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Techniques for Masturbating: The Impossible Sexual Relationship as Prescribed by Gaspar Noé's Film "We Fuck Alone"

Summary:

This essay analyzes temporal-spatial differentiation in its relation to autoerotic sexuality. According to Nicolas Abraham, the principle for time/space difference is transfiguration of the interval's regularity into rhythm. The analysis presented here is based on an examination of Gaspar Noé's film *We Fuck Alone*. This film discloses the Lacanian maxim there is no sexual relationship in at least two respects. First, it demonstrates a fairly complex structure that might be called masturbating together alone. Second, this masturbating together alone includes not only a phantasmatic support, but also a prosthetic support that industrializes masturbation.

Little girls masturbating about tomorrow. Little boys masturbating. Every second losing intensity, creating the need forever to go back inside and feel safe, to travel back and feel alive. It really is so difficult.

– Genesis P-Orridge and Psychic TV, "A Hollow Cost," 1994

1. Doubling the Length of a Film

Something strange once happened to the time of a film or, rather, to my perception of its duration: in my mind, it was cut exactly in half.

It was like this. I decided to *review* the 2006 short *We Fuck Alone* (from the compilation film *Destricted*), directed by Gaspar Noé. The film had made such an incredibly strong impression on me that I wanted to watch it again and show it to my wife, Olesya. Before we began watching the film, I confidently warned her that it lasted forty-four minutes. Imagine my surprise when, as the film ended, I saw that the timer showed that exactly twenty-two minutes had passed! A great perturbation occurred in my mind.

The rescreening had not simply shortened the film, but cut it exactly by half: in my memory, its duration had been doubled. I am not sure whether this is relevant or not, but when the perturbation occurred, I recalled that Freud had said, in his discussion of the case of Dora, that when a patient tells the same story twice but tells it differently each time, we should believe the first version. Following this logic, the film in fact lasted forty-four minutes after all. Such is the logic of duration in the unconscious or, we might even say, in the *protracted unconscious*.

This all sounds absurd, of course. How could I not believe the objective information provided by the timer? On the other hand, why should I not trust the “whims” of memory? Whatever the case, this selfsame memory seems to have entered into some kind of *doubling resonance* with the time of the film. Someone might say, however, that it was not a matter of the protracted unconscious, but that during the first screening all *potential time* had accrued to me alone, while during the second screening this time had been “objectively” split between two people.

Interval 1. The “Protracted” Unconscious and the Topology of Chronology

Or we might say that during the second screening I had watched the film with another person and its potential time had been objectified, whereas during the first screening the resonance of the protracted unconscious had been operative. Freud writes about the *protracted unconscious* in the conclusion to the ninth of the “Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis”:

We are now prepared to assume that there are in the mind processes and purposes of which one knows nothing at all, has known nothing for a long time, and has even perhaps never known anything. With this the unconscious acquires a new sense for us; the characteristic of “for the time being” or “temporary” disappears from its essential nature. It can mean *permanently* unconscious [*dauerndunbewusst*] and not merely “latent at the time” (Freud 1915–1916, p. 148).

The unconscious, as we know, has no sense of time. It operates outside of time: it is not connected with time at all, and yet it is protracted. It is *dauernd* – that is, it is “lengthy,” “protracted,” “constant.” As such, as *dauernd*, it is “permanent,” “everlasting.” In the passage quoted above, Freud conflates and separates the notions of *the unconscious* and *knowledge* as psychological processes. The unconscious is knowledge about which the individual either has not known for a long time, or has never known, or will not know for a long time, or will never know. The unconscious is the unknowing of knowledge. The unconscious is ignorance of the knowledge that forms the basis of all knowledge. And if the unconscious is this ignorance, this unknowing, then how can the subject know whether it has known something about this knowledge or has never known?

