can be made of love, this does not fit in with his attempts to speak about it. Specifically for Lacan, love is an artificial and illusory effect of transference and is narcissistic in structure. By this he means that love is addressed to knowledge and thus expected to produce knowledge for the subject. Soler (2006, p. 224) elaborates Lacan's claim by insisting that "this is not just any knowledge, for in it, a real specific to the experience is demonstrated." Žižek (2006, p. 52) draws upon Lacan when he states that there exists a specific knowledge "which does not know itself" and which is the core of fantasy.⁵⁸ It is at this juncture that Žižek considers the importance of the materiality of love (1997, p. 60-61):

⁵⁸ Lacan's statement is reminiscent of Oscar Wilde's, "the love that dare not speak its name".

There is no symbolic order without the fantasmatic space, no ideal order of *logos* without the pseudomaterial ‘virtual’, Other Scene where the fantasmatic apparitions can emerge, or, as Schelling put it, there are no Spirits, no pure Spirits without Spirits, no pure spiritual universe of Ideas without the obscene, ethereal, fantasmatic corporeality of ‘spirits’ (undead, ghosts, vampires...) Therein, in this assertion of the unavoidable pseudomaterial fantasmatic support of Ideas, resides the crucial insight of true (‘dialectical’) materialism.

For Žižek love has a materiality to it. Kristeva (2010, p. 162) elucidates this when she attributes to Freud a “new knowledge of the imaginary and its objects... for better or worse”. The contemporary ideology of marriage⁵⁹ attests to this and to the fantasy that structures and perpetuates notions of everlasting love and desire as within a natural ideological order, suggest by Žižek, (2006, p. 121-122):

[Marriage is] the implicit presupposition (or, rather injunction) of the ideology of marriage is that, precisely, there should be no love in it. The Pascalian formula of marriage is there not, ‘You don’t love your partner? Then marry him or her, go through the ritual of shared life, and love will emerge by itself!’, but on the contrary ‘Are you too much in love with somebody? Then get married, ritualise your love relationship, so as to cure your passionate attachment, and replace it with boring routine – and if you can’t resist passion’s temptation, there are always extramarital affairs...

Marriage ideologically affirms that the sexual relationship is indeed possible, but only through the sanctity of upholding this ideological condition. Badiou (2009, p. 21) expands on Lacan’s ontology of love as it relates to desire:

⁵⁹ I claim that this ideology of marriage is directly linked to a construction of the marriage ‘market’ industry which is steeped within a heteronormative, economic and romantic Imaginary of romantic love and desire.

Lacan also thinks... that love reaches out towards the ontological. While desire focuses on the other, always in a somewhat fetishist manner, on particular objects, like breasts, buttocks and cock... love focuses on the very being of the other, on the other as it has been erupted, fully armed with its being, into my life thus disrupted and re-fashioned.

For Badiou love needs reinventing and ought to be approached as a way of corresponding with individual experience and the tensions which ensue: “love contains an initial element that separates, dislocates and differentiates” (2009, p. 28). Marriage provides a way for the love to be managed as logical signifier from which alienation can be disavowed. In *Encore* (p. 44) Lacan indicates that the function of love is an endeavour to make up for the lack of sexual relationship. The specificity of love as a logical signifier of alienation is crucial for love to be recognised by the subject. Fink describes the process of alienation which allows the object of desire to emerge (1991, p. 22):

In alienation, the child seeks out that point or space in the mother where she is lacking – where, that is, she does not seem sufficient unto herself in some way or other, where she seems to want something, to seek out something. The very fact that she is called away from the child, or leaves the child alone (whether in body, mind or both) is enough for him or her to detect a space of desire and to aspire to fill that space – to be that which fills her up, to be the all-encompassing object of her desire. That very aspiration is what allows the subject to come to be – to occupy a space within the Other; he latches on to that space of desire, explores its boundaries and aspires to fill it. In doing so, he proves that the mother is not whole and complete – she is barred.

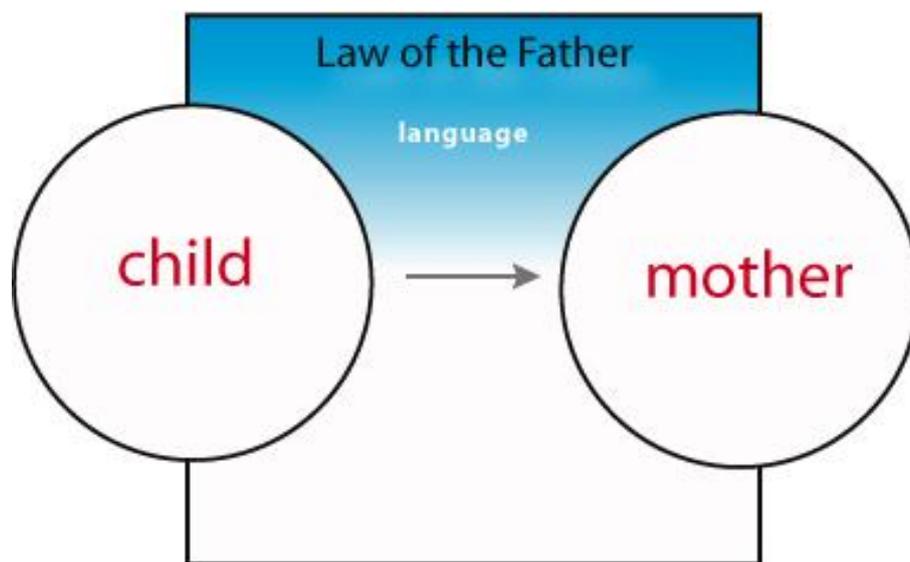


Figure 16. The Law of the Father

Psychoanalysis claims that the first subject to attempt to do this is the mother. It is this very desire for the original object of desire, the mother, which causes the subject to be divided thereby perpetuating lack. The subject unconsciously addresses this question of division through pursuing, encountering and experiencing love. With specific relation to desire, love is a condition, whereas desire is unconditional. Lacan means that love is based on recognition and mystery whereas desire is an essence or enigma premised on lack. Evans states that for Lacan “[l]ove is a metaphor (Sem. VIII, p. 53), whereas desire is metonymy. It can even be said that love kills desire, since love is based on a fantasy of oneness with the beloved (Lacan, Sem. XX, p. 46) and this abolishes the difference which gives rise to desire” (p. 103-104). Desire is thereby distinguished from sexual life by closing the field of the sexual relationship – which means that it cannot go anywhere. Love is for the Hysteric, a foreign signifier, not entirely recognisable to the subject, but still sought as conceptualised and residing within a love object (p. 103):

Love is deceptive; ‘As a specular mirage, love is essentially deception’ (S11, 268). It is deceptive because it involves giving what one does not have (that is, the Phallus); to love is

‘to give what one does not have’ (S8, 147). Love is directed not at what the love object has, but at what he lacks, at the nothing beyond him. The object is valued insofar as it comes in the place of the lack.

Within this fantasmatic structure there is potential for subjects to narrate or write their love stories and the impossibility of the sexual relationship, through placing an emphasis on love rather than on the sexual non rapport. However, this provides for the subject only an interim solution to the problem of love. Evans comments on Lacan’s theorisation of love and desire, suggesting that both remain inevitably unsatisfied, and also that the structure of love and desire are much the same in that they are both founded on a wish to be the object of the Other’s desire (1996, p. 104). Soler (2006) discusses love as entrenched within discourse, specifically the discourse of the Other where desire is also implicated. In her comment on the conflation of love with desire, she describes (p. 182) a relationship narrative which was broadcasted on French television in 1997 and based on an actual event occurring in WWII:

...the narrative of a lifelong love, formed on the edge of death, just before leaving a Nazi concentration camp ... there is a single message: beyond the particular circumstances, the lovers said, while wrestling with the enigma of what cannot be explained, they had instantly become certain that they recognised each other.

The promise of recognition of love for another, although of necessity steeped in discourse, is nevertheless a mirage for the subject. It is a way, albeit temporarily, for the subject to avoid castration. At the same time, the love object is another subject who reciprocates the desire for recognition and responds to the demand thereby marking desire for the subject. The image of the Other which recognises the subject ‘for who he/she is’, is the ultimate construction and function of love. Kristeva expands this when she states that (2010, p. 159):

Object relations are at the heart of psychoanalytical theory and clinic: The subject of the drive (whether the life drive or death drive), the subject of desire, the subject of love are

constituted, suffer or experience pleasure because of the object or through it. Whatever the variants of the psychoanalytical approach to the subject (the ego, the self), objects vary but inevitably constitute their indispensable correlates.⁶⁰

At the same time the search for this nuanced perception obscures and confuses how love can be approached. For love to be successful it must maintain a cogent fantasy and be the symptom for the divided subject. Love must, as Soler claims, “invent itself between the Imaginary and Symbolic” domains (2006, p. 209). For the subject love is a sublime aesthetic which promises access to the Real, and which constitutes one’s subjectivity as simultaneously the lover and beloved. In this way, love is considered to be a Master signifier which although a signifier without meaning, is nevertheless recognisable to the subject. As Fink states (1991, p. 27), “the master signifier is nonsensical”. The non-sense the S1 provides, at a cost, is a much desired freedom for the subject.

The question of love has been talked about as a symptom of neurosis and psychosis in psychoanalytic literature dating back to Freud. Even today we hear and might even say the clichéd phrase, ‘madly in love’. Love in popular culture certainly propagates a strong connection between madness, irrationality and love. Freud maintained that within the love relation, the primordial object, that is the lost object which is the mother, is illuminated for the subject. In all relationships where love is identified as present for the subject, an unconscious desire for the lost object circumscribes the experience. This desire to obtain and

⁶⁰ To clarify, when Kristeva is discussing object relations, she is specifically employing a Lacanian interpretation and not that of Klein who posits the conception of the self with the totality of the object or Winnicott’s notion of the transitional object which stands in for the signification of the maternal (as opposed to the mother). Specifically Kristeva is positing and directing the love-object towards lack and as being a specular image of what one does not have.

possess the lost object is demonstrative of both love and of its failure. Thus the subject attempts to find love in an object and the repetition of attempts and failures is justified in the pursuit of love. Soler articulates the symptom of love when she states (2006, p. 225):

The symptom designates for a subject the organisation of his/her *jouissance* as a speaking being, an organisation that binds not one person to the other, but only one person to his/her *jouissance*. Love is the symptom that succeeds in knotting this first relation – which does not form a social bond, and is thus autistic – to a bond with the sexed counterpart. Thus we get Lacan's final thesis, that a woman is a symptom for a man. We could add that she is one type of symptom, for there are others.

Soler elaborates on the relationship between love and the symptom in her discussion of transference (2006, p. 276):

Stupid blindness and irresponsible submission also place upon the Other the burden of desire and of surplus *jouissance*, which are what support thought and decision. In other words, the one who loves is pushed to sacrifice what is most real for him, which we call his symptom.

Transference is a way for the subject to gain access to discourse, even if this involves interrupting it, by for example acts of critical inquiry. Silvestre articulates the operation of transference succinctly (cited in Bruno, 1991, p. 56):

Those moments when the transference interrupts the association, those moments of stagnation, far from being empty moments, lost for the subject, are on the contrary intervals during which a specific kind of material comes forth, that of the object relation, that is, of the fantasy.

The symptom is a manifestation of desire emerging from transference. It is important for the subject that this is preserved and cultivated because it provides a link to the social bond and is

an adhesive to the Imaginary, the Real and the Symbolic. In conducive circumstances, love transpires to be the symptom (of desire) which promises to satisfy. Given that the big Other does not exist, then all choices, behaviours and acts are a manifestation of the symptom. As Soler puts it (2006, p. 279), “[o]ur compass is always the symptom, whether we like it or not”.

Whereas Žižek claims that one should enjoy one’s symptom, Soler (2006, p. 281) insists that one ought to love one’s symptom, so that one can become insightful into how the symptom directs the course of one’s life. This gives rise to a neurotic formation of the subject where love is posited as the Master signifier, that which opens the subject to an experience of truth, even if it is an unwelcome and horrific truth as Pauline and Juliet discover.

Love as an ideological act of fantasy

One should start with the paradox that singular erotic love, taken precisely as the absolute, should not be posited as a direct goal – it should retain the status of a by-product, of something we receive as a form of undeserved grace (Žižek, 2010, p. 108).

Despite the deregulation of the institution of marriage⁶¹ New Zealand implemented a most important legislative change earlier in 2013: same sex couples could legally marry. As anatomy is to the body, the legal system shapes how we can think about love as intrinsically linked to romance and ultimately to commitment. Prior to this change in legislation, same sex couples were legally recognised and could enter into a civil union or simply reside together. However, while a marriage-like ceremony could be undertaken, it was not legally binding.

