What if the Law is Written in a Porno Book? Deterritorializing Lacan, De-Oedipalizing Deleuze and Guattari

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Reading Lacan often feels like an exquisite practice in female masochism. It hurts, stuns, burns, resists—only to pull me further into its maze, seducing with the intensity of its pain. I identify all too easily with the indignant woman in Jacques-Alain Miller’s introductory dialogue of *Television*, who refuses to submit to the label of “idiot” that Lacanian discourse designates as her proper name. Reading Deleuze and Guattari, on the other hand, often feels like candy—both the high fructose kind that rots my teeth and the “candy” that euphemizes heroin, plunging me into hallucinations and bodily euphoria of the most pleasurable sort. To read these authors together thereby produces a most startling conflation of pain and pleasure, fertile ground upon which to explore the machinations of the law—that structure through which our ethics and politics are cathected.

Reading the law as this site of pain and pleasure, I pose the question: what if the law is written in a porno book? The phrase, lamentably, is not mine. It comes from Deleuze and Guattari’s reading of a great scene from Kafka’s *Trial* in which Joseph K breaks into the inner sanctum of the law only to find several—not One—law books filled with bad porn, “an indecent picture” (T, 52) of a nude man and woman.Crudely drawn images of pleasure displace the esoteric language of authority as the alleged site of justice. All that hinges on the mechanisms of the law—identity, recognition, judgment, causality, temporality—shift with this unmooring of the law from its stable, transcendental perch.

Deleuze and Guattari rail against the stupidity of those who would render Kafka’s prose metaphorical. Distinguishing Kafka’s texts as a “minor literature,” they sever his language from systems of referentiality and representation: “Kafka deliberately kills all metaphor, all symbolism, all signification, no less than all designation” (K, 22). A deterritorializing rhizome, Kafka’s texts resist the introduction “of the enemy, the Signifier and those attempts to interpret a work that is actually only open to experimentation” (K, 3). This severance from representational language is a political act, constituting politics as the dethroning of interpretation machines.

The line between interpretation and experimentation thereby becomes the boundary for good and bad readings—of Kafka, the world, oneself, and desire. The conceptual fulcrum of that boundary is Oedipus.
To enter Kafka’s “micropolitics of desire” we must “deterritorialize Oedipus into the world instead of reterritorializing everything in Oedipus and the family” (K, 10). The charge against psychoanalysis is explicit, not only in their text on Kafka but across so many of Deleuze’s and Deleuze and Guattari’s texts: when psychoanalysis renders desire as a lack, it simultaneously renders politics as a matter of signification, a matter of the law as it is written in the Symbolic. This is what draws Deleuze and Guattari to Kafka: “We believe only in a Kafka politics that is neither imaginary nor symbolic. We believe only in one or more Kafka machines that are neither structure nor phantasm. We believe only in a Kafka experimentation that is without interpretation or significance...” (K, 7). While psychoanalysis would allegedly interpret Kafka, reducing his bizarre scenes of pleasure and pain before the law to unusual twists of signification that we can nonetheless decipher and judge, Deleuze and Guattari find experimental resistances to this latent fascism.

To read psychoanalysis as this reterritorializing force is to read its texts as the work of arborescent structures, just as Deleuze and Guattari insist across Anti-Oedipus and A Thousand Plateaus: “Take psychoanalysis as an example: it subjects the unconscious to arborescent structures... central organs, the phallus, the phallus tree” (ATP, 17). This arborescent reading reduces psychoanalysis to the singular conceptual figures of a Freudian Oedipus or Lacanian phallus. To think conceptually about the law and desire is to appeal to a transcendental structure that fully recognizes the subject in a manner that surpasses the capacity of the subject to grasp itself. This transcendental law renders the subject as lacking the capacity for self-consciousness and subsequently dependent upon the law for its own meaning, which it craves: recognition-lack-dependency-desire. It is an old story. For Deleuze and Guattari, it is the mechanism of interpretation-machines and their latent fascism, the political epistemology they bestow upon psychoanalysis.