What is surprising is that we can say with equal justice that the unconscious (but not its subject qua the subject of con-sciousness) *knows only the present*. It is con-temporary, and therefore we say that it has no knowledge of time and that precisely because of this it *has no knowledge of the present*. That is, it is difficult or even impossible to talk about the temporal structure of the unconscious by virtue of the fact that there is no present tense in the unconscious. Hence, in view of this ephemeral reference point’s absence, there is no sense in speaking either of the future or the past. On the one hand, the time of the unconscious is only the present, which renders moot all talk of chronology. On the other hand, the time of the unconscious is any time whatsoever, only not the present, and this likewise makes it impossible to speak of any kind of chronology. But the fact that this time is non-chronological does not make it illogical.

The protracted unconscious does not presume the presence of chronology, but “at the same time” it responds as the “extended psyche.” This response, moreover, is likewise bound up with unknowing: “[The] psyche is extended; knows nothing about it. [*Psyche ist ausgedehnt: weiß nichts davon*]” (Freud 1938, p. 300). Its own duration, expanse, extensiveness, and topographical nature escape the psyche. This thought, which Jean-Luc Nancy has called “Freud’s most fascinating and perhaps [...] most decisive statement” (Nancy 2008, p. 21), can be interpreted to mean that the psyche is a notion of the self based on a projection of the body or, rather, on the unconsciousness of this projection. The psyche begins to extend in connection with an *always-already present other*, thanks to an interval [*espacement*] that opens between self and other but is not taken into account. This interval goes unnoticed by virtue of the fact that the mirror projection is returned, is introjected, without gaps or remainders, as if transitivity had consumed the space between self and other. Fundamentally important in this process is the fact that psychological extension *includes* the temporal

aspect: *ausgedehnt* means *both* distant, lengthy, vast, *and* prolonged. The verb *ausdehnen* means *both* to stretch, expand, lengthen *and* to extend time. So we can understand Freud's "fascinating" phrase as follows: "The psyche is protracted, only it does not know this."

The protracted unconscious effects the *différance* of space and time: the becoming-time of space and the becoming-space of time are produced within it. It is understandable why Lacan links space to the Imaginary, and time to the Symbolic. But it is likewise understandable that there is no Imaginary, just as there is no Symbolic, insofar as becoming-self-and-other – the deferral and differentiation of the interval – can be understood *both* as constituting these dimensions, the temporal and the spatial, *and* as the suturing of the unfolding space of the Imaginary by an *always-already* pulsating Symbolic.

Thus, the paradox is that, on the one hand, the category of time always already belongs to the protracted unconscious; on the other, it does not belong to primary processes, relating instead to the logic of "the waking I," which "has received it through social channels," from the self-and-other: "[O]ur acquisition of time is parallel to our integration into society" (Abraham 1986, p. 5). At this doubling point, where the imaginary/transitive space of the self-and-other qua the space of the emerging time of self-and-other is symbolized, not only is the Imaginary stitched together by the Symbolic, but the *différance* of spatial-temporal extension also takes place. We might say that the deployment, the distribution [*espacement*], of spatial-temporal intervals in the relationship of self *and* other takes places as it were "here" and as it were "now." But it happens in deferral, in postponement, retroactively [*nachträglich*] – that is, not here and not now. Time is not the time either of subject or object; it is neither subjective nor objective. It exists in relationship, in *between*, in the distributive, hymen-like conjunction "and," *between* me and an other. As Nicolas Abraham (1986, p. 5) writes, it is *transphenomenal*.

In this sense, the distinction that Abraham draws between the regularity of the interval and rhythm is vital. For the interval to become rhythm, "a creative act is necessary. We must assimilate and, at the same time, transfigure the crude perception of intervals" (Abraham 1986, p. 4). The "regularity of the interval," the "commensurability of distance," the "rhythmicity of the interval" point to the indifferenciability of space and time. It is precisely here that we find the insoluble knot of the Imaginary and Symbolic. Abraham indicates this directly when he writes that what is meant by raw intervals are "recurrent *Gestalten*" (Abraham 1986, p. 4) – that is, figures of time deployed in space. These are not yet rhythms, but they are already "a priori criteria for pleasing rhythm [*eurythmie*], that is, criteria for the suitable arrangement of sequence" (Abraham 1986, p. 4). And this sequence can emerge where doubling is always already present, where two – self and other – are reflected in the imaginary distribution of space.

