

Lars von Trier's *Nymphomaniac: Vol. 1* as psychotherapy manual

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Abstract Manuals for clinical practice arrive in numbers and in force, threatening the first of the particular with the first of a philosophy. Yet the individual with no manual but his/her own particularities is likely to suffer and make others suffer. Thus, respect for the quest to discover a manual coupled with persistence in rejecting all that come along seems a responsible course of action. If this struggle is embraced, it may generate a fecund state of mental tension, prone to surprises and sudden inspirations, which the writer calls *dii-consciousness*. For a dii-conscious clinician, manuals for treatment exist like violets in the wild. One searches and picks; the flower wilts, is discarded; one walks on and more are found. The author plucks a treatment manual from the film under discussion, considering diagnosis, theory, and practice in detail. Yet this manual must be discarded on the path, its truth no preservative against wilting.

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Pornography as Manual

Lars von Trier's *Nymphomaniac: Vol. 1* (2013) is pornographic – if what that means, for starters, is that the sex is not represented but shown. No common film code, like a dropped camisole, ankles interlocking, slow fade; no, we *see* the sex. All the sensitive things go into the other sensitive things, thence into our eyes. If we flinch in reaction, who would blame us, since, though pornography comes in various forms, the following might be fixed points in the Western version: ugliness, debasement, cruelty. We know these as the dark stars most charted from the way the film was advertised, even from the title's salacious parentheticals (“*Nymph()*maniac”), which aim our senses at

what we expect to encounter, dread to, hope to, that adrenalized cavity searching that sets the controls for the heart of the void.

Check out Lars von Trier, though; this *Nymphomaniac: Vol. I*, the way he does it, is beautiful. Tender. Delicate, even. I am not referring to some special quality in the camera work, a lyrical cinematography capable of transforming the shown sex so that it leaves the constellation of conventional pornography; on the contrary, if excerpted and shown on a pornography website, the film's sex would register for visitors as common fodder. This is our impetus, then: the perhaps untenable statement that the film's pornography, though formally a match to common pornography, is phenomenally different, such that a new, light and descriptive ternary (beautiful, tender, delicate) comes to exist simultaneously with the old, dark one (ugliness, debasement, cruelty). Thus it would seem that von Trier has manufactured the pornographic junctures in his film like the double-splits in a quantum mechanical experiment, so that what was singular and common going through is dual and impossible coming out. If so, and if we persist in this metaphor of English scientist Thomas Young's famous dual-slitted interferometer, the pornography of *Nymphomaniac: Vol. I* is both the "common particle" (thus far in Western culture, human sex photographed and projected must pass through the single slit of ugliness, etc.) and "the interference wave" (in the instance of this film, human sex photographed and projected passes here through double slits, producing both dark and light bands). Essential to hold in mind is that particle and wave are not parts constituted to form light but are – in the wonderful way that quantum reality reveals the limits of our Newtonian common sense – two things that are one thing: light. So though we propose that *Nymphomaniac: Vol. I* is a phase-shifter, a duality-conjuring engine, capable of producing both darkness and light, its products are still only one thing: pornography.

So, though I have risked borrowing a metaphor from science, I do not mean to sanitize our area, to deconstruct the film as some booster for the innocent in us all or a humanist re-educative experience. Von Trier is not to become the Anne Geddes of adult sexuality. This is pornography – yet the act of showing sex has been *reproduced* but not *repeated*. And so a bizarritiy. Something we know from science fiction, religion, quantum physics – but to find it here in the quotidian, that is doubly strange. And yet...what if we could make it ordinary? Wouldn't we want this and want it every day? An irreconcilable split comes together at once in a non-transformative transformation such that the integrity of the entity is protected while its complex nature is revealed. Couldn't one call this "therapeutic action"? And maybe it is von Trier's film that contains the method of such unmaddening madness. Should it be, then surely it is a process better imagined as Welsh occultist John Dee's alchemical chamber than Young's dual slits. Typical shit turned to rare gold, a circumstance demanding our attention, even if only to debunk the magic and hoard the product – for surely we are asking, *How did he do this to shit?*, even as we bite the gold.

To draw you into my investigation I must provide something better than adjectives: ideally, some *representation* we can share for mutual “showing”, rather than just me “telling.” This is essential since you may not have seen *Nymphomaniac: Vol. I*, or, even if you have, we may disagree about the pornography. But this is easier said than done, since this constellation named “Contemporary Western Pornography” is so lightless, so thoroughly black-holed. Of course, the lack of a ready representation is parcel to my point, that von Trier’s pornography is new under the sun. Yet I have found something. Unfortunately, it is going to cost me some 1,000 words *about another film* in order to render the representation useful. So, before we commit to this mutual “showing,” let me attempt to remove what foreseeable obstacles I can with this brief “telling”: a propaedeutic on von Trier and *Nymphomaniac: Vol. I*.