⁶¹ By this I mean the increasing amount of same sex and heterosexual de facto relationships and the increasing realisation that the concept of family is not necessarily defined and bound through marriage.

Apart from members of some religious organisations this change was met on the whole with public celebration; wedding planners, bridal shops and celebrants now able to advertise to a new clientele. Magazines featured happy same sex couples planning their big day and discussing their longing to extend their family. Suddenly a new world of choice about how to stage one's love appeared. Industries associated with the contemporary marriage market propagate the capacity for choosing the *right* love object. Organising a wedding entails a series of actions and decisions which rationalise the choice of the love object or romantic partner by idealising love as already deeply entrenched within existing heteronormative ideologies. Those embarking on a same sex marriage could now legally marry and consequently could also legally divorce. This is interesting since the legal sanctioning of popular belief in romantic love, while offering same sex couples a powerful tool for cementing social relationships, also has the potential to make class and gender segregation more visible and apparent. That is, marriage as an institution confers rights and benefits only within the context of marriage and assumes equality through these propagations; such potential in fact goes against the egalitarian intent of the legislation. The ritual of the modern marriage or even of the civil ceremony, can be seen as a hysterical masquerade in that it stages two split subjects completely subsuming their *objet a*, thus offering the illusion of becoming whole. At the same time marriage is also still seen as an institution which organises intimate relationships and desire.

The dovetailing of love with marriage has had a chequered history. Before and during Antiquity and the Renaissance in European cultures, politics and economics trumped matters of emotion and marriage was thus considered an economic arrangement. The Victorian era in Europe considered love an ideal, but nevertheless placed class, sovereignty and wealth as pivotal in choosing a partner. Families would often decide who a woman would marry so that marriage could sustain economic stability. Such locations of love as contractual and figures of love as external to oneself are in contrast to both historical church teaching and to modern

secular custom which consider love to be the most important feature preserving the sanctity of marriage. Illouz describes the Victorian courtship as (2012, p. 34):

the prevalence of economic considerations [which] also means the modes of evaluation were more “objective” – that is, they relied on the prospective partner’s (more or less) objective status and ranking, as it is known and accepted by his or her social environment. Thus, a woman’s dowry determined her value in the marriage market... The dowry played a key role in bestowing status and forging alliances. The size of the dowry dictated a bride’s social and economic standing.

Men of nineteenth century middle class Europe were very keen to wed since it provided a way in which masculinity could be defined and exercised (Illouz 2012, p. 6):

Certainly such emotional definitions of masculinity were the combined outcomes of the moral code of Victorian culture and the economic character of transaction: Marriage always involved a transfer of significant amount of real or personal property from the family of the bride to that of the groom, with a reverse commitment in the future of a significant proportion of the annual income. The dowry acted as a device for male commitment to a wife and anchored the interpersonal commitment of the new couple in a wider system of familial, economic, and social obligations. It reinforced family relations between parents and daughters and shaped the social relations among kin to increase ties of affection and interest. In short, male commitment was embedded in a moral and economic ecology based around dowry.

By contrast present day love is viewed on the whole as a chance encounter of meeting the *right* person at the *right* time, although questions of property, ownership and entitlement are still central tenets of marriage. A love relationship no longer necessarily presupposes longevity or lifelong commitment. Regardless of this somewhat precarious position, Soler (2006, p. 225) maintains that “[w]e love love, however, more than ever and perhaps more desperately than ever before, in this age in which, when we love, we say prosaically that we

have a relationship or an affair, doubtless because we know that here is where the shoe pinches us.” By contrast, in his commentary on love, Badiou (2009, p. 21) rejects the idea that love is a subjective experience of the Other⁶² and offers instead that love is an ongoing project of the self which has the potential to wholly encompass sexual desire.

It has been well debated and established in feminist writing that whether one embarks on the institution of marriage makes no difference to how happy, satisfied and committed a couple presume themselves to be. Nor does marriage necessarily enable individuals to define the love they feel for their partner. In *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) Shulamith Firestone insists that the concept of romantic love obfuscates and perpetuates the power differentials hidden in gendered class and sex segregation. She considers love to encapsulate mechanisms by which women’s oppression can be reproduced, for example, through self sacrifice and through traditional gender roles. Such writings in the field of feminism have called into question common assumptions and particularities concerning erotic relations. Illouz highlights how feminist scholarship in the field of love and emotions has encouraged, and in some instances enabled, a subjective reflexivity (2012, p. 171):

First, it invites men and women to reflect on the rules which organise the routine, taken-for-granted, course of sexual attraction (a routine shaped by centuries-old norms of patriarchal dominance) and to monitor reflexively their emotions, language and conduct. Second, in order to install symmetry, it invites women to evaluate and measure their own and their partner’s contributions to the relationship. Third, it trumps erotic relationships with the values of fairness in the workplace and the polity (the professional status of potential lovers must trump

⁶² Badiou states that rather than embedded in *experience*, love is an *encounter* with the Other. By this he means love is an event which takes place within the “real world” (2009, p. 24) meaning, in the Symbolic. Experience is opaquely defined for Badiou as “always the possibility of being present at the birth of the world” (p. 26).

their private desires as individuals). And finally, it calls for a subsuming of erotic relations within neutral procedural rules of speech and conduct, which disassembles relations from their patriarchy and concreteness.

From insights provided by feminist scholarship, it can be ascertained that the convergence of marriage and love is constantly being redefined rather than dismissed. Not everyone is deeply (or even remotely) in love with their partner. Some people approach love and partnership in a most pragmatic way and in this context marriage can offer emotional and financial security as well as strengthen social bonds with others. Marriage is nevertheless a circumstance from which love is ideologically structured and idealised by contemporary society. Even in the absence of religious belief it is considered sacred, that is the Imaginary Other (*objet a*), yet at the same time rational within the domain of the Symbolic of traditional partnership. Given that love can be viewed as the merging of desires circulating between people (or an object), it can also be considered in terms of an act that both traverses and does not traverse fantasy.

The question beckons: *what specific kind of fantasy of love is the subject specifically attempting to traverse?* Considering that the promise of love is that a subject will find another subject which provides wholeness, the specific fantasy is that a subject will be complete only when together with another subject. As Žižek says in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989, p. 126), in traversing or going through the fantasy, “all we have to do is experience how there is nothing behind it, and how fantasy marks precisely this nothing.” Such nothingness is an encounter with the Real and suggests a change, or movement, from one place to another, even if it entails that such a transition means returning to the same place. With respect to love, it can be considered both a symptom and Master signifier, at least for a time as an interim fantasy. Freud makes an observation about erotic love and fantasy when he states (1953, p. 112):

[W]e have always been struck by the phenomenon of sexual over-evaluation – the fact that the love object enjoys a certain amount of freedom from criticism, and that all its characteristics are valued more highly than those of people who are not loved, or than its own were at a time it itself was not loved.

Simon Blackburn (2006, p. 83) emphasises the domain of the Imaginary when he states:

[T]he lover not only makes up the object of his desire, but also makes himself or herself up in their own imagination, in something of the same way that people are said to brace themselves when they look at flying buttresses and to rock to and fro when they imagine being at sea. The poetry or feigning can take over the self and for the moment at least we are what imagine ourselves to be.

In considering the traversing of this specific fantasy - of the sacred, unquestioned higher authority of love which offers a full, whole and recognisable subjectivity – and in the absence of an even higher fantasy, for example, that of god or of belief in the extraordinary potential of individual promises, love retains both romantic and rational notions which can shape meaning for the subject. Illouz describes how love has been influential in studies of modernity (2012, p. 9):

[R]omantic love is one of the best sites to take stock of such an ambivalent perspective on modernity because the last four decades have witnessed a radicalisation of freedom and equality within the romantic bond as well as a radical split between sexuality and emotionality. Heterosexual romantic love contains the two most important cultural revolutions of the twentieth century: the individualisation of lifestyles and the intensification of emotional projects; and the economisation of social relationships, the pervasiveness of economic models to shape the self and its very emotions. Sex and sexuality become disentangled from moral norms, and incorporated in individualised lifestyles and life projects,

while the capitalist cultural grammar has massively penetrated the realm of heterosexual romantic relationships.

Such a sentiment is prevalent in the film *Heavenly Creatures*: the centrality of love between Juliet and Pauline overrides socio-economic circumstances and expressions of sexuality; sexual fantasy is dramatically interwoven with emotional aspiration, which, for the two girls, is the longing for fame and recognition. Love is an illustration of the compatibility and connection between emotions and economics. However, June, a participant from the creative industries focus group offers that the connection between Juliet and Pauline is less about being *in love*, and more about their strong emotional connection which facilitates freedom to indulge in autonomous and unreflexive self expression:

I think it [Juliet and Pauline's friendship] was more than it was convenient! That's what, for me, motivated the girls. I didn't get a strong sense of them being kind of in love with each other. It was more that they understood each other and gave each other something that they needed. And then they just kept going down that path.

Influenced by the film, June speaks from her own experience of love and desire when she makes the claim, "I didn't get a strong sense of them being kind of in love with each other." While June does not elaborate on this, she does offer an interesting insight: romantic love⁶³ is shaped in particular ways which circumscribe the domain of love *par excellence*; particular circumstances must be in place for it to be recognised as such. Dale and Gary, participants in

⁶³ For the purposes of this exploration, I deliberately draw no ontological distinctions between the articulations of experiencing being *in love* and romantic love.

the fathers of teenage daughter focus group, are particularly attentive to how the character of Professor Hulme and Mr Rieper are portrayed:

Gary: I thought both the fathers were aloof and distant. Pauline's father was like... reminded me of my dad who was emotionally distant. Whereas, the other father [Professor Hulme, Juliet's father] was kind of academic and distant.

Dale: Yeah, but he became more and more a figure of scorn. You know, the way his wife manipulated him. I mean he was manipulated by his employers, wasn't he? They wanted to get rid of him. She wanted to get rid of him. Basically.

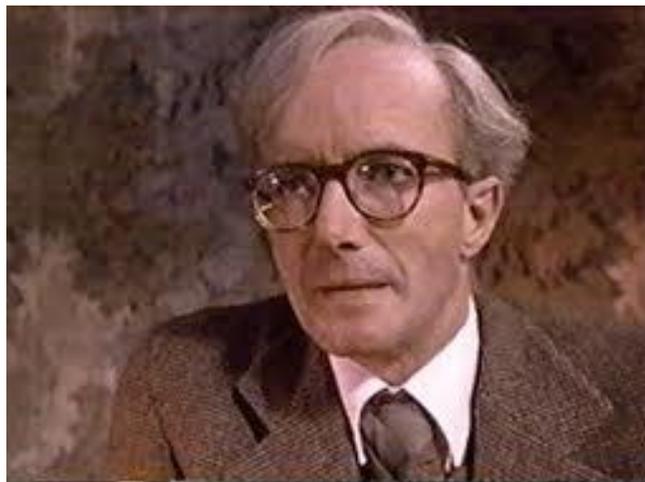


Illustration 33. Professor Hulme [Clive Merrison].

Here, the love relationships Professor Hulme and Mr Rieper each had with their partners are shaped as threatening and not entirely trustworthy. They are nevertheless portrayed as against perceived overwhelming patriarchal forces which supposedly govern a person's emotional well-being. Love can be withdrawn at any time, once it is deemed insufficient. For love to survive, reflexivity must be given up. Love relies on blind spots (hence the cliché, 'love is blind') for it to endure within the frame of fantasy. We present to our beloved the best parts

of ourselves, certainly at the beginning, and these enactments are important for our beloved to remember when times get tough. Lacan recognises this behaviour when he professes that love is a gesture of giving something one does not have. For love to persist, the image of the ideal self as symptomless is transmitted to the other subject. The presentation of this ideal self is confusing for the other subject in that it is both deliberate, yet not entirely conscious. Love is the ultimate defence mechanism and for it to be successful, it must be shrouded in illusion and fantasy. It is important that we present to our beloved an image worthy of enduring love. Such an image holds traction in the social sphere and hence participants do not identify with fathers in *Heavenly Creatures* as portraying the role of the beloved of the feminine subject. Indeed, Gary and Dale identify love as a site of loss and vulnerability. A valid question here is the inverse of Freud's great quandary: *What do these men want?* By *these men* I refer not only to the film characters but also to the participants. It is through the particularity of the film characters that participant fathers struggle with how love, commitment and desire are to be assimilated. This is perhaps bewildering and beyond rational consciousness yet yields sympathy for those like Professor Hulme who presents themselves as emotionally unavailable. By contrast, Mr Rieper is readily understood to be weak and vulnerable. Neither of these positions is deemed by participants to be a desirable subjectivity from which to stage the *objet a* relative to wives and children.

Love and the conditions in which it is structured are often presupposed and ideologically propagated. The biblical sentiment 'Love thy neighbour' is testament to such a staging of love as unconditional and unquestioned, as the ultimate Master from which the subject is enabled to structure not only love, but also desire and drive. In the Bible the relevant verse is as follows (Romans, 13:9):

For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

To most twenty-first century readers this is a highly problematic and unconvincing exhortation in that these are naive and somewhat reduces the complexities of social mores. Nevertheless, its ideology is pervasive particularly within the sentiment of what Žižek calls new conservative socialist liberalism, which addresses ‘new environmentalism’, anti-violence, pseudo-spirituality and social justice issues. This kind of ideological position plays an explicit part in structuring modern ideas of love and in the staging (and the containment) of desire. In contemporary times with the absence of god, with the deinstitutionalisation of family, with the perils predicted by environmentalists and with the decline of capitalism, love has had to rely on the propaganda of simple humanism as a support. Yet even this according to Žižek, is merely an ideological fantasy that is difficult to sustain (1997a, p. 49):

Subjects are always-already displaced and decentred, because desire is not autonomous but constituted in relation to the Other. Since the Thing, the ultimate object of jouissance, is impossible to obtain, fantasies are constructed bringing the subjects into contact with ‘partial’ and ‘incomplete’ objects of desire, to make an attempt to close the ‘hole’, which always fails. So what the subjects receive is surplus-jouissance only, keeping them attached to the Other for ‘more’ jouissance. Ideological fantasy serves as a screen to make the relationship of domination acceptable for the subjects. By ‘traversing the fantasy’, by recognizing that desires are the desires of the Other, subjects can break the chains of servitude.

Even if one chooses not to believe in the ways and rituals propagated when one was a child, the beliefs sustaining them still exert unconscious traction. As Chris, a participant in the creative industries focus group explains, he still struggles with articulating love and prefers his body to be the primary expression, even as an adult in his late thirties:

My understanding of desire is that when you go back to when you are one or two, when... is pretty much when you can't remember, most of your patterns are set in the way you relate... My sense of desire is heavily implicated with my catholic upbringing. I know it because we didn't express out desires. We didn't say , ‘I'm hungry..’, you know? You know what I

mean. It was to that degree, let alone, 'there's a girl at school I like..'. That 's just off the radar, you know? We didn't say things like, 'Goodnight Mum, I love you'. We never said that. It was part of the.. part of the product of being Catholic. No, that's not the word I want to use.. umm.. what's the word.. the result of having such an upbringing, I found, or I find is that we don't use language like love. It is sort of ridiculous. Umm.. so it is heavily tied up in that. My sense of desire or desires and what is OK to express or what is not is always a sense of barrier that I have to cross. Often my body language is like that, for example. Like still pretty repressed and you know... Even now, I'm leaning this way!

Desire and its relation to love although signifiable, is not easy to articulate. The proximity of the law to desire implies for Lacan that the divided subject "make himself his own neighbour, as far as his relationship to his desire is concerned" (1959-60, p. 76). In this way the subject is forced to continually question his/her ideals and emphasis consequently falls upon the tensions arising from discourse. Chris goes on to point out the regulatory nature implicit in the tension between desire and love:

Being Catholic creates all sorts of confusion about what it even is to desire. It's almost you are not allowed to desire anything when you're a Catholic, you know? So I would argue that my, even um... not only understanding what desire means, but my ability to desire something and then you know, get it.. or make contact with it is still confused. I suggest because of my upbringing.

Love can be interpreted as a desire for what is possible. Such possibilities are manifested through experience, that is, well informed experiences. Chris surprisingly appears to speak more easily of what he signifies as desire than of love. His question about and problem with love is set against an impossible demand – that one ought to articulate it, but "we don't use it". For love to be named requires its constitution by one subject to another who supports not only the subject's expression of expression, but also the fantasy that accompanies it. Desire is more easily articulated than love because for Chris – and his sculpture work in the previous

chapter on the body attests to this – desire offers possibilities for self expression and for absolute difference. Guéguen (1991, p. 63) cites Jacques Alain-Miller as stating that “one desire may be hiding another”. For Chris this is a fixed point of satisfaction – love and desire are conflated for him within the sublimation of art and music, rather than in another subject. On the other hand love *per se* requires a joining and merging with another subject which might compromise Chris’s individuality and ability to express. Paradoxically, however, love is still the Master for Chris because the great barrier for the Master is the inevitable confrontation which demonstrates its impossibility to govern the subject (Rodriguez, 2011, p. 57). In this way the manifestation and sublimation for Chris, namely in art, music and in his heavily Catholic upbringing, have all contributed toward a reluctance to engage love discursively within heteronormative conventions. Love is better supported by fantasy and within this concealment possesses a more cogent possibility.

The impetus to believe in love as not only an individual pursuit, but to love one’s community is a conjecture worth scrutinising. Love is posited as an ideological ethic toward which one ought to strive with complete subjective resolve. It might, according to some religious and pseudo-spiritual convictions, relieve the subject from guilt about having pursued sexual gratification, an act which in the absence of love can situate the subject as selfish, a most undesirable social quality to have in contemporary times. The injunction to love thy neighbour supposedly transforms love into an act which is visible to other subjects and which they can recognise and articulate. However, this misses the point in that love cannot be shown and is not a Thing to be exhibited. The lack of appearance of love poses a problem which is plastered over with ideology to make it representable. In revisiting a quote from Tracey, a participant in the creative industries group, a glimpse of this ideological appearance of love manifests when she talks about her love of and commitment to nature:

I’ve had some really difficult chapters in my life, to me, I guess my religion has always been nature. And I have a real sense of strength and being at peace with nature. And I know lots of

artists and stuff always have that kind of connection. Umm... so... yeah, so I wasn't kind of a question of... of... my love of nature, but also just sort of... my love... I guess sort of agnostic sense of greater sense of spiritual body. I have... I've looked into other... read some other things, looked into other things, but I always felt like there are always these... so many different rules to apply.

Tracey states confidently that, "I guess my religion has always been nature. And I have a real sense of strength and being at peace with nature". The construction of nature and more precisely the natural world is a way for the subject to elevate it directly to *das Ding* (the Thing) and to put it through the process of sublimation which is within the order of desire. Grigg (1991, p. 33) aptly describes Lacan's use of the term *das Ding* and its relation to desire:

...Lacan uses the term Das Ding to signify that which is not signifiable, what has not entered into the play of signifiers, and which is therefore not to be confused with the desired object. The metonymy of desire, the mechanism of substitution governing desire – these concern only desire as desire for the desired object – in Lacan's terms, this concerns only the empirical objects of desire. Das Ding concerns loss as such. It is, we might say, a loss that is prior to that which is lost, prior metonymic substitution within the signifying chain, this is not because of the loss of any kind of first primordial object, but because it is the loss itself that is original. To contrast it with the empirical, we might call this a pure loss. We can therefore characterise the object of desire, the desired object, as a refund object, even though this empirical object has never previously been lost. As Lacan says, 'The object is by its very nature a refund object. That it has been lost is a consequence, but retroactively'.

Although religion, love and to some degree nature are not Things as such, Tracey has elevated their status so that they not only coincide but sublimate. By sublimation I am referring to the by-passing of repression where enjoyment is reduced and comparative to the sexual act. An important aspect of sublimation is that it socially valorises and perpetuates the

drive towards a specific object, notwithstanding that this drive is within the structure of fantasy. Some might even argue that it is exalted precisely because it is an illusion. While there still remains enjoyment for the subject, this is contingent and held within the structure of other subjects who witness and recognise it. In this way other subjects contribute to the elevated status of the Thing being sublimated. The function of sublimation is to orient the drive and to co-exist with perversion. When Tracey states, “my love of nature, but also just sort of... my love... I guess sort of agnostic sense of greater sense of spiritual body” she is articulating that desire for her is recognisable and manageable although she struggles within speech to find the right signifiers to articulate it. Sublimation deals with the body and the bodies of other subjects, although it does not in itself maintain or hold the subject together. This refining process of sublimation is described by Zupancic (2003, p. 78) “as immediately inscribed and confined within a discrete narrowly defined time and space (one week, one house – this being another time, another place), destined to become the most precious object of [one’s] memories.” The subject’s lack becomes something which can be sublimated and also, most importantly, elevated within an object to the status or dignity of *das Ding* (or the Thing) which is an encounter with the Real. Although love is not a Thing as such, it requires elevation to this status in order for it to be recognised.

Important amongst the ideological fantasies of love is the body. In *Heavenly Creatures* Juliet and Pauline, most of the time, attempt to exude grace, style and sophistication. Gestures of the body and ways of speaking and articulating thoughts signal how love structures both the beloved and the subject who loves. Much of the content of the girl’s fantasises about love are related to the social conditions of the time, although they adopt a medieval motif in their Fourth World. The desire to appear beautiful, graceful and honourable is upheld in their fantasy just as it was during 1950’s Christchurch. The crucial difference, however, is unlike their lived experiences, in the Fourth World they are not slaves to love and can enact and exercise the freedom afforded to them by virtue of being saintly or by depicting true love is as not necessarily beyond appearances. Their fantasy of love is therefore perpetuated by the

social mores and conditions of 1950's Christchurch. It could be argued that an authentic prophet of love in *Heavenly Creatures* is Mrs Hulme, the marriage counsellor and adulterous wife of Professor Hulme. She blatantly positions herself as the object of desire, the *femme fatale*, which renders her inaccessible to her daughter. She is the most disliked character by participants because she redefines love and attraction as traumatic, somewhat selfish and a betrayal of the ideological conditions of the time. In her portrayal of love the social ties which bind subjects to one another are not as valued as they were in conservative 1950's Christchurch. This is one of the most shocking features for viewing participants: love which is purely for the self, is subversive of the dominant ideologies and conditions of the time, in which one cannot be unapologetically selfish. In both 1950's Christchurch and the Fourth World, ideology is paradoxically instructing subjects to be faithful to themselves; when it comes to love, they can thereby realise their true potential. This comes at a cost and is not without trauma as Žižek states (2013, *Love as Political Category*):

[T]here is always something traumatic/extremely violent about love. Love is a permanent emergency state. You fall in love. And it's crucial to know that in English and in French we use this expression; you 'fall' in love. You lose control. I claim that love, the experience of passionate love, is the most elementary metaphysical experience, it's a platonic experience. In the sense of, you lead your easy, daily life, you meet up with friends, go to parties and whatever, everything is normal, maybe here and there a one night stand, and then you passionately fall in love, and everything is ruined. The entire balance of your life is lost. Everything is subordinated to this one person. I cannot imagine in normal daily life, outside war and so on, a more violent experience than love.

The violence of love is necessarily bound within the sentiment of love thy neighbour, which Žižek claims enforces the fantasy of god "as a zealous, stupid guy who says, you can love others, but make sure that you love me more" (2013). This position opposes the naive egalitarian universalism which love thy neighbour espouses, and which induces guilt for the subject about not loving or even about hating.

Love as proximity of desire: “There is something in me more than myself”.

The only strong male characters were in their fantasy, the guys they fantasised about. There were no real strong male characters... Yeah, there was no Tom Selleck (June, creative industries focus group participant).

Love certainly holds the promise that the beloved (Other) will recognise the subject's desires. More than this however, love is a longing that the beloved will cherish the lover as much as the lover cherishes the ideal of their chosen subject. Such recognition is considered rare and love is a way of celebrating this. This particular narrative of love dates back to the Greek myth of Narcissus and his discovery of the beauty of his reflection in the water, from which manifests a love for his reflection. His fixation for himself is so overwhelming that he does not realise that his beauty is merely an image, a reflection and thus cannot return the love he so desires.



Illustration 34. *Narcissus*, Caravaggio (1597-1599)

The ultimate failure of love is that the Other will not fulfil the recognition that the subject craves in fantasy. Conversely the subject in place of the Other is aware that he/she too is unable to fulfil the idealisation of love for the beloved. *Heavenly Creatures* demonstrates this tension beautifully. The film is ostensibly about murder but it is as much about the failure of love and in particular the subject's failed attempt to absorb the *das Ding* of love within the bounds of sexuality. Soler (2006, p. 212) states, "[t]hat love leads to death is not a modern theme". In the film there are three significant scenarios: Mr and Mrs Hulme are reaching the end of their love journey as their marriage disintegrates; Juliet and Pauline's love is never fully realised because they are separated by the judicial system; Mr Rieper loses his love and in an effort to recover from this devastation has to harness the love he has for the daughter

who killed his wife.⁶⁴ In these ways the film stages love as desire which is constantly under scrutiny and which judges and demands responsibility from the subject. When love fails it becomes injurious and both the subject who loves and the beloved are held culpable. Butler (2005, p. 10) in her discussion of Nietzsche's work discusses the failure and culpability of love and loss as a way in which the subject can achieve some potential:

In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche offers a controversial account of how we become reflective at all about our actions and how we become positioned to give an account of what we have done. He remarks that we become conscious of ourselves only after certain injuries have been inflicted. Someone suffers as a consequence, and the suffering person or, rather, someone acting as his or her advocate in a system of justice seeks to find the cause of that suffering and asks us whether we might be that cause. It is in the interest of meting out a just punishment to the one responsible for an injurious action that the question is posed and that the subject in question comes to question him or herself. 'Punishment', Nietzsche tells us, is 'the making of memory'.