2. In the Beginning Was the Doubling

The two of us sit in front of the screen. We share time, the shared, bifurcating, doubling time of the film. In *We Fuck Alone* itself, there is more than one doubling.

The film begins with a doubling. We might even exclaim, "In the beginning was the doubling!" A peculiar kind of narcissistic mode is established from the very first instant: a scene from a porno film pulses on a TV screen that appears on screen. This doubling of screens is presented even before the opening credits roll. This doubling fades after several seconds: the TV screen now coincides with the cinematic screen. Two screens are reduced to one. But the memory retains a trace of the fact that there is more than one screen.

The TV screen has a fundamental significance in this story. Interestingly, it also figured prominently in Gaspar Noé's first feature film, *Seul contre tous*, which was entitled *I Stand Alone* for Anglophone audiences. These titles – *I Stand Alone* and *We Fuck Alone* – clearly resonate with one another. In this resonance, which of course arises from lonely action – "I/we do (something) alone" – the mutable element

involves the transition from the first-person singular pronoun (I) to the first-person plural pronoun (we): we, I, I and someone else, self and other, I and others, self and others – or even, *other selves*, other “I’s.” Moreover, the plural remains indeterminate, and we are tempted to say that there are two of them. You and I.

Two characters. Two viewers viewing for the second time. Two televisions on the porno screen.

The infinite number suggested by *we* is an infinite number of pairs, of couples. Do we all couple? No, it is rather the case that, however many of us there are, we all fuck alone in pairs. A multitude of couples fucking alone? No: a multitude fucking alone in pairs.

The idea that coupling leaves us loners is, to be sure, not a new one. According to this idea, we might say that the individual is condemned to masturbation, and the transition from masturbation to “normal sex” in fact turns out to be only a new form of masturbation. This really is not a new idea. Freud (1985, p. 94) wrote about it in 1894, true, in connection with what would be called *safe sex* a hundred years later: the use of condoms, he argued, makes sexual relations resemble masturbation. In his 1912 essay “On Masturbation,” Sigmund Freud’s double, Victor Tausk, wrote, “Many a man will confess that he masturbates with his penis in the vagina of a woman. [...] The criterion which determines whether a sexual act is either a masturbatory one or intercourse is not given in the external form of the sexual behavior but in the psychic superstructure of the physical process” (Tausk 1991, p. 34). Tausk gives the psychic superstructure a chance at intercourse, but it is just this superstructure that makes relations with the other *as such* impossible.

Whereas Lacan appeals precisely to this superstructure in his famous dictum about the impossibility of the sexual relationship, Derrida, in his deconstruction of Rousseau, points out that it is impossible to totally clarify the difference between masturbation and the sexual relationship insofar as the sexual act likewise depends on *self-arousal* [*auto-affection*], which *as it were* does not take the other into account. This “as it were” is just what marks the other’s disturbing, touching “presence.” This self-arousal is also contained in the so-called reflexive verbs denoting the sexual act in Russian: *sovokupliat’sja* (to copulate), *sparivat’sja* (to couple, to mate), *trakhat’sja* (to bang one another), *ebat’sja* (to fuck one another). We are once again forced to reiterate Freud’s thought that an other is always present in the life of any human being, even when it would seem that we are banging ourselves alone.

The opening scenes of the film convince us that “we all bang ourselves alone.” We see a couple on the porno TV screen that is superimposed on the cinematic screen: a woman stands facing a wall, her legs spread and her arms raised, while a man sucks on one of her orifices and furiously masturbates. All that remains is to exclaim, “Well, there it is, the sexual relationship!” And in reply hear the exclamation, “There is no sexual relationship!” Moreover, we should follow Jean-Luc Nancy (2001) in stressing the word *relationship* in Lacan’s maxim. The relationship is the *between* in masturbography.