But if we look more closely at the texts of both Deleuze and Guattari and Lacan, such a reading of psychoanalysis is not so easily found. In several texts, Deleuze and Guattari hold out Lacan as an exception that apparently proves the rule of dogmatism in psychoanalysis. For example, early in Anti-Oedipus amid their condemnation of psychoanalysis’ disastrous rendering of desire as lack, they note that “Lacan’s admirable theory of desire appears to us to have two poles: one related to the ‘object small a’ as a desiring-machine, which defines desire in terms of real production, thus going beyond both any idea of need and any idea of fantasy; and the other related to the ‘great Other’ as a signifier, which reintroduces a certain notion of lack” (AO, 27). While we are left to lament the triumph of the latter pole, they indicate the possibility of Lacan conceiving of a productive desire through the objet a.1

We also find traces of experimentation and productive desire in Lacan’s texts. In “The Direction of Treatment and the Principles of its Power,” Lacan explains that the role of analysis is not to interpret a subject’s behavior but to confront and provoke the resistances that block particular pathways of desire, behavior, and pleasure. He even appears to disavow the cardinal rule of Freudian Oedipal machines, demonstrating the insufficiencies of reading dreams as metaphorical. Finally, he initiates us into a complicated tangle of causality and temporality when he shows how the final value of an interpretation emerges through what it provokes, not through what it explains: “to confirm that an interpretation is well founded ... will emerge as a result of the interpretation” (E, 234). Interpretations are not referential for Lacan: they are productive.

To experiment with rather than interpret Lacan is therefore not only to read Lacan as Deleuze and Guattari read Kafka, but also to read Lacan as Lacan reads the world. It brings us into a world that may sound more Deleuze and Guattarian than Lacanian: mazes of temporality and causality where subjectivity and desire emerge as effects without causes, surfaces without depths, forces without intentions. Rather than the classic reading of desire as driven by an ontological lack, the following experimentation with Lacan approaches the question of the law and desire through this “other pole” of Lacan’s theory of desire, namely, through the Real and objet a.

This reading of the law in its relation to the Real will trace out Lacan’s suggestion that interpretation is a problem of chronos—a matter of introducing something “into the synchrony of the signifiers that compose [interpretation] ... in order to decipher the diachrony of unconscious repetitions” (E, 233). The process of introducing this “something” into the synchrony of signifiers opens us onto a second “cut” in discourse, namely, the assignifying effects of the Real that surface as objet a to cause our desire. Developing this different reading of desire as emergent from the assignifying Real, rather than the call of the Other into the Symbolic, I will trace how this leads Lacan to his infamous reading of Kant as initiating a purely formal law that is not cathexed with pleasure or pain and, therefore, is not distinguishable from its Sadean counterpart. Drawing parallels between Lacan’s “Kant avec Sade” and the reading of Kant that Deleuze offers in Coldness and Cruelty, I suggest that Lacan may not be so different from Deleuze. For Lacan, we respond to the assignifying scene of the Real as Deleuze suggests we might best respond to the purely formal law: we can only laugh, that gleeful noise through which we subvert the law and its absurdity. It will be through this laughter that we will find final resonance between Deleuze and Guattari and Lacan. Having traced the similarities in their depictions of
the purely formal law of modernity, I will return to Kafka and experiment with Lacan, listening for the distinctly Lacanian ring in the boisterous laughter over Joseph K’s mis-identification before the law. Reading the masochistic scene of The Whipper, we will find Lacan also laughing at that moment when K is asked by the Examining Magistrate: “Well, then, you are a house painter?”

The Block of the Phallus

We must first work our way back through the construction of Lacan’s texts as a conceptual machine. The dominant reading of Lacan in the Anglophone academy has focused on his transposition of Freudian schemas into the field of language. Most readings have focused on his development of the Symbolic as the register in which the law operates, specifically the submission to the phallic signer through which all meaning must pass. While many theorists have deconstructed this model of subjectivity and its erasure of sexual difference, several have argued that this reading overemphasizes the role of the Symbolic, at the expense of Lacan’s later shifts towards the Real and objet a.

In the dominant reading, desire is framed as the translation of need and demand into the Symbolic order. Grounded in the ontological break of the infant from the Mother, the phallic signer intercedes in the mother-child dyad to introduce the law, completing the Oedipal triangle and granting entrance into language. Desire is thereby doomed to failure, haunted as it is by this ontological lack of demand and need. Furthermore, the law functions primarily through the rule of prohibitions, which locates subjectivity in a self-splitting double-bind: its entrance into language severs it from the plenitude of pre-linguistic/pre-Oedipal contiguity with the M/Other; and yet the phallic law of language prohibits any return to this romanticized realm of plenitude. Cast out of Eden, the subject can only desire that which the law will always prohibit. Moreover, the méconnaissance endemic to the field of signifiers will render the quest for one’s identity only more and more dependent on this cruel prohibition of the law. It is a sadistic law that produces a masochistic subject who cannot resist its attraction. It is also the reading of desire that dominates Deleuze and Guattari’s renderings of psychoanalysis as the phallic-tree-machine.