Lars von Trier is the Danish film director whose provocative ways of being in the world and dangerous methods for directing films often receive more attention than his products. He is fascinating – an infamous sadist to his actors, yet many Hollywood stars seek a tour of duty; a celebrity sufferer of severe depression and advocate for psychotherapy; a man who, sitting beside American actor Kirsten Dunst at the Cannes Film Festival in 2011, made a statement expressing sympathy for Adolf Hitler in his manner of dying (this is not the place for this; it will distract us; but the actual quote suggests, in addition to overwhelming provocation, a fearsome humanism rarely encountered – please consider for yourself at Shoard, 2011) – yes, all this, but even so, he is by no means more fascinating than his films.

Imagine if the spa industry offered some negative of a massage, a homeopathic beating that left you muscularly degenerated, spiritually exhausted, and possibly permanently injured – yet also grimly satisfied. Von Trier’s films are like that and more, since they entail the bonus question: *Why am I satisfied by being beaten?* Then a bigger bonus: the answer is not some pat masochism but knowledge that the beating beat into you an awareness about existence without which you had been able to succeed in fooling yourself. Given such densities and the requirement of some self-sacrifice, it is naturally easier not to think about the films in depth nor strive to speak of them thoroughly, and instead to focus on the man responsible and “choose a side.”

Regarding *Nymphomaniac: Vol. I*, I contend that the film was falsely advertised as another beating by von Trier – or even as a “fucking,” since the pornography was such a focus in the advertising. We can tolerate “fucking” in academic print and make good use of it if it moves our minds to, for example, the Marquis de Sade’s *120 Days of Sodom, or the School of Libertinism* (1785/2012) and “the fuckers” (p. 18) the male libertines employ to brutalize their captives, among whom are their daughters. The daughters all die, except for the Duke’s, who survives by attending well to her lessons and becoming a fucker herself. The plot of *Nymphomaniac: Vol. I* is, in fact, a reversal of de Sade’s pornography

primer, neither a beating nor a fucking: a man finds a female fucker and speaks to her gently, and she tells him about her life.

Here, then, is the representation, a pornographic singularity in order to enhance our understanding of *Nymphomaniac: Vol. I*'s duality: the film *Blue is the Warmest Color* (2013), from Tunisian-French director Abdellatif Kechiche, about a young Parisian woman, Adèle, discovering her sexuality. If *120 Days of Sodom* represents Western pornography's first principles, *Blue is the Warmest Color* is, again, a reversal: a woman actively explores her sexuality in defiance of domination. The film shares both a release year and well-advertised, lengthy pornographic scenes with *Nymphomaniac: Vol. I*. However, quite obviously to any viewer, the pornography in *Blue is the Warmest Color* is not ugly, but entirely "beautiful." Thus, the film is unique in its own way, showing sex but perhaps not pornography: here darkness is banished, light pervades; these are angels having sex.

One might imagine pornography's journey through Western history, a bad seed all its days, purified at last in the baptism of *Blue is the Warmest Color*. *Nymphomaniac: Vol. I* avoids such hallowing yet also is hallowed, its pornography granted dual membership in the same heavenly choir and the Church of Satan. Yet this conceptual ontology of the pornographies – *Blue is the Warmest Color*'s singular "being" as purified versus *Nymphomaniac: Vol. I*'s dual "being" as purified/putrefied – is by no means what signifies their greatest difference. To see what it is, we must borrow a tool from critical theory, one of its most powerful but also most unwieldy: *ideology*.

Žižek's "The Specter of Ideology" (1994/2012) is a manual for exorcising ideology at its most ornately papal – in scrupulosity, commandment, and origin-story apocryphalia. But we may confidently employ this dread manual if we commit with Quakerish conservatism to the following plainness: an action is ideological if its manifest intent, the other's benefit, serves to hide its secret one, the self's benefit. The pornography in *Blue is the Warmest Color* satisfies this definition of ideology, while the pornography in *Nymphomaniac: Vol. I* defies it.

The important moment in *Blue is the Warmest Color* comes when Adèle, after marching in a pro-education rally and enjoying the fruits of liberalism that her great city has to offer, is shocked, along with the viewer, at her peers' illiberality regarding sexuality. She is attacked when they suspect she might be a lesbian. So *Blue is the Warmest Color* becomes a message for France and the world – you are not the humanists you think. The lengthy shown-sex scenes seem deliberately independent of this point, a soul-soothing relief from the world of moral lessons. Adèle, training to become a teacher, is challenged by the learning curve of that profession and its banality in comparison to her girlfriend Emma's art world success. Sex with Emma is a paradise of the human physical – an Eden where the apple, that least juicy of fruits, never grows.