In Noé’s film, the two main characters, a teenage girl and a young man, do not meet in a single scene. This is yet another demonstration of the fact that “we all bang ourselves alone.” Each character makes love alone. Each character masturbates by himself or herself. We, the contemplators and viewers, see this. Whereas the film cuts back and forth between two different scenes – the teenage girl masturbating alone; the young man masturbating alone – the man and woman on the porno TV screen are masturbating “together” or, to be more precise, *together alone*.

What does this *together alone* mean? In general, *we* watch together alone. Such is the law of the movie screening. However, there remains what remains off screen. This “off-screen” is *always already together*. Nothing else remains. Lacan’s dictum – “There is no sexual relationship” – assumes (however odd this might sound) an *other*, a spectral other, even a multitude of spectral others that we both see and do not see, as befits a relationship with specters. Complicating this situation, we might say that a love scene can be staged not for a seeing other, but for a contemplating other.

Two thoughts about the contemplating other. *First thought*: he, this spectral voyeur, is precisely a contemplator – that is, he is the one who watches and the one whom he watches. This thought is triggered by the word *contemplator* itself, which connotes as it were someone who watches jointly, who simultaneously peeps and is peeped. This thought is reinforced by Freud’s argument, in the essay “A Child Is Being Beaten,” that *all* the characters involved in a phantasm represent the subject. One of my analysands, Enchantress, once said to me, “My fantasy is to be with three men at the same time.” How are the roles assigned in this fantasy in which, as she puts it herself, there is her *as well as* all the other characters? This is how: two of the men must be with her while the third looks on. The third man must be situated at a distance: he must be an *outside accomplice*, a spy, a con-templator. His gaze holds the scene together.

Second thought. As Derrida says, this contemplator has the visor typical for a specter: he sees us, but we do not see him. The well-known Rat Man provides a fitting example of this effect. In the scene that interests us, he is twenty-one years old. His father has recently died. The Rat Man, of course, concedes nothing to Hamlet: he continues to converse with the ghost of his own father. And so, the Rat Man sits hunched over his textbooks, waiting for midnight to toll. Then he opens the door to his room (to afford the specter a better view), pulls out his penis, and gets down to business; moreover, in such a way that this business is also reflected in the mirror. The father’s gaze is thus captured by the doubled spectacle, inserted into the enjoyment.

Masturbation is not simply an act in which, to paraphrase a popular Russian song, the subject “quietly converses with [him]self.” As we have seen, this act features the most varied elements, including the specter with his visor and autoerotic part-objects that fissure the narcissistic mirror image, which is guided by the principle of “in the beginning was the doubling.”

3. That Actually Existing Nonexistent Relationship

The impossible sexual relationship is made possible by the mediation of spectral others, disembodied bodies. These others are both visible and invisible. We might say that the act of masturbation involves various specters – visible and invisible specters, specters called into service by hallucinations, and seeing but unseen specters, the ones with the visors. In the (impossible) sexual relationship there are specters as far as the eye can see (and cannot).

These specters are summoned up by the libido. The libido cannot exist without phantasms. This argument has been made on more than one occasion by Žižek in his discussions of the famous scene from *The Matrix* where the hero, Neo, “wakes up” inside the giant incubator where human beings are used as batteries. Žižek upends the banal question of *why the Matrix needs libidinal energy*, asking instead *why the libido needs the Matrix*. The answer is this: the libido maintains its existence only through phantasms. Between people who engage in sexual relations, between their circulating libidinal flows, there exist phantasms, the transparent formulas of love, spectral matrices. Here, we should once more accent the word *between*. The phantasmatic matrices of love *in relationships* are between.