Lacan never disavows his early work on the field of language as a phallicized entrance into signification. Nor does he ever disavow the role of the “barred S,” the impossibility of coming to any full or transparent recognition of a “pure self” before the law. In keeping with these prior formulations, he is forced into particularly convoluted speech as he attempts to delineate the register of the Real. The most well-known formulation is the one he offers via double-negation, “the lack of a lack,” indicating the impossibility of rendering the Real directly in speech. Desire stands in a different relation to the Real than that form through which we experience desire. Experience is always already mediated through the Symbolic, which renders desire as a lack that stands before the judgment of the prohibitive, phallicized law. But the Real, this “lack of a lack,” is devoid of signifiers and does not submit to that law. Functioning as a limit to the Symbolic order, the Real stands in as a representation of that which cannot be represented. But rather than taking the Heideggerian, Derridean, or Lévinasian turn of rendering this “unrepresentable” as that which cancels itself out upon articulation, Lacan struggles to trace the effects of the Real without positing some conceptual structure as the cause of those effects, a turn that looks more like strategies we associate with Deleuze and Guattari, as well as Foucault. To trace the effects of the Real in the register of desire therefore requires a sense of its relation to language, the site of our experience of desire and subsequent failure to experience, or render into language, the Real.

When Lacan tells us that “the channel of desire flows ... as a derivation of the signifying chain” (E, 259), the vertiginous effects of the Saussurean play of signification on the subject emerges. “[T]he subject does not even know where to pretend to be [the] organizer” (E, 259) of this signifying chain; the subject can only realize itself as an effect of a play of signification that has no anchoring cause in the signified. Contingent effects layer one upon another to produce a desiring subject that cannot understand the desire it is experiencing. To have even the possibility of recognizing this desire as “his own,” the subject must assume the position of the Other, the site and apparent cause of desire, a move also known as analytic transference. According to the dominant reading, we should understand this place of the Other through the phallic signer: the Other functions as the site allowing entrance into the law and replaces the Mother as the child moves, in Freudian terms, into the Oedipal drama and, in Lacanian terms, into the field of signification. The Lacanian twist on the Hegelian struggle for recognition emerges as the desire not only to be recognized by the Other, but the desire to be the cause of desire in the Other. But if we emphasize the relation of the law to the Real, Lacan introduces yet another figure, the objet a, which he (annoyingly!) describes as “the cause of desire” (TCPE, 82).

In “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious,” Lacan distinguishes Hegelian and Freudian notions of desire vis-à-vis the Real, and distances himself from his earlier Hegelian models. He argues that the Hegelian model of desire forecloses...
the Real in its claim to absorb it into the viable possibility of full self-consciousness. For Hegel, desire is fundamentally the desire to know; consequently, it unfolds in the time-space of the Symbolic and its desire (driven by lack) for self-consciousness, not fundamentally altering the Master-Slave dialectic. To the contrary, Freud reads desire in the scene of the unconscious, rendering Hegelian self-consciousness impossible. Again placing us in a field of effects without causes, Lacan writes that "in the Freudian field, ... consciousness is a feature ... inadequate to ground the unconscious in its negation ... since it is a service that has no holder" (E, 297). The unconscious is not a supplicant to any dialectic of consciousness, neither as negation nor as cause. Desire, as unconscious and involving "the real of the body" (E, 302), is irreducible to demand and need. The unconscious is a service that has no holder, an effect with no cause, a surface with no depth. This is the "other scene" (E, 297) that psychoanalysis opens.

In reading this scene through the relation of the law to the Real, we shed the Hegelian overtones of a self-Other dialectic. The analytic scene operates in "the function of the cut in discourse" (E, 299). Lacan acknowledges two cuts in language. One kind "acts as a bar between the signer and signified" (E, 299), and he addresses it through the phallic signer in the Symbolic. But the analytic scene opens onto another cut in the signifying chain, which "verifies the structure of the subject as discontinuity in the real" (E, 299). These are moments when discourse "stumbles or is interrupted" (E, 299), e.g., witticisms, slips of the tongue, jokes, perhaps laughter. The analytic scene opens onto "holes" in signification that are not mere slippage between word and object but effects of that strange time of unconscious forces, which erupt into signifying relations.

