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Why those who are singular have the most fun: A Lacanian consideration of how Salvador Dali's auto-erotic practice points the way to a form of *jouissance* capable of alleviating subjective alienation

This paper explores the theme of artistically productive auto-eroticism in work by the surrealist artist Salvador Dali and relates this to the Lacanian concept of *Le Sinthome* (a *jouissance* addressed to no one). It suggests that when we create for our pleasure alone and generate a singular subjective vocabulary, we arrest or freeze the slippage between signifier and signified where pleasure is lost to desire. The paper argues that the experience of loneliness, rather than resulting from an excess of idiosyncratic expression, arises instead from subjects becoming trapped in a worn-out and commercially-dominated symbolic sphere. The paper asserts that the kind of "masturbation" in which Dali engages revivifies subjectivity and also serves to remind us that, in order to be authentic, subjectivity needs to actively generate imaginative fantasmatic content (and not passively absorb ready-made fantasies). Lastly, the paper briefly considers such subjective auto-eroticism as the basis of a limited form of community.

Keywords: Salvador Dali, Jacques Lacan, Eve Sedgwick, *jouissance*, *lathouses*, *le Sinthome*, masturbation, fantasy, subjectivity.

In 1970, Jacques Lacan rather controversially announced "There is no such thing as a sexual relationship:"¹ Alain Badiou usefully and eloquently interprets this statement as Lacan reminding us that,

in sex, each individual is to a large extent on their own [...] at the end of the day, the pleasure will always be your pleasure. Sex separates, doesn't unite.

¹ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis (Vol. Book XVII)*, 151.

The fact that you are naked and pressing against one another is an image, an imaginary representation. What is real is that pleasure takes you a long way, very far from the other. [...] In sex, you are really in a relationship with yourself via the mediation of the other [small “o”]. It is quite true, after all that sex, however splendid it is and certainly can be, ends in a kind of emptiness. That is really why it is subject to the law of repetition: one must start time and time again. Every day, when one is young!²

To put it bluntly, sex leaves one feeling even more alone. Why might it end in a sense of emptiness and loneliness? If one were to use a Lacanian lens, it is because it brings us face-to-face with the inevitable isolation inherent in the structure of human subjectivity. Sex presents us with the failure of connection at the very moment that we are meant to have obtained it. In Lacan’s account, this is because connection (for a subject) can never be with an other or their body. As Badiou’s quote implies, any sexual partner is only ever a means through which to engage with the terms underwriting one’s own subjectivity; an unconscious negotiation concerning pleasure and Being. The other person in sex becomes a stand-in for the only truly significant other a human subject will ever have and that is the symbolic sphere as Other [with a big “O”]. Indeed, it is only through this Other that others [little “o”s or, in effect, zeros] are afforded significance or granted meaningful existence for a subject.

It is also this Other which shapes our pursuit of satisfaction, even when we are pursuing such satisfaction through the bodies of others. It is a powerful and privileged marker/signifier established via the Other that we are seeking in or through sex. This signifier is linked to Being and pleasure and is pursued as an object by the subject. It is also this object that we convince ourselves is embodied in our sexual partner/s. This privileged “object”, or *agalma* – as Lacan refers to it in his interpretation of Plato’s *Symposium*, cannot be found in the body of the other.³ Socrates must be philosophical about Alcibiades’ insistence that it is Socrates himself that he loves. Like a good analyst, he must

² Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, 18.

³ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Transference (Vol. Book VIII)*, 136.

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resist Alcibiades' attempts at seduction and ask that they be subjected to analysis and reflection. What Socrates is at pains to point out is that what Alcibiades is in fact seeking (through him) is a privileged and satisfying signification for his own being (thereby enabling the illusory *jouissance* of Being).

