

Erotics in Lacan's Schema L

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Abstract: *Lacanian theory of the subjective is based on the idea that Desire is a lack that arises in the subject in the process of introduction into the symbolic world of society where all interactions are mediated by language. The subject is evicted from the immediacy and intimacy of the world of the Mother and pushed into the symbolic world of the Father. The loss translates into a condition of lack and constitutes desire as a feature/faculty of the psyche. Desire resides in the unconscious where access to it is interpolated by language. Lacanian theory of the subject provides concepts allowing us to understand the mechanisms of desire and how they play out internally within the psyche as well as socially between subjects. A principal axis of these interactions is speech — connecting the individual to the social aspect of the psyche — the Big Other. Other such axes realize the function of imagination, sublimation and unconscious construction of a path of desire navigating the subject toward the Real. The Real is the lost world of the Mother, which had been once present at the time of birth, and which the subject attempts to recover. They are represented and described graphically in Lacan's Schema L where the main points of interest relate to language. The chief goal of the paper is to demonstrate how erotic experience participates in the structure of the subject and how it fits into the interactions of Schema L. Specifically, the erotic experience is found on the axis of interaction of the Real with object a (objet petit a). In order to relate erotics to performance arts (and dance specifically), we will situate the latter within Schema L as well..*

Keywords: *"object a", Lacan, erotic, "the Real", desire, symbolic, "imaginary relationship", "Schema L".*

1. Introduction

In Freud's theory (Freud, Freud Reader 1989) the subject of mental life constitutes itself in response to being immersed in social conditions as a sexual being. The individual — called the **subject** in psychoanalysis — emerges in the social world in the process of being separated from the embrace of the mother. He is forever losing the boundless intimacy of her embrace and is introduced into the world where all functions need to be performed according to the rules of the world. The definitive loss of the mother's embrace is felt by the subject as the lack marking his desire and directing his "drives" which are pathways toward the repair of the loss or restoration of the lost intimacy. Mostly, these pathways are plotted across the unconscious knowledge accumulated in the process of coming out of the mother's embrace and into the grip of the rules of the world. In Freud's theory, the subject chiefly falls on obstacles in efforts

to realize his sexuality as the world offers few solutions — unacceptable to many individuals. In the conflict between sexuality and society the “drives” become frustrated and repressed — meaning pushed down to reside in the unconscious.

Lacan formalizes and modernizes Freud's theory by shifting emphasis from sexuality toward language and the formalism of signification that pervades and conditions the mental aspects of functioning of individuals in the world. “Lacan's faithfulness to Freud produced something that goes way beyond Freud” writes Leupin (Leupin, p.xxiii) referring to his formal structuralist rigor which then yielded additional results like a mathematical theory.

This article is focused on the most structuralist aspect of Lacan — which is Schema L. In my view Lacan's achievement lies in a theory of the subjective rather than in developing clinical psychoanalytic techniques. Had he completely succeeded, his theory would be supported by solid mathematical constructs which are formalizations of fundamental intuitions. Lacan did not receive suitable support from actual mathematicians to achieve that.

Leupin aims to extract the most profound insights in Lacan's theoretical thought. Schema L is one of such attempts — and, in my view, is also the most important. I regard the work of Leupin as an attempt to formulate a Lacan doctrine, which is a teachable form of a theory, and to provide an outline of a handbook or manual. Leupin's book is like a handbook in that it firmly articulates major tenets of Lacan's theory of the subjective. I am aiming for a minor addition to his handbook, namely, situating the erotic within Schema L.

Lacan never mentions the erotic as a dimension of experience or mental life of the subject, consequently, there is hardly anything to quote from Lacan on the topic. Nevertheless, Lacan leaves the unlabeled arc in Schema L that seems to fit this function.

2. Schema L

Lacan introduced Schema L early on to illustrate the functioning of the psyche in its capacities of imaginary, symbolic and unconscious functions (Lacan, *Écrits*, Seminar on the Purloined Letter, p40). Schema L attempts to provide a view of interdependencies between these functions and a structural interpretation.

Schema L is a network structure representing the psychic organization of the subject that emphasizes the contrasts between what seems to be internal vs external and immanent vs transcendent. There are four nodes (in graph theory called “vertices”), with only some connected, representing positions of the subject. The links between nodes (in graph theory “edges”) are to represent mental functions of the subject.