The lack endemic to language thereby assumes another dimension—these "holes" produced in the signifying chain by the eruption of signifying forces. We can best map these holes through the breaks in synchronous temporality that they initiate. In his "Names-of-the-Father Seminar," Lacan turns towards the function of the objet a to map those moments in which "the subject is affected by the desire of the Other ... in a nondialectizable manner" (TCPE, 82). That is, he turns to this figure of the objet a to outline the effects of the Real, which resists signification, in experience. He subsequently alters our orientation to the scene of desire by focussing on the objet a, rather than the call of the Other, as the cause of desire. Awkwardly temporalizing a phenomenon that does not fit into chronological schemas, Lacan describes the objet a as a "primal" falling away from the subject, through which the subject comes to desire. The Real is thereby interpellated by the Symbolic, producing the diversity of forms in which we experience desire. For example, whether we experience the object of our desire as oral, anal, or genital depends on how "its" fall is signified by the Symbolic mediation: "The diversity of forms taken by that object of the fall ought to be related to the manner in which the desire of the Other is apprehended by the subject" (TCPE, 85). These experiences are already phallicized through the law of the Symbolic; but the objet a indicates the limits of such experiences and the subsequent "obscenity into which the subject is plunged in relation to desire" (TCPE, 87). The subject comes to be constituted as a legible subject of desire through a cutting away of objet a, through the resistance against signification that propels the subject into the phallicized signifying field. The "lack of a lack" of the Real erupts into the signifying field through the objet a, which is mediated by the Symbolic into legible forms of desire, experienced through the lack endemic to signification. The objet a thereby "causes" the desire of the subject through this "primal" resistance of signification and cutting away from the subject.

To trace the effect of the objet a requires a technique that will not render it a causal or conceptual structure: Lacan returns us to the voice of the Other in the scene of desire. In Seminar I, he developed the voice of the Other, which is critical to the analytic scene, as the essential site through which the ego is interpellated by the Symbolic. But in the "Names-of-the-Father Seminar," Lacan focuses on the phenomenon of the voice, rather than its issuance from the Other, as an "objet a as fallen from the Other" (TCPE, 87). Through this phenomenological approach to the structural function of the voice, Lacan attunes us to the as signifying quality of the voice per se, rather than its signifying speech. We hear the voice as sound, even as noise, not as signification: we are no longer in the scene of experience and the interpellation of the Symbolic. It is no longer a matter of meaningful speech calling us from the Other into subjectivity, but of a more "primal" question about the emergence of voice at all: "we can no longer elude the question: beyond he who speaks in the place of the Other, and who is the subject, what is it whose voice, each time he speaks, the subject takes?" (TCPE, 87) Here Lacan confronts the convoluted schemas of temporality and causality. In following out this question of how a voice emerges at all, Lacan suggests we are not wholly "animals at the mercy of language" (E, 264). Because desire is experienced as an effect of the second cut in language, the Real functions as the impossible against which symbolization is constantly elaborated. But rather than reduce this to a matter of dialectical negation and submit the Real to the laws of signification, Lacan strives to maintain the Real as generative, as lacking the lack of the Symbolic. Ultimately, this will require a turn to geometrical topologies to map the temporality of a deferred, nonlinear chronology that does not assume the unfolding
cours of time. But we can already see that the Real has no substance and can only be read via effects, which it produces out of excess and abundance that do not signify.

What happened, then, to the porno book? When Deleuze reflects on his work with Guattari on Kafka, he recognizes that he was attempting similar dynamics in his prior work on Sacher-Masoch, where he also found the law in a porno book, of sorts. He describes Sacher-Masoch's texts as "pornological literature [which] is aimed above all at confronting language with its own limits, with what is in a sense a "nonlanguage" (MCC, 22). Sacher-Masoch's texts enact a law that is not Symbolic. As Deleuze elaborates the contours of this law, which emerges out of contracts and exemplifies the modern condition of law, we find inversions of temporality, causality, and identity that bear strange resemblances to those we have encountered with Lacan and his subsequent reformulation of the law through "Kant avec Sade."

Chastising psychoanalysis again, Deleuze focuses on the characteristic of masochism that psychoanalysis misses: the role of contracts. Reproducing two of Sacher-Masoch's contracts with his "torturers," Deleuze shows how "the function of the contract is to lay down the law, which, once established, becomes increasingly cruel and restrictive toward one of the parties" (MCC, 76). The contract thereby generates a law and the terms of this law often "overstep and contravene the conditions which made it possible" (MCC, 77). Resembling the classic social contract, these masochist contracts generate a law that erases the consent which made the contract possible. But rather than guaranteeing security and protection, these masochist contracts guarantee wholesale submission to the whims and caprices of another, including explicitly those that cause suffering and pain.