Thus, following Lacan, we can repeat: there is no sexual relationship. And so it is not love that people make over and over again, or sex that they have, but *the impossible*. Everyone engages in something that can be talked about, but that is impossible to fully enunciate. It is quite understandable that in Gaspar Noé’s film no one says a word, neither the teenage girl nor the young man. In an interview, the filmmaker said, “I would say that everybody is obsessed with sex. Those who say they are not: either they are lying or they are denying their own reptilian side of their sex lives. The only people I know who are really not obsessed with sex are heroin junkies.” People are obsessed with sex – that is, they are obsessed with something that does not exist. And it is just this “does not exist” that distinguishes them from reptiles. Reptiles do not tremble and throb at the outer limits of the impossible. What distinguishes people is their obsessiveness. Obsession is repetition, the compulsive reproduction of the formula for impossibility, which has nothing in common

with the inherited instincts of reptiles. Once this mechanism has been set in motion, there is nothing we can do about it. And it would appear that logical time is the time of obsession, of obsessing alone.

4. Supplementation Is Impossible? Supplementing the Impossible

We will say it again: in the strict sense of the word, the film's characters are *not alone* in their masturbation.

They fantasize, whether they notice it or not. At very least, what they see on the TV porno screen can be regarded as their fantasies. Or we can hypothesize that the TV porno screen fantasies stimulate their own fantasies, fantasies hidden from our view. The others depicted on the TV porno screen perform an orthopedic function. The screen is a screen of narcissistic doubling. In this sense, it is no wonder that, in one of his letters to Fliess, Freud wrote, "What would you say if masturbation were to reduce itself to homosexuality, and the latter, that is, male homosexuality (in both sexes) were a primitive form of sexual longing?" (Freud 1985, p. 380). Self-arousal is thus bound up with a homosexual choice of object, with the self as other.

Masturbation is a trait of human sexuality. Along with fantasizing, it constitutes the zero degree of human writing, of the all-too-human; it is a trait of human being itself. We might say (not without a touch of pathos) that the masturbating hand is what makes a human being human. It arouses itself and produces a perturbation in the natural order. Reptiles do not masturbate. This is well understood by Rousseau, for whom masturbation is an addition to and substitute for the sexual act, *a supplement to what is considered natural*. When the individual masturbates, it is always already supplementing what Freud called "organic helplessness," the lack of the natural, which leads to dependency on the Other, to the structuring of the psyche (which prostheticizes this lack), to the mirror other in its orthopedic function, and to the transitive others of identification.

Rousseau speaks of two human forms of supplementation – *writing*, which is an addition to and substitute for speech, and *masturbation*, which is an addition to and substitute for the presence of the woman. Rousseau is moved by the desire to possess the natural, to possess presence. This desire is elicited by the *lack of presence*. The supplement becomes dangerous or, as Rousseau calls it, a "fatal advantage" [*funeste avantage*] (Derrida 1976, p. 151). According to Derrida, the supplement "leads desire away from the good path, makes it err far from natural ways, guides it towards its loss" (Derrida 1976, p. 151). A fatal advantage that leads to self-possession, a fatal advantage that keeps leading and leading the way forward by taking a bypass.

In our story, writing is likewise vital, if we understand writing in its expanded, deconstructive sense. For Gaspar Noé's film is obviously a specimen of *cinematographic* writing without a single word. The film itself is a *supplement for the impossible*, but the supplement itself *as such* is always already off screen. The possibility of the supplement proves impossible for reason to grasp. This is what Rousseau writes in the *Confessions*. Moreover, "[b]lindness to the supplement is the law. And especially to its concept" (Derrida 1976, p. 149). The law of the supplement operates like law because it is always already unconscious.

Supplementarity is simultaneously *substitution* and *addition*. It is not identical to itself: it is other to itself, other in itself. The supplement points to the fact that something considered whole and self-sufficient is not these things. Such, too, is the condition of "natural" man. The additive element in supplementarity also acts as a substitute. It emerges to supplant something and takes its place or, to be more precise, to take the place of existence's lack, of the originary absence of presence. The movie screening supplements the (impossible) sexual relationship and replaces it. Masturbation supplements the (impossible) sexual relationship and replaces it. Lacan's dictum becomes even more obvious in the regime of supplementarity.

