

Against Monogamy

Author(s): Leo Bersani

Source: *Oxford Literary Review*, 1998, Vol. 20, No. 1/2, Beyond Redemption: The Work of Leo Bersani (1998), pp. 3-21

Published by: Edinburgh University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44031041>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Edinburgh University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Oxford Literary Review*

JSTOR

Against Monogamy

Leo Bersani

Psychoanalytically speaking, monogamy is cognitively inconceivable and morally indefensible.

This severe truth bears emphasis at a time when monogamy appears to be enjoying — often in the most unexpected places — a new lease on life. In the current celebration of family values in the United States, for example, the value placed on monogamy and on the institution that (at least officially) mandates it — marriage — by conservative religious groups, was to be expected; somewhat more surprising is the conjugal furor manifested by many individuals who, having often been more or less brutally excluded from the comforts and reinforcements of family life, might have been expected to continue marching under a Gidean banner defiantly proclaiming: *Famille, je vous hais!* I refer to all those European and American gay men and lesbians who have recently been demanding for homosexual couples legal rights and benefits similar to those enjoyed by married heterosexual couples. I mention this not to question the legitimacy of these demands (they are entirely just demands), but rather to note that a community that has been at times notorious in its embrace of sexual promiscuity has, during the past decade or so, made an unprecedented attempt to persuade what is curiously called the general population of the gay commitment to the ideal of the monogamous couple. The AIDS epidemic can certainly be held partially accountable for this rush to respectability, although, since we seem anxious to demonstrate that we can be not only good husbands and wives but equally good clergymen and soldiers, the drive behind the defence of monogamy can probably not be wholly explained as a private and public health strategy. Foucault's hope that gays might be in the vanguard of efforts to imagine what he called 'new ways of being together' appears, for a large number of gay people today, to be considerably less inspiring than the hope that we will be allowed fully to participate in the old ways of being and of coming together.

And yet, if the monogamous model seems more firmly established than ever before as the hegemonic model of sexual relations, the very publicity it has been enjoying suggests that its hegemony has been subjected to perhaps unprecedented strains. It's not simply the

fragility attested to by such things as high divorce rates, large numbers of single parents and the surprisingly large of heterosexual men and women apparently untempted by married life, although this surely accounts for much of the defensive praise of family values. More interestingly, monogamy has become a *subject of reflection* — a reflection that is a minor but crucial aspect of a more widespread problematising of the nature and value of community, of the relation between community and identity, and, most profoundly, of the nature of sociality itself. With the fracturing of our world into frequently antagonistic communities — national, racial, religious, ethnic, sexual — a troubled reflection about the relation between community and identity (more exactly, about identity as communitarian) was perhaps inevitable. Identity-politics is far from dead. Indeed, with the collapse of communism it practically defines our entire political life. We know that, in practice, communism was inseparable from nationalist ambitions; in its universal revolutionary aspirations, however, it was an anti-identitarian ideology, a global social project independent of substantive local identities. Those identities, as the hostilities in the former Yugoslavia and among the republics of the former USSR dramatically illustrate, immediately filled the void left by the collapse of communist regimes. To this must be added the new confrontations in Western European nations between the dominant groups and the vast numbers of political refugees and immigrant workers from Eastern Europe or from Africa, and, in the United States, confrontations between established powers (generally white, male, heterosexual and Christian) and the various minority cultures demanding social spaces for *their* communities, social recognition for *their* particular identities.

Such demands, it seems to me, can't help but raise questions about their premises. What relations exist, or should exist, between the various communities in which we live, most notably between minority communities and the dominant culture? Are communitarian identities necessary, or even desirable? Does sociality depend on such identities? To what extent do antagonistic confrontations between different communities derive not merely from particular historical and sociological conditions but, more profoundly, from the very value attributed to communitarian identities? Doesn't this valorising of particular communitarian —

and cultural — identities in turn privilege difference over sameness in human relations, thus condemning the social to repeated efforts to overcome the trauma of difference as well as to a dependence on such weak cohesive virtues as a mere tolerance for diversity? Might there, finally, be another way to think of the social, a view of relationality as grounded in the extensibility of the human subject, that is, grounded in sameness rather than in prejudicial hierarchies of difference? And might this refiguring of the relational help us to elaborate modes of being-in-the-world to which the concept of identity itself might be irrelevant?

In short, we are in a time of relational crisis, of a dangerous but also potentially beneficial confusion about modes of connectedness, about the ways in which who or what or how we *are* depend on how we connect. I will be speaking primarily of social relationality, although it is also important to address (as Ulysse Dutoit and I have begun to do in our recent work on Caravaggio, Rothko and Resnais) perceptual orders that design some of the multitudinous relations between the human and the non-human. If there is no moment at which human connectedness has not already been initiated, we might nonetheless posit, largely for heuristic purposes, different plateaux of relationality. The isolating of such plateaux implicitly sets up a structural successiveness — from the simple to the complex, from spatial connections to intersubjectivity — within the various orders of the relational. Such analytic moves obviously have a certain artificiality since we live those orders simultaneously. They can, however, help us to re-direct our relational attention; they can serve as a cognitive prelude to what I will be putting forth as an ethical imperative to re-adjust or to re-orient our extensions. I will illustrate this by examining what we might think of as a threshold between two relational plateaux: that of the intimately conjoined couple (and this will return us to the subject of monogamy) and that of the subject's non-intimate connections to the multitudinous points of disseminated sociality.

* * *

But why psychoanalysis? Psychoanalysis — and especially Freud — provides the most significant account we have of how human beings initiate, sustain, repudiate and re-direct affective and social ties

with one another. Specifically, Freud's work is a profound — and profoundly troubled — reflection on the passage from the sociality of the couple to the sociality of the group. In Freud's thought, the prohibition of an incestuous monogamous passion is given as the pre-condition of an exogamous monogamy later on. The little boy, for example, renounces desire for one particular woman in order to desire other particular women, and especially, in marriage, one other particular woman. However, the Freudian description of the Oedipus complex — the crucial moment of passage from the family to the social — provides some reason to think of it as the structural occasion on which the child (male or female) renounces an exclusive desire for *any* particular person.

Oedipal love is an ambiguous model for adult monogamy. In Chapter III of *The Ego and the Id*, Freud complicates his theory of the 'simple positive Oedipus complex in a boy' in ways that nearly destroy its descriptive usefulness. It consists, most simply, in 'an ambivalent attitude to [the boy's] father and an object relation of a solely affectionate kind to his mother'; the necessary demolition of this complex involves the boy's giving up his object-cathexis of his mother and internalising his rival-father as conscience, or super-ego. This is the 'normal' outcome of the Oedipus complex, and it both permits 'the affectionate relation to the mother to be in a measure retained' and 'consolidate[s] the masculinity in a boy's character'. But, first of all, as Freud recognises, this is not what we should have expected: he has claimed a few pages earlier that when we are forced to abandon a love-object we introduce it into the ego, identifying with it. Indeed, on the basis of this more familiar psychoanalytic rule Jean Laplanche has argued that the positive Oedipus complex in a boy leads to homosexuality (he has internalised the desired Oedipal mother *and* her desires), while the negative Oedipus complex in a boy (in which the boy's love for the father was the dominant attachment) will lead to a heterosexual object choice modelled on the desires of the father whom the heterosexual man has taken, permanently, into himself. Freud himself doesn't draw these conclusions; he simply notes, in passing, that 'this alternative outcome [of introducing the abandoned object into the ego] may also occur', although here identification, instead of explaining how we manage to give up an object of love without really giving it up, will depend, for both sexes, on 'the relative

strength of the masculine and feminine sexual dispositions'. By identifying with the lost father object instead of with the rival-mother, for example, the little girl will 'bring her masculinity into prominence'.

Now something quite new has entered the picture. Identification with the parent of the other sex may not be the resolution of Oedipal rivalry (a resolution that, drawing on the affectionate component of an original ambivalence toward that parent, also guarantees the continuing strength of the rival's prohibition by internalising it) but may instead be largely due to our constitutional bisexuality. Having mentioned this possibility, Freud immediately goes on to give bisexuality a much more important role in Oedipal desires. It suddenly benefits from a remarkable promotion: no longer simply a factor that may, for example, explain a boy's exceptional identification, in the simple positive complex, with his mother instead of his father (the exceptional nature of which is, in any case, curious since it obeys, as we have seen, the more general psychoanalytic law of identification with lost love-objects), bisexuality now determines an Oedipal structure in which the simple positive complex is nothing more than 'a simplification or schematisation' justified, 'to be sure', by 'practical purposes'. Everyone lives both the positive and the negative Oedipus complex. This means that in the little boy there is one desiring subject that takes the mother as the primary object of love and will end by identifying with a father originally (pre-Oedipally) loved but then perceived as a rival, and another subject that desires the father and will identify with the rival mother. Rather conveniently, 'analytic experience ... shows that in a number of cases one or the other constituent disappears, except for barely distinguishable traces'. Nonetheless, 'at the dissolution of the Oedipus complex the four trends of which it consists [both an object relation and an identification with both parents] will group themselves in such way as to produce a father-identification and a mother-identification', and 'the relative intensity of the two identifications in any individual will reflect the preponderance in him of one or other of the two sexual dispositions [masculine and feminine]'.

A lot has come to depend on those 'two dispositions'. The stability of the 'official' end-point of each version of the Oedipus Complex depends on the strength of the masculine or feminine disposition

that determines which parent — the rival or the love-object — the child will identify with. Sexual preference depends not on whom we loved in our Oedipal drama, but on whom we identified with, which may mean that there can be a homosexual *or* a heterosexual consequence of *both* the ‘normal positive’ and the ‘inverted negative’ complexes. Furthermore, the appeal to sexual disposition changes the motivating force behind identifications. In the Oedipus complex, we identify with the lost love-object only if we have the same sexual disposition as that object. We become again that which we are already. This is particularly surprising given Freud’s frequently reiterated scepticism about the validity of the masculinity-femininity distinction. Even in the passage I have been discussing, he qualifies his confident statement that the little girl’s identifying with her lost loved father ‘will clearly depend’ on the strength of her masculine disposition by adding: ‘whatever that may consist in’. And in the long note to the final sentence of Chapter 4 in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud simultaneously reasserts the importance of bisexuality for psychoanalytic theory and acknowledges that sex ‘is hard to grasp psychologically’. We may have thought that sex is exactly what psychoanalysis sets out to ‘grasp’, but to the extent that understanding sex would mean understanding maleness and femaleness, psychology, unlike anatomy, Freud writes, cannot define those terms with any precision. ‘For psychology the contrast between the sexes fades away into one between activity and passivity, in which we far too readily identify activity with maleness and passivity with femaleness, a view which is by no means universally confirmed in the animal kingdom’. Bisexuality, a theory ‘surrounded by many obscurities’, is nonetheless brought in to explain the most momentous consequences of the Oedipus complex. The theory depends on the existence of sexual dispositions which, Freud suggests, may be meaningless (or, at the very least, whose meaning we have yet to grasp), and yet apparently nothing is more important than ‘the relative strength of the masculine and feminine sexual dispositions’ in each of us, in the determination of our lifelong sexual identity.

The notion of bisexuality, which has been welcomed by many defenders of psychoanalysis as proof that Freud himself disputed the claim that heterosexuality is more ‘natural’ than homosexuality, is in reality a murky and even somewhat treacherous concept, one that

contravenes the very plurality of desire it would appear to confirm. It is not only that bisexuality in Freud is nothing more than heterosexuality doubled. Since, as Judith Butler has pointed out, it is in desiring with his 'femine disposition' that a boy sees his father as an object of sexual love, bisexuality is simply 'the coincidence of two heterosexual desires [that of the masculine boy for his mother, that of the feminine boy for his father] within a single psyche'. Even more: bisexuality doubles the Oedipal couple, making of the very agent that disrupts copulative intimacy the occasion for repeating that intimacy. Indeed, its function as a concept may be to account for that repetition by disguising it. A presumably natural, and universal, bisexual disposition would be somehow more acceptable, more respectable, than the child's efforts *to stay within the family on any terms*, and to do so by initiating an intimate relation of desire with the very parent trying to break up such a relation. To see the child's so-called bisexual impulses as his or her most refined strategy for remaining within the family would be for Freud to acknowledge his own reluctance to imagine how we ever move beyond familial desires, his reluctance to imagine that move within the very situation — the Oedipus complex — which psychoanalysis proposes as an account, precisely, of how we become social beings and not merely familial beings.

An authentic breaking away from the family within psychoanalysis' own account of the Oedipus complex does, however, take place; it is enabled by the multiple partners necessitated by the child's so-called bisexuality. This is a less acceptable exit from Oedipal ties than the father's — the Law's — terrifying prohibitions, for it suggests that post-Oedipal desire may owe very little to the structures of Oedipal family desires, and any such failure to preserve and repeat those desires — I will return to this — is what Freud is incapable of entertaining and of conceptualising, even when he has himself provided the material for such conceptualising. The Oedipal situation, as Freud describes it, is, after all, an agitated movement among various couples: the male child with the beloved mother, the male child with the father who must be internalised as Law, the feminine male child with the loved father, the feminine male child with the rival mother. The Oedipal triangle is a misnomer; it always contains at least four people, and this doesn't even take into account the shifts in the parents' identities as a

result of the shifting sexual dispositions — masculine and feminine — that model the child's relations to them. There are not only the masculine boy and feminine boy; there are also the desired father and the law-giving father, as well as the desired mother and the threatening mother, which gives us six Oedipal identities. In a famous letter to Fliess, Freud wrote: 'Bisexuality! I am sure you are right about it. And I am accustoming myself to regarding every sexual act as an event between four individuals.' By this he presumably meant that in heterosexual intimacy, there is a repetition of the bisexuality already governing Oedipal relations — that is, a fantasmatic desiring woman within the man and a fantasmatic desiring man within the woman. But since this creates, for the man, a male partner instead of a female partner, and, for the woman, a female partner instead of a male partner, we need two more shadow partners for the bisexual scenario. (It's true that a certain economy of identities might be managed by superimposing the fantasy man created in the woman by the real man's homosexuality [that is, according to Freud, his feminine self] on the woman's masculine [or, again according to Freud, homosexual] self, since both these fantasy figures are males desiring females. The verification of any such economy of fantasmatic moves is, to say the least, somewhat problematic...) Furthermore, to the extent that our sexual behaviour always includes a motivating memory of our Oedipal fantasies of sexual intimacy (includes, that is, the memory of a presence summoning us away from that intimacy), each partner sees the other not only as two desired objects (male and female) but also as two possibilities of interdiction and identification.

With ten figures, the 'memory' of the Oedipal triangle in our adult intimacies becomes a fantasmatic orgy. This is, it could of course be argued, a *reductio ad absurdum* of what Freud himself characterises as object choices and identifications so complex as to make it nearly impossible 'to describe them intelligibly'. Our fantasy calculus does, however, have the advantage of highlighting the instability of the psychoanalytically conceived couple. The fantasy-relation that would be the most important antecedent for the adult drive toward monogamy — the phallic drive toward the Oedipal parent — turns out to have been but one in a whirlwind of desiring mobility. Monogamy disciplines the orgies of childhood. In constantly renewing our fidelity to that early loved object, we just as constantly

betray the polygamous conditions in which we loved it. If it is true that bisexuality in Freud perversely reinforces the heterosexual couple, it also institutes a mobility of desiring positions and a multiplicity of identities that make of the couple itself a unit in continuous dissolution. Psychoanalytically, monogamy is inconceivable except as something that blocks circuits of desire. A particular couple with particular identities begins to be traced when one relational line holds us with what is probably a paranoid fascination — when the desired other has become what Jean Laplanche calls an enigmatic signifier imagined to be in possession of, and to be wilfully withholding, the secret of our being. Monogamy perhaps thrives on this at once narcissistic and paranoid fascination with the secrets of the other as *our* secrets. Monogamy is nourished by an impoverished narcissism; it is the arrested deployment of desire's appetites and curiosities.

* * *

From Freud to Lacan, psychoanalytic therapy has been vastly more conservative than psychoanalytic theory. While thrillingly dismantling received psychoanalytic wisdom about, most notably, castration, the ego, the death instinct, and the very possibility of that which appeared to be the psychoanalytic object par excellence: a sexual relation, the most radical theorists have for the most part remained remarkably silent — or at best vague and inconclusive — about the relevance of their theoretical subversions to a possible questioning of the couple — especially, but by no means only, the heterosexual couple — as a normative model for psychoanalytic therapy. Given this disjunction between sexual theory and sexual politics, it is hardly surprising that psychoanalysts, from Freud to the present, have been somewhat incoherent not only about the social function and value of monogamy but even about its psychic genealogy, about precisely those continuities between childhood and adult life that have for the most part been psychoanalysis' self-defined specialty. Freud, for example, while never treating the topic exhaustively, touches upon it in a series of comments that make for anything but a unified point of view. The remark in the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* to the effect that in finding a love object we are re-finding it appears to ground monogamous impulse

in the memory of an infinitely satisfying (if only in fantasy) infantile relation to the mother. From this perspective, monogamy would be a relation indifferent, even hostile to the needs of larger social orders. Indeed, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, libidinal bonds uniting a couple contribute to the antagonism between civilization and sexuality. Civilization uses 'every means' to bind 'the members of the community together in a libidinal way', an aim that sexual love between two individuals resists. 'A pair of lovers are sufficient to themselves, and do not even need the child they have in common to make them happy'; a love-relationship at its height leaves 'no room ... for any interest in the environment'. Four pages earlier, however, such love-relationships, institutionalised in marriage, are just what society requires in order to rein in our naturally promiscuous bent. It is a kind of concession to the anti-social drive toward sexual pleasure: 'Present-day civilization makes it plain that it will only permit sexual relationships on the basis of a solitary, indissoluble bond between one man and one woman, and that it does not like sexuality as a source of pleasure in its own right and is only prepared to tolerate it because there is so far no substitute for it as a means of propagating the human race.' An even more disabused interpretation of monogamy is suggested in the passing remark, in the 1918 piece on 'The Taboo of Virginity', that 'the right to exclusive possession of a woman...forms the essence of monogamy'. Far from having profound roots in the history of each individual's sexuality, monogamy would be the intimate arrangement most consistent with the more general social right to private property.

An analogous interpretive mobility can be found in Adam Phillips' reflections on the subject in his recent book, *Monogamy*. The couple, Phillips writes, is 'home': 'Because we begin our lives in a couple, and are born of a couple, when we talk about couples we are telling the story of our lives.' And: 'Our survival at the very beginning of our lives involves us in something like monogamy.' 'The stuff of which monogamy will be made' are the 'inklings' the child has, in relation to his or her mother, 'of privilege and privacy, of ownership and belonging'. And yet, 'One of the most striking things about reading stories to young children is the ruthless promiscuity of their attention.' Children's 'curiosity is not monogamous. It ranges.' In growing up, we lose, Phillips writes in one of his most striking formulas, 'the primitive art of losing interest in things or people' —

and that art may be 'the best thing we can learn from children'. On the one hand, a revival of the form of our first passion; on the other, a betrayal of the healthy promiscuity of childhood desire. (We might think of this promiscuous curiosity as a socialised version of Freud's scenario of mobile Oedipal desires.) Finally, the psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas expresses most forcefully the view of monogamy — and of marriage — as a regression to infantile securities. In the chapter 'Why Oedipus?' from the 1992 *Being a Character*, Bollas writes that we need to retreat from both the anguishing 'complexity born of having a mind to oneself' as well as from 'the distresses of group life' which, with its competing points of view that never cohere into a unified social identity, 'often operates according to psychotic principles'. In order to survive both within groups and within our individual consciousness, we regress, and this regression 'has been so essential to human life that it has become an unanalyzed convention, part of the religion of everyday life. We call this regression "marriage" or "partnership", in which the person becomes part of a mutually interdependent couple that evokes and sustains the bodies of the mother and the father, the warmth of the pre-Oedipal vision of life, before the solitary recognition of subjectivity grips the child'. Thus monogamy, for Freud, Phillips and Bollas, turns out to be nearly all things: a civilized necessity that represses desire and betrays the promiscuous curiosity of childhood, a self-sufficient arrangement that, on its own, would never open out into community life and is therefore threatening to civilization, a denial of the mobility inherent in what was only superficially monogamous desire during the Oedipal stage, and a retreat to the comforting immobility of childhood ties and away from the multitudinous and wildly scattered 'subjectivities competing for selfhood' in both mature consciousness and social groups.

The psychoanalytic content of the Oedipus Complex (incestuous desire, parricidal impulses, the derivation of a super-ego from parental authority, bisexuality) distorts a much simpler and, I believe, more consequential drama to which the identity and the sex of the agents are irrelevant. The major function of the figure Freud speaks of as the rival father is not to be either a sexual rival or a parent, but rather to redirect the child's attention, to suggest that there are other modes of extension into the world. It doesn't matter if the agent doing that is a real father in the traditional nuclear

family, or another woman, or indeed another man when the desired adult is also a man or, finally, the several agents that may compete for the child's interest, re-direct its curiosity, in the single-parent family. The crucial thing is to get the child out of the family, although such a reading may appear to be forestalled by Freud's relegating of that function to the father.

Sophocles' tragedy points less ambiguously to this reading of the Oedipal myth than Freud's appropriation of it. First of all, *Oedipus Rex* is not about Oedipal desires. There is no evidence that Oedipus, having killed his father and married his mother, has fantasies of incest and parricide, whereas the psychoanalytic version of the myth is about nothing if not the determinant role in our psychic lives of incestuous and parricidal fantasies. What Oedipus comes to realise in Sophocles' play is the failure of efforts to remove him from the site of Oedipal fantasies, of the Oedipus complex. After hearing the oracle's prophecy of Laius's death at the hands of their son, Laius and Jocasta literally throw the child into the world, hoping he will die on the 'barren, trackless mountains' on which a servant is ordered to abandon him. But thanks to the good — or bad — services of another shepherd, Oedipus is taken in by another family, this time the royal family of Corinth. When he himself hears Apollo cry to him that he will kill his father and couple with his mother he flees his adoptive home and, as everyone knows, after his murderous encounter with Laius lands right back in his real home. Oedipus is catapulted from home to home — as if there were no way to escape from the terrible intimacies of the Oedipal family. The play does, however, recognise the urgency (as well as the tragic futility) of the attempted escape; it projects a defeated dream of pure, orphaned being in the world. But it also represents this being-in-the-world as a violent fate: the probable death of the child abandoned in nature, the extraordinary violence of Oedipus's encounter with Laius and his retinue (he kills all of them). It is at a meeting of three roads that the three lives of son, mother and father begin tragically to intersect. Not only does Oedipus leave home only to circle back to it; the father moves in the world as a familial menace, guaranteeing that whatever the son finds in the world will be, as Freud might say, a refinding of scenes and structures from home.

And yet there is an ambiguity about the father's 'place' in both Sophocles and Freud. In *Oedipus Rex* he is met after all *out there*,

and the event of his murder — and especially the murder of those accompanying him — exceeds the prophecy of parricide. In Freud, the father's prohibition at once tears the child away from a familial intimacy and guarantees the permanent fantasmatic repetition of that intimacy. The crucial factor here is identification. On the one hand, the child's identifying with the father is a kind of internal monumentalising of the most violent sides of the Oedipal conflict. Unable to satisfy the revengeful aggressiveness toward the parent who thwarts its desire to have the other parent all to itself, the child, as Freud writes in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 'takes the unattackable authority into himself' where it both continues to play the father's threateningly prohibitive role and, very conveniently, can also be the defenceless object of the child's aggressiveness toward it. In this version of things, the Oedipus complex, far from being dissolved, is repressed, which means that it will be symptomatically repeated throughout the subject's life. As Freud also says in *Civilization and its Discontents*, when human families expand into human communities, they repeat, in intensified form, the conflicts and the guilt of the past. 'What began in relation to the father is completed in relation to the group.' What we 're-find' in the erotic attachments of adult life are not only the warmth of pre-Oedipal intimacy but also the desires, the furious aggressiveness and the ineradicable guilt of the Oedipus complex.

But let's suppose that identification can be something quite different, that it can truly dissolve the fixity of Oedipal desires that are, paradoxically, at once monogamous and promiscuous. It can do this, I think, only if the child identifies with the other *as himself*. It is as if Freud obscurely realised this by making the exception, for the Oedipus complex, to his rule that we internalise lost love-objects. That is, it is as if he realised that at issue in the Oedipus complex is not how we preserve a relation to those objects, but rather, whether we will successfully, *and with pleasure*, move from away from, abandon love-objects. This can be done only if the rival father, or the rival mother, for both the little boy and the little girl, is no longer seen either as a rival or as a parent, but rather as a seductive summons. He or she intrudes upon familial intimacy with a promise (and not merely the prohibitive threat Freud emphasises) — the promise that if the child leaves the family it will have the narcissistic pleasure of finding itself in the world.

From this perspective, the privileged position Freud gives to the so-called positive Oedipus complex can be understood, and justified, not because it is the structure that holds forth the prospect of a heterosexual resolution, but rather because it is the structure in which narcissistic identification with the other can best take place. And this is because within this structure, the other, the one disrupting the erotic Oedipal couple, is the parent of the same sex as the child. An alien world best exercises its seduction when it appears with the familiar aspect of sameness. It is true that here I am giving a great deal of importance to sexual difference and sameness as phenomenological indexes of all sameness and difference, a move for which queer theorists have sharply criticised our heterosexist (and psychoanalytically inspired) culture. I would forestall any such criticism of what I'm now proposing by pointing out that we are speaking of that particular moment in development when, as Bollas has put it, 'in the course of "answering" questions about the origins of their body's genital urges, [children] discover with what sex they are identified, therefore with what parent they are identified, and they realise their lineage'. Bollas speaks of 'a new psychic structure' arising out of the new libidinal position of 'genital primacy'. It is the self corresponding to this re-positioning of bodily intensities that naturally sees in sexual difference the phenomenology of all difference, and this limited (even distorted) view of sameness and difference is immensely helpful in guiding the child away from the anxieties of Oedipal intimacy to what might otherwise be seen as a dangerous move away from home.

* * *

But the guiding away can be successful only if something is truly lost, or forgotten, and here we confront both a necessity and an opportunity alien to psychoanalytic thought. But what exactly is psychoanalytic thought, and how might answering this question help us to define what might be called the psychoanalytically constituted subject? One of the most curious aspects of *Civilization and Its Discontents* is Freud's reiterated self-reproach to the effect that he is not speaking psychoanalytically. The work was written in 1929, late in Freud's career, so it's not as if he hadn't had time to develop a distinctively psychoanalytic language. You would think

that by now Freud would be 'speaking psychoanalysis' fluently. But the complaints start in Chapter 3, where he laments that 'so far we have discovered nothing that is not universally known', nothing, that is, that might not have been said without the help of psychoanalysis. Given the repetition of this complaint three more times in the work, we should be alert to anything that breaks the self-critical trend, to any moment when Freud might be saying: 'This is it! Now I'm being profound, saying things that people didn't know before I said them! Now I'm speaking the language of psychoanalysis!' And indeed there is just such a moment. In the middle of Chapter 7, Freud announces an idea worthy of the founder of a new science, a new way of thinking about the human mind. 'And here at last an idea comes in which belongs entirely to psychoanalysis and which is foreign to people's ordinary way of thinking.'

What is that idea? It tells us, Freud continues, that while 'conscience is indeed the cause of instinctual renunciation to begin with ... later the relationship is reversed. Every renunciation of instinct now becomes a dynamic source of conscience and every fresh renunciation increases the latter's severity and intolerance.' And Freud declares himself 'tempted to defend the paradoxical statement that conscience is the result [rather than the cause] of instinctual renunciation'. It would seem, then, that paradox is central to psychoanalytic thinking. There is, however, something troubling in the fact that *Civilization and Its Discontents* has been dealing in paradoxes long before Freud announced the arrival of an idea worthy of psychoanalysis. We have learned, for example, that the more virtuous a man is the more severe is his super-ego, and that he blames himself for misfortunes for which he is clearly not responsible. Such paradoxes may be at first puzzling, but they are resolvable. To renounce instinctual satisfaction is not to renounce instinctual desire; the frustration of desire increases its intensity, and so saints, Freud remarks, 'are not so wrong' to call themselves sinners: frustrated temptations are inescapable temptations.

Freud moves on, however, to say something quite different: renunciation itself *produces* conscience. The more familiar view, Freud himself reminds us, is that 'the original aggressiveness of conscience is a continuance of the severity of the external authority and therefore has nothing to do with renunciation'. But internalisation turns out to have two very different aspects. On the

one hand, the authority becomes an internal watch-dog and is thereby able to continue to exercise its prohibitive functions. On the other hand, Freud tells us, it is internalised *in order to be attacked*. The authority's imagined aggression toward the desiring subject is taken over by the subject, not only to discipline desire but in order to attack the authority itself. The subject-ego is being punished for its guilty desires, but the punishing energy is taken from the subject's fury at the agent of punishment, who in fact also becomes its object. The child is showing the father what a good punishing father he, the child, would be, but since it is aggression toward the father which allows for this instructive demonstration, the object of it is bound to be the father, 'degraded', as Freud says, to sitting in for or as the child in the punished ego. This ferociously severe conscience enacts the phenomenology of the renounced instinctual drives. We no longer have the paradox of virtue intensifying the reproaches of conscience, a paradox explained, and dissolved, by the role of secret desires compensating for the renounced behaviour. Now we are not speaking of degrees of guilt or of moral severity but rather of an aggressiveness that accompanies renounced desires. The external authority's severe demands on the subject are, as it were, fused with the subject's vengeful anger at those demands, both of which constitute the subject's renunciation: the consequence, and the content, of renunciation are a doubly reinforced conscience.

This idea may be called distinctively psychoanalytic in that it describes a process in which the world has been sacrificed but *nothing has been lost*. The external authority now exists only as a function of the subject's fantasies: both as the reappropriated angry father originally projected onto the real father and as a carrier of the subject's revengeful aggressiveness toward the father. Psychoanalysis does not deny the world's existence, but it does document the procedures by which the mind de-phenomenalises the world, freezes it in a history of fantasmatic representations, or persistently resists the world with its fantasy of lost *jouissance*. To complain, for example, as critics have done, that Freud turned away from the real world and studied the seduction of children only as fantasy is like complaining about astronomers turning their analytic attention to the stars. Psychoanalysts are no more and no less capable than anyone else of recognising such phenomena as real child abuse, but that recognition is irrelevant to what is

'psychoanalytic' in psychoanalysis. In fact psychoanalysis is hyperbolically aware of the world as different from the self — which is why it can so brilliantly describe all our techniques for erasing that difference, and why it is of so little help in constructing an epistemology and an ethics grounded in perceptions of sameness, an epistemology and an ethics that might allow us to build a non-violent relation to the real.

In psychoanalysis, nothing is ever forgotten, given up, left behind. In Chapter 1 of *Civilization and Its Discontents* Freud claims that 'in mental life nothing which has once been formed can perish', and, soon after this, 'everything past is preserved'. Everything persists; psychoanalysis classifies the modalities of persistence and return: conscious memory, slips-of-the-tongue, repression, symptomatic behaviour, acting out, sublimation. *Civilization and Its Discontents* textually confirms this law. It wanders, and Freud appears to have trouble finding his subject (the function of religion, the conditions of happiness, the nature of civilization, erotic and non-erotic drives, the etiology of conscience.) And yet aggressiveness comes to include everything: it is accompanied by an intense erotic pleasure; like the oceanic feeling discussed in Chapter 1, it breaks down the boundaries between the self and the world; it gives expression both to instinctual needs and, in the form of conscience, to the inhibiting energy of civilization. With the analysis of aggressiveness, the boundaries separating concepts are broken down; manifesting a kind of oceanic textuality, ideas flood together in a dense psychoanalytic mix that obliterates such cherished distinctions as those between Eros and non-erotic aggression, even between the individual and civilization (both are at once objects and sources of aggression.)

Distinctions between ideas are perhaps grounded in assumptions of a difference of being between the self and the world. In demonstrating the mind's resources for erasing that distinction, psychoanalysis understandably has difficulty articulating its concepts, keeping some space between them. For Freud, this meant holding on, for dear intellectual life, to dualisms he himself recognised as fragile. Their terms may constantly be collapsing into one another — sadism into masochism, the non-erotic into the erotic, even, as Jean Laplanche has demonstrated, the death drive into sexuality — and yet Freud continued to insist, to insist all the more tenaciously, on the validity of his dualisms. 'Our views', he writes

in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 'have from the very first been *dualistic*, and today they are even more definitely dualistic than before.' The logical incoherence that results from the breakdown of conceptual distinctions accurately represents the over-determined mind described by psychoanalysis. For over-determination, far from being merely a characteristic of primary process thinking, defines the psychoanalytic mind — that is, the mind that has renounced none of its interpretations of the real.

This also is an oceanic phenomenon — not exactly, however, the 'limitless narcissism' of the self everywhere present in the world, but rather that of the world entirely reformulated as the self. The distinction, which may appear tenuous, is actually of the greatest importance, for what I take to be to be psychoanalysis's most serious limitation is precisely the difficulty it has imagining that we can find ourselves *already* in the world — there not as a result of our projections but as a sign of the natural extensibility of all being. This is the presence to which art — not psychoanalysis — alerts us. I have recently been interested — especially in the work done with Ulysse Dutoit — in tracing the communication of forms in art as the affirmation of a certain solidarity in the universe, a solidarity we must perhaps first of all see not as one of identities but rather of positionings and configurations in space. The narcissistic pleasure of reaching toward our own 'form' *elsewhere* has little to do with the flood of an oceanic, limitless narcissism intent on eliminating the world's difference. Rather, it pleasurably confirms that we are inaccurately replicated everywhere, a perception that may help us, ultimately, to see difference not as a trauma to be overcome but as the non-threatening supplement to sameness. Psychoanalysis profoundly describes our aptitude for preserving the world as subjectivity. Even the metonymic excesses of desire in Lacan are not the result of self-accretion through what might be called the accurate perception of inaccurate self-replications. Rather, Lacanian desire's excess is a function of misrecognition; constantly confusing the objects of our desires with their cause, we multiply desires in a hopeless effort to rejoin a retroactively fantasised lost 'true' object of desire — thus remaining faithful, in an even more desperate version of fidelity to the past than the more literal Freudian one, to a lost nothingness. Art gives us a model of the world *as world*, one

we 'know' as aesthetic subjects thrown outwards, 'defined' by relations that at once dissolve, disperse and repeat us.

We move by forgetting — and no human faculty is more alien to psychoanalysis than that of forgetting. Freud initiated the systematic study of all the ways in which we remain faithful, the strategies by which we manage to go on loving and fearing our first fantasmatic objects. Psychoanalysis, with its obsessive concern with the difference between the self and the world, necessarily sees the latter as the repository of everything hostile to the self. It is a place to which, at best, we adapt and from which we retreat and regress to the imagined familial securities nourished by such privileged institutions as monogamy and marriage. The family is the psychoanalytic haven to which we regress, a regression that might be unnecessary if we had left it in the first place. If psychoanalysis, in its account of the extraordinary mobility of childhood and, more specifically, even Oedipal desires, has itself described for us the original inconceivability of a monogamous fixity of desire, and therefore of a stable sexual identity, monogamy nonetheless is the relational figure most congenial to what we might call the psychoanalytic fidelity of the self to the self, its indifference to signs of self that are not signs of interpretation, and, finally, its profoundly immoral rejection of our promiscuous humanity.