Turning to Kant, Deleuze shows how the law in Sacher-Masoch's contracts exemplifies the condition of modern law. Kant inverts the classical Platonic-Christian relations between the law and the Good, thereby rendering the law a purely formal concept:

Kant gave a rigorous formulation of a radically new conception, in which the law is no longer regarded as dependent on the Good, but on the contrary, the Good itself is made to depend on the law. This means that the law no longer has its foundation in some higher principle from which it would derive its authority, but that it is self-grounded and valid solely by virtue of its own form (MCC, 82).

Because the law is now defined by its pure form, its content is insignificant and indeterminate; consequently, we can never be edified in our adherence to the law. We cannot discern either our own motivations or the righteousness of our acts; we only know we are guilty. Constantly judged by the internalized, hyper-vigilant law, we are always guilty in advance of any action or desire: "the law manifests itself in its absolute purity, and proves us guilty" (MCC, 84). This sounds strikingly similar to the reading of modern law Lacan offers us in his essay, "Kant avec Sade." This is where we also find the shift in the function of the law that follows from our reorientation towards the Real and objet a as the cause of desire. For Lacan, Kant renders the moral law a purely formal structure, void of signification just as it is void of any object or pathological cathexis. If objet a is the cause of our desire, rather than the call of the Other, the law is removed from the libidinal forces that it judges. We are no longer drawn to the law by our need for its (mis)recognition; rather, emerging through the cutting away of the objet a, we come before the law without any possibility of signification. Coming before a purely formal entity that no longer judges us according to the specific content of our actions or intentions, we no longer attempt to justify ourselves before the law; signification has no place here. Beyond good and evil, in the asignifying scene of the Real, the purely formal law is absurd. Not only can we not distinguish between Kant's and Sade's imperatives, but we also begin to hear how we laugh—with Lacan and Deleuze and Guattari—at dear old Joseph K.

The Boisterous Laughter

In his reading of Kant in Coldness and Cruelty, Deleuze turns back to Kafka's world as a delineation of this "dimension of the modern conception of the law" (MCC, 84). He seems to turn there because it is all so funny. As he tells us, "Max Brod recalls when Kafka gave a reading of The Trial, everyone present, including Kafka himself, was overcome by laughter" (MCC, 85). Laughter ushers us into the comic—not the tragic—as "the only possible mode of conceiving the law" (MCC, 86). Deleuze argues that irony and humor are how we are cathedected to this modern law; they are the libidinal forces through which the law functions and, consequently, through which we respond. In the purely formal law of modernity that renders us all guilty in advance, the law does not heed or depend upon any transcendental Good to keep it in its bounds: unhinged from any determinate content, it becomes a potential seat of tyranny. We are thereby called upon to transcend or subvert the law, and irony and humor are the two modes through which we can do so.

For Deleuze, the texts of Sacher-Masoch provide a humorous subversion of the law that twists its authority to such extremes that the absurdity of a law-without-content is exposed. The laughter in, at, and of
Kafka thereby becomes crucial. When we laugh at and with Kafka, Deleuze hears the laughter of a masochist humor. When we laugh at and with Kafka, we have consented to a contract with a masochist; the pure formal law that judges Joseph K guilty without his consent is merely the agreement generated out of the masochist contract. The contract is expressed in the images of bad porn—a very odd, and very funny, moment in K’s Trial.

The humor that this masochism provokes in us exposes the absurdity of an empty, formal law that preemptively judges us guilty. The masochist humor subverts the law through a temporal reversal: “A close examination of masochistic fantasies or rites reveals that while they bring into play the very strictest application of the law, the result in every case is the opposite of what might be expected (thus whipping, far from punishing or preventing an erection, provokes and ensures it)” (MCC, 88). Rather than occurring after the forbidden act of pleasure, the punishment now becomes the necessary condition for the possibility of pleasure. This subverts the law: “What else but a demonstration of absurdity is aimed at, when the punishment for forbidden pleasure brings about this very same pleasure?” (MCC, 89) The punishment does not cause the pleasure but becomes the necessary condition for achieving it. When we laugh at Joseph K’s discovery that the law is filled with bad porn, are we not receiving pleasure on the condition of his ongoing torture for a crime he never committed by a law that is patently absurd?