The symbolic Other regulates our relations with others, mediating these along with our sense of Being or, perhaps more accurately, our sense *for* the brute fact of our being. The symbolic Other begins this mediation from the moment we are born. It can be thought of as all signifying and symbolic practice such as discourse and language but even includes rhythms in behaviour, such as feeding, cuddling and the ceremony surrounding potty training.⁴ In its most readily understandable aspect, this Other can be seen as the sum of the chains of symbolic, cultural, and linguistic significations in which a human child is enmeshed from birth. In its more psychoanalytic aspect, the Other is also the map of how these chains become embedded and snarled in individual subjectivities, drawing subjects toward what appear to be anchoring significations.

Infants come to characterise and invest in this symbolic Other as a powerful, if shadowy, presence in their imaginary perceptual universe. As nascent subjects, we do not stand much of a chance against this Other. We cannot incorporate it entirely through identification (although we do try), nor can we conquer it or obliterate its existence. This pretty much exhausts our infantile subjective arsenal of identification and/or annihilation. The Other, upon its emergence, begins to strongly suggest that instead of identification or annihilation, we give up our literal battles and preoccupying pleasures in order to compete (at a safe symbolic distance) for what it designates as Being or being of value; it suggests it is capable of offering even greater (symbolic) satisfaction at a lower risk. In fact, it is rather more of an imperative than a suggestion (resist and we risk being seen as less than fully human); in Althusser's terms, if we refuse, we might suffer the kind of socio-cultural death that

⁴ See Louis Althusser's essay "Freud and Lacan" in his *Writings on psychoanalysis: Freud and Lacan* for a vivid and compelling account of the way in which human infants are interpellated into the symbolic order.

sanctions “a failure of humanization.”⁵ In the process of surrendering ourselves to the Other, our pleasure becomes desire and that desire becomes dominated by the objects designated as desirable by the Other. If a human child does not step onto the carousel of desire with its painted ponies forever advancing out of reach, that child risks being labelled narcissistic, juvenile, aberrant, anti-social, backwards and/or inarticulate. The child must accept castration in the sense of surrendering its imaginary and, by the standards of the symbolic, perversely auto-erotic preoccupations. Instead, it must accept the paltry satisfactions promised by phallogentric and heteronormative social and sexual relations (as privileged and supposedly anchoring significations).

The, at turns, domineering, beguiling, and normalising Other, however, does not exist as such. It has no coherence; it has no singular intention; it does not even have a singular cultural or ideological identity. It is after all, simply the human practice of symbolic signification. What it does have (at least post-structurally speaking) is a missing centre. It lacks any point that would ground it; it lacks any transcendent referent to arrest the play or slippage between signifiers and signifieds (as much as we, as subjects, may be led to believe “Other”wise). This lack is what allows it to operate as a symbolic system. It can only ever give the appearance of assurance and authority; or that cultural/ideological prohibitions and values are fixed and unchanging (the law). It promises meaning but delivers slippage. It promises us we can become “men” and “women,” it promises we can be “white” or “black,” or “South African” or “Portuguese” and that these things will bring us as much compelling satisfaction or *jouissance* as our own anuses or suckling mouths did. You cannot suck on signifiers, however, especially not ones that have no stability or meaning beyond how they have been contextually determined and subjectively articulated/invested in. They have as much “body” as a communion wafer. And it is we in this instance who give of our bodies and our drives to prop up the Other-God.

The significations into which we are initially interpellated (like sexual difference), are largely pre-scripted, received, and, thus, inauthentic. They encourage subjects to surrender their agency as

⁵ Althusser, *Writings on Psychoanalysis: Freud and Lacan*, 22.

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participants in signifying negotiations concerning Being and *jouissance*. These ready-made significations are what Lacan calls the “goods”; they circulate readily in the economy of desire (or should that be the socio-symbolic vocabulary of desire?) and are passed about like coins with eroded faces. The symbolic Other, like Judge Daniel Paul Schreber's God, seems a deity whose attention, outrage, and retribution we seem to attract when we seek to pursue divergent or unsanctioned pleasures.⁶ The subjective force of its sanction would alarm anyone tempted to deny its status as an omnipotent Other.