For Rousseau, masturbation is condemnable because it deceives nature; on the other hand, it develops a rich imagination, which prostheticizes the lack of the natural. It is precisely the absence of the woman that leads

to the *immediate* imaginary attempt to possess her. The fatal advantage deceives nature and reassures the subject, but at the same time it generates a feeling of guilt that is introjected in connection with the threat of castration, and “[p]leasure is thus lived as the irremediable loss of the vital substance, as exposure to madness and death” (Derrida 1976, p. 151).

Masturbation is an obvious form of self-arousal. Derrida (1976, p. 153) emphasizes that the arousal we experience from the presence of another *changes us ourselves*. In and of itself, arousal is always already arousal itself, self-arousal. Derrida notes that “Rousseau neither wishes to think nor can think that this alteration does not simply happen to the self, that it is the self’s very origin,” that “[t]he thing itself does not appear outside of the symbolic system that does not exist without the possibility of auto-affection” (Derrida 1976, pp. 153–154). In this situation, the supplement activates the imagination and uses the desired image to supply a phantom “presence”: “procuring it for us through the proxy of the sign, it holds it at a distance and masters it. For this presence is at the same time desired and feared” (Derrida 1976, p. 155). Presence ends up “at a distance,” not here (*Da*), somewhere over there (*Fort*). Presence is represented in substitution, set aside, postponed for later.

Freud describes this supplementation in addition-substitution via the figure of the human subject as a prosthetic God. The prosthesis always already operates in the mode of supplementation. It is not present. To prostheticize means to supplement. Prostheses are situated between the (non) inside and the (non) outside. The human subject is situated between the (non) living and the (non) dead. The “origins” of the human being are found (neither) in the natural (nor) in the artificial. As Derrida says, they are found in artifactuality, in actuvirtual psychotechno-prostheticization. The human subject is revealed in the supplementation of liminal insufficiency with techno-specters, in the teletransmission of the self beyond impossible limits.

5. The Technics of Sex

The “origins” of the human subject are found in doubling, in the machine of the orthopsychical. The “origins” of the individual are found in the machine of writing, in the machine of representations, which reorganizes the external and internal, the psychical and non-psychical, the living and the dead. “The machine – and, consequently, representation – is death and finitude within the psyche” (Derrida 2001, p. 286). The life of death is inscribed in the operations of the masturbating machine.

By definition [Latin *manus* “hand” + *turbare* “to disturb”], the masturbating machine functions thanks to the hand. “The hand cannot be spoken about without speaking of technics” (Derrida 1987, p. 169): the technics of writing and the technics of masturbation, the technics of thinking and the technics of sex. Moreover, we must speak of the hand in its immediate connection with the machine of psychical writing, with its phantasmographic work. Hands are not all the same; the left hand is not the right hand. Will it be softened with the shift to working with two hands on the computer? After all, in the old days a man wrote and masturbated with one hand.

The phantasmatic representations experienced by the characters in *We Fuck Alone* are maintained by masturbation prostheses. Technical devices mediate autoerotism. The sexual obsession of the characters is filtered through dolls. Such, literally, is the technics of sex. The teenage girl masturbates with the aid of a large teddy bear, while the young man uses an inflatable doll. She gets a stuffed friend; he, a hairless, silicone doll. While the girl is satisfied by the teddy bear, the doll is not enough for the young man. In his cruel despair, he shoves a gun in the doll’s mouth as he masturbates with it. And the scene begins with him masturbating with one hand while managing to drink and smoke – that is, to stimulate his mouth – with the other. A double self-arousal in the obsessive movement of self-possession!

It would seem that these transient fantasy objects, these dolls, have nothing in common with each other. The inflatable doll is used for the purpose for which it was made. It is a product of the porno industry, and it is inevitably uncanny, distantly reminiscent of E.T.A. Hoffmann's character Olympia in "The Sandman." Whatever the case, it was produced to aid the young man with his masturbations, but the teddy bear? At first glance, it is the teenage girl who is perverse. Her agent is displaced: how dare she pull this stunt with a toy beloved by children the world over!