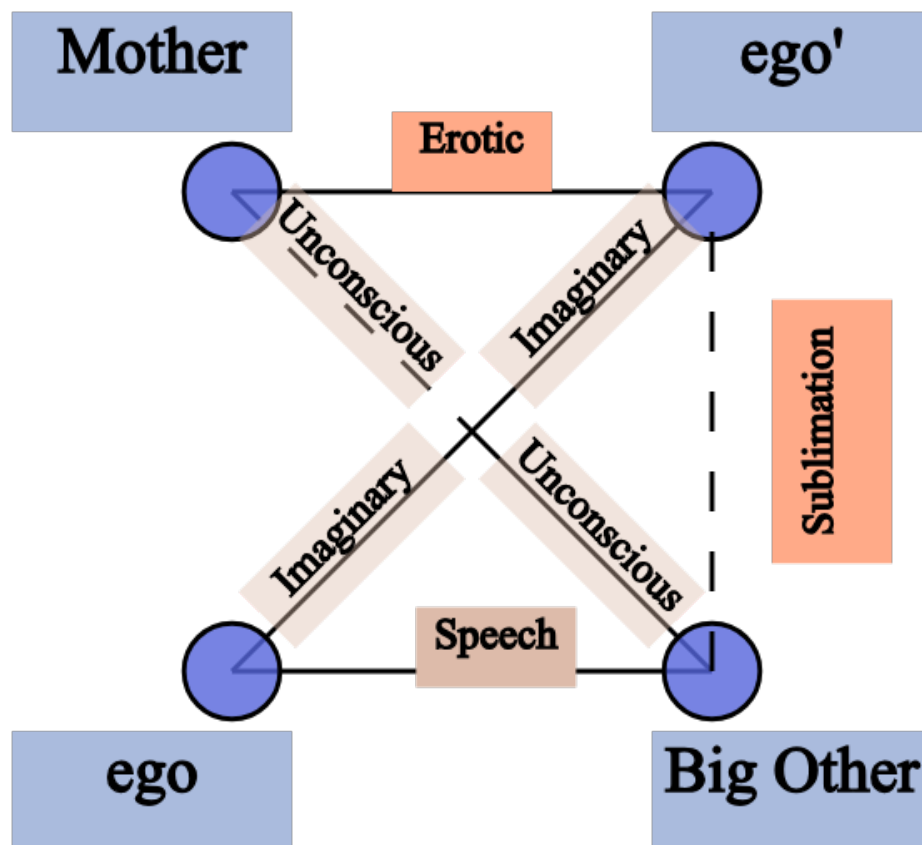


Figure 2 Lacan's Schema L. Legend of other terms approximately equivalent: Mother is also Desire, the Thing, the Real, id, Es, Sacred; ego is also Subject, I, Ich, \$; Big Other is also Logos, the Symbolic, l'Autre, Superego; ego' is also object a, constitutive of the Imaginary order, fetish, fantasy. In orange: two new labels introduced in this work: Erotic and Sublimation.

Let's start with the subject at the place of the *ego* or *I* — the lower left node, which is the place where the subject stands equipped with language to deal with the world. The subject comes to this place in the process of child development involving separation from the embrace of the mother — just like in Freud. The place of the Mother is in the upper left node. Lacan draws no link connecting the ego and Mother apparently to represent the finality of the separation.

The position of *ego* of ordinary experience where the subject is embedded in the world is seen as the world of speech — the Logos. I, the subject, need to present myself to the world using speech, adopt its techniques and acquire power to get what I want. The first words and formulas have been given to me by my mother — “I am a young boy, I am five years old.” Every day I learn more from the world and get more from it. At a point I learn that there is a documentation trail about my existence, that I am part of the Logos, that it creates stories about me and enforces rules about me. My *ego* is built up as a pact of coexistence with the Logos — the world of signifiers supported by language and speech.

The Logos is designated by Lacan as the Big Other or *l'Autre* (written with capital A or O) and is also called the Symbolic order. Within the Symbolic order the subject functions as an artifact of signification through language. The Symbolic order names objects, creates rules and

distinctions and so regulates access to objects that we want. It supports power and its institutions. It purports to provide pathways to fulfillment, but they are narrow and ultimately ineffective because they direct the subject toward signifiers buried in the unconscious. The process of creation of the ego by separation from the Mother assures that knowledge of desire is lost and needs to be rediscovered through the interaction with others — both in the guise of Big Other (Logos) as well as small other (*object a*, *ego'*). In Schema L, the Symbolic is represented by the node in the right bottom corner. Lacan frequently refers to the link between *ego* and Big Other as the function of language and speech.

The upper two nodes are positions where the subject touches immanence — we already mentioned the position of the Mother — an echo of Freudian ideas of return to the mother. More poignantly, the Mother represents the very touchstone of reality, as the place where being originates and quite possibly expires — without recourse to the world of signifiers. Lacan calls it the Real, the Thing and the place of Desire which now gets substituted for the Freudian Mother. Freudian “return to the Mother” becomes in Lacan a separation from the Mother which leaves the subject with a loss, which he attempts to fill throughout his life in the process of pursuing his Desire. I'll talk more about the Real in the following, as well as about the position of the *object a*, which I also wish to call *ego'*. This is the position of the harbinger of the Real that the subject senses through the Imaginary register which develops on the axis *ego* — *ego'*. In Schema L the Imaginary order connects the *ego* not with the Big Other but with the *ego'* or *object a* placed in the upper right corner. *ego'* and its function is the main topic of this article.

The diagram in Fig. 1 introduces the additions to Schema L proposed here. The arc between the *ego'* and Mother/Desire is labeled as **Erotic** since, as will be argued, it corresponds to our grasp of this concept. A by-product of our considerations we have a new arc and label — **Sublimation** — designating the process where *ego'* is elaborated by the Symbolic order.

3. Oedipal eviction

Lacan sees the process of separation from the mother as fundamentally shifting the subject from the sexual reality of being a child toward the Symbolic world from where the subject needs to find a way to inhabit his sexual being — among other matters of desire. The intimacy with the mother disappears as a consequence of the process of initiation into the world of language. Language, speech and the law — the Symbolic order — are the new external systems that the subject is expected to embrace. One could say that an *extimacy* with the Logos replaces the intimacy with the Mother and that sexuality tends toward the Symbolic — becoming a feature of the Logos. This is the Oedipal cut where the mother is actually the one that pushes the child subject away from herself toward the Logos in a way evicting him from the place of original intimacy. The eviction from the mother and initiation into the Symbolic and Imaginary order set the young subject on the path of reconstruction of the lost intimacy. This eviction or estrangement from the unified mother-child body proceeds gradually at the same time that the reconstitution along other paths is being prepared.

The Symbolic order is predicated on distinction and difference (Leupin, p13) — as it is the space of language and the law. Yet, as the introduction into the Symbolic is the main mechanism of repression, much of its content is placed in the unconscious. Lacan has famously stated: “the unconscious has the structure of language.” (Lacan, public statements)

However, this also means that much of what the subject knows and desires cannot be uttered unless it happens in the discourse of dreams or in a psychoanalytic session. Lacan posits that the

Symbolic order hosts a master signifier residing in the unconscious and inaccessible to ordinary discourse. The master signifier — also called the Phallus — is the key that answers to the subject's mental structure — aka his Desire. Since this key signifier is unavailable it is seen as the signifier of what is missing — that it is the signifier of Lack. Therefore Desire is constituted by the Lack proceeding from the insufficiency of the Symbolic order. (Lacan, *Écrits*, Signification of the Phallus, p. 685).

4. Mirror stage and the gaze — awareness of the body

Apart from speech, the subject — as a child — acquires the awareness of the body. Initially, the subject's body is not strongly differentiated from the body of the mother. It emerges from the intimacy with the mother, originating in the deep sexual intimacy of gestation in the womb and birth. However, when the child subject's awareness grows, the relationship with the mother recedes further into the background — it slips away and becomes the material of the unconscious.

The acquisition of body awareness proceeds through the “mirror stage” and happens in concert with the acquisition of speech and symbolic system during the withdrawal of the mother's body. (Lacan, *Écrits*, Mirror stage as Formative of the I Function, p75)

The mirror stage is the point where the subject, upon seeing the body in a mirror reflection, realizes that he is seen. The subject realizes that he has an image. This comes with an element of jubilation. Lacan says: “The jubilant assumption of his specular image (...) seems to me to manifest (...) in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form.” (Lacan, *Écrits*, Mirror stage as Formative of the I Function, p76) The awareness of being seen and of having an image reinforces the position of the other as the seeing other — in addition to the speaking/symbolic Big Other. Lacan posits the relationship with the seeing other as the imaginary relationship. The subject is seen — but the seeing other is also seen by the subject. The gaze, thus established, is reciprocal as the subject being seen constructs the imaginary other as an object of the gaze.