It can be argued that love is a measure of a subjective authenticity in the quest to become whole. This particularity of love is identified by June, Sam and Chris:

June: It was almost like she, they were in love with their fantasy together. Yeah, that's what I was saying about props, even physically, that sense that they weren't together when they were together sexually.. they weren't actually.. The fantasy itself is the most real thing.

⁶⁴ According to historical accounts, throughout Pauline's trial, imprisonment and release, Mr Rieper remained very loyal to his daughter by providing her with emotional and financial assistance in restarting her life.

Chris: It was the fantasy itself that meant more. That's the way the film portrayed it.

Sam: Reality actually got in the way.

The justice of love not being fully authentic, meaning that another cannot clearly measure it in the Symbolic, is itself punishment which incurs a slur on the character of the lover as June, Sam and Chris acknowledge. However, Layla, a participant in the young women's group offers another perspective:

Well I reckon the two girls are motivated by a sort of sense of belonging, because they found each other. And then they sort of found a world where they, um, sort of belonged in and sort of, they sort of trans-, kept transitioning between that world and the other world. And they, they needed each other and so they, they sort of created other characters which needed them, and, yeah.

To be successful love relies on social artefacts, props and structures where the subject and the love object are constantly valorised. Layla continues with a reflection on the process of contemporary young love and courtship:

I remember when I was younger and I had this boy who lived down the road, who I was absolutely in love with. And, um, and I'd never admit it and I'd never talked to him. And then suddenly, I always remember, this is quite weird, but I used to have dreams that he was my boyfriend and then I'd wake up in the morning and be so disappointed. (laughter) But that's that, I mean it's so bizarre, but that was one thing that I just, and then I realised years later that I didn't actually like him that much. I think it was just the fact that I probably couldn't, I'd never built up the courage to tell him that sort of thing, and, um, I knew that it would never happen. And then I kind of thought about it more and more just because of that reason, where you wanted something so badly that you couldn't have that, then you thought about it all the time.

Layla's story prompts Kim to reveal her confused feelings regarding attraction and the possibilities of love:

Kim: You do get to that point where you want something so bad that you don't know why you want it, as well, you know, like, I've got a same situation, you know, with a, a boy. But it's like, yeah, I don't, I don't know this guy very well at all, but I am so drawn, and it's like I don't know why, 'cause how can I relate to this person that I don't actually know? But that could be what I want, is to, and it can, that could come back to you though, it could actually come back and be a, am I a brave enough person to actually make the step to get what I want? You know, like 'cause, ah, my first initial thought when you asked that was actually more so in my career, as being a musician, which we all have, are, you know, familiar with. I always say that being a musician is the never ending battle, and we never actually get what we really want. You know, like, even if I became a famous singer, and made millions of albums and sang, there could always be something more that I would want, I'd, I reckon. But then again, can you make yourself get everything you want? You know, like could you...

Layla: It's like they say with relationships, it's the thrill of the chase, to want someone.

The fascination of love as the ultimate enigma is both contrasted to and connected with the rational ideologies which love offers. Layla and Kim challenge ideas of love by allowing themselves to set the possibilities for love, instead of adopting an idealisation of love such as that which the modern marriage market propagates. At the same time their conception of love is nevertheless elevated to the status of *das Ding*, the ultimate semblance representing subjective wholeness. Thus authenticity is staged as the regulator of love which certainly shapes how one thinks about contemporary relationships. Illouz defines the problem of authenticity, its relation to love and to the demands of the subject (2012, p. 31):

Authenticity demands that actors know their feelings; that they act on such feelings, which must then be the actual building blocks of a relationship; that people reveal their feelings to

themselves (and preferably to others as well); and that they make decisions about relationships and commit themselves based on these feelings. A regime of emotional authenticity makes people scrutinise their own and another's emotions in order to decide on the importance, intensity, and future significance of the relationship. 'Do I *really* love him, or is it just lust?' 'If I love him, how deep, intense, and real is my love?' 'Is this love healthy or narcissistic?' These are questions that belong to a regime of authenticity... Authenticity presumes there is a real (emotional) ontology that precedes and exists beyond the rules by which the expression and experience of feelings in general and love in particular are organised and channelled.

Love is here articulated both within the order of the Real and that of the Symbolic. It is how the subject constructs and measures authenticity that determines which order gives more traction. The romantic love bond problematically presupposes that the subject will be able to identify the truth of their feelings and read their emotions clearly. If one does not feel the love one is supposed to, as Kim and Layla hinted, then it can be rationally reduced to a courtship or a flirtation which differs from the shape of *real* love. Authenticity is codified in love rituals which strive to communicate emotions and to diminish elements of uncertainty. The rationale of love both in the institution of marriage and in rituals which sanctify love not only propagates an amazing subjective insight to completely identify with the symptom of love, but is also reliant on it. At this level love is signified as part of a wider moral order. Zupancic (2003, p. 71) problematises how *real love* can be articulated as something more than the subject:

Real love, if we can risk this expression, is not the love that is called sublime, the love in which we let ourselves be completely dazzled or blinded by the object so that we no longer see (or can't bear to see) its ridiculous, banal aspect. This kind of sublime love necessitates and generates a radical inaccessibility to the other (which usually takes the form of eternal preliminaries that enables us to reintroduce the distance that suits the inaccessible, and thereby to resubliminate the object after each use). But, neither is real love the sum of desire

and friendship, where friendship is supposed to provide a bridge between two awakenings of desire and to embrace the ridiculous side of the object. The point is not that, in order for love to work, one has to accept the other with all her baggage, to stand her banal aspect, to forgive her weaknesses – in short to tolerate the other when one does not desire her. The true miracle of love – and this is what links love to comedy – consists in preserving the transcendence in the very accessibility of the other.

Indeed, this is not the most persuasive selling of (the fantasy of) love, but it is in all its harshness, honest. Love resides in the Symbolic and consists mostly of a drive for the subject's desire to be recognised. It can be banal and also real because one can literally fall, or as Zupancic poignantly puts it, stumble in and out of love.

The impossibility of love is what places it at the level of sublime fantasy. The statement that, "I have just not met the love of my life" indicates that this fantasy of love is manifesting in Symbolic ideologies which support a singular construction of love. Narratives and songs about encounters with enduring love encompass the basic fantasy that true love stands the test of time. A friend told me of the love story of her parents who met before WWI and who lived in England where they had three children. Just before WWII broke out, her father, a GP who worked in the poor communities of London, arranged for his wife and children to live in Christchurch, New Zealand, his wife's birth place. For six years they were separated and many times her mother feared her husband might have died. After the war and nine months after her father's surprise arrival in Christchurch, my friend was born to her forty-six year old mother and her parents remained together in New Zealand until they died. Her parent's stories of enduring love inspired my friend; for her it provided a testament that love is fundamental to a subject's development and maturity. It inspired her to pursue a successful career in health science and to be committed to her own husband and children. What her parent's story reveals is that despite extraordinary circumstances and long absences, the impossibility of love is very possible. Her father's absence during WWII is a traumatic gap transmitted in retrospect to her via her parents and siblings. Within their stories, she can

actively nurture her fantasy of enduring love, because it is from this traumatic gap of her parents being separated that love is seen to endure and she emerges. Thus a fantasy of enduring love provides her with both the experience of trauma and a shield from it. Zupancic points to this particular identification of love as providing a structure from which the Real can be graspable (2003, p. 76):

[T]he whole point of the Lacanian concept of the Real is that the impossible happens. This is what is so traumatic, disturbing, shattering – or funny – about the Real. The Real happens precisely as the impossible. It is not something that happens when we want it. It always happens at the wrong time and in the wrong place; it is always something that doesn't fit the (established or anticipated) picture. The Real as impossible means that there is no right time or place for it, and not that it is impossible for it to happen. It thus breaks or interrupts the linearity of time, the harmony of the picture.

The realisation of love as an impossibility to the subject is “derealised from the very moment it happens” (Zupancic, 2003, p. 75). The means by which love's authenticity can be measured originates in beliefs and in the body where desire also can be located. For participants love feels immediate and spontaneous and offers an illusion of freedom, whereas desire is scrutinised with some degree of anxiety as being predominately biological. The body, as discussed in the previous chapter, is a mediatory force from which desire can manifest and be declared. In this way love can be construed as a struggle for separation in which the body acts as catalyst. The paradox of the relationship between love and the body is love's demand that one gives up the body in order to make a declaration of love. This is not just any declaration, but one that resonates with another subject (the love object) within the order of the sublime. This declaration is for the love object only to interpret. Love is then transcendent, an unshakable idea which holds people together. Thus love is a struggle to both connect and separate, to define one's subjectivity and to be free from any definitions which might be constraining. Love is not easy, being staged within an act of transference during which the

utterance of the words, “I love you” are insufficient. In spite of this, love is a noteworthy and persuasive Master as Badiou suggests (2009, p. 93-94):

We should follow our old master. One must start with love. We philosophers don't have that many means at our disposal; if we are deprived of the means of seduction, then we are disarmed... It is about seducing on behalf of something, which in the end, is truth.

For Badiou, our old Master is the discipline and field of philosophy, and, more precisely the art of formulating the foundations of robust philosophical enquiry. The Master is a voice or an encounter which is potentially transformative through its initiation of a process of truth finding for the subject. However, it is important to realise that the Master, the pursuer of truth and knowledge, is also contradictory. A true Master would oppose any declaration or proclamation of truth and knowledge. Lacan claims that “truth makes holes in knowledge” (1966-67; cited in Pluth, 2010, p. 94). Badiou is in agreement with Lacan that the relationship between truth and knowledge is conflicted and states that truth can be described “as knowledge that repeats” (Badiou, 2004, p. 61). In this way the Master can be considered a signifier which repeats consistently because its conditions are structured towards repetition. For Žižek, such conditions are ideological. For many people love is a contradictory and confusing Master. As such love is at odds with the pursuit of truth, particularly when love hurts or disappoints and does not live up to its Imaginary status. Desire, however, provides a way in which the subject can manage this contradiction because the position of the subject-supposed-to-know cannot be attained if one pursues both love and desire. Rather, love provides a proximity to desire - there *is something more in me than myself* attests to how the subject struggles with articulating the unconscious desires he or she is aware of. Love holds a promise or a key to understanding how the subject can relate to the love object.

Love as sublimation and virtue of desire

Only love sublimation makes it possible for jouissance to condescend desire (Lacan, Sem. X, cited in Zupancic, 2003, p. 62).

Love is the human face of jouissance and certainly implies movement for the subject, whether it is cultivating emotional development, facing loss or taking a chance. In any event, the subject resolves, unconsciously, to elevate love to the order and status of *das Ding* thus rendering a movement worthy. This is a somewhat perplexing elevation in that love is not a thing whose transcendental promises are visible. Yet they can nevertheless be experienced and talked about. For love to gain the status of *das Ding*, the element of fantasy is crucial. Once fantasy is more fully involved love achieves the status of being in the Real. The process of achieving this status is interesting since objects that are visible must be identified and sanctioned by the subject as worthy of representing love. It is precisely the appearance of such an object that is important as Zupancic (2003, p. 65) points out: “[It] is not that appearances are always deceiving, but, instead, that there is something in the appearance that never deceives”. This means that the semblant object must mean more for the subject than its mere appearance. What must lie behind the object is its true significance of love. The object is distinguished from other objects in that it transmits a truth for the subject. Such a sublime spectre of truth through the object promises access to the Real as Zupancic (2003, p. 68) goes on to explain:

The Real is identified with the Thing, and is visible in the blinding splendour as the effect of the Thing on sensible matter. It is not visible or readable immediately, but only in this blinding trace that it leaves in the word of the senses.

The process of sublimation implies that love is a presence that one inhabits. Peters states that (2013, p.11):

Love, for Lacan, is the condition that reveals most about the impossibility of the sexual relation in so far as it reveals both the desire to engulf and dominate the object into the self, and the ways in which the loved one can never ‘live up’ to the projected fantasy invented by the besotted lover. As Lacan puts it: ‘I love you, but because inexplicably I love in you something more than you – the objet petit a – I mutilate you’ (Lacan 1981: 74). Here, love becomes inexorably bound not to any transcendent aspects of the loved one, but remains on the side of the ‘victim’ of the ‘sickness’ that Freud believed constitutes ‘falling in love’.