The Other's presence also means that any others we encounter appear magicked up, not quite real, “fleeting-improvised” men and women, as Schreber put it.⁷ That is to say that how we experience others is mediated through this God-Other. In Lacan's terms we rarely encounter others as fellow subjects (except in rare acknowledgements of shared subjugation to the Other).⁸ Instead, our experiences of them are unconsciously pre-determined; they act out roles and narratives stemming from our investment in the goods/significations on offer from the Other. Often, they are part of the goods themselves – wife, husband, boyfriend, girlfriend – signifiers seemingly of value owing to how they appear to be valued by the Other: symbolic commodities that, more often than not, fail to provide as much satisfaction as advertised. Rather than significant others, they are rendered significant objects. This can lead to veneration and/or degradation of others, depending on the way

⁶ Daniel Paul Schreber was a German judge who suffered a paranoid psychotic break. He is perhaps most well-known because he wrote a book detailing his psychotic beliefs entitled *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*. In this memoir, Schreber describes his idiosyncratic theology which included a jealous God resentful of Schreber experiencing desire for anything or anyone else. Both Freud and Lacan refer to his case and suggest that it reveals much about the typical functioning of the human psyche. Freud interprets the significance of Schreber's memoir in his 1911 essay entitled “Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia” while Lacan devotes much of his third seminar to an examination of the same.

⁷ Schreber, *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, 125; Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Psychoses (Vol. Book III)*, 274.

⁸ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Encore: On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge (Vol. Book XX)*, 85.

in which the “will” or law of the symbolic Other has been collectively and socio-historically characterised with regard to these “objects.”⁹

Sex does not, then, involve an other *as such*. Instead, it is an inauthentic act for a subject in which *he* or *she* pursues satisfaction only to see it slip further down a chain of signification that traverses the Other and that the subject cannot consciously follow. The symbolic Other’s predominant signification concerning sexual difference as the foundation of subjectivity and supposedly guaranteed route to *jouissance* and Being cannot stand the test: pleasure is revealed as only desire, the Good dissipates into goods, and the phallus becomes – all too quickly – simply a penis. *Jouissance* is elsewhere and the subject (in the midst of their inevitable disappointment) must begin their suspension of disbelief all over again (possibly “every day when one is young,” as Badiou suggests). None of the Other-discourse in which subjects have allowed their unconscious to become mired is capable of bringing them closer to *jouissance*. And, as Lacan reflects, life makes no sense if one gives ground on one’s *jouissance*.¹⁰ His meaning here is two-fold. On the one hand, life seems unsatisfying and purposeless (pleasure is compromised). On the other, Being (the “sense” we accord being) is also at risk.

Can anything be done to ameliorate what appears to be a hopeless situation? What routes might a subject follow to mitigate *his* or *her* lonely hamster wheel of disappointment and inauthenticity? And can a subject who manages to mitigate this pitiable state of affairs tell other subjects anything meaningful about it?

⁹ The extreme example that lays bare the extent to which others are in fact objects characterised by core significations negotiated with a symbolic Other is the Holocaust. There others were revealed as simply objects in a national and nationalistic narrative. Jewish people became significant to defining Germanness and Arianism until the Other invoked by Naziism demanded that even this object of pathological fascination be sacrificed so as to ensure absolute purity. Lacan suggests that it was this insatiable and unmeetable demand for an indefinable greatness of Being constituted through the symbolic Other that transformed that Other into a sadistic dark God with whom there was no negotiating. See Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (Vol. Book XI), 275.

¹⁰ Lacan & Swenson, “Kant with Sade”, 68.