The subject discovers the capacity of seeing other individuals in the world and treating them as objects of the gaze. These objects are designated by Lacan as *object a* (small a for *le petit autre*). The relationship based on seeing/being seen dynamic is the foundation of the Imaginary order — the second component of the psyche after the Symbolic. The *ego* subject (that is subject in the mode of the *ego*) relates to *ego*’ on the basis of similarity rather than distinction.

Thus the *ego* subject, after being evicted from the body of the mother, is placed on two tracks — the Symbolic, which leads toward the Logos, and Imaginary, which is the track of Eros, as I shall shortly argue.

In his essay “Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in Hamlet” (Lacan, 1977) Lacan lays out the status of *object a* and the principles of entanglement of the Symbolic and Imaginary order on the basis of Shakespeare's Hamlet where he places the chief protagonist in the position of the *ego* subject. This is the closest he comes to addressing the erotic. After asserting that Ophelia is Hamlet's *object a*, he says:

With respect to the object a, at once image and pathos, the subject feels himself to be in an imaginary situation of otherness. This object satisfies no need and is itself already relative, i.e. placed in relation to the subject. (...) the subject is present in the fantasy. And the object is object of desire only by virtue of being the end-term of the fantasy. The object takes the place (...) of what the subject is — symbolically — deprived of.

The last formulation is repeated again in the next paragraph. (p.15) The *object a* is the focus of the search for the lost object of primordial relations. What the Mother has purged away pushing the child subject toward the Symbolic has reappeared in the Imaginary. Indeed, a few pages later, Lacan asserts that Ophelia is the “O phallos” — the surrogate phallus or master signifier (p. 20), and that the *object a* is not so much an object of desire as object **in desire**. (p.28) The *object a* is partaking in desire as it marks the “immanent presence of the phallus” (p.34).

5. The reciprocity of the gaze

The gaze is mutual — because it is based on the similarity principle rather than the symbolic designation. The subject as the *ego* is aware of being seen by the other in the capacity of *object a* — or as *ego*’. Unlike the Big Other, which purports to lay out the interaction in the articulation of speech and partially answers the question “what do you want?” within the Symbolic order, the *object a*, or *ego*’, appears to see, or potentially sees, something beyond the symbolic articulation of the subject. The aspect being seen is an unspeakable fascination that *ego*’ potentially harbors for *ego* proper. By the mutuality of the gaze, the ego subject also develops a fascination with *ego*’. This can be captured in the formula:

Since you see me like I cannot see myself, then I see you the way you cannot see yourself.

The gaze is a peekaboo game in which both sides imagine to discover something about each other that is otherwise impossible, impossible within the Symbolic order.

What is it about oneself that the *ego* (or *ego*’) subject cannot see? It is the connection to the lost intimacy of the child-mother relationship, the vestiges of that relationship that *ego* still holds on to. The mutuality of the gaze permits the *ego* to see the stem of that lost primordial (pre-Oedipal) immanent world in the *ego*’.

The gaze is always going to capture a partial view, as it is obstructed by the symbolic apparatus of the ego. The lost primordial world is already indicated by the broken symbolic path of unconscious knowledge. It is also negatively indicated by the mother evicting the child from her embrace into the Symbolic order as a young *ego*. *ego*’ becomes the glimpse of the world of the primordial intimacy.

These three points: *ego*, symbolic unconscious and *ego*’ — are the vantage points into what Lacan calls the Real order and which I have provisionally termed as the primordial intimacy. That last path of accessibility of the Real I will call the Erotic.

The Real is where the lost intimacy resides. In Schema L it is located in the left upper node — already known as the Mother. The Real is the locus of Desire, which is described by the master signifier of lack, the lost object in the process of initiation into the Symbolic order, and accessible apparently through the imaginary *ego*’.

Lacan did not really offer any name for the path I presently call Erotic, but nevertheless the link connecting *ego*’ and the Real is always drawn without much commenting. What is not drawn is the edge representing the vantage point of the ego into the Real on the left side of the diagram — vertically connecting. However, the Real-*ego* edge is quite much talked about as the vector of eviction of a young *ego* from the Mother’s body. Perhaps the absence of the edge is designed to indicate the gravity and finality of this eviction.