6. Autotechnoerotics, or To Each His Own, But Industrial for Everyone

In Gaspar Noé's film, the teenage girl, as in childhood, is surrounded by stuffed toys, by *toys for children*. As her fluffy double, the teddy bear of course occupies a privileged position among them. From time to time, this witness and petting accomplice winds up in the disposition of the con-templator, which we have discussed above. First, his mug with its joyfully opened maw stares down from a portrait hung above the girl's sofa. Second, from time to time the teddy bear is tossed over the toy's face first right onto the girl's private parts, which Teddy impulsively, like a spy, conceals from the viewer's eyes, while at the same time enabling us to identify with his gaze, now fixed in a position we might call *L'origine du monde*, the impossible position of "More, more!"

While the girl is assisted in her self-arousal by the fluffy bear cub, the young man is aided in arousing himself by a silicone girl, a *toy for adults*. Adults play at sex, and they do this seriously, of course, even, like the hero of our film, desperately. However, a toy is not enough for him. A rubber doll is not enough, nor is the teddy bear. Fantasy is not enough! Rousseau would have been perplexed: such people these days, and nothing is enough for them! Whatever the case, we must again reiterate that each character also needs a screen, and not just a simple white screen, but a screen with a *pornographic* film playing on it. Both the girl and the young man are situated before their own telepornographic hymen membranes. Each is situated within their own mediatedness. Or, to quote Friedrich Kittler, "There are many media techniques without love, but there is no such thing as love without media techniques" (Kittler 1999, p. 114).

We are situated between two screens as between two deaths. We, the viewers and con-templators, cross as it were the masturbatory screen, approaching the pornographic screen, which, in its determination to show everything, is impossible. We, *Fuck Alone*, are between the symbolic screen of representation and the screen of the impossible, the unrepresentable, *the Real*. The doubling of screens, moreover, likewise annuls the porno effect. *We Fuck Alone* presents us with the indecent formula for today's *industrially prostheticized sexuality–porno screen+ inflatable doll + gun*– but at the same time it remains outside of pornography. When we speak of the industrialization of sexuality, we should note that sexuality cannot help being forced through the crucible of mass-consumerist ideology. This is witnessed by the fact that sexuality itself is today most often understood as a form of entertainment and an object of necessary and consumable surplus enjoyment [*plus-de-jouir*]. You *have to* do it! Even if you don't want to, if for no other reason, you have to do it for your health. In short, you have to do it, *Teddy*, you have to!

As we can see, this is no longer Rousseau's good old formula: *fantasy + hand = satisfaction of desire*. Industrialized masturbation pulsates to industrialized techno-time, the time of the teddy bear and the time of the porno screen, the time of synchronization, a deranged time. In their lonely masturbation, the girl and the young man are *lonely together*. They will never meet, but we cinephiles can see that they are synchronous in their industrially montaged techno-porno time. It is no wonder that is entitled *We Fuck Alone*, rather than *Each Person Fucks Alone*. We bang ourselves synchronously alone. Masturbatory time is irreversible. Irreversibility time-delays time from the future. Time destroys everything. The synchrony of narcissism erases everything, bringing time to a halt.

For Freud, the origin of time has to do with the intermittent way that inscriptions are registered in the psyche. It is not only a matter of the protracted unconscious with its discreteness, but also of the discrete

manner in which psychical writing is stratified. The discreteness in inscriptions is caused by the gaps *between* psychical agencies. The intervals [*espacement*] between inscriptions, the *différance* between them already establishes a diachronic dimension. The technical apparatus of writing structures that very same time that is deranged by synchronizing teletechno prostheses.

7. Desperate Deferred Pulsations of the Regular Interval, Flashing Gaps on the Pulse of Time

The time of masturbation is a time of repetition, a time when time is forfeited in repetitive non-movement. Unperformable movements are performed over and over again. One and the same thing over and over again. Repetitions operate at all levels of Gaspar Noé's film: the masturbatory rhythm, the alternation of scenes, the soundtrack. All these elements produce the effect of a perpetuum mobile, of eternal return and eternal rotation. Time becomes non-time as it were; the doublings cause it to stand still. It might last eleven minutes, twenty-two minutes, forty-four minutes, eighty-eight minutes... It returns as it were to its eternal, "originless" origins, to itself as doubling, to its *différance*.

Repetition is inscribed into the film's *tekhne* and into the industrial pulsations of the stroboscope's neuro-attack. The entire film, from first frame to last, is illuminated by a stroboscopic effect: it is here we find the source of the dizziness that might ensue during screenings. How could time not become deranged? How could it not double? *We Fuck Alone* warns its viewers:

THIS FILM CONTAINS STROBING EFFECTS

THAT MAY BE HARMFUL TO VIEWERS

AFFLICTED WITH EPILEPSY

It is not the illusion of continuity that the stroboscopic effect demonstrates, but discreteness, the intervals of time that *periodically* succeed one another, flashing gaps, interstices. This effect is caused by the fact that the perceiving consciousness preserves a trace of what it has seen. At the basis of Gaspar Noé's film is a flickering trace in which there is no place for the illusion of continuity. Continuity is displaced into uncanny photic intervals.

By stroboscoping the impossible sexual relationship, Noé appeals to the very foundations of cinematography: whereas the twentieth century "managed to transfer the cinematograph effect back into everyday life," the nineteenth century "had to first discover the stroboscope effect in order to make filmmaking possible at all" (Kittler 1999, p. 166). Cinematographic writing is a species of the stroboscope. The absence of continuity, the trace of non-presence, the displaced illusion, the warning to viewers, the pulsation – all these things cannot help but produce an effect of the uncanny to one degree or another.

Gaspar Noé lays the sutures bare; he returns a perpetually unmistakable fear to the screen – the fear of the impossible: the fear of the impossible plenitude of presence, of the impossible sexual relationship, of the impossibility of possessing the thing once more, finally, of possessing oneself. Where is self-possession here? Must one find oneself in self-arousal and possess it? No, one must find the self *again* and possess!

Again and again, over and over one must seek the self *through* an other! This motion lays bare the photic intervals of the drive; in the masturbatory regularity of the interval, it awakens prehistoric times, times of pulsating reflection without the subject.

Again and again the pulsation presets future time, time deferred until later. Over and over the pulsar resonates via the doubles of *We Fuck Alone*. Again and again time escapes from the uncanny coupling of

the techno-mediated fantasy. This coupling is supported by the repeated, barely audible cries of an infant: it is maintained and ruptured. The birth of the subject is deferred again and again. As long as the drive pulses, as long as *pulsion* pulses, as long as...

We can divide the life of each instinct into a series of separate successive waves, each of which is homogeneous during whatever period of time it may last [*in einzelne zeitlich geschiedene und innerhalb der (beliebigen) Zeitenheit gleichartige Schuebe zerlegen*], and whose relation to one another is comparable to that of successive eruption of lava (Freud 1914–1916, p. 131).

Repetition is a trait of the drive, which, as we know, is ruled by the principle of compulsive repetition. Its aim is the eternal return, eternal self-arousal and eternal self-elimination. The aim of the drive's pulsation is to pulsate: a closed circuit, an aimless aim. Pleasure oozes out *along the detour* of repetition. But repetition itself is *also* the persistence of the signifying chain, is *also* the persistence of the repeating letter, is also the compulsion of the formula for the impossible relationship. Repetition is a return to the routes of otherworldly pleasure.

The film approaches the temporary denouement of the little death. It moves closer and closer to resolution. Life and death, love and despair, punishment and reward double rhythmically in pulsation.

Freud traces compulsive movements to the repetitive motions that have their origins in masturbation. On October 27, