

ADDENDUM: ON LOVE AS COMEDY

The status of this addendum is that of an “essential appendage.” Nietzsche is not discussed in it. It is a short study of the logic of comedy, and its inherent affinity with the functioning of love (one could also say: with love that “functions”). Of course, comedy and laughter are Nietzschean themes *par excellence*, whereas love is, perhaps, the most palpable figure of the Two—not simply in the sense of a couple, of “two persons,” but, rather, as a figure that somehow (and locally) solves the eternal antinomy of desire (or “will”) and enjoyment (the “Thing” or the Nothing) by articulating the two on the same level, as a minimal difference of the same. The value of this appendage for the discussion of Nietzsche, however, does not lie in the fact that it also touches some of the themes that were important to Nietzsche. On the contrary, its interest resides in the fact that, while it departs from a quite independent question and context (the original paper was written for an occasion that had nothing to do with Nietzsche), its argument leads to the very core of what I have developed here as the Nietzschean theory of the two, and of truth as a montage of two semblances/appearances. This is why I chose to couple this essay with the main body of the text just as it is, without attempting to integrate it by any kind of rearrangement of its internal components.

In Lacan’s seminar *L’angoisse*, we find the following, rather peculiar statement: “Only love-sublimation makes it possible for *jouissance* to condescend to desire.”¹ What is peculiar about this statement, of course, is the link it establishes between love as sublimation and the movement of condescending or descending. It is well known that Lacan’s canonic definition of sublimation from *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* implies precisely the opposite movement, that of ascension (that sublimation raises, or elevates, an object to the dignity of the Thing, the Freudian *das Ding*).² In this last definition, sublimation is identified with the act of producing the Thing in its very transcendence and inaccessibility, as well as in its horrifying and/or inhuman aspect (for example, the status of the Lady in courtly love, which is, as Lacan puts it, the status of an “inhuman partner”). Yet, on the

subject of this particular sublimation that is called love—which is thus opposed to courtly love as the worshiping of a sublime object—Lacan states that it makes it possible for *jouissance* to condescend to desire, that it “humanizes *jouissance*.”³

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

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

Concerning the art of comedy, we can actually say that it involves a certain condescension of the Thing to the level of the object. Yet what is at stake, in good comedies, is not simply an abasement of some sublime object that thus reveals its ridiculous aspect. Although this kind of abasement can make us laugh (consistent with the Freudian definition according to which laughter plays the part of discharging the libidinal energy previously invested in sustaining the sublime aspect of the object), we all know that this is not enough for a good comedy to work. As Hegel knew very well, genuine comic laughter is not a scornful laughter, it is not the laughter of *Schadenfreude*, and there is much more to comedy than just a variation on the statement “the emperor is naked.” First of all, we could say that true comedies are not so much involved in unveiling and disclosing the

nudity or emptiness behind appearances as they are involved in constructing emptiness (or nudity).

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

Recall Chaplin’s *The Great Dictator*, where “the Thing called Hitler” takes the double form of the dictator Hynkel and a Jewish barber. As Gilles Deleuze has pointed out, this is a Chaplinesque gesture *par excellence*: we find it in *City Lights* (Charlot the tramp and Charlot supposed to be rich), as well as in *M. Verdoux*. Chaplin’s genius, states Deleuze, consists in being able “to invent the minimal difference between two actions,” and to create a “circuit laughter–emotion, where the former refers to the little difference and the later to the great distance, without effacing or diminishing one another.”⁵ This is a very important insight that will help us to specify the mechanism

of comedy, as well as that of love. First, however, let us determine more precisely what this “minimal difference” is. We could say that it stands for a split at the very core of the same. In order to illustrate this, let us take another comic example, a punch line from one of the Marx Brothers’ movies: “Look at this guy, he looks like an idiot, he behaves like an idiot—but do not let yourself be deceived, he is an idiot!” Or, to take a more sophisticated example from the Hegelian theory of tautology: If I say “a is a,” the two “a”s are not exactly the same. The very fact that one appears in the place of the subject and the other in the place of the predicate introduces a minimal difference between them. We could say that comic art creates and uses this minimal difference in order to make palpable, or visible, a certain Real that otherwise eludes our grasp. We could go even further, and state that, in the comic paradigm, the Real is nothing but this “minimal difference”—it has no other substance or identity.

The comic line from the Marx Brothers also enables us to grasp the difference between the act of taking a (sublime) Thing and showing the public that this Thing is, in fact, nothing more than a poor and altogether banal object, and the act of taking the Thing, not to the letter, but, rather, “to the letter of its appearance.” Contrary to what is often believed, the axiom of good comedies is not that “appearances are always deceptive,” but, rather, that there is something in appearance that never deceives. Following the Marx Brothers, we could say that the only essential deception of appearance is that it gives the impression that there is something else or more behind it.⁶ One of the fundamental gestures of good comedies is to make an appearance out of what is behind the appearance. They make the truth (or the Real) not so much reveal itself, as appear. Or, to put it in yet another way, they make it possible for the Real to condescend to the appearance (in the form of a split at the very core of the appearance). This does not mean that the Real turns out to be just another appearance; it means that it is real precisely as appearance.

A good example of this is to be found, once again, at the beginning of *The Great Dictator*, when Chaplin gives his momentous impersonation of Hitler (in the guise of Hynkel) addressing the crowd. If,

in the case of such speeches, we usually have to ask ourselves what the speaker was *really* saying, that is, what was the true significance of his words, Chaplin shows us this underlying meaning in a most direct way—and he does so precisely by eliminating the very question of meaning. He speaks a language that does not exist, a strange mixture of some existing German words and words that sound like German but have no meaning. The scene is interrupted from time to time by the voice of an English interpreter, who is supposed to translate and sum up what Hynkel is saying, but who is obviously trying to make the speech sound quite innocent. These sporadic translations make us laugh as much as Chaplin himself. They make us laugh because they are so obviously false and full of omissions. Yet the very fact that they make us laugh is in itself quite funny, since we could not exactly be said to *understand* what Hynkel is saying (and to compare this with the “translation”). In other words, we understand nothing of what Hynkel is saying, but we know perfectly well that the translation is false. Or, to put it in yet another way, we never get to know the Thing in itself, but we are perfectly capable of distinguishing it from its false appearances. What we get are two fake speeches, yet somehow we know exactly what Hynkel is saying.

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

front of him. He searches and searches; finally, he notices a picture (a photograph) of Hitler on the wall, and cries out triumphantly: “That’s it! This is what Hitler looks like!” “But sir,” replies the actor, “that is a picture of me!” This, on the contrary, is quite funny, especially since we ourselves, as spectators, were taken in by the enthusiasm of the director who saw in the picture something quite different from this poor actor (whose status in the company is not even that of a true actor or a star, but of a simple walk-on). Here we can grasp very well the meaning of the “minimal difference,” a difference that is “a mere nothing,” yet a nothing that is very real, and in relation to which we should not underestimate the role of our desire.

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

The classical tragic paradigm is perhaps best defined in terms of what Kant conceptualizes with the notion of the sublime. Here, the Real is situated beyond the realm of the sensible (nature), but can be seen, or “read,” in the *resistance* of the sensible or of matter, its inflections, its suffering. We are dealing with a friction that results from a relative movement of two heterogeneous things, one determinable (as sensible) or conditional, the other unconditional and indeterminate. The subject experiences this friction as pain and violence done to his or her sensible nature, yet it inspires her or his respect for this unconditional/unknown Thing in which she or he can recognize her or his practical destination, her or his freedom. What results from this friction is the sublime splendor. (In his analysis of *Antigone*, Lacan insists upon this dimension; he insists that *Antigone*’s ethical act produces this aesthetic effect of blinding splendor.) So, if we take this classical example, we could say that, in *Antigone*, death appears as the limit of the sensible, its extreme edge—an edge that one can surpass in the name of some Thing in which the subject places her true or real being. The death is the place *par excellence* of this friction we mentioned above, emphasized, in the play, by the transformation of death from something that happens to us into a *place*: *Antigone* is con-

demned to be buried alive in the tomb, which thus becomes the place of the surpassing, the scene (or stage) of the sublime splendor that Lacan evokes in relation to the heroine. What is important is not so much the fact that the death takes place, but the fact that it is a place, a place where certain things become visible. It is as though one were to spread the extreme edge of a body, the skin, so that it becomes the scene for the encounter of two things that it usually separates, the exterior and the interior of the body. What is at stake in the case of *Antigone* is not the difference or the limit between life and death, but—to use Alain Badiou’s words—the limit between life in the biological sense of the word and life as the subject’s capacity to be a support of some process of truth. “Death” is precisely the name of this limit between these two lives; it names the fact that they do not coincide, that one of the two lives can suffer, or even cease to exist, because of the other. In the case of *Antigone*, the other life (the unconditional or real life) becomes visible on the scene of death as that something of life that death cannot reach or get at, that it cannot abolish. This other or real life is thus visible *per negativum*; it is visible in the bedazzlement, in the sublime splendor of the image of something that has no image. The Real is identified with the Thing, and is visible in this blinding splendor as the effect of the Thing on sensible matter. It is not visible or readable immediately, only in this blinding trace that it leaves in the word of the senses. In the case of tragic or sublime art, we could speak of an *incorporation* of the Real, which makes the latter both immanent and inaccessible (or, more precisely, accessible only to the hero who is supposed to “enter the Real,” and who therefore plays the role of the screen that separates us, the spectators, from the Real).

The comic paradigm, on the other hand, is not that of incorporation, but, rather, the paradigm of what we could call *montage*. In this paradigm, the Real is, at one and the same time, *transcendent* and *accessible*. The Real is accessible, for example, as pure nonsense, which constitutes an important element of every comedy. And yet this nonsense remains transcendent in the sense that the miracle of its real effects (i.e. the fact that the nonsense itself can produce a real effect

of sense) remains inexplicable. This inexplicability is the very motor of comedy. One could also say that nonsense is transcendental in the Kantian sense of the word: it is what makes it possible for us actually to *see* or *perceive* a difference between a simple actor and the picture of Hitler (which is, in fact, the picture of the same actor). This difference that we “really” see is pure nonsense, but it has a transcendental foundation: a dimension that laughter does not dissipate, but only illuminates and localizes. The appearance or illusion of this difference has precisely the same status as the Kantian “transcendental illusion” (*transcendentale Schein*). It is an illusion or error that Kant qualifies as necessary, an illusion that we have to subject to critical examination, but in relation to which it would be illusory to believe that it would dissipate entirely after this examination. What is so singular about this “transcendental illusion” is that it is not a false representation of something. Unlike empirical illusions (for example, optical illusions) that make us see an object as different than it really is, the transcendental illusion presupposes the lack of the object that appears in this illusion.

“Transcendental illusion” is the name for something that appears where there should be nothing. It is not the illusion of *something*; it is not a false or distorted representation of a real object. Behind this illusion there is no real object—there is only nothing, the lack of an object. The illusion consists of “something” in the place of “nothing.” It involves deception by the simple fact that it is, that it appears. It is precisely the mysterious “something more” that appears in the picture of Hitler, and that we “see,” even though it is not an object of experience. This indicates, perhaps, the unique possibility of perceiving something that is not an object of experience, but is also not the noumenon, the “Thing in itself.” The photograph in question is not a false representation of the actor as its real object. It is an exact representation of the actor *plus* a transcendental illusion. Like the Kantian transcendental dialectic, comedy does not aim at dissipating this illusion or appearance; it discerns it, plays with it, and points at the Real that it contains.

In relation to comic art, one could speak of a certain *ethics of unbelief*. Unbelief as an ethical attitude consists in confronting belief not simply in its illusory dimension, but in the very Real of this illusion. This means that unbelief does not so much expose the nonsense of the belief as it exposes the Real or the material force of nonsense itself. This also implies that this ethics cannot rely upon the movement of circulation around the Thing, which gives its force to sublime art. Its motor is, rather, to be found in a dynamics that always makes us go too far. One moves directly toward the Thing, and finds oneself with a “ridiculous” object. Yet the dimension of the Thing is not simply abolished; it remains on the horizon thanks to the sense of failure that accompanies this direct passage to the Thing. In Lubitsch’s movie, the director tries to name or show the Thing directly (“That’s it! That’s Hitler!”), and, of course, he misses or “passes” it, showing only a “ridiculous object,” that is, the actor’s picture. However, the Thing as that which he missed remains on the horizon, and is situated somewhere between the actor who plays Hitler and the picture of that actor, which together constitute the space where our laughter can resonate. The act of saying “That’s it, that’s the Thing” has the effect of opening a certain *entre-deux*, thus becoming the space in which the Real of the Thing unfurls between two “ridiculous objects” that are supposed to embody it.

Let us be more precise: to “move directly to the Thing” does not mean to show or exhibit the Thing directly. The “trick” is that we never see the Thing (not even in the picture, since it is merely a picture of the actor); we see only two semblances (the actor and his picture). Thus we see the difference between the object and the Thing without ever seeing the Thing. Or, to put it the other way around: what we are *shown* are just two semblances, yet what we *see* is nothing less than the Thing itself, becoming visible in the minimal difference between the two semblances. This is not to say that, through the “minimal difference” (or through that gap that it opens up), we get a glimpse of the mysterious Thing that lies somewhere beyond representation—it is, rather, that the Thing is conceived as nothing

other than the very gap of/within the representation. In this sense, we could say that comedy introduces a kind of parallel montage: a montage not of the Real (as the transcendent Thing) and the semblance, but a montage of two semblances or doubles. “Montage” thus means: producing or constructing or recognizing the Real from a very precise composition of two semblances. The Real is identified here with the gap that divides the appearance itself. And in comedies, this gap itself takes the form of an object.

Now, what has all this got to do with love? What links the phenomenon of love to the comic paradigm is the combination of accessibility with the transcendental as the configuration of “accessibility in the very transcendence.” Or, in other words, what associates love with comedy is the way they approach and deal with the Real.

Already, on the most superficial level, we can detect this curious affinity between love and comedy: To love—that is to say (according to the good old traditional definition), to love someone “for what he is” (i.e. to move directly to the Thing)—always means to find oneself with a “ridiculous object,” an object that sweats, snores, farts, and has strange habits. But it also means to continue to see in this object the “something more” that the director in Lubitsch’s movie sees in the picture of “Hitler.” To love means to perceive this gap or discrepancy, and not so much to be able to laugh at it as to have an irresistible urge to laugh at it. The miracle of love is a funny miracle.

Real love—if I may risk this expression—is not the love that is called sublime, the love in which we let ourselves be completely dazzled or “blinded” by the object so that we no longer see (or can’t bear to see) its ridiculous, banal aspect. This kind of “sublime love” necessitates and generates a radical inaccessibility of the other (which usually takes the form of eternal preliminaries, or the form of an intermittent relationship that enables us to reintroduce the distance that suits the inaccessible, and thereby to “resublimiate” the object after each “use”). But neither is real love the sum of desire and friendship, where friendship is supposed to provide a “bridge” between two awakenings of desire, and to embrace the ridiculous side of the

object. The point is not that, in order for love to “work,” one has to accept the other with all her baggage, to “stand” her banal aspect, to forgive her weaknesses—in short, to tolerate the other when one does not desire her. The true miracle of love—and this is what links love to comedy—consists in *preserving the transcendence in the very accessibility of the other*. Or—to use Deleuze’s terms—it consists in creating a “circuit laughter–emotion, where the former refers to the little difference and the latter to the great distance, without effacing or diminishing one another.”

The miracle of love is not that of transforming some banal object into a sublime object, inaccessible in its being—this is the miracle of desire. If we are dealing with an alternation of attraction and repulsion, this can only mean that *love as sublimation* has not taken place, has not done its work and performed its “trick.” The miracle of love consists, first of all, in perceiving the two objects (the banal object and the sublime object) on the same level; additionally, this means that neither one of them is occulted or substituted by the other. Secondly, it consists in becoming aware of the fact that the other *qua* “banal object” and the other *qua* “object of desire” are one and the same, in the identical sense that the actor who plays Hitler and the picture of “Hitler” (which is actually the picture of the actor) are one and the same. That is to say: one becomes aware of the fact that they are both semblances, that neither one of them is more real than the other. Finally, the miracle of love consists in “falling” (and in continuing to stumble) because of the Real which emerges from the gap introduced by this “parallel montage” of two semblances or appearances, that is to say, because of the real that emerges from the non-coincidence of the same. The other whom we love is neither of the two semblances (the banal and the sublime object); but neither can she be separated from them, since she is nothing other than what results from a successful (or “lucky”) montage of the two. In other words, what we are in love with is the Other as *this minimal difference of the same that itself takes the form of an object*.

Here we can clearly see the difference between the functioning of desire and the functioning of love, as well as the reason for Lacan’s

thesis that love is ultimately a drive. The difference between desire and drive may be discerned in the two different types of temporality involved in them. Above, we formulated this difference in terms of the difference between succession and simultaneity, but we could formulate it in yet another way. What characterizes the subject of desire is the difference between the (transcendental) cause of desire and its object, the difference that manifests itself as the “temporal difference” between the subject of desire and its object *qua* real. The subject is separated from the object by an interval or a gap, which keeps moving with the subject, and makes it impossible for her ever to catch up with the object. The object that the subject is pursuing accompanies her, moves with her, yet always remains separated from her, since it exists, so to speak, in a different “time zone.” This accounts for the metonymy of desire. The subject makes an appointment with the object at nine o’clock, but for the object in question it is already eleven o’clock (which means that it has already gone).

This “immanent inaccessibility” also explains the basic fantasy of love stories and love songs that focus on the impossibility involved in desire. The leitmotiv of these stories is: “In another place, in another time, somewhere, not here, sometime, not now. . . .” This attitude (which clearly indicates the transcendental structure of desire: time and space as a priori conditions of our experience) can be read as the recognition of an inherent impossibility, an impossibility that is subsequently externalized, transformed into some empirical obstacle. (“If only we’d met in another time and another place, then all this would have been possible. . . .”) One usually says, in this case, that the Real as impossible is camouflaged by an empirical obstacle that prevents us from confronting some fundamental or structural impossibility. The point of Lacan’s identification of the Real with the impossible, however, is not simply that the Real is some Thing that cannot possibly happen. On the contrary, the whole point of the Lacanian concept of the Real is that *the impossible happens*. This is what is so traumatic, disturbing, shattering—or funny—about the Real. The Real happens precisely as the impossible. It is not something that

happens when we want it, or try to make it happen, or expect it, or are ready for it. It always happens at the wrong time and in the wrong place; it is always something that does not fit the (established or anticipated) picture. The Real as impossible means that there is no right time or place for it, not that it cannot possibly happen.

The fantasy of “another place and another time” that sustains the illusion of a possibly fortunate encounter betrays the Real of an encounter by transforming the “impossible that happened” into “cannot possibly happen” (here and now). In other words, it disavows what *has already happened* by trying to submit it to the existing transcendental scheme of the subject’s fantasy. The distortion at stake in this maneuver is not that of creating the belief that something impossible will, or would, nevertheless happen in some other conditions of time and space—the distortion is that of making something that *has happened* here and now appear as if it could happen only in a distant future, or in some altogether different time and space.

A paradigmatic example of this disavowal of the Real (which aims at preserving the Real as inaccessible Beyond) is the movie *The Bridges of Madison County*: What we have here is a fortunate love encounter between two people, each of them very settled in their lives: she as a housewife and mother, bound to her family (immobile, so to speak); he as a successful photographer who moves and travels around all the time. They meet by chance, and fall passionately in love—or so we are asked to believe. But what is their reaction to this encounter? They immediately move the accent from “the impossible happened” to “this cannot possibly happen,” “this is impossible.” Since she is alone at the time of their encounter (her husband and children have gone away for the week), and since he has to stay in the area anyway, in order to complete his reportage, they decide to spend the week together, and then to say goodbye, never to see each other again. Described in this way, this seems like a casual adventure (and, I would say, that’s what it is). The problem, however, is that the couple perceive themselves, and are presented to us, as if they were living the love of their lives, the most important and precious thing that has ever happened in their love life. What is the problem or the

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

To return to the question of the difference between love (as drive) and desire: we could now say that what is involved in the drive as different from desire is not so much a time difference as a “time warp”—the concept that science-fiction literature uses precisely to explain (“scientifically”) the impossible that happens. This time warp essentially refers to the fact that a piece of some other (temporal) reality gets caught in our present temporality (or vice versa), appearing where there is no structural place for it, thus producing a strange, illogical tableau. According to Lacan, the drive appears as something that “has neither head nor tail,” as a *montage*—in the sense in which one talks about montage in a surrealist collage.⁷ Something appears where it should not be, and thus breaks or interrupts the linearity of time, the harmony of the picture.

There is yet another way of conceiving the proximity of love (precisely in its dimension of creating a “minimal difference,” and rebounding in the space between two objects) and drive. This other way leads through the Lacanian analysis of the double path that characterizes the drive: the difference between *goal* and *aim*. The drive al-

ways finds or makes its way between two objects: the object at which it aims (for instance, food in the case of the oral drive) and—as Jacques-Alain Miller puts it—the satisfaction as object (“the pleasure of the mouth” in the oral drive). The drive is what circulates between the two objects. It exists in the minimal difference between them—a difference that is itself, paradoxically, the result of the circular movement of the drive.

The *entre-deux*, the interval or gap introduced by desire, is the gap between the Real and the semblance: the other that is accessible to desire is always the imaginary other, Lacan’s *objet petit a*, whereas the Real (Other) of desire remains unattainable. The Real of desire is *jouissance*—that “inhuman partner” (as Lacan calls it) that desire aims at beyond its object, and that must remain inaccessible. Love, on the other hand, is what somehow manages to make the Real of desire accessible. This is what Lacan is aiming at with his statement that love “humanizes *jouissance*,” and that “only love-sublimation makes it possible for *jouissance* to condescend to desire.” In other words, the best way to define (love-) sublimation is to say that its effect is precisely that of *desublimation*.

There are two different concepts of sublimation in Lacan’s work. The first concept is the one he develops in relation to the notion of desire, the one defined in terms of “raising an object to the dignity of the Thing.” And then there is another concept of sublimation, which Lacan develops in relation to the notion of drive when he claims that the “true nature” of the drive is precisely that of sublimation.⁸ This second notion of sublimation is that of a “desublimation” that makes it possible for the drive to find a “satisfaction different from its aim.” Is this not exactly what could be said of love? In love, we do not find satisfaction in the other at whom we aim; we find it in the space or gap between—to put it bluntly—what we see and what we get (the sublime and the banal object). The satisfaction is, literally, *attached* to the other; it “clings” to the other. (One could say that it clings to the other just as the “pleasure of the mouth” clings to “food”: they are not the same, yet they cannot simply be separated—they are, in a manner of speaking, “dislocated.”) One

could also say that love is that which knows this, and desire that which doesn't. This is also the reason for Lacan's insistence that the *jouissance* of the body of the Other is not the sign of love,⁹ and that the more a man allows a woman to confuse him with God (i.e. with what gives her enjoyment), the less he loves. With this in mind, we can perhaps define more precisely the "desublimation" involved in love: desublimation does not mean "transformation of the sublime object into a banal object"; it implies, rather, a dislocation or a decentering of the sublime object in relation to the source of enjoyment—it implies that we see the "minimal difference" between them. (This, of course, has nothing to do with the archetypal situation in which we love and worship one person, but can sleep only with others whom we do not particularly care about. The case of someone worshipping the other so much that he is incapable of making love to her is precisely what bears witness to the fact that the "dislocation" [sublimation as desublimation] did not take place, and that he confuses the other with the source of some unspeakable, supreme enjoyment [or a supreme lack of it] that has to be avoided.) In other words, in this situation, the Other, instead of inducing an immanent count for Two, falls into "two ones."

Love (in the precise and singular meaning that I have tried to give this notion) affects and changes the way we relate to *jouissance* (where *jouissance* does not necessarily mean sexual enjoyment), and makes of *jouissance* something other than our "inhuman partner." More precisely, it makes *jouissance* appear as something we can relate to, and as something 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 "nonreflexive" attachment. In this case, we will always use the other as a means of relating to our own enjoyment, as a screen for our fantasy (the sexual act being, as Slavoj Žižek likes to put it, an act of "masturbating with a real partner"). The two sides of love that mutually sustain each other, and account for the fact that—as Lacan puts it—love "makes up for the sexual relationship (as nonexistent)," could be formulated as follows: to love the other and to desire my own *jouissance*. To "desire

one's own *jouissance*" is probably the hardest to obtain and to make work, since enjoyment has trouble appearing as an object. One could protest against this, claiming that it cannot be so difficult after all, since most people "want to enjoy." However, the "will to enjoy" (and its obverse side as the imperative of *jouissance*) should not be confused with desire. To establish a relation of desire toward one's own enjoyment (and to be able actually to "enjoy" it) does not mean to subject oneself to the unconditional demand of enjoyment—it means, rather, to be able to elude its grasp.

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