6. The Real

The Real is more than the primordial intimacy. “The Real is not an agency or an order; it is a set whose contents are unknown.” (Leupin, p16) Lacan uses the Freudian concept of *das Ding* (eng. the Thing) to introduce the concept of the Real in Seminar VII (Lacan, Seminar VII, The ethics of psychoanalysis). He contrasts the world of representation, in play in the Symbolic and Imaginary orders, with the nature of the Real as the inexorable “need to live” or in German “*Not des Lebens*.” He says: “*Das Ding* is the primordial function that is located at the level of the initial establishment of the gravitation of the unconscious *Vorstellungen*.” (eng. representations) (Lacan, Seminar VII, The ethics of psychoanalysis, p62) The Real exists beyond the conscious and unconscious representations of the Symbolic order and beyond the intuitions of the Imaginary order. It is the space where the signifiers are struggling to deploy. Lacan uses St Paul’s Epistle to the Romans — substituting the Thing for the Law (Lacan, Seminar VII, The ethics of psychoanalysis, p83):

But the Thing finds a way by producing in me all kinds of covetousness thanks to the commandment, for without the Law the Thing is dead. But even without the Law, I was once alive. But when the commandment appeared, the Thing flared up, returned once again, I met my death. And for me, the commandment that was supposed to lead to life turned out to lead to death, for the Thing found a way and thanks to the commandment seduced me; through it I came to desire death.

The Real is the sense of the ultimate condition of life which appears as unfathomably grounded in the experience of the body yet also placed beyond the direct grasp of that experience. Of course, two types of events of life that slightly evade the grasp of experience are birth and death. And both of them relate to the more reachable experiences of sex and violence.

The Real hosts the limit experiences, which cannot be easily had or repeated without risk of destruction and those that are not easily amenable to representation. The Real order hosts the Desire which itself is a symbolic Lack, a Lack that cannot be approached without risk of destruction.

However, the Erotic is not like that.

The imaginary *ego*’ displays glimpses of reality of life in fragments — objects — that are consumed by the gaze. These can be incomplete fragments of the body, like eyes, lips, buttocks, feet, fingers and certainly genitals, — with special attention given to creases, openings and folds of the body that veil the Real and yet promise to reveal it — armpits, groin, hands, arms, breasts. It is not just the actual flesh that functions as a lure of the gaze but its ornaments — clothes, shoes, jewelry, eyewear, surroundings of the body — domestic or theatrical. In other words the *ego*’ is a lure that generates fetishes — objects that function outside of the body to grant it meaning. The objects of the gaze external to the body become its extensions — and are quite often actual prosthetic devices — like shoes and eyeglasses.

To be sure, since the imaginary axis connects *ego* and *ego*’ in a mutual fashion, the subject as *ego* engaging in the imaginary function will easily engage in the behaviors he sees in *ego*’. *ego*’ is the shining lure of the Real beckoning to proceed along a path not provided by signifiers from the Symbolic. This lure, in what is now called the Erotic, illuminates the path toward the Real. The imaginary objects on the Erotic track are magnetized by the presence of the Real rather than mobilized by the Symbolic.

7. Literary realizations of the *ego* — *ego*' imaginary relationship

Similar to Lacan's exploration of Hamlet, I can think of many well-known examples in literature where the imaginary relationship is in play. Literary creators, authors of novels, have had the intuitive insights into the workings of the human psyche before and outside psychoanalytic theories. The elements of Schema L can be seen at work in the many literary examples reaching much greater length than exceeding the space of this article. I'll mention works such as "Great Gatsby", a 1920s novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald, Bram Stoker's novel "Dracula" (published 1897), "The Age of Innocence," by Edith Wharton, published in 1920 — all dated within the age of Freud and Lacan.

One example stands out for me as a vivid elaboration of Schema L. Leo Tolstoy's well-known novel "Anna Karenina" (published 1878) presents a near perfect example of the whole Schema L. Anna is settled in St Petersburg with her husband, Karenin, a successful government official, and their young child. She is well settled in the sense of the subject being invested in her *ego* and the Symbolic order. Yet she is not satisfied with her life and is seeking for something. She travels to Moscow to visit with her family and friends. The moment of arrival is very telling. When the train arrives she briefly meets the eye of her future lover, Vronski, of whom she had heard but who is at the station due to another arrangement. Yet something else happens — as if the genius of the writer had an intuition of Schema L. A railroad worker is crushed by the wheels of the train by unfortunate accident — a worker she also had glanced at earlier. The worker was checking the axles of the train cars while she saw his gleaming eyes on a face darkened by coal dust and oil, and hardened by work. That was the Real — the Real which she could not pursue directly. The gaze toward Vronski was also a glance into the Real. To complete the scene, Vronski, being an army officer in uniform, takes command of the situation after the deadly accident.

Vronski is Anna's *ego*' and leads inexorably toward the Real. Once, during the brief initial encounter at the railway station disturbed by the accident. Second, by taking charge and ordering some disposition in the situation post-accident. Third, by being Anna's actual *ego*' that leads her into the disastrous romance ruining her family life and leading her to suicide under the wheels of a train. Vronski is the *ego*' that leads Anna on the path of the Erotic into her death which is the impossible completion of her Desire.

8. Dance and performance arts

Performance arts operate combining the Symbolic and the Imaginary order and exhibiting the *object a*. As the Imaginary is governed by similarity rather than distinction, the subject can access *object a* via the gaze rather than language. This path avails the subject with the capacity of *object a* to unveil the numinosity in which it is rooted — this is erotic ideation. It is especially apparent in dance arts which always reach toward a strong exhibition of the body and its movement which outweighs the presence of signifiers in contrast to theater, which sends the signifiers ahead of the body on the stage.

In addition to being the carrier and exhibitor of *object a*, the body is also the ground of experience. Merleau-Ponty in the "Phenomenology of Perception" talks about the body:

The body therefore is not one more among external objects, with the peculiarity of always being there. If it is permanent, the permanence is absolute and is the ground for the relative permanence of disappearing objects, real objects. The presence and absence of external objects are only variations within a field of primordial presence, a perceptual domain over which my body exercises power. (Merleau-Ponty, p.105-106)

This “field of primordial presence” corresponds to and confirms what Schopenhauer calls the “objectivity of the will” manifested by the presence of the body (Schopenhauer, p100). The body appearing in dance arts, with the significance of the ground of experience, imports a lot of signifiers through the imaginary function of the subject — a lot of material for constructing *ego*. Furthermore, the body, by virtue of movement, multiplies its presence and interrogates its variability. Erin Manning quotes Brian Massumi on this topic:

“When a body is in motion,” writes Massumi, “it does not coincide with itself. It coincides with its own transition: its own variation.... In motion, a body is an immediate, unfolding relation to its own nonpresent potential to vary” (Manning, Kindle Locations 497-498).

The dancing body positions the subject in the place of *object a* and amplifies its imaginary functions. Let us look at a few specific examples situating dance in the understanding of Schema L.

9. Butoh and expressionism

The Japanese dance art of Butoh developed after World War II sourcing its inspiration to both traditional Japanese theater and performance art and German expressionism. The chief method of performance is a mental transformation of the body into another body, perhaps dead or nonhuman, and presenting dance according to inner landscape thus developed. The founders of the form talked about the mental condition required for the performance as *Ankoku* — which means transport to the place where the living meet the dead, a place of very special spiritual qualities.

A founding Butoh artist, Natsu Nakajima, talks about *Ankoku*, while opposing it to the “dualism of the Occidental culture”:

I am bewitched, not by the scriptural quest in the field of language, but rather, by learning in the field of the body (Nakajima)

Further, “*Ankoku Butoh* (...) is based on the eastern belief of body-mind/body-heart unity. We hold the belief of the total body and the view of “body as the scene of a full life.” (Nakajima)

She recalls the Butoh master Tatsumi Hijikata speaking of the necessity to “shed the skin of our body that has been tamed and domesticated” and refers to “the body that becomes nothing.” (Nakajima)

We can very clearly discern the interest in the imaginary function, based in the dancing body, and keeping the Symbolic order at bay. The imaginary body becomes “the ego” that facilitates the transformation into full life or into nothingness — a place beyond language which we know as the place of Desire or the Real. The Butoh project is thus an erotic project in the sense of the enhanced Schema L.

A Butoh dancer and author, Sondra Horton Fraleigh, talks about expressionist and modern dance connections of Butoh in her book “Dancing into Darkness” (Fraleigh). She acknowledges and elaborates the conflict between the Japanese and Western view of the sublime, where the latter sees it as an overcoming of the body. The Japanese aesthetic would see it in a surrender to the force of nature. She also contrasts “*Sankai Juku's* aesthetic with the sexually conflicted

sublime of the German expressionist Pina Bausch” whereas Sankai Juku, a renowned Butoh dance company, practices shibui — a Japanese quality of sublime, claimed to be “nondualistic.” (Fraleigh, p66)

The work of Pina Bausch, by contrast to Sankai Juku, is full of brutal gendered conflict. Specifically, in the *The Rite of Spring* (1975) production of Pina Bausch:

The thrall of her works summons a terrible sublime. Her aesthetic is not beautiful, nor does it produce the pleasure with associate with this term. She exploits the terror of male impotence in the face of feminine sexuality and plays upon cruelty in both sexes. The virgin's blood sacrifice, her dualistic awakening and resistance, is epitomized in Bausch's riveting choreography. (Fraleigh, p74)

The dancer performing the virgin sacrifice dance of death is reported speaking about her performance: “I really dance in *Sacre*, I dance until I die.” (Fraleigh, p74)

There is a psychological mounting and surmounting of energies, but no sublime overcoming of the body by the mind. There is fate, and there is nature's powerful approach. Spring pulses in the blood. The timpani builds to a breaking point, as the dancer pitches forward. She plunges face down like a piece of timber in the silent air. No one stirs after her fall. (Fraleigh, p74)

This is a palpable scene of the consumption of an individual life by the Real, seen as indomitable force of nature.

In contrast, the “dualistic” overcoming of the flesh is apparent in ballet. As a side topic, Fraleigh also mentions Balanchine who commented that “ballet is a garden of beautiful women and I am the gardener.” (Fraleigh, p76) This is in line with the view of the sublime where “the body is the vehicle of the sublime, but only as it is surpassed. Thus the sublime signals a triumph of reason, or mind over body — a mind that is more than merely mental, one that takes pleasure in both concealing and elevating its power over nature.” (Fraleigh, p77)

I am not taking part in the above discussion, but merely exhibiting it in order to show dance through the lens of the Lacanian Schema L concepts discussed here. There is a search for the sublime and the erotic: masculine *jouissance* as well as sacrifice to force of nature that can be equated to a consuming desire that results from identification with *ego*. In the words of Nakajima we can read attempts to articulate the magnetic attraction of the Real that motivates the erotic. In the work of Pina Bausch we read a struggle and surrender to the erotic force leading to the Real through sacrifice. On the other hand, Balanchine, in his words, gives a very good expression of the symbolic function process capturing the inscrutable Real in the network of sublimation in contrast to Bausch's confrontation of the imaginary *ego* with the reality of sex and death.

10. Argentine Tango

Argentine Tango is a social partner dance that follows a very specific technique. It is mostly talked about as embrace where the two dancing partners approach each other physically and maintain a space where their interaction unfolds. The dancers state:

Central to the art of tango is the embrace, a fundamental component that sets it apart

from other dance forms. The embrace in tango is not merely a physical gesture but a profound means of communication and connection between partners. (Ultimate Tango)

While the dance is improvised, it follows certain rigorous technical precepts and happens in close physical contact unusual for social dance. The embrace extends beyond the dancing itself into the culture of courtship and partner selection. The space created by the embrace is charged with meaning supplied by this cultural environment. The dancers play with distance and closeness where they create staging for the gaze and sensual pleasure demarcated by the structure of the dance. The music and the lyrical content of the songs adds the context of a romantic gendered love relationship as well as erotic tension. We can see the embrace as having a Symbolic function securing the dancing couple outwardly and embedding it in a culture. Along with the technique it provides rich equipment for masculine, symbolic *jouissance*.

The improvised dance occurring inside the embrace realizes the lures and promises of the imaginary body precisely in the manner of the erotic function leading ego toward the place of Desire. Denniston says:

Tango took place not on the level of the floor, but on the level of the hearts. The movement of the feet was a symptom of the movement of the hearts, caused by it, not causing it. It was the followers heart that danced. The leader's job was to make that happen. (Denniston, p30)

In tango the dancing body is the *object a* that opens the gates of Desire seen as romantic love relationship enacted as an imaginary process.

11. Eroticism vs Sublimation and Exoticism

So far we have elaborated two paths to the Real available to the *ego* subject. One is the path of the Symbolic — through speech the subject can inhabit the Logos and allow himself to follow his Desire through unconscious mental mechanisms. The other is the path of the Imaginary: where the subject generates an *object a* through the gaze — seeing in it something that he himself has lost. That object of the gaze is already partly-immersed in the immanence of Desire and attracts the *ego* subject as well as feeds off of him.

However, the Imaginary and Symbolic paths interact at the midpoint before meeting in the place of Desire. Schema L shows plainly the nodes of Big Other and *object a* as initially unconnected, but it is really there that the interaction takes place. I think this is the sublimation that Lacan talks about in Seminar VII. He says that sublimation “raises an object to the dignity of the Thing” (Lacan, Seminar VII, The ethics of psychoanalysis, p112) surrounding the definition with examples from old literature and history of “courtly love.”

Sublimation is the Logos “gazing” at *object a* and converting it into object of beauty. The subject in the place of Logos must justify its gaze, he must not remain silent in awe in front of a noumenal appearance of *object a*. The gaze from the vantage point of the Symbolic order is about production of art. The language resident in the Symbolic is used to attribute, via the resources in the unconscious, a sublime character to *object a*. The term sublimation is correctly chosen as it's associated with the movement upward, where the subject in the Symbolic elevates himself to a place impossible to occupy. The inverse of sublimation I would call exoticism, which signifies a movement downward where object *a* is reluctant to descend. In exoticism the *object a* is debased

rather than elevated.

Kelley Ross presents a classification of levels of value and levels of knowledge in his dissertation "The Origin of Value in a Transcendent Function" (Ross, 1985). This great post-Kantian theory is pronouncedly a theory of the structure of the Logos. One of the levels of value is beauty which is ranked just below the sacred. It is very much like *object a* being the vestibule of the Real. He considers two principal types of beauty: sublime and erotic, in his discussion of aesthetic attributes (Ross, note on erotic art). The sublime is the elevation of beauty to the level of the sacred. About the erotic he says: "erotic and carnal images and situations have a power, tending even to the numinous, that has spawned various sorts of taboos and special institutions over the centuries"

Hence, about erotic — there is not much that the Logos has to say, other than — it can go too far in the direction of base instincts. Psychoanalytically, we would say it would go too far in the direction of gratuitous unveilings of the phallus.

Given these two types of beauty identified in a solid theory of the Logos I would not hesitate to label the upper edge of Schema L as erotic and the vertical connecting *object a* and the Big Other as sublimation (along with its inverse).

12. The ancient theory of Eros

In ordinary modern usage the term *erotism* (or *erotics*, *eroticism*) signifies acts, thoughts that satisfy the sexual desire which is anything driven by the reproductive instinct and libido. It is worthwhile to recount here some of the underpinnings of our present theory that can be found in the notions of the ancients.

Ancient Greeks, from whom we have adopted the term, considered Eros as an avatar of Love, Love achieved in variety of ways — including sexual acts. This is consistent with the present theory of the erotic gaze since Love is a condition where the gaze guarantees access to the Real and accompanies the subject in the transport to it. The loved subject is fully seen — truly *witnessed* — by the other (*ego*, *object a*) in the approach to the Real, which Lacan calls *jouissance*. The loving gaze is a full gaze. It is a condition where the subject is denuded of signifiers and ready to be consumed by his Desire and yet is holding on to the gaze that set him off on the journey of Eros.

Aphrodite and Eros — the primordial couple of Greek mythology — represent the reality of sexual desire and the complexity of the path toward its fulfillment, respectively. According to the foundational myths in Hesiod's *Theogony*, Eros was one of the first four gods while Aphrodite was born from the sea as a result of castration of the sky god Uranos. Aphrodite is the eternal, and unconstrained by anything, Real whereas Eros is the primordial force of love with his bow and arrows provoking love's incidents. In Lacanian view, Eros aligns with the gaze.

13. Conclusion

I have shown here a Lacanian perspective on the relationship between *object a* and the Real and given arguments to identify it as the Erotic link. It is a capacity that a subject develops as a result of Oedipal eviction and mirror identification.

Art uses the symbolic to arrive at *object a* through sublimation, but the object is known through the imaginary relationship supported by the gaze. Nevertheless, the object *a* is the core plan of all artistic endeavor as a convergence point of the imaginary and symbolic paths. Art as

such is characterized by object *a* and by the three paths that touch it — imaginary, sublime and erotic.

The essence of erotics is the transport toward the immanent Real that is offered by *object a*. This erotic capacity of *object a* can function quite apart from sublimation and, based on the imaginary relationship, implement object fascination.

Reaching a bit beyond the material of this article, I would comment on the opposition of the erotic edge on Schema L to the speech edge. In my view, this is the opposition between the categories of transcendence and immanence where speech reflects an interaction between transcendent personas whereas erotism is an interaction between personas attempting to embrace the immanence of the Real.

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