But among us apple-eaters, maybe one gets the feeling that something isn't quite right. We start to feel tricked, feel used. In critical theory, such inchoate

warning signals are welcomed under the tropes of “attitude,” “mapping,” and “negative dialectics” – encouragements to consider opposing propositions, the better to hold in abeyance the finished thought that must serve some agenda. Peter Dews (1994/2012) argues that criticality is “an awareness of the subterranean links between the metaphysics of identity and structures of domination” (p. 47). Translated into psychotherapeutic shoptalk, persistent critique is hypervigilance born of trauma – used and abused, we are now highly sensitive. And suddenly we sense that the shown sex in *Blue is the Warmest Color*, though manifestly about pleasure and freedom from lessons, secretly teaches one. And it is the same lesson as the one we have been taught by Adèle’s beating after the protest: that we are humanistic failures when it comes to homosexuality and must be shown what lesbian sex is like in detail, then tested repeatedly and at length as to our reaction. Should we allow our own less-than-angelic desires to emerge, whether to judge or join the protagonists’ publicly displayed private paradise, our ugliness etc. sullies their beauty etc., and we are the inhuman beaters. The pornography becomes the chalkboard on which we must write our lesson 120 times.

And so, in yet another reversal of the Western pornographic tradition, we have pornography for the sake of a social good – a reversal that is ingenious, even righteous, and also ideological. The film’s lesson is essential (we *are* humanistic failures), yet the secret lesson (a truly humanistic failure) makes us not want to learn it. This is not only a matter of the pedagogical question: *Can we learn good things by manipulation?* Ideology is about etiology. What makes us sick? That a mind contains putrid things, such as homophobia, or the fact that minds exist that seek to make other minds more like their own? Could it not be that this ideological state of human relations is the reason we cleave to the putrid? Better to be ugly and honest than beautiful and false.

Though possessed of an essential lesson, *Blue is the Warmest Color* risks losing its uniqueness and remaining of a kind with all the pornography we’ve ever known. On the surface, common pornography is a manual: for operating manually. Enjoy thyself! Welcome to freedom and pleasure! Yet, as Andrea Dworkin (1981), the American anti-pornography crusader, taught us, pornography is secretly a method for harming women. *Blue is the Warmest Color* also has secret content; the fact that its message is humanistic does not excuse this ideological technique.

I propose that von Trier creates pornography that is alive in duality as both ugly *and* beautiful, and so allows, for perhaps the first time in Western cinematic history, pornography to be experienced with *some* pleasure and *some* guilt. In this way, the film promotes mental health not by handing it a secret lesson, but by representing its complex requirements. It is thus *not* ideological: the film’s manifest intent of serving the other is never undercut to serve a secret, selfish agenda – an action rare enough to make it tantamount to an outline for a more advanced humanity and a blueprint for a better world.

Die Agnostic Manual

How did he achieve this? I do not think von Trier “planned” to do what he did, to create pornography that could be healing and inspiring as well as dark and frightening. But I do think he may have grown sick enough of cynicism, his own and the world's, to try his best not to put it in his film. I also think he was not depressed when he made his film, but, rather, manic.

The diagnosis of “mania” indicates, first, that one's identifications have been revealed, at least on some level of consciousness, for what they are, *viz.*, identifications, not objective truths; and second, that one has rallied to some degree after the initial depression that may follow this new awareness. The way in which the arbitrary and foundationless “you made it up” nature of identity is revealed to a person is always a trauma: big, like death, rape, abuse; little, like psychotherapy or a von Trier film; or steady, like living in late capitalism or a loveless home. Yet a negative of *victim* is *student*; afterward, we know better. And so we watch and learn, as whatever swept like solar winds across the universe, hallooing our names – money, titles, absolutes, organizations, pleasures, families, theories, gods, as well as modalities, methods, theories and specializations – comes to clatter in our hands like Nietzsche's seashells. I propose the term *deidentified* for the person who experiences this state of *being without a ready identity* in a depressed fashion. We speak now of sadness without anything to make us sad; an experience of cavity or gap; cold where once there was heat.