Joseph K is not a masochist: he never submits to the law. Moreover, he constantly identifies with the law, positioning himself as the one man who can see the Truth of what is happening. But Kafka has submitted to the purely formal law, and his bizarrely comic literature is the masochist contracts he offers us. If we can in turn submit to Kafka, we may then be under the spell of “a logician of consequences” (MCC, 89), a masochist who subverts the law through reversing its temporal and causal orders: Joseph K is harassed, tortured, and ultimately killed as a consequence that has no cause. The purely formal law is a seat of tyranny, and we can only subvert it through laughing at its absurdity.

Does Lacan, then, laugh at Kafka as well?

The Whipper

Whipping is one of the most fetishized acts of sado-masochism. It is also one of the funniest and kinkiest scenes of The Trial. Erupting seemingly from nowhere into the narrative, K cannot resist the scene: “Seized by uncontrollable curiosity ... he literally tore the door open” (T, 83) and stumbles upon the two warders receiving a whipping—allegedly for having stolen K’s undergarments. The scene is saturated with classic sado-masochistic details. Kafka immediately directs us to the whipper and his clothing, “sheathed in a sort of dark leather garment which left his throat and a good deal of his chest and the whole of his arms bare” (T, 84). Deleuze and Guattari point out that “[t]oday still, these are the clothes of American sado-masochists, dressed in leather or rubber, with folds, buckles, piping and so on” (K, 68). We cannot avoid the erotically charged details of the scene, which lead to temporal and causal reversals that vertiginously threaten K’s identity. From a Lacanian perspective, K opens onto “that other scene” of the unconscious when he stumbles into the scene of the whipper, a scene of the Real, saturated with objet a and their stirring of desires we cannot understand.

Kafka teases us with an explicitly Oedipal interpretation that would wrap this into a neat package of the Symbolic law: the warders plea their innocence on the basis of familial and marital commitments, and the justice of the punishment centers on K’s intentions. Moreover, in case we did not get it, the Whipper is literally beating these men with a phalus, a “rod.” But the Whipper does not speak in ways that can be understood in the causal order of the law: “the punishment is as just as it is inevitable” (T, 84). The role of the mouth, that organ of the Symbolic, is doubly desacralized: Willem’s mouth eats rather than speaks, and it is smacked by the rod. No speech makes any sense here.

Upon entering the room (which hilariously resembles a closet), K persists with his assured self-identification as a moral super-hero out to fight the corruption of the law. He takes it as “obviously his duty to intervene on this occasion” (T, 88). But two events unhinge this self-identification: Franz’s animal shriek, “single and irrevocable” (T, 87), and the exact repetition of the scene the next day—an assignifying voice and a temporal/causal impossibility. At this final moment, K spins vertiginously, slams the door, and beats it with his fists, ordering that the room be cleaned out: “We’re being smothered in dirt!” (T, 90).

For Lacan, he may as well be the house-painter: can you hear him laughing?

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Works Cited


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Notes

1. Deleuze and Guattari sprinkle other texts with similar suggestions regarding Lacan. For example, in *Dialogues,* Deleuze parenthetically remarks that, contrary to “the dead look” and “stiff necks” of psychoanalysts, “only Lacan has kept a certain sense of laughter” (D, 82). I will return to this central activity of laughter as a mode through which Lacan resists the arborescent structures of interpretation.

2. Some of the most important feminist readings of Lacan include Irigaray, Grosz, and Braidotti. For the argument that widespread misreadings of Lacan have been circulated in Anglo-American contexts due to the influence of French feminism, which have centered readings of Lacanian psychoanalysis strictly on the dynamics of the phallic signifier and the enactment of the Law in the register of the Symbolic, see Dean 2000. Dean also focuses on “the later Lacan” of the 1960s and 70s for greater emphases on the Real.

3. Lacan attempts to capture this in his phrase, “wo es war, soll Ich warden” (E, 299), which inverts both the temporal chronology and the surface-depth spatiality of desire-as-lack-before-the-Law. As Lacan tells us, “the idea that the surface is the level of the superficial is itself dangerous. Another topology is necessary if not to be misled as to the place of desire” (E, 240). For more on this dynamic, see Daniel Smith’s essay in this issue.

4. To continue down another corridor in this maze of mirrors, Deleuze recognizes Freud for capturing this concisely when he shows in *Civilization and Its Discontents* that “the more virtuous a man is, the more severe and dis-trustful” (MCC, 84) is his conscience.

5. For more on this dynamic, see Andrew Cutrofello’s essay in this issue.

6. I focus on the masochist humor to subvert the law, but Deleuze also shows how Sade provides an ironic transcendence of the law into a non-place that undermines its authority.