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Some might suggest that there is the possibility of feminine *jouissance* beyond a preoccupation with a primary signification (most often characterised as phallic). This feminine *jouissance* would be a form of *jouissance* where Being did not depend on securing a seemingly lacking anchoring signification. In this hypothetical paradise a subject would be immersed in the slippage and play of signification, with multiple and manifold potential sources of *jouissance*. Indeed, the rhizomatic slippage and play itself might be suggested as the primary source of *jouissance* for such a subject. While Lacan does allow for such a form of *jouissance* in Seminar XX, I would argue that he does not envision it as truly possible for a subject. If one wanted to see such a path unproblematically celebrated, one would do better to take one's lead from Deleuze and Guattari.¹¹ Lacan, in my view, is far more measured and, on more than one occasion, suggests that this is not a viable route for a subject. In his *Four Fundamental Concepts*, he indicates that reducing the Other to the "universality of the signifier" and thereby trying to locate some sort of *jouissance* that transcends the Other *qua* seeming Other is a doomed enterprise.¹² He says that such a "position is not tenable for us" and argues that what results instead is an unanswerable and unnegotiable desire that demands "the sacrifice, strictly speaking, of everything that is the object of love in one's human tenderness."¹³ He also warns that a subject cannot "go to heaven, disembodied and pure symbol," even after analysis.¹⁴ Instead, analysis is a way for a subject to re-signify Being for themselves through a more authentic renewal of their "pathological truth" (via fantasy).¹⁵ This is a re-signification, not an abnegation of the responsibility to renegotiate

¹¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari challenge what they see as Lacan's misplaced obsession with lack in their *Anti-Oedipus* and celebrate the schizoid subject in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

¹² Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis (Vol. Book XI)*, 275.

¹³ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis (Vol. Book XI)*, 275.

¹⁴ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis (Vol. Book II)*, 325.

¹⁵ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis (Vol. Book II)*, 325.

a compelling primary signification for Being (and thereby provide for the possibility of an accompanying *jouissance*). I find it difficult, by contrast, to envisage what form Deluzean therapy might take or what it might look like if it were successful.

The contention of this paper is that there is another route by which a subject may escape the dissatisfaction and isolation brought about by sexual relationships or by relationships predicated on sexual difference. I locate this model most powerfully in the work of the surrealist artist Salvador Dali.

Dali is, of course, well known as a painter and as a surrealist artist. As a surrealist he was greatly influenced by the work of Freud. What is perhaps less well known is that Dali reflected on his own practice and fashioned his own psychoanalytic-based theories to describe it. Perhaps the most well-known of these is his paranoid-critical method for painting. Dali claimed that he could induce in himself a self-aware (or lucid, in the sense of lucid dreaming) paranoiac state. This state would allow him to consciously perceive in others, everyday objects, and landscapes, the unconscious associations and obsessive symbols that pervaded his subjectivity; to consciously follow the chains of signification underpinning his subjectivity beyond consciousness (to regain ground in terms of his *jouissance*). These associations and unconscious significations form part of a paranoid state because they threaten the autonomy and primacy of the conscious self. They appear (accurately) as determining rather than determined and imply that any meaningful subjective agency only occurs at an unconscious level. Such significations also threaten the desirability of the goods on offer from the symbolic Other, rendering them devalued currency, unreliable and insubstantial shadows.

I do not think it is a coincidence that Dali's paranoid critical method resembles in many ways Lacan's account of the imaginary order or that Lacan suggests that it is in paranoia that one can glimpse the constituent significations of a subject.¹⁶ I believe that both Lacan and Dali were aware of each other's work, and it is worth bearing in mind that Lacan's doctoral thesis dealt with paranoid delusion. In fact, I have contended

¹⁶ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Psychoses (Vol. Book III)*.

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elsewhere that Lacan may have borrowed more from Dali than Dali did from Lacan.¹⁷ Whatever the case, both Dali and Lacan suggest that the further one goes in approaching the primary signification underlying one's Being, the more anxious one becomes. For Lacan, this anxiety results from the unconscious awareness that there is, in fact, no privileged way of securing Being; any primary signification which attempts to bind being to meaning is ultimately arbitrary and always provisional (even where it is socio-culturally policed). He sees such anxiety being provoked by Dali's art where the viewer is confronted with a "paranoiac ambiguity" which symbolises the "function of lack" insofar as it destabilises reassuring commonplace significations.¹⁸ Lacan goes even further to suggest that Dali's art exposes the "phallic ghost" in this anamorphic way.¹⁹ In other words, Dali's work, for Lacan, is capable of suggesting both the presence and failure of any predominant anchoring signification, especially that predicated on sexual difference.

It might be said that Dali's work subverts the law and deserts the symbolic, instead re-entering an infantile imaginary realm, where signification is more idiosyncratic or singular and signifiers are experienced as literal and capable of offering literal satisfactions. In this realm the chances of obtaining *jouissance* increase tremendously. In Dali's work one can see him retreat back up the well-worn garden path down which the symbolic Other has led us all as subjects.

I am going to use, as instructive example of Dali's approach, a short written piece entitled "Reverie."²⁰ I find that this piece is an accessible entry point into Dali's artistic process. The work appears to relay the stream of consciousness which accompanies Dali's repose on a couch after lunch and includes an account of a masturbatory interlude.

¹⁷ Please refer to my dissertation *Paranoid metaphors: an examination of the discursive, theoretical and sometimes personal, interaction between the psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, the surrealist, Salvador Dali, and the English poet, David Gascoyne*.

¹⁸ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis (Vol. Book XI)*, 85.

¹⁹ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis (Vol. Book XI)*, 88.

²⁰ Dali, *Oui: the paranoid-critical revolution writings, 1927-1933*, 139-153.

He begins the piece by contemplating a paper he intends to write about spatial distortion and the Swiss painter Arnold Böcklin. His thoughts about this painter are accompanied and interrupted by a number of sensations, including a need to urinate, a series of erections, and sensual mastication. These sensations cathect and intermingle with fantasies drawn from his subjective history. His formative fantasies are also evoked by images from the famous paintings that occupy his thoughts. In “Reverie,” as in much of his artwork, the symbolic order becomes distorted: sense is overtaken by ambiguous or obsessive imagery and complicated by sensation. This piece of writing describes a solitary turn inwards and is accompanied by literal masturbation. I would contend, however, that there is a more profound form of “masturbation” going on here, one that resists or refuses the symbolic Other/order.

There is much in Dali’s piece that would have been found scandalous when it was published in 1931: the insertion of pieces of bread into his foreskin which he later consumes; the fantasy of sodomizing a 14-year-old girl among “excrement and rotten straw” with the permission of her mother as well as the voyeuristic pleasure at the thought of watching the same girl dirtying her feet.²¹ Dali is retreating from normative desires into subconscious fantasies, entering a subjective vocabulary of desire. In the process he forces established signifiers and images to carry the weight of his drives and their idiosyncratic and imaginary fantasmatic significations. He also deconstructs the dominance of genital pleasure by delighting in earlier divergent drives including the scopic, oral, and anal. This is masturbation *sans* phallus.

In Lacanian terms, he has withdrawn from the economy of the goods (small “g”) in order to envision and pursue his Good (big “g”) by means of his meditative reverie. Here are forms of desire and pleasure which cannot be readily exchanged or made equivalent. Indeed, in his retreat from the symbolic into the imaginary, his subjectivity comes to orbit an idiosyncratic libidinal investment. This image is a “small aluminium glass attached to a small chain” at a fountain surrounded by cypresses which he recalls from his childhood. In his fantasy, the girl he intends to sodomize drinks repeatedly from the glass, cleaning it in

²¹ Dali, *Oui: the paranoid-critical revolution writings, 1927-1933*, 153.

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between, bending forward and kneeling such that her buttocks show through her transparent clothing. Dali writes: "The time it takes for the three consecutive gestures of *emptying the glass* creates the illusion of a very clear and exact 'déjà vu' which coincides with a strong erection."²² It seems as if the uncanny and insistent nature of this image is itself part of what allows Dali to experience *jouissance*; not only does the imagery bound up in formative fantasmatic signification bring excitement but so too does the mode in which Dali engages with it. Here his libido is able to fixate on a single and singular image (a signifier as source of pleasure), as opposed to having to pursue substitutory figurative signifiers. This central image refuses and resists any symbolic slippage or *différance*, almost as if it were chained to a wellspring of *jouissance*.