Žižek (2007, p. 199) says of love, “man’s love for a woman – his very ‘spiritual’, ‘pure’ love as opposed to sexual longing – is a thoroughly narcissistic phenomenon: in his love of a woman, man loves only himself, his own ideal image”. Given that the Symbolic cannot encompass all that one might seek to represent, the object of love is rendered a sublimated lost object that fills the void created by inaccessibility to the Real. Lacan states this eloquently in *Seminar X: Anxiety* (1962-3S, p. 58):

What the one lacks is not what is hidden within the other—the only thing left to the beloved is thus to proceed to a kind of exchange of places, to change from the object into the subject of love, in short: to return love.

The desire to be one with another is, as Lacan suggests, a drive of love. This is despite such a drive being within the register of the Imaginary, while it may yield longevity, love may or may not persist. Salecl (1998, p. 18) outlines this succinctly when she states: “What love as a demand targets in the other is therefore the object within him - or herself, the real, non-symbolisable kernel around which the subject organises his or her desire”. Peters (2013, p. 21) offers a cogent explanation of Lacan’s theory of the subject’s desire to attain one-ness:

To indicate the specificity of this One, Lacan coined the neologism *le sinthome*: the point which functions as the ultimate support of the subject’s consistency, the point of “thou art that”, the point marking the dimensions of “what is in the subject more than itself” and what it

therefore loves “more than in itself”, that point which is none the less neither symptom (the coded message in which the subject receives from the Other its own message in reverse form, the truth of its desire) nor fantasy (the imaginary scenario which, with its fascinating presence, screens off the lack in the Other, the radical consistency of the symbolic order).

What are the consequences for the subject once love is elevated to the status of *das Ding*? To revisit Žižek’s ontology of the gaze as ‘looking awry’, love is always a distortion which is important if the subject is to believe in love as a universal, even if possibly devoid of substance. Žižek states (1999, p. 156), “the Object can be perceived only when it is viewed from the side, in a partial distorted form, as its own shadow – if we cast a direct glance at it we see nothing, a mere void”. Such distortion is important for the subject who loves, who is the beloved and also for other subjects who witness love. The marriage ritual propagates this distortion which is obviously illustrated in *Heavenly Creatures*: The Parkers were not married, although living together happily enough and the Hulmes were unhappily married and living in a three-some situation. Such distortions allow for sublimation to occur and to be repeated with the social bond. More so it allows this to happen in the guise of such distortions being a process that is natural and unquestioned, which in turn posits a problematic position: love is presented as certainly not easy, but nevertheless, natural. Lacan, challenges this when commenting on the relation between love and the lover (1959-60, p. 152):

The detour in the psyche isn’t always designed to regulate the commerce between whatever is organised in the domain of the pleasure principle and whatever presents itself as the structure of reality. There are also detours and obstacles which are organised so as to make the domain of the vacuole stand out as such ... The techniques involved in courtly love – and they are precise enough to allow us to perceive what might on occasion become fact, what is properly speaking of the sexual order in the inspiration of this eroticism – are techniques of holding back, of suspension, of *amor interruptus*. The stages courtly love lays down previous to what is mysteriously referred to as *le don de merci*, ‘the gift of mercy’ – although we don’t know

exactly what it meant – are expressed more or less in terms that Freud uses in his *Three Essays* as belonging to the spheres of foreplay.

Love's fantasmatic capacities always maintain a relationship to culture and society; which is to say love is always a love story which is ideologically constructed and socially performed. *Heavenly Creatures* illustrates how Lacan's logic of love and the process of sublimation are enacted at the level of the everyday objects. Yet, the stocking, a semblance for 1950's femininity, could not be more pure and distinguishable. However, the rock-in-the-stockings is a weapon through which the act of murder manifests. It is through this refashioning of femininity that the dialectic of desire and prohibition is determined. The rock-in-the stocking becomes a libidinal object which is the signifier of castration.⁶⁵ Lacan states in *Écrits* (1977, p. 324): "Castration means that jouissance must be refused, or that it can be reached on the inverted ladder of the Law of desire". Castration is a way of enjoying the signifier as well as coming to terms with inevitable loss.

⁶⁵ Refer to Appendix E (hyperlink to journal article) where I offer a more detailed account of the significance of this murder weapon, *Between the Subject and the Social: Signifying Images of Desire and Ideological Subjectivities* (2011, Vol 6 (2)) a journal article submitted to the *International Journal of Žižek Studies*.



Illustration 35. Pauline and Juliet [Melanie Lynskey and Kate Winslet] enacting their 'Saints'.

Love becomes an official desire of social discourse once it has been elevated to *das Ding*. In *Heavenly Creatures* the killing is an ideological act. It is undertaken by two teenagers who in some ways refuse the patriarchal order in which they have been brought up. The epoch of courtly love becomes for them the fantasy they share. They are the object of each other's affection as they enact the potential of love and of future relationships. In the roles of the saints-in-love, they enact spontaneous passion and intense enjoyment which they imagine might take place. Regardless of whether any sexual act might take place they are simultaneously in the role of both the lover and beloved. They enact the object of another's (unknown future subject) of desire. The murder provides no compromise between the merging of the Imaginary with the Symbolic and thereby serves to oppose the domination of patriarchy; after all, they are not enacting these love encounters with a man, but rather with each other notwithstanding that at the time lesbianism was considered to be immoral. Interestingly this perception of immorality comes from Pauline's mother and not from

Juliet's, whose bourgeois ideals of equality unwittingly preserve the fantasy and matrix of love and courtship for the girls.

The body certainly plays a part in the reiteration of love. However, it is important to realise that anatomy does not completely determine the status of such division. To recapitulate, biological sexed division is natural – one is, generally, born either female or male. However, the female or male body is signifiable and is directed and influenced by external forces, experiences and discourses. What occurs is a distinction between the sexes that in itself operates as a signifier. What makes a woman a woman or a man a man needs explanation as anatomy does not completely resolve the problem of sexual difference. Rather, the body is captured and thus affected by signifiers. Such signification is also the ideological problem of love, specifically as it encompasses choices of sexuality, sexual freedom and how desire exists in the dramatic context of fantasy as well as in everyday life. In this context love is seen as an expression of desire; moreover, love makes *jouissance* contend with desire. In confronting love, one has to deal with the effects (and limitations) of the biological body, not only as an affect of signification, but also as it actually is. In this way love is a material signifier situated within the Symbolic and the Real, while also producing Imaginary effects. This situation is crucial to the subject who strives to demonstrate love through an act, event or encounter. Love both drives and inhibits the subject, in that it resides within the process of sublimation which in turn entails that it restricts *jouissance* within a socially acceptable, albeit arbitrary, morality.

Love as a desire to love discontentedly

Quite suddenly, with blinding insight, the secret of their blissful marriage was revealed to me. She couldn't speak a word of English and he couldn't speak a word of Spanish (Worth, 2002, p. 143).

In 1850 Tennyson wrote his well known line, “’tis better to have loved and lost than to never have loved at all” (*In Memoriam*, 27). Here love is illustrated as full of promise yet therein lies inevitable disillusionment, whether or not one stays with their love object. Although, *In Memoriam* specifically pays homage to the poet’s dead friend, it is frequently cited as a sombre reminder that anyone can carry the scars of disappointing, failed or unrequited love. Despite its perils, the implication is that love is an important, even a life-changing experience for the subject. By contrast, Wagner penned his thoughts on love to his friend, the Hungarian composer, Liszt (Donington, 1990, p. 265):

The love of a tender woman has made me happy; she dared to throw herself into a sea of suffering and agony so that she should be able to say to me ‘I love you!’ No one who does not know all her tenderness can judge how much she had to suffer. We were spared nothing – but as a consequence I am redeemed and she is blessedly happy because she is aware of it.

When the subject is open to the experience of love, can the struggle for visible structures which support it be put in place? Only something appears where it is least expected and this is love. In many ways *Heavenly Creatures* carries the complexities of the sentiments of both Tennyson and Wagner. Through its portrayal of Mrs Rieper, this film conveys the everyday suffering and hard work which love brings; self-sacrifice for the love of her family and also the myth of how absolute love was framed at that time. The disappointment of love is highlighted by the bourgeois Hulme marriage, a pompous ideological masquerade hiding unhappiness. The film attempts to incorporate these two co-ordinates of love by rupturing the fantasmatic element which strives to keep love alive. It concludes with a very dramatic and emotional scene. Juliet and Pauline are separated, but desperately try to reach each other, their efforts are averted and obscured, however, in the blur of anonymous people who surround them, people with whom they have no connection and yet who have structured the contents and values of their lived experiences. The scene is shot in slow motion and in black and white, reminiscent of melodrama or horror. Equally poignant is the lack of sound and of

speech, a lack which highlights the visible distress on their faces as the fantasy which sustained them is being dissolved. This very lack of sound or voice is crucial here in depicting horror and trauma thereby achieving maximum spectator impact, an affect that in film is normally conveyed through sound. At this point an unsettling silence is precursor to the blood curdling scream of Pauline whose face is covered with her mother's blood. For the viewer this scream is even more present than the visual image and provides a stunning emotional impact as the credits start to roll.



Illustration 36. Juliet [Kate Winslet] running on towards her parents and Pauline (unseen) in a fantasy scene.



Illustration 37. Juliet [Kate Winslet] with her parents.

Breaking with the Master-signifier of love is not easy or even desirable for the subject, even when the experience of love has been harsh. The voice (not to be confused with speech) and the gaze can accentuate the love object for the subject and this awareness has been exploited in film making, not only as a means of stylisation, but also as an attempt to confront the complexities of love, connection and relationships and to displace them from their mythical context. In *Heavenly Creatures* this nuanced approach which recognises and presents love as complex is not lost on participants in this study. However, for participants love is still an important dimension to be grappled with throughout their lives. Love is the ultimate life goal as described by Kim, a participant in the young women's group:

I think probably some basic wants of the whole human, humanity, you know, like the whole, sort of like to belong, to be loved and love, um, food, shelter I guess. The necessities and then you have like the... ..the, the basic, the basic needs of humanity. And then above, I, I think above from that you have your own personal, like, interests above that. But I guess, I guess what you want first is, you know, to belong, to be loved and to love others, and then I guess above that, you know, the interest stuff. But I guess if above that, but if things go wrong in that, in that second stack, you want to put those right first.

For Kim, love is posited as a necessity of life which is a “basic need of humanity”. This can be considered within the order of the ego and a primitive and erotic form of narcissism from which an ethic of love is constructed as being within the natural order. Moreover love is seen as social valorisation signifying subjective importance, social roles and identities. Love has always embraced the fantasy of ultimate subjective fulfilment. The contemporary French philosopher François Regnault⁶⁶ (cited in Soler, 2006, p. 210) comments that one is

[a] subjective knot where a subject is knotted to a woman (or a woman to a man) and, at the same time, to the figure that he will cut or will leave in this world, or in the beyond. This means that a man, or a woman, does not fulfil his/her existence if she/he is not loved.

For Regnault, as for most of us, love is a theatre filled with possible plots, a (hopefully appreciative) audience and many props which combine to elucidate love’s characteristics and splendour. Love is not always romantic love. Jenny, a participant from the older residents’ group offers an insight into how a mother’s love for her offspring may be experienced in terms of vulnerability, particularly when individuating from the family unit. Here Jenny reflects on her observations of Mrs Rieper:

Well, I think the mother, the mother, Pauline's mother, she'd obviously... well, Pauline was probably quite like her in lots of ways. But she'd obviously run away with the father at seventeen, and they never got married and she probably had a baby when she was very young.. probably had Pauline when she was very young.. she had this girl who was bright, she was doing really well at school, she was proud of her, and she was thinking ahead that she was going to go on and study and.. and it was like her life.. that she had never done that with

⁶⁶ Regnault is very influenced by Althusser and Lacan, having attended their seminars. He currently teaches psychoanalysis and theatre in Paris.

her life.. and she was.. she was.. look.. looking for.. she loved her daughter, didn't she? And she just got really upset when it wasn't going to.. that's not the path it seemed to be going along. It started going off in a different direction.. and umm.. just the way she looked at her daughter, she just loved her and cared about her so much, and just really didn't know what to do. Did she? She didn't really know what to do.

The confusion and discontent love may carry does not escape participants. Most are aware of the risk of love, of potential heartbreak and more poignantly that one can be in a relationship where love is insufficiently fulfilling. At this point desire might be the important missing feature of love since desire propagates love as a measure of self consciousness, as defined within the parameters of the Symbolic. Given that desire is always of the Other, love on its own may not necessarily be enough for the subject because without desire, love risks being only love for oneself. Lulu, a participant in the older residents' group illustrates, when discussing her adult daughter, how desire and love are conflated:

The thing that I probably most in my heart that has pained me most.. and it is something that I can't do anything about.. and it is OK now, but my elder daughter had a partner who died when he was.. and they were in love and.. get married and have children and things.. and he died. And that was desire that I had, not for me but for my daughter to meet somebody else who would fill the gap and someone that sh.. and.. would be right for her.. and.. although she went through most of that, she has sort of.. come to terms with it probably not going to happen.. and I have too.. and that for me a desire.. that wasn't for me, but it was for someone I love very much..

Although Lulu posits love and desire in very normative and conservative terms, she provides a way in which desire provides cognition for love in that it provides parameters for love to manifest itself and for desire to be managed. In this way love and desire can be understood in traditional ideological terms that are socially valorised and to a large degree unquestioned. The sublimation of love provides an ideal that renders the subject recognisable and important,

particularly when attempting to manage love alongside desire. In Lulu's case this importance is articulated by a mother about her daughter as a perceived lack that she is burdened with, regardless of whether or not her daughter experiences this as lack. Lulu's articulations concerning her daughter are characterised by traditional gendered politics which perceive women as complete if they love their partner and bear children, all very reminiscent of 1950's Christchurch where Lulu grew up and, ironically, of which she is critical. An anxious gap is revealed by Lulu, an important gap belonging to her: her daughter is not living the life she did at her age. For Lulu this displaces the gendered convenience of social mores, ideologies and a comfortable authority. A sense of self consciousness and meaning seems lost both for Lulu and for her perceptions of her daughter. Hegel recognises this conundrum in *Phenomenology of Spirit* when he states (cited in Connell, 2013, p. 75):

The male has desire, drive; the feminine drive is far more aimed at being the object of the drive, to arouse drive and to allow it to satisfy itself in it ... It is the element of [custom or morality], the totality of ethical life ... though not yet in itself but only the suggestion of it. Each one [here exists] only as determinate will, character, as the natural individual whose uncultivated natural Self is recognised.

For Lacan there is no avowal without disavowal. This is the location from where the ego is formed, from misrecognising itself which results in alienation. The image of the Other then provides the necessary impetus for the ego to reintegrate itself. As Bruno (1999, p. 55) goes on to elaborate, "Through the imaginary, then, the real fact is elided that the subject cannot see the point from which he sees himself". Love relies on this misdirection of the gaze. When one is looking in a particular direction, there remains another space not being gazed upon. To reiterate, Žižek claims that the subject encounters the gaze as "awry". The dizziness and confusion experienced by the subject when the discourse of the gaze is enforced, entails that other objects are not gazed upon, yet not necessarily *missed* by the subject. Such a *missing* by the subject, while symbolic of lack, is necessary for the revelation of and potential for fantasy. Thus, when the subject shifts their gaze to another object, the fantasy remains. This

is the crux of Žižek's thesis of "looking awry" and provides a most cogent apparatus for understanding love. The fantasy of love remains regardless of the object the subject chooses to signify it with. In this way, the object of love (whether it be nature, another subject, a social movement, or even the Eiffel Tower) is called love. The naming of love is important because otherwise for the subject the object would be nameless and this would produce anxiety.

In an effort to undertake the important task of naming, Jenny, a participant from the older residents' group, elaborates on the heartbreak of love depicted in *Heavenly Creatures*; at the same time in order to understand the murder, she constructs a particular logic in which the Symbolic and the Imaginary converge:

The idea when they only had two or three weeks before they were going to go off and go to South Africa.. and the father came around and suggested that she could spend those weeks to stay.. Pauline could come and stay at Ilam.. umm.. if Pauline's parents had said then.. Pauline's mother didn't think that was a good idea, but she let it happen.. but she didn't know what to do, did she? She totally, she just sat there crying.. because she just went along with his suggestion.. because if that hadn't happened, probably.. probably it wouldn't have.. what happened.. wouldn't have happened if she had.. when they go together for those last three weeks, that's when everything really went off the rails, didn't it?

An alternative ending to the Parker-Hulme case is frequently imagined by participants. The 'what if' is a persuasive yet unsatisfying signifier for viewers to ponder. It seems there are two reasons for this: the first is that love between Juliet and Pauline is a discontented one that can really never endure because they are young and immature; secondly, the reality of the murder is so traumatic that it seems senseless. As participants interrogate the 'what if' scenario of another narrative, they are in fact giving ground to a fantasy that structures and shapes neurotic desire. Through this articulation, fantasy is given empirical and Symbolic meaning, which holds more traction than accepting discontented love as the only solution.

The 'what if' injects romantic fantasy with more precision. For Jenny, discontented love is portrayed initially as singular in meaning. However, she is alerted to the conflation of love with how one relates to *jouissance*, precisely by her *jouissance* as a viewing participant. Zupancic discusses how the subject, in his/her relation to love makes *jouissance* into *something* (2003, p. 79):

Love (in the precise and singular meaning) affects and changes the way we relate to *jouissance*, and makes of *jouissance* something else other than our 'inhuman partner'. More precisely, it makes *jouissance* appear as something we can relate to, and as something that we can actually desire. Another way of putting this would be to say that we cannot gain access to the other (as other) so long as the attachment to our *jouissance* remains a 'non-reflexive' attachment.

From the standpoint of another view of discontented love, Lulu is prompted to offer contradictory insights into the love relationship between Professor Hulme, Mrs Hulme and Mr Perry, strictly from the perspective of a viewing spectator:

I think that her father was quite a needy, the professor, was quite a needy character, and he was caught in a very.. in a trap because.. it was his wife in a marriage who was in marriage guidance.. marriage guidance! [Yes!] A marriage guidance counsellor! Was, umm.. was, in actual fact, her marriage wasn't working that well, was it? I felt really sorry for him because he was a well educated man and he really manipulated Pauline's parents because umm.. they looked up to him, possibly because he was a Professor, and probably was supposed to know more. But in actual fact, I think Pauline's parents had the right idea!

This construction of love and marriage is one that is responded to enthusiastically by participants when Jenny, James and Lulu continue to comment (note especially Lulu's telling, final insight):

Lulu: But the Professor and his wife's life was quite a tenuous one and she was having an affair with a man she... she was supposed to be counselling. So, talk about motivation! There's a whole heap bubbling under the surface with that couple isn't there [murmurs of agreement] in that family.

Jenny: And the way he was given the farewell speech and they were up there acting out the happy married couple going on to higher things, when really it was the complete opposite from all that [pause]. They'd asked him to go and they weren't all that happily married at all! [slight laugh]. Just acting. Yeah.

James: So might part of it be some of their motivations are public and there are also private motivations and they are not connected with relationship to Pauline's family and that had some influence on her own behaviour and the outcome of that.

Jenny: I think that Pauline's parents were much more connected. They could see what was going on and they were terribly worried about her. They were beside themselves with worry, whereas the other two parents didn't even.. they were too wound up in their own.. they just wanted to brush.. it if was causing a problem, they just wanted to brush Juliet aside. When the father came down and said, 'they're in the bath together.. and they're taking photographs', and she just said.. 'don't worry about it. It's alright'.

Lulu: But people have often got their opposites. Opposite situations within themselves. The marriage guidance and she had a problem herself. And I often see that in my work. You've got these two that are fighting and we often have opposites.

Badiou states that “selfishness is love’s enemy” (2009, p. 60). While this is a simplified version of the experience and expectation of love, it is nevertheless a sentiment reflected upon by participants. Love is suffused within an ideology of individualism which promises the subject a trajectory of truth, yet with all its associated drama and disappointment love is

far from a peaceful process. It is, however, a powerful process where there is a strong anchor for recognition. Even more than this, love is filled with *jouissance* through which we achieve our enjoyment and fantasy. One could even argue that love, together with any kind of positing of truth, is a selfish pursuit. As art, science and literature demonstrate, love has the ability to transcend the ego in its discoveries of new possibilities and risks. Zupancic characterises this when she states that (2003, p. 79):

The two sides of love that mutually sustain each other and account for the fact that, as Lacan puts it, love ‘makes up for the sexual relationship’ (as nonexistent), could be formulated as follows: to love the other and to desire my *jouissance*. To ‘desire one’s own *jouissance*’ is probably what is hardest to obtain and to make work, since enjoyment has trouble appearing as an object... However, the will to enjoy should not be confused with desire. To establish a relation of desire towards one’s own enjoyment (and to be able to actually ‘enjoy’ it) does not mean to subject oneself to the unconditional demand of enjoyment – it means, rather, to be able to elude its grasp of the Thing.

In addition love provides a safety net and it is this construction of love that participants seem not to be entirely comfortable with in their comments on Professor and Mrs Hulme. As Lulu states, “But people have often got their opposites. Opposite situations within themselves”, thus highlighting the importance of the contradictory positions of love and the revelation of the split subject. Understood in this way love and commitment offer a critical insight into the ideological conditions of the time, namely that love can be staged for political purposes, in spite of it not necessarily giving pleasure to those who are staging it. Every subject must manage the tensions that love brings, even in the most happy and fulfilling of relationships. Lulu goes on to state, “[y]ou’ve got these two that are fighting and we often have opposites.” This is an interesting tension love brings that is problematic – that one insists on one’s subjectivity yet also determines that one’s object of love insist on theirs. This tension occurs where a sense of equality can be recognised; recognition dependent on both self mastery and on the loved one also engaging in this process of critical awareness. So it is most interesting

that conflict and tension inherent in split subjectivity are seen as threatening to the love relationship, as Lulu suggests:

Lulu: Yes. Within ourselves. [pause] Perhaps Pauline's family are less so because they are more straightforward. And often, so you think the more intelligent people are... the more things are going on, the more, the more... they are at cross purposes. When we are talking about relationships, we have to remember that those girls were besotted by those film stars. By the singers... [all in agreement]. Actually, their main love was through those fantasy.. those characters... they were never going to meet them or act with them. But in their hearts, that's where they were going. And their relationships with each other, all the intimate connecting relationships were actually focused on these famous people which they fantasised about..

Lulu raises an important point here – the love for fantasy was overemphasised and fuelled the hatred towards mother. The girls disrupt the selfishness/selflessness dichotomy residing in the construction of love although this binary is assumed by participants and perpetuated by social clichés such as, “love is kind”, “love understands” and so on. However, an opposite to love is hate and it is both love and hate which fuel the impetus for Pauline and Juliet to carry out the murder of Honora Rieper. The love/hate tension is normalised in pervasive attitudes such as “there is a fine line between love and hate”. Maybe there is a valid logic here: one might be prepared to hate if love commands one to do so. There are many political and social conditions that appropriate this sentiment, the most obvious being those centred on religious conviction. This trumps the “love thy neighbour” sentiment as an absolute condition of love (and of hate) that does not consider the division of the subject. Love posited in this way is also a justification of hate; it is militant and presupposes the subject as not self determining and lacking in potential. In this way, the desire for selfishness holds a very real and quasi-ethical way out for the subject. Only when one is true to the division within oneself and also to that which separates one from another subject, can one recognise that any act or event is not completely within one’s conscious perception of self-determination. Both love and hate

become impossible acts and are displaced by fantasy. Love also becomes entwined within the passion of the sexual relationship as Arendt claims (2009, p. p. 301):

This mere existence, that is, all that which is mysteriously given to us at birth and which includes the shape of our bodies and the talents of our minds, can be adequately dealt with only by the unpredictable hazards of friendship and sympathy, or by the great and incalculable grace of love, which says with Augustine, *Volo ut sis* (I want you to be), without being able to give any particular reason for such supreme and unsurpassable affirmation.

Once discovered, love is imposed on another subject, thus restricting freedom. We create ourselves, much like Pauline and Juliet do when enacting their saints of the Fourth World, to be considered whole and lovers for another. In this way love is an illusion and can never be possessed without the crucial element of fantasy. Love differs from desire in that desire cannot possess anything except itself. With desire there is nothing for the subject to lose, whereas love affords a socially valorised recognition wherein one might possibly lose oneself. Discontented love does not characterise love as empty and meaningless. Rather the opposite, since it gives love traction through the inevitable tensions love brings. Even in our modern cynical times, manifestations of love, passion and desire retain a strong individual and social hold.

Concluding comments

[W]e could say that there is love when it is about this particular person and not about another one, when we deal with someone that cannot be replaced. This is the sublime idea of love. On the contrary, in Freud's psychology of love or "erotic life," we see that he uses the word "love" whenever there is the possibility of some substitution, of the need for a substitution (Alain-Miller, 2008).

Despite the risk of love, it seems most people are faithful servants to this Master, who promises simultaneously everything and nothing. Because of the opaque and mysterious nature of love it is easy to be dismissive or sceptical about it - however, I am neither cynical nor suspicious about love. It is too fascinating a phenomenon and it seeks to attempt to answer something of the Real for the subject. This is because love is neither insignificant nor does it bear universal meaning about its effects. Love confronts and disrupts an assumed symmetry between the subject and the love object since there is more to love than love itself, but at the same time I concur with Judith Butler when she makes the compelling claim, “there is no possibility of not loving, where love is bound up with the requirements for life” (1997, p. 8). Love relies on fantasy and on the recognition of lack, both in the self and in the love object. Only then does love exhibit a semblance of authenticity in articulating the love story for the subject. Although love is elevated to the status of *das Ding*, there are no universal rules about love, notwithstanding that the subject is influenced by rules of societal and ideological origin. The status of love entails that one loves love, maybe even more than the love object. The expectations and ideological conditions of love necessitate that the love object occupies a place where it is an external object *par excellence*. This promises that the subject can enjoy love as a subjective and meaningful experience so long as there is a love object. The experience of a broken heart or an unrequited love takes on a different dimension; one laments such a loss for oneself, rather than another subject, on realising that love yields enjoyment only with conditions. In this way love is perpetuated as *das Ding* both for the subject and for the social bond in order to manage desire. It is a way of articulating unification between the law and love, whereby Symbolic authority is dominant. As Žižek and Salecl (1999, p. 194) state, “every ideology relies on some kernel of the Real” and love is no exception. Love provides a mastership for how the subject operates within the law, thereby reconstituting the name-of-the father into the name-of-love. What is crucial for this process to be managed is the necessity for love to be declared, articulated into consciousness, even if this be false or misleading. Only then can love be proclaimed a Master. This shapes love for the subject into something sufficiently tangible to constitute and manage desire. The

construction of love is not entirely graspable nor even peaceful; it is conceptually opaque and yet it assumes an important feature, that of self preservation. The subject's search for meaning is an interpretative act intrinsically bound up with the experiences of loving and being loved and, more importantly, of how love is staged alongside desire. Desire is heavily implicated by Lacanian psychoanalysis as something that is taught or constructed for the subject. It is through the interrogation of fantasy (through analysis) that the subject reveals, both consciously and unconsciously, the co-ordinates and mechanics of this construction and how it contributes to the process of subjectivisation, and it is at this juncture where the subject and social intersect. The implied conclusion for a subject is to be prepared as Žižek famously claims, "to go to the end" – by uncompromisingly and fully identifying with the symptom. This position can be experienced by the subject as hostile and vulnerable as Lacan articulates (cited in Peters, 2013, p. 23).

I feel the inherent abject dimension of that object when I do not want to respond to the other's demand for love. Then, when the other is attacking me with her/his desire, I am bothered, humiliated even. But love emerges when, from the very position of being reduced to mere object, I begin to long for the other. The confrontation with the fact that I am nothing but the object of the desire of the other is, then, neutralized or oppressed by my own desire... (Lacan Undated: no page number).

Love, it is argued, is constructed and staged for the subject at birth, or on entering a family unit, or forming a sexual relationship with another subject. This is facilitated by signifiers in the ideologies which govern contemporary ideas of love and marriage. This echoes the advice, be careful with whom you fall in love. It is important with whom one falls in love because love is neither so easy, nor so natural as it seems.

Concluding comments: disturbances and discipline of desire

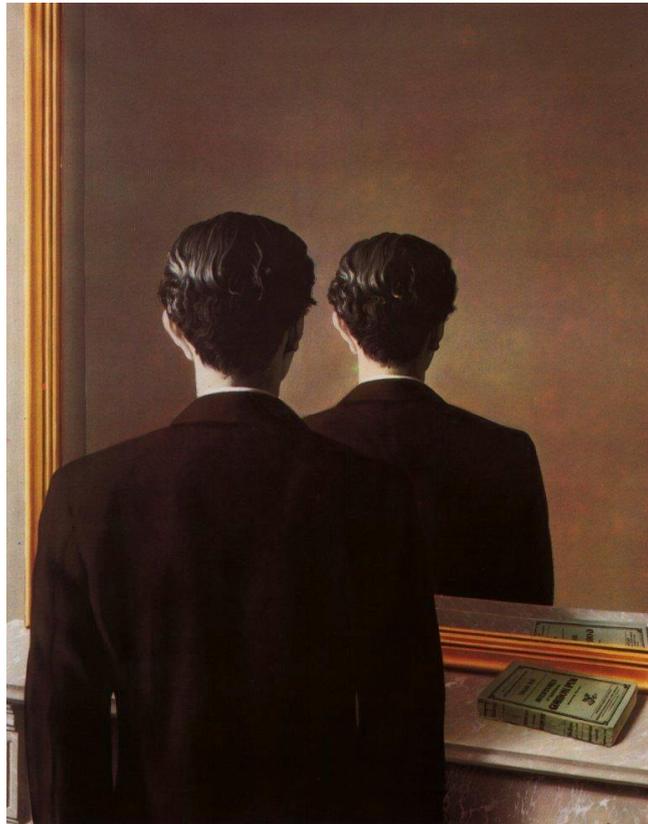


Illustration 38. *La reproduction interdite* (Not to be Reproduced) Magritte, R. (1937).

Although it might be *desirable*, it is impossible to give desire a precise meaning. To be clear, this is not what this thesis sets out to explore. Unlike many of the studies on desire highlighted in this thesis, my research both resists and critically engages dominant discourses which are restricted to either the domain of biology or that of psychology. Lacanian psychoanalysis in partnership with sociology and feminist theories facilitates a reading of desire which, having a specific focus on the gaze, permits a more critical exhortation of scholarship and challenges some contemporary sociological thought and conventions. Indeed, engaging Lacanian-Žižekian theoretical ideas for sociological work provides a potentially

fruitful methodology for analysis. What brought me to my thesis subject of interrogating desire was through my interest in exploring desire as a theoretical concept operating in contemporary times. This was guided by initial research questions such as: how might one come to understand what desire means; how might people think about desire and what might they do about it, if anything; is the experience of desire itself enough, or do we feel the need to act upon it; also, what part does the social play in accessing knowledge of desire? Such articulation of psychoanalytical concepts within political and social theories is distinctly Žizekian. This is not to say that other models of social analysis may not be fruitful. However, the virtue of a Žizekian-informed psychoanalytic framework is that method and analysis combine and keep returning to one another thereby prompting the researcher to engage nuanced social and political questions and concepts. Questions concerning meaning and knowledge, themselves in a state of perpetual crisis, are further problematised by the development of concepts such as desire which are troubling to the conditions of ideology, indeed to ideology itself. At this discursive juncture, transference and counter-transference create an ongoing crisis of meaning, rather than attain meaning, for both the subject and the researcher. Regarding my research, the decision to encourage participants to discuss desire is itself a political act because desire is so difficult to talk about and impossible to fully articulate; participants' interpretations of desire shift and circulate within and between discourses of the Master and the Hysteric. This discursive shifting fails in uniting the divided subject, a unification which is the Hysteric's desire. Precisely because I was interested in exploring such crises, psychoanalysis was privileged over other methodologies for analysis such as empiricism, positivism or a sole focus on narrative. In this thesis I explore the gaze, more specifically how Žižek structures the gaze as awry and parallax, in terms of ideological conditions which regulate an ideal of desire and I argue that by abstracting desire as a unique and incongruous subjective-social experience or act which can be critically discussed, it becomes a focus for understanding how the Master's discourse is shaped and understood in the 21st century. The gaps revealed by this view provide an interrogation of desire which is carried from a number of different angles including transcriptions based on focus groups and

individual interviews, the viewing and discussion of film, a focusing on pivotal recent and historical social and political events, a review of recent changes in legislation and an examination of how the media capture attempts to theorise desire. Carried out in these ways a materiality of desire emerges, one that understands the particularities of events and experiences as being part of a wider social order. Although some of these particularities lie outside New Zealand they are nevertheless both directly and indirectly influential in how desire can be understood and explored in Žižekian terms, that is, in terms of those ideological conditions that construct how a subject encounters the world. The desire of the Master is to command society as well as the knowledge which appropriates mastery. Although psychoanalysis focuses on emerging symptoms, I became interested in what kinds of Masters might emerge when participants spoke of desire. The reason I privileged the discourse of the Master is owing to how the Master's discourse circulates the *objet a*. The *objet a* is the product of the Master's discourse and offers the subject an opportunity to pursue desire. Such a pursuit compels the subject to challenge the Master through a bout of hysterical questioning. What most manifested during participants' talk was a construction of the 21st century moral subject. The discursive themes of belief, the body and love, all serve as ways of organising the social bond and thereby permitting the subject, in the Hysterical location, to speak and to provoke. In many ways the Masters of belief, the body and love reflect elements of disavowal and self denial. Participants were grappling with yet another ideological condition, this being capitalism that is appropriated within a more humanistic and ecological discourse, as a way of accessing the *objet a*. I argue that this willing leap into discourse refers back to the mirror stage where the self view induces how one presents oneself to the Other. This both offers a way out of the University discourse and points towards the Master's. Whereas Žizek seeks a total break from the social⁶⁷, I do not consider that this is either

⁶⁷ Last chapter in *Less Than Nothing*

possible or necessary because of the inevitable function of the big Other. My research leads to the conclusion that the contemporary Hysterical subject, being formed out of the nonexistence of the big Other, exhibits how the Symbolic is dedicated to the Other. Identification with the Master thus operates at the level of the social. The Master provides a distant yet tacit scaffolding for the subject and more importantly this works for everyone. Therefore I argue that belief, the body and love operate at the very point of the big Other's nonexistence and in response to this crisis of meaning, create new social bonds through an investigation and possible literacy of desire. My postulation is a response to the demand of the Other which the subject attempts to fulfil and it points to something that is acceptable and permissible about *jouissance* and its pursuit rather than to developing a literacy of desire in the 21st century. This I attribute to *jouissance* being disruptive of the Master's discourse and of the master/slave dialectic; disruption is assured by the subject always seeking a better *jouissance* and one that will last. I argue that a literacy of desire as a form of social critique is incompatible with the sole nature of this pursuit of *jouissance*. My response is that in returning to the Master's discourse desire arguably takes a more modest location in being both a discipline and a disturbance for the subject. Lacan asserts that enjoyment is a "political factor" and I argue that desire is too. The three discursive themes I present emerge from within the Hysteric's discourse because the research project itself pivots on the incitement of desire. A critical return to the Master in order to make sense of desire is paradoxical because the three governing masters that I identify as being at work today are talked about as both ideals of desire and access to knowledge. Although already ideologically constituted these masters at the same time tantalise the subject in that by not being explicitly chosen, they seem to be offering a challenge. It is not the existence of these ideals of desire, but *how* they are desired, which reveals the Master as an ultimately illusory metanarrative. This in turn forces the subject to confront the horror of the failure of the Master and allows, for the speaking subject, a possible literacy of desire to emerge.

When considering areas of life that are complex and difficult to define, areas such as love, belief or the body, then desire makes its inevitable appearance for the subject. These areas of life carry with them ideological convictions and assumptions regarding how the desiring subject is placed within the wider social order, which are both hidden and not so hidden, complex and somewhat obvious. This accounts for why my exploration of desire includes certain technical elements of Lacanian psychoanalysis, which Žižek employs and expands, in tandem with a critical consideration of the problem of *meaning* for the contemporary Hysterical subject when this is posited as an unquestioned ontological position, which shapes ideas of desire. Thus the individual nuances to which subjects become accustomed within the domain of desire, an order that is already ideologically and politically constructed, provide ways in which they can manage desire. Such management of desire is not easy because ideological conditions that govern it shift and are continually changing.

Along with desire, this thesis has considered what the current 21st century Hysteric looks like. Participants' contributions to how they understand and explore desire are manifested in three distinct 'symptoms' of desire which imply a hysterical dynamic: firstly, how belief and desire conflate yet are in tension; secondly, how the body plays a pivotal role in attempting to recognise desire; thirdly, how love intersects both as a subjective and a socially *desirable* desire. Although these themes are ideologically and politically invested and propagated, they are also understood by participants as being somewhat singular, in that on their own they present as distinct entities. In this way belief, the body and love serve as Masters enabling desire to be a transformative force, notwithstanding that for the subject there lies a 'reality' of the Other that is sustained through Symbolic manifestations of these Masters. Although in this way, there lies for the subject a reality (of the Other) that is sustained behind such representations of these three orders. Explorations of belief, the body and love all reveal the Imaginary to be crucially implicated with the Symbolic; recognitions and articulations of desire also touch on the Real and it is these glimpses that most convey meaning for the subject and of the society in which she/he lives. Such glimpses are sublimated to objects and

experiences in order to alleviate subjects' guilt and anxiety when confronted with the possibility that with regard to desire, *nothing* rather than *something* exists. In this way the Hysteric of the 21st century gaze is inverted by those ideological conditions which demand a reflexivity which can be spoken from a kind of interrogative fantasy of self authorship: desire is structured through belief, the body and love, all of which harbour political and social investments, not all of them deemed valuable to the individual, but enough so that the subject can attempt to cultivate them for her/himself, making them an ongoing subjective project. Thus the ontological reproduction of *how to desire* as ideological formations continues as a contradictory ethos of self-crisis from which desire can be possibly located. This is important because the discourse of the contemporary Hysteric, driven by the pursuit of the Real, seeks to constantly unfix and destabilise power structures, knowledge and authority, an evident sentiment in participant transcriptions. The catch however is, as Žižek poignantly puts it, "not to fall in love with yourself".

Belief, the body and love, the modalities of desire critically explored in this thesis, act as the current 21st century Master for the 21st century Hysteric. The choice of the film, *Heavenly Creatures*, is crucial because this film not only stages the fantasy structures of cinematic discourse in general, but also offers opportunities for viewing participants, when pondering desire, to explore Symbolic substitutions of desire, these being uncomfortable realities that lie behind how the murder is planned and represented. Through such discomfort, belief, the body and love are enabled to materialise ideologically in participants' subjectivities which are already constituted within the domains of both philosophical and visceral daily life. When participants talk about the film, they are far from passive spectators. Rather, they are engaging with how desire is staged and articulated within the context of a pivotal, historical event. In doing so they are unpacking, critiquing and exploring what might be concealed and are allowing themselves opportunities to believe in, to experience and to love something else. These three governing Masters of desire enable acts, thoughts and ideas to be constituted, perpetuated and maintained not only through one's lifespan, but also intergenerationally.

They materialise through being sutured into objects and experiences which can be talked about as ideals of desire; as Masters they carve out, drive and give traction to compatible ideological forces, while holding in tension and obfuscating less compatible, competing ideologies that tantalise the subject. Thus the Masters of belief, the body and love are premised on a state of being which for the subject not only places the act, thoughts and ideas within the orbit of desire, but also allows them meanings that might be transformative. This is a paradoxical position because for desire to be talked about and given Symbolic meaning, it must be attached to a Master of one's choice, notwithstanding that being already ideologically constituted for the subject, the Master is not necessarily explicitly chosen. The desiring subject seeks the most desirable Master in order to become a part of the wider ideological cause or community, which will hopefully yield power and freedom. Thus desire becomes a metanarrative, the reality behind the illusory Master. It moves away from the ontology of experience and object and thereby becomes for subjects both a discipline and a disturbance of the Master's discourse. Subjects are deemed (by themselves at least) to act as if the Masters of belief, the body and love are on their own enough, while knowing full well that they are not. The three discursive themes which arose in the focus groups and interviews point to the domains of belief, the body and love as operative Masters in contemporary New Zealand. These Masters are interesting because participants speak of them as directly linked to how they structure and pivot desire. Žižek offers that capitalism is the modern Master which is failing. I claim that desire as arranged and managed around the notion that the big Other's non-existence is prompting people to look for new Masters. This necessarily involves the ultimate master-slave relationship which appropriates the subject into the Master's discourse. However compelling this appropriation may appear for the subject, these new Masters mean that the subject is at work addressing the complexities that link the subject with the social.

Although participants exhibit either an optimism or a disavowal when viewing the Master as ultimately failing to fully communicate desire for them specifically, I argue the contrary: that within unconscious knowledge of the Master's limitations and within the limitations of language, participants are confronted with the possibility of a literacy of desire (that is, the contours of a speaking about or around desire to emerge) which can determine the shape of their lives in a complex and rapidly changing world. Such a response to desire stages it both as an experience and as an ontology of subjectivity.

Belief, the role of the body and love all have laws into which the subject is inscribed. The truth of the Master emerges from the work of the slave who knows and in many ways accepts this dynamic. From this research I conclude that in contemporary New Zealand and in the wake of the failure of capitalism as Master, subjects are slaves to belief, to their bodies and to love. These three represent not only ontological formations of the crisis of the self faced by the modern subject, but also to offer a promise of direct access to knowledge and point to a potential for critique and thereby to possible social transformation.

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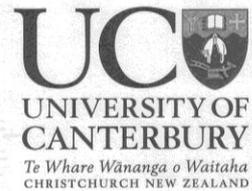
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Appendix A: University human ethics approval

Human Ethics Committee

Tel: +64 3 364 2241, Fax: +64 3 364 2856, Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz



Ref: HEC 2009/184

25 January 2010

Cindy Zeiher
School of Social and Political Sciences
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Cindy

The Human Ethics Committee advises that your research proposal "An Empirical Study on Meanings and Constructions of Desire" has been considered and approved.

Please note that this approval is subject to the incorporation of the amendments you have provided in your email of 26 December 2009.

Best wishes for your project.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Grimshaw'.

PP
Dr Michael Grimshaw
Chair, Human Ethics Committee

Human Ethics Committee

Tel: +64 3 364 2241, Fax: +64 3 364 2856, Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz



Ref: HEC 2009/184

5 May 2010

Cindy Zeiher
School of Social and Political Sciences
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Cindy

Thank you for your request for an amendment to your research proposal "An Empirical Study on Meanings and Constructions of Desire".

I am pleased to advise that this request has been considered and approved by the Human Ethics Committee.

Yours sincerely


PP Dr Michael Grimshaw
Chair, Human Ethics Committee

Appendix B: Guiding questions for focus groups

1. Introductions

The researcher and participants introduce themselves. Confidentiality and privacy issues are discussed. People are reminded that their participation is completely voluntarily and that they are free to withdraw up until the time the focus group is recorded. Participants are reminded that if they have any concerns about their participation, they will have the opportunity to review the transcript before the analysis takes place.

2. What is your response to the film?

This question is posed as an opening question to gauge participants' general responses to the film and to ascertain if anyone found parts of it particularly distressing. It is situated as a non-threatening and brainstorming question which leaves open various opinions and ideas about the film. It also provides an opening for participants to begin discussing whatever aspects of their responses are in the foreground for them.

3. How do you think the different characters are motivated in their lives?

This question encourages participants to connect more closely with the narration and characterisation of the film. Additionally it promotes discussion about connecting ideas and meanings of desire and talking about them in terms of the characters and film.

4. Which particular characters do you feel a connection with and why?

This question follows on from the previous question and allows a more intimate connection between desire and the characters of the film. Also, through having already introduced

discussions around the concept of desire, participants are encouraged to engage with the film more self-reflexively.

5. Can you remember a time when you wanted something you couldn't have?

This transition question positions the participants slightly away from the film and encourages them to talk about desire as shaped by a 'lack' which they may have experienced.

6. How do you think it is that we know what we want?

This key question is the most challenging to talk about and because of this, it is anticipated that it will provide thoughtful and engaging responses within and across the groups. Wording the question collectively provides safety for the participants to engage in more philosophical and social ideas about desire.

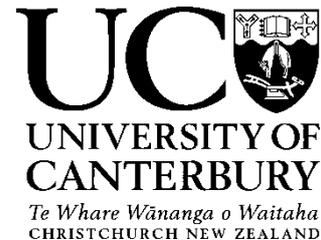
Appendix C: Information and conditions for participant consent and amendment

College of Arts

School of Social and Political Sciences

Tel: +64 3 364 2899, Fax: + 64 364 2414

Web site: <http://www.saps.canterbury.ac.nz/>



An Empirical Study on (Hidden) Meanings and Constructions of Desire

An Invitation to Participate in a PhD (Sociology) Research Thesis

I invite you to participate in a focus group which is a key part of my research thesis exploring social ideas, meanings, constructions and conceptualisations of ‘desire’. The focus of my thesis explores how people from diverse social groups talk about ‘desire’ and what kinds of different meanings and knowledges are derived from these understandings. The discussion groups I will be focusing on are: young women aged between 18-25; fathers of teenage daughters; people who were residents of Christchurch during the time of the Honora Parker murder (which inspired the film, *Heavenly Creatures*); and those who are positioned in the creative arts, but have not had the experience of living through the social context of 1950’s Christchurch (as they were not born during that time).

This research is solely for the purposes of my Doctorate thesis in Sociology and will be supervised by Professor Victoria Grace from the School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Canterbury. Dr Alan Wright from Cinema Studies is my second supervisor. This research has been approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

If you agree to participate in this research, I would like to invite you to a screening of *Heavenly Creatures* at [address, time and date]. This will be followed a focus group discussion about the film. I anticipate we will be finished by [time]. The group discussions will be audio-recorded and facilitated by me. I have prepared questions which relate to the relationship between ideas about desire and the film to help guide the discussions. Because I am focusing on how the group as a whole conceptualises and makes various meanings from the film, there will not be an opportunity to review or amend the group transcript afterwards. However, if you have any concerns or would like the opportunity to discuss your participation, I am happy and available to speak with you. Additionally, while every effort will be made to preserve and maintain confidentiality during focus group discussions, no guarantee can be given except on behalf of myself and my supervisors.

An additional feature of this research entails the possibility that I may approach you after the focus group for an individual interview. This will not take more than one hour and the venue is flexible to the needs of the participant. Participants have the right to refuse this request and are able to withdraw from the interview process at any stage.

Though a PhD is a public document via the University of Canterbury library, please be assured that all identifying features (i.e.: the city people live in) and names of participants (i.e.: I will use pseudonyms) will remain confidential during the research process and in the thesis. I will be doing all the transcribing and only myself and my supervisors will have access to any of the transcripts. Upon the completion of the thesis, all participants will be offered a summary of key findings resulting from my research and it is envisaged that a publication may arise out of this thesis.

It should be noted that there are scenes in *Heavenly Creatures* which might be disturbing to some viewers and could be considered of a violent and sexual nature. If you think you will be disturbed by such scenes, perhaps you should not participate in this research. You are welcome to talk further with myself, Professor Victoria Grace or Dr Alan Wright (364 2987) please don't hesitate to contact us on: clz11@uclive.ac.nz, victoria.grace@canterbury.ac.nz or

alan.wright@canterbury.ac.nz. If you are happy to participate, please sign the attached consent form and return it to me.

Regards,

Cindy Zeiher, PhD Candidate, Sociology Programme

School of Social and Political Sciences

University of Canterbury

An Empirical Study on Meanings and Constructions of Desire: An Invitation for Participation – Consent Form

I _____ agree to attend a screening of the film Heavenly Creatures and participate in focus group facilitated by Cindy Zeiher for the purposes of her Doctor of Philosophy research in Sociology (University of Canterbury).

I am agreeable for the focus group which I participate in to be audio-recorded as well as to be transcribed and analysed by the researcher. I agree to keep all information resulting from discussions from the focus group confidential and will not discuss this with any other person outside of the focus group. I understand that materials from the focus group will not be used for any other purposes without my signed consent.

I understand that the researcher may approach me for an individual interview to talk further about conceptualisations of desire. I understand that I can refuse this request or can withdraw during any time of the interview process.

I understand that my identity will be protected and that my name or any identifying features will not be disclosed under any circumstances by the researcher or supervisors.

I understand my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from this research process up until the time of the commencement of the focus group. I am able to contact the researcher, Cindy Zeiher, Professor Victoria Grace or Dr Alan Wright (supervisors) if I have any concerns about my participation in this research.

Name:

Signed:

Date:

Amendment to Human Ethics Approval

Cindy Zeiher

PhD Candidate (Sociology)

School of Political and Social Sciences

Ethical approval number: 2009/184

16th September 2013

In the analytic chapters of my PhD in sociology I wish to use and comment on two images of sculptures supplied by a participant of my research on subjective desire. This particular participant was commissioned to undertake these sculptures and as a result of using these in the analytical chapters of my PhD, the participant's anonymity may be compromised. The participant also photographed the images that are proposed to be used in the PhD thesis.

Given this, I propose that a re-consent for this participant only be undertaken under the following conditions stated below.

I, _____ agree to the following:

That Cindy Zeiher can use two images of sculpture work for the purposes of her PhD research. Given this I understand that my anonymity may be comprised.

That my first name only can be used in the PhD thesis.

Signed (Participant)

Appendix D: Guiding questions for one on one interviews

How did you find participating in the focus group?

How did you find watching the film?

Have you ever spoken about desire to another person before? Can you remember a time when you have? Can you describe what that experience was like?

How challenging do you find it to talk about desire at all? You are welcome to use a different word (or words) apart from desire if you like.

Is there anything you would else you would like to add? You are welcome to contact me anytime for a follow-up interview or if you would like to discuss something in particular with me.

Appendix E: Hyperlinks to published articles

Zeihner, C. (2013). *Tracking an Authority of Ideology*. TOPIA: Canadian Journal for Cultural Studies, 29.

<http://pi.library.yorku.ca/ojs/index.php/topia/article/view/37224>

Zeihner, C. (2012). Between the Subject and the Social: Signifying Images of Desire and Ideological Subjectivities. *International Journal of Žižek Studies*, 6(2).

<http://zizekstudies.org/index.php/ijzs/article/view/386/438>