To think this through in pictures, consider Patrocles as the defeated middle term in the American painter Cy Twombly's *Shades of Eternal Night*, hanging as the grey and weeping cloud between Achilles' red Hell and Hector's white Heaven. To stave off this quasi-existence as dead-centered undead, as middling shade, heat must be made in the iced-over cavity left by the extracted identification. Of course, this new heat can only take the form of new meaning, which, post-deidentification, must be regarded as meaningless. The depression-assuaging power of this new meaning cannot be its meaning, then, but rather some kind of “force” the person puts behind the meaning. “Mania” seems the appropriate term for this energized state, where the power of personal willing replaces the power of meaning to stave off depression. “Healthy mania” would be the ability carefully to control this willing, so that the meaningless meaning is infused with not *a lot*, and not *nothing*, but with *some* energy, which we can imagine as a color: a little tint to suffuse the gray, to blend enough of Achilles' red with Hector's white to pink the sky and make a dawn...or at least to rouge the zombie's cheeks so he can fit in at the office.

Now, lest this pink be seen as a prescription for passivity (pink like baby flesh), softness (cupcake frosting), or mediocrity (neither in the red nor black), consider Pascal, who, after his conversion to Christianity, writes “FIRE” and “Certitude,

heartfelt joy, peace” and “Joy, Joy, Joy, tears of joy” (1669/2003, pp. 41-42) and also this:

How difficult it is to submit to someone else’s opinion without being preoccupied about having to do so! It is natural for us to react contrarily; I think something is ugly when you think it is beautiful. That is to say, to think just the opposite of what you want me to think. Perhaps then, it is better to say nothing at all, so that someone else can think more objectively for himself and in the light of his own appropriate context.

(p. 46)

Despite finding a new manual in which he has full confidence, Pascal is hesitant to use it on others, so demonstrating a special kind of thinking, captured in the common phrase “think twice,” which we could expand and make uncommon: “think twice *at the same time*.” So, think twice of pink by thinking both Pascals at once: the flush after truth’s revelation and returning to the world with ragged breath and bug-eyed clarity and the urge to convert, *and* the pale, aghast humility which comes from seeing that others might need something else.

Three examples of this healthy mania now pass before us, like the shades from Freud (1900/1995, p. 266) that Lacan (1973/1998, p. 32) calls on as well, the ones that must be fed on blood. (Let’s give them a little sip. Not too much.) Decrepit forms, yet behold: they have found a way to move, gadding about on those automatic scooters for the disabled.

First shade: Returning to old, deidentified sources of meaning in the spirit of “in spite of, not because,” as Kierkegaard founds his faith or Kant his duty, so that the lack of fuel becomes the very source.

Second: Recognizing that our deidentification is a privilege, something we arrived at because we had the time, money, energy, and education to do so, meaning we must go about our depression modestly, gratefully, even cheerfully, daily embodying the line from Gilbert and Sullivan (1879/2006): “Though the moments quickly die, greet them gaily as they fly” (p. 155).

Third: Dalliances in super-heat, manic episodes that are identity relapses, when colliding with a poem, painting, person or representation that showers us in sparks, catching us alight – a few minutes of minds on fire before the inevitable stop-drop-and-roll.

All in all, just three small, withered figures, but we might chase them now and take their bones for staves to mount a mountain passage, their rags to wrap a torch to light a tunnel deeper down, their gristle for some starving winter night. It is still cold and gray here. But less so.

Then the nymphomaniac arrives. We find that she has built quite a bonfire. Look how she uses herself to light it. Discovering that her original choice of meaning was baseless, she attempts to energize sex into identity. Her fire burns so brightly that her section of Limbo takes on the glow of the Other Place and many

keep their distance. One day we see her crying, flames licking low, and so we gather courage and call out, *Hey there, we see what you're doing. It's not going to work. Why don't you try...*

And that's when the danger sets in, with the arrival of the specialist. Because she is already a specialist. We cannot just replace the contents of her specialty with our own. Tell her it is desire, thought-feeling-behavior, drive, abstinence, harm reduction, opposite action, affect, relationships, the relationship, comfort in solitude, social justice, archetypes, narratives, eye movements, chair making, the unconscious, representation, transference – for anyone who has survived the surgery by butter knife that is the removal of identifications, these must register as criminal prosthetic graftings in Frankenstein's lab. Watch as they clench their teeth and nod at our wisdoms – *You know, it's like there're these three shades...* – and become our pet monsters.

The manual arrives to preserve us from such grotesqueries. The manual finds me growing hysterical as it speaks calmly. The manual says: *No. It is not your identity that you impart to the patient. What you are listing there are called techniques. You use them. Others use them also. We are liberal about such things and offer a range of technical options, some emphasizing human essence, others particularity. If the former, the technique elaborates the human mind, so that patients arrive and learn how their problems match; common solutions are then offered for healing. If the latter, what is elaborated in advance is that nothing should be elaborated in advance, so that patients arrive and learn how they have been told too often how they match; the common solution is that there are no common solutions. Choose a technique from across this broad continuum and of course you may identify with it, if by that you mean derive personal satisfaction from it; you may even model for your patient what it is like to have a healthy life with some meaning in it, a positive identity derived from a sound philosophy – we may even grant that this modeling has some sizable share of the variance of treatment outcome. Your metaphor of “pink” seems quite apt; though we generally prefer metaphors from parenting, this one seems to work. Yes, psychology is “in the pink” these days, the professional associations' most highly regarded manuals recognizing precisely the problems you are bringing up. Identity logic, instrumental reason, reductionism, and ideology – it has already been considered and addressed. The postmodern turn, cultural awareness, empirical supports, immanent critique – these are well established everywhere. Certainly, there may be some identity “seepage” here and there; naturally, we get excited when we see our ideas represented in patient content; but few if any quality clinicians would think their own identities and values superior to a patient's and seek to implant them. And if anyone does get out of hand, become “monstrous” or “maniacal,” that is called a “rupture,” which we address through disclosure and frank discussion – all part of the treatment, all “grist for the mill.” This is the whole point of a manual these days: not to elaborate some universal theory but to prevent its existence.*

Now I feel worse. If this is pink, I reject it. Whereas I thought the manual was too red hot, so sure of itself in its blazing conversion that it would stop at nothing to convert the patient, now I find icy perfection and white-out blur. Stillness and standing at a distance. The lack of meaning written in with doubt and “not knowing” as confident first principles. Conditional releases for convicted criminals, the manuals, taken collectively, cancel each other out, so saying nothing except “obey this nothing.” Where I feared mania I found depression. “Rather would I be a day laborer in Hades among the shades of the past,” writes Nietzsche (1883/1995, p. 120), and now I understand him.

So truth changes color and temperature. Truth moves, which may be the only true thing about it. When a truth moves between people, do you go after the person or the truth, or try to follow the movement?

We need a manual. We can't have one. But we need a manual.

Oh Come, Oh Come, E-manual!

Wherefore Lars von Trier's *Nymphomaniac: Vol. I* as psychotherapy manual in three steps – the unconscious, representation, and transference – taking the form of *Vice* magazine's well-known dialectical categories.

Do Have a Manual. Don't Follow It.

The film's set-up of an elderly man, Seligman, who finds a middle-aged woman, Joe, injured on the street and takes her into his home, might just as easily head toward de Sade as Rousseau, that is to say, according to the manuals. Von Trier assumes we are going to assume the former no matter what he does, which frees him to create something new. The heavy metal music cue that hammers us early on is a feint, as is the menace of the darkened alley and shadowy apartment. Seligman, it turns out, is more Rousseau than Rousseau: the man is positively Rogerian. And I don't mean Carl: I mean Mister.

As impromptu psychotherapist to this woman at the witching hour, Seligman proceeds responsibly, committing to consistent practice based on highly regarded theory. It is clear he believes Joe is too hard on herself, that her conduct, though horrific, makes sense given her particular circumstances, and that her self-critique, rather than her sexual behavior, is the primary mania to confront. His method is calmly to act as devil's advocate to her self-critiques, generally taking the form, *But that's who you were, so what else could you have done?* The empathy that flows from such incontrovertible logic calms her. Here Seligman employs one of the most humanistic theories and technically best intervention styles psychotherapy has to offer – one we know, not from school, but from being

the type of people who decided to become psychotherapists. No degree required. The best “citizen shrinks” – parents, barbers, bartenders, BFFs – this is what they do. As Arthur Miller puts it: “...everybody becomes a healer the moment he forgets himself” (cited in Seem, 1977/2009, p. xxi). Just take about 45 minutes off from protecting your own needs and the person who spends that time with you is likely to feel better.

Of course, this is not all that we need to heal, for if it were, we would all be healed. Seligman’s logic, though compelling, must stand side by side – existentially, as the law of non-contradiction falters – with an opposite and equally incontrovertible logic. When Joe states that she became sexually lubricated while watching her father die, Seligman attempts to argue the normative humanness of such an experience. But he cannot sustain eye-contact. They both look at the floor. And this is the moment we must endeavor to understand.

Though “wherever you go, there you are” and “you are only human” are true, something is silenced when this is seen as the *only* truth: the opposing truth is that humans are bad for each other and the world and maybe the universe would be better off without us. This is rarely given voice, except by our symptoms. But in their moment of silence, when Seligman and Joe look at the floor, this logic is allowed to speak its truth: that though she must be shown empathy and encouraged to live, the lives we live are filled with horror and cruelty, of which we are sometimes the cause. All the empathy that accrues, with eye contact, under “you are only human” bleeds under “you are *only* human,” while looking at the floor.

Not bled to death, just bled. Rogers does not die at the hands of von Trier; they are formidably fit to duel. Their weapon is Kierkegaard’s (1843/2003) “two edged sword, bringing death and salvation” (p. 61). That they duel for Seligman and Joe is a healing moment, one that generates improved mental health for both parties, and allows everything around them to be suffused with newness and potential for change, including the pornography. In this way our own mental health is improved by watching it, and for this special reason: No one is lying. For five minutes, no one is dissembling, acting, manipulating, teaching a secret lesson, or defending a hidden agenda, which is five more minutes of such than occur in most lives. No one is lying because no one is thinking – *not as we commonly know it*.

To picture-think this idea, imagine a dissolve in a film, where one image overlaps another, sometimes to provide a transition or make a graphic comparison, but often just to give the viewer the pleasure of seeing something human vision is not capable of producing: an image of two things at once. I propose that the dissolve is a pleasure both to the eye and the mind that sighs at it, dreaming it could do the same thing: think two things at once. Though less common in psychology, such thinking is often described and encouraged in other disciplines. Christianity challenges us to recognize the dual nature of Christ, both wretchedly human and pristinely divine. Marx would have us think both the good and bad of

capitalism simultaneously in order to sustain/overcome it (see Jameson, 1991, p. 47). Science fiction frequently imagines that the superiority of alien races derives from this mental feat. Consider British author Peter Hamilton (1996/2008):

The Laymil shipmaster's thoughts were oddly twinned, as though the recording was of two separate thought patterns. On a subsidiary level it was aware of the ship's biological and mechanical systems. ... On an ascendant level its mind was observing the planet below through the ship's sensor faculty.

(p. 853)

I call this "twinning" *dii-consciousness*, which I like for its sci-fi sound. I distinguish it, firstly, from the "double consciousness" spoken of by W. E. B. Du Bois (1903/1986, p. 364), who refers to an inharmonious split in the mind produced by opposing forces in a culture leading to self-censoring behaviors. Secondly, I distinguish it from dual processing theories, where emotions or drives are seen as competing with reason for psychic dominance. I define *dii-consciousness* precisely otherwise, as a mind uncensored and no longer striving to force certain thoughts out of awareness, so that one can simultaneously think "humans good" and "humans bad," "pornography ugly" and "pornography beautiful," "I need" and "you need." Thirdly, I distinguish *dii-consciousness* from the "dialectics" of Linehan's (1993) behavioral therapy, where primary goals are acceptance and improved functionality. The goal of simultaneous thinking would not be to accept and make peace with contradictions, but to increase the tension between them, seeking productivity in the surprises and inspirations that may result from trying not to favor one side. Also, though we might be able to think twice at the same time, we can only act once; hence, *dii-consciousness* would not necessarily lead to better behavioral outcomes. When we choose a behavior or course of action, the action will inevitably favor one side or another, subject or object, and so fail to some degree. The difference is, with *dii-consciousness* practiced and embraced, at least we can know we tried. When everything is thought that can be thought, cynicism, manipulation, and ideology will end. A *dii-conscious* individual elaborating her struggle to reach a conclusion that she is aware is inadequate – this is a person we could trust.

Such a scenario is not so difficult to achieve as we might imagine, particularly in our practices, for we have a helper. A built-in second thought, seeking audience at all times. Lacan (1973/1998) writes, "The status of the unconscious, which, as I have shown, is so fragile on the ontic plane, is ethical" (p. 32). We know both "fragile" and "ethical" from the above scene in *Nymphomaniac: Vol. I*. Should Seligman cleave to his theory and press the point that Joe is "only human" (Rogers), something would be silenced, that little voice that always says what is not being said – in this case, that she is "only human." But, as Seligman stares at

the floor, something creeps out with the fragility of a pin worm. Easily crushed, afraid of the light, yet this little monster will never give up; it is wholly ethical and will demand to speak its truth, if not via *pruritus ani* in the therapist, which requires good scratching by interpretation, then by depression, anxiety, mania, obsession in the patient. That von Trier allows Seligman's unconscious to speak what has not yet been spoken by the conscious makes him a master clinician, which is to say, ethical.

Do Make Representations. Do not Expect them to Last

But is this then the manual – “on the one hand *and* on the other”? The elaboration of dualities surely reduces to a simple interpretation of patient content under the heading “everything is true.” And if everything is true, nothing is; if everyone is special, no one is. What difference would we find then between dii-consciousness and this notion set forth by British critical psychologist Ian Parker (2014)?

The aim of Lacanian analysis is “to obtain absolute difference”.... In this reading, the end of psychoanalysis includes bringing the subject to the point where they are a perfect Saussurean, such that they recognize that the language that bears them is made up only of differences without any positive terms.

(p. 39)

I have already proposed that fully to remove difference and positive terms is to invite a state of cold depression, the undead status, the deidentified shade and zombie. How does the dii-conscious entity sustain heat and life when every truth is equally alive and so might as well be cold and dead?

Sartre (1943/1984) tacks hard in the opposite direction with his well-known critique of psychoanalysis, arguing that the “simple bodies” of interpretation do little but reduce the value of individual particularities (p. 715). He prefers this approach to understanding people: “Marx was so far from this false universality that he attempted to generate his knowledge dialectically in man, rising progressively from the broadest determination to the most precise” (1968, p. 49). Yet one might say Sartre has taught us too well: the particularism dominant in contemporary psychotherapy threatens to expand differences in the individual until all commonalities are eclipsed. Such therapies risk creating red-in-the-face maniacs certain of their original choices and so seeking dominion over the choices of others.

The solution is perhaps a dii-conscious interpretation, taking the form of “everything is true, *until it isn't.*” The most precise determination of a person

builds *alongside* the idea that the same could be built for anyone, so no difference. You are special *and* everyone is special, just as you are not *and* no one is. This spiraling upward of a determinate truth until it topples into its coexistent opposite is difficult to describe abstracted from a process. Fortunately, we have one simmering before us: my attempt to share a representation of a possible middle term, the reanimated state we may achieve by identifying modestly with something post deidentification: namely, the color pink. Pink, like rose-colored glasses; pink, like the inside of the body that von Trier's pornography shows us. But you may hear my pink and see breast cancer survivor ribbons, so that I arrive pink in the face and must bow my head and look at the floor. Pink is no longer true. Hear Fredric Jameson (2011):

The problem of representation today eats away at all the established disciplines like a virus, particularly destabilizing the dimension of language, reference and expression (which used to be the domain of literary study), as well as that of thought (which used to be that of philosophy).

(p. 4)

As well as that of speech (which used to be that of psychology). So though we blush and bow, eventually we must raise our heads and try another color or shape or flavor of speech in the hope that it retains some of the meaning we intend, the heat of a temporary truth, so that it arrives warm – not hot like Max's dinner at the end of *Where the Wild Things Are*, nor cold like Momma Bear's porridge. If it happens to feel just right, then we have managed to defy Saussure for a few seconds, which would be a mini-miracle. Given present conditions, we can live on such nourishment for some time. Representations are a problem, but, acknowledged as such, they save lives, arriving at the right moment to add heat and color – but only when we allow them eventually to die.

Representation defines the two-act structure of *Nymphomaniac: Vol. I*. Joe has two: first arboriculture, then pornography. During her childhood, her father took her on many nature walks, instructing her in the sensitive specifics of tree identification. He did not look at her much during these walks, but did gaze fascinated at the little, black, clitoris-shaped ash tree leaves. Arboriculture was her father's mania, which planted the seeds of her own. The pornography we see is in Joe's memories, but Seligman seems to see the memories, too. Unlike her father, Seligman is looking. They watch pornography together. Meanwhile, if pornography viewing is about engaging sex anonymously and abstractly, that experience is repeated but not reproduced for the film's audience: we experience the common pornography "particle" we are used to, as well as the "interference wave" derived from the fact that this pornography is also a shared representation between Seligman and Joe, who are engaged personally and directly. And for Joe and Seligman, as the memories of her manic sex pass through the critical lenses of their minds, her behaviors remain what they ever were, only now revealed in their

complexity – beauty, etc., and ugly, etc. Light and dark; only human and *only* human.

Yet, as with any representation, just like the pink discussed above, pornography is useful for only so long. The combustion between the truth value (the essential) and the applicability of the representation (the particular) eventually burns out. Seligman has his own two representations to warm them up: first fly fishing, then the mystique of numbers. He offers these as universal keys to understanding the problems of human life (the essential), which Joe picks up to understand her own (the particular). As fly fishing starts to stink, they abandon it for the mystique of numbers. This idea, that numbers have meaning outside of their practical purpose in counting, entrances them both; they seem certain now they've got it: life's answer, the manual, truth! So when the film climaxes in a pornographic flashback of Joe crying out, "Fill all my holes!" and "I can't feel anything!" and all hope is lost, and there is no difference, and the pit of depression spreads wide, Seligman has got her. In the pink. In the mystique of numbers. She has something else to believe in. And that is where von Trier abandons the film.

Don't Sum. Do Sum Up

Numbers, counting, algebra, etc., we have, of course, from Adorno (1970/1982) as "mathematicization," the ultimate grasping at straws:

Since the philosophical first must always already contain everything, spirit confiscates what is unlike itself and makes it the same, its property. Spirit inventories it. Nothing may slip through the net. The principle must guarantee completeness.... But the thicker the veil before spirit, the more reified spirit, as master, itself becomes – as occurs with numbers.

(p. 9)

This spirit we wish to kindle *some*, so that depression's Limbo does not freeze us, but Adorno says this has never been enough: spirit demands total identification and makes an inventory until everything is included. His master is our maniac. If theorists can tie their ideas to numbers, this is the ultimate mastery and completeness since numbers appear to stand objectively off to the side. In fact, we might say Adorno makes numbers too completely incomplete by his own typical mastery. All we really need is Pippi Longstocking, the nine-year-old girl from Lindgren's (1957/1997) series of children's books. Pippi despises all mathematics as "pluttification" and chucks it, along with all other "shuns," in favor of recreation (p. 43). She understands that the fun – meaning, heat, color, truth, re-creation – drains out once *deus ex mathematica* arrives.

Badiou is an egregious example of one who tends toward mathematicization, but we may consider Lacan as well. The former's "event" (Badiou, 2005/2013, p. xv), the idea that truth is "never" revealed by a content but "solely" by a breaking with that content, loses revolutionary power when he seeks its foundation in math. "Never" and "solely" require a defense, and when he looks for such by counting, his event is over and we find we are nowhere special, except where we have always been, at another man's absolute. Lacan (1973/1988) fares no better than Badiou; the first half of the following quote propounds his revolutionary event, but he'd have done better to pinch it off after the "but":

[Recollection] is something that comes to us from the structural necessities, something humble, born at the level of the lowest encounters and of all the talking crowd that precedes us, at the level of the structure of the signifier, of the languages spoken in a stuttering, stumbling way, but which cannot elude constraints whose echoes, model, style can be found, curiously enough, in contemporary mathematics.

(p. 47)

Once nothing can elude us, constraints are taught and "infinity is finally defined" (Badiou, 2005/2013, p. 164), then we know re-creation is over. These men are wrong, not in their ideas, but in seeking to prevent the arrival of the opposite and avoid a duel in the dual. Fortunately, the unconscious speaks whatever is not spoken, so can and will elude them, *ad infinitum*.

Arriving at math, we must know we are almost done. Which is why von Trier ends his film with numbers: their meaning is coldest and cannot last long. After math, science, biology, neurology, the final major defenses of our paradigm, we have only the gap raw and pink before us, and, over across the way, another person.

I propose that dii-consciousness risks being a mere idealism or fantasy best left to science fiction, a clear resident of the ideic rather than practical world – that is, until we see how clearly it is manifested and vigorously exercised in the gap between patient and clinician in psychotherapy. Action in this gap we term transference, but its experiential components and healing powers may derive from its pressure toward dii-consciousness. In transference, the patient is persistently challenged to see one thing (the therapist) as many (the therapist *and* father, mother, lover, friend, enemy, etc.), and progress is not a return to common sense ("nah, she was just my therapist all along") but recognition of one's power to conceive and elaborate complex dualities ("she was many things at once"). Transference as dii-consciousness then requires the patient to cope with persistent failure: "yet when I act like she was my therapist, that's not right, and when I act like she's my mother, that's not right either." Some patients may adapt to this quickly, seeing it as keenly representing already familiar dilemmas native to the irreconcilable split between self and other. Alternatively, some may

suffer acutely as duality in the transference pushes them to leave the comforts of one-side-or-the-other, A-is-A reality. If opposing truths can co-exist, many long-established confidences and dearly held personal meanings are set to drift. The reaction may be rage and horror, as we witness in Joe's response to Seligman at the beginning of *Nymphomaniac*, Vol. II. Artaud's (1974/1995) poetic description of the link between dualities and the body is fine language for the throws and gnashings of such a transference: "Yesterday Friday March 15th in the installation of my suffering, the dialectic entered me like the derision of my living flesh which suffers but does not understand" (p. 69).

Given the agonies potentially incurred in the passage from singular to dual awareness, we can forgive how often manuals attempt to draw our attention to other aspects of psychotherapy or formalize therapists' behaviors regarding transference – but we may also see such manuals as defensive operations designed to protect authors and readers from some truth they agree they do not like and want to forbid from entering consciousness. The manual for encouraging dii-consciousness we must not find here in this paper or anywhere else, if we seek to avoid the mathematicization of our own practices. Yet to remain dii-conscious, we must never stop looking for manuals – in poems, films, stories, philosophies, even manuals. When a manual arrives, we may sense its utility by the duality it kindles: both inspiration – "this is it! this will help!" – and caution – "this is only for right now because I can already see these problems." Such a practice favors inspiration over knowledge, novice enthusiasm over confident expertise, persistent trial and error over mathematics and perfection. Every manual Vol. I we find is always already rejecting itself in favor of some yet unimagined Vol. II.

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