This form of pleasurable fixation or obsession that escapes conventional sense is conveyed in the Lacanian concept of *Le Sinthome*. Lacan relates this concept to *Finnegan's Wake* by James Joyce, suggesting that Joyce found a way to manipulate English so that it could become part of his subjective fantasmatic idiom and, thereby, provide for his *jouissance*. This is particularly cheeky in terms of the Other, as it is a kind of public masturbation, in full view and defiance of the symbolic order. Joyce's signifiers do not circulate freely, nor do they keep their distance from the signified; they are more act than symbol. According to Lacan, in Joyce's novel, the signifiers "stuff the signified," becoming almost more images than symbols, turning public words into private fetish objects.²³ This is why Lacan asserts: "Joyce's work is not readable – it is certainly not translatable into Chinese."²⁴ He likens Joyce's writing to Freudian slips of the tongue in that it similarly alludes to another and more powerful level of subjective signification. Lacan even creates a play on Joyce's name to describe the way in which the author wrenches signifiers from the socio-symbolic order to make them accomplices of his singular *jouissance*: "Joy-issance". Lacan

²² Dali, *Oui: the paranoid-critical revolution writings, 1927-1933*, 150.

²³ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Encore: On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge (Vol. Book XX)*, 37.

²⁴ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Encore: On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge (Vol. Book XX)*, 37.

insists that “this joy, this *jouissance* is the only thing that we’re able to get a hold of in his [Joyce’s] text.”²⁵

I find Žižek’s work on the concept of *Le Sinthome* fascinating and of particular interest in linking it to Dali. As is the case with the image of the cup on a chain in Dali’s reverie, *Le Sinthome*, according to Žižek, is the point of reference that structures enjoyment for a subject. He defines it as a signifier that is no longer part of the circulation of signification, “floating” because it has become “permeated with enjoyment” beyond any traditional form of proportion or sense.²⁶ Žižek coins the phrase “Joui-sense” for the way in which it functions as it constitutes a subjective meaning that is not dependent on, or recognised by, the symbolic order.²⁷ The fact that it exists beyond sense also leads him to refer to it as “a kernel of idiotic enjoyment” that is mindlessly and obsessively repeated.

Žižek posits that *Le Sinthome* enables us to “pull ourselves out, to preserve a kind of distance from the socio-symbolic network” allowing us to become so “crazed in our obsession with idiotic enjoyment” that “even totalitarian manipulation cannot reach us.”²⁸ He also suggests that for the later Lacan the aim of analysis was not to free subjects to renegotiate with the symbolic order as Other. Instead, he argues Lacan came to a point where he wanted analysands to identify with the “pathological singularity on which the consistency of [their] enjoyment depends,”²⁹ thus enabling them to undertake an act that releases them from the symbolic network and social bond.³⁰ However, Žižek does seem fully convinced by the concept and can only redeem it by seeing in it a way of uniting people in resistance to fascist ideology. What his use of the concept neglects, however, is the highly subjective and idiosyncratic nature of *Le Sinthome*. I maintain that, instead, *Le Sinthome*, is essentially masturbatory, that even when it is put on public display, it is still ultimately about the singular pleasure of the author-

²⁵ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Sinthome*, (Vol. Book XXIII), 8.

²⁶ Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, 128.

²⁷ Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, 128.

²⁸ Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, 128.

²⁹ Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, 138.

³⁰ Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, 139.

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subject. In the symbolic order it makes no sense; it is the ultimate in-joke and appears idiotic and incomprehensible to others. Also, just as I think Lacan did not fully endorse feminine *jouissance* as a practicable route, I am convinced that neither he nor Dali would advocate that a subject become uncritically fixated by *le Sinthome*. I posit that both see it as a strategy, be it a creative or an analytical one.

Unfortunately, *le Sinthome* is, however, not a guarantee that one can elude the Other. Lacan was not insensible to the idea that subjective fantasies and fixations (idiosyncratic *jouissance*) can be made into, and available as, goods (the “G”ood marketed as “g”oods). Therefore, he offers a corollary to *le Sinthome*, namely the notion of “*lathouses*.”³¹ *Lathouses* is a portmanteau word “coined from the Greek *lethe* (forgetting), *aletheia* (truth), and *ousia* (being).”³² Justin Clemens points out it was also intended to remind Francophones of *ventouse*, an octopus sucker, suction cup, or cupping glass.³³ *Lathouses* are extracted (sucked) from the drives and imaginaries of subjects (especially through scientific studies and technologies) and fed or sold back to those subjects as routes to supposed *jouissance* in the marketplace of the Other. Of course, *lathouses* cannot really offer *jouissance* as that can only be provided by a subject locating a meaning for their being (thereby approaching the ultimate satisfaction of Being). However, Lacan suggests that *lathouses* come “pretty close” to being able to secure Being and can also generate the sort of anxiety that characterises the approach to primary significations.³⁴ Possibly this is because, at some point, *lathouses* were part of subjectively compelling fantasies before they were extracted and commodified. *Lathouses* imply forgetting (*lethe*) because they suggest to the subject that they need no longer engage in an authentic search for Being or *jouissance*; they can simply plug (it) in and play: “at the corner of every street, behind every window, this abundance of these objects designed to be the cause of

³¹ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis (Vol. Book XVII)*, 162.

³² Clemens, “The Virtual Extimacies of Cao Fei”, 201.

³³ Clemens, “The Virtual Extimacies of Cao Fei”, 201.

³⁴ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis (Vol. Book XVII)*, 162.

your desire, insofar as it is now science that governs it – think of them as *lathouses*.”³⁵

There are many examples of *lathouses* and the technologies that enable them or operate as them. One example might be the social media platform *Facebook*, where the curated subjectivities on display are the product and identification is encouraged. Another example might include the popularisation of fetishes and their ultimate anodyne commodification in works like the *Fifty Shades of Grey* series of novels and films.³⁶ The ultimate proliferation of *lathouses*, of course, must be a result of the internet. I am reminded here of the song by the American comedian Bo Burnham entitled “Welcome to the Internet”: “Could I interest you in everything? / All of the time? / A little bit of everything / All of the time / Apathy’s a tragedy / And boredom is a crime / Anything and everything / All of the time.”³⁷ Possibly a redeeming feature of *lathouses* is that they liberate subjects from the illusion that Being can only be realised through sexual difference by suggesting that *jouissance* can be varied and plethoric. However, they do so even as they fail to deliver any true *jouissance*.

What *lathouses* extract from us are not only our fantasies but also the impulse to fantasize, to engage in subjective reverie. As MacCannell puts it: “The globalized imperative to ‘enjoy’ what is already accumulated, already at hand, is precisely what blocks desire: we want want, we lack lack, we can no longer desire.”³⁸ As another commentator remarks, *lathouses* are the hallmark of capitalism and they ultimately lead to a breakdown in desire, much in the same way sexual relationships lead to emptiness and disappointment: “The consumer therefore continues to search for objects, but they absorb us rather than inspire us. This kills desire and as such, what really becomes consumed in capitalist

³⁵ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis (Vol. Book XVII)*, 162.

³⁶ *Fifty shades of grey*, published in 2012, is the first in a series of erotic novels by E.L. James that topped world best seller lists and popularised softcore bondage, discipline, dominance, and submission.

³⁷ Burnham, “Welcome to the Internet”, Disc 2, Track 4.

³⁸ MacCannell, “The Real Imaginary: Lacan’s Joyce”, 57.

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discourse is desire itself.”³⁹ The Good has become the goods. We have surrendered subjective agency and our responsibility as subjects. The world is more connected than it has ever been, and we can communicate anywhere at any time. Yet the experiences of emptiness, loneliness, and alienation are becoming more pronounced.

If one accepts that, as subjects, we are inevitably prevented from truly engaging with an other *qua* other and that we are destined to remain in negotiation with the symbolic Other when it comes to *jouissance* and Being, then Dali's masturbatory mode may offer a greater sense of vitality and connection than either sexual relations or *lathouses*. Dali as subject shows us how to refuse to cede our search for *jouissance* to any unsatisfying “partnership.” Dali hijacks public signifiers as fetish objects and troubles the symbolic order's assurances concerning the possibility of phallic *jouissance*. And, while his artworks are commodities, I would argue that their fantasmatic import have not become *lathouses* any more than *Finnegan's Wake* has become a suggested route to ready *jouissance*.

The point then is that, as beings that are also subjects, we may be feel less lost, lonely, dissatisfied, and alienated if we were to engage in our own fantasmatic reveries, in self-pleasure or self-constituting pleasure (which will also help our lives make sense). It may not be the case that we are too self-involved, at least not in the sense of being involved in a profound, critical, and authentic engagement with signifying our being. Instead, it is possible that we are too Other-involved and overrun with *lathouses* which include or lead to ready-made and hollowed-out identities, goods, and pleasures. When goods masquerade as Goods, *jouissance* recedes and, possibly worse, the capacity for *jouissance* is diminished. This is ironic when, at the same time, the world appears to suggest that everything that might provide pleasure is readily available (just so as long as we can afford it).

I maintain that Dali's form of masturbatory reverie and critical paranoid practice can counter this. Unconscious self-pleasure, if one can call it that, becomes a route to an experience of authenticity and attachment to the world. It is a refusal to be incorporated into a numbing

³⁹ Dulsster, “The Joke of Surplus-Value and the Guffaw Of The Saint”, 212.

economy of goods where *jouissance* is presented as cheap, even if it is not always inexpensive.

Eve Sedgwick asserts that masturbation is powerful because it escapes dominant narratives that assert the primacy of reproduction and interpersonal relations thereby demonstrating an “affinity” with “history-rupturing rhetorics.”⁴⁰ She claims that as a private traceless act it threatens “the orders of propriety and property.”⁴¹ It is an affront to the socio-symbolic order. Lacan and Dali offer us an even deeper of understanding the subversive nature of a subject retreating into fantasy and the imaginary, thereby refusing to adopt normative significations concerning *jouissance* (via which pleasure gives way to desire). My contention is that Dali’s approach is a remedy to the sort of disconcerting alienation and isolation experienced by those subjects who pursue normative satisfactions through to their certain failure. It is way to escape our inevitable (in Lacan’s account) existential loneliness that has been exacerbated by the contemporary and exponential proliferation of *lathouses*.

Some may argue that this assertion of subjective isolation in Lacan offers no real possibility for community or connections between subjects *qua* subjects. Indeed, it does not offer any significant opportunities for community, but it does suggest a form of comradeship. With his very public but also singular salvo across the bow of the Other, Dali’s creative work is heralding a form of resistance to the socio-symbolic Other. Lacan suggests that it is only in acknowledgement of their struggle against the symbolic Other that subjects can perceive one another as fellow subjects: “it is in their courage in bearing the intolerable relationship to the Supreme Being that friends recognize and choose each other.”⁴² Dali is a beacon of resistance against prescriptive humanization and the degradation of *jouissance*; he stands as an ally against, in the words of Louis Althusser, the “long forced march which makes mammiferous larvae into human children, *masculine* or *feminine* subjects”.⁴³

⁴⁰ Sedgwick, “Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl”, 821.

⁴¹ Sedgwick, “Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl”, 821.

⁴² Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge (Encore Edition) (Vol. Book XX)*, 85.

⁴³ Althusser, *Writings on Psychoanalysis: Freud and Lacan*, 22.

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In conclusion, this paper has tried to argue that masturbation ultimately provides for a less lonely experience than sex or relationships. It has also contended that reverie and fantasy, which it views as subjective forms of masturbation, offer a mode of resistance to socio-symbolic assimilation by means of singular or idiosyncratic attachments, obsessions, and significations. In this sense, “masturbation” becomes an authentic act of defiance for a subject. An act which can be profoundly productive while also laying bare the only basis for camaraderie between humans *qua* subjects. It is a way of standing one's ground when it comes to *jouissance* and suggests that, indeed, it is the singular who have all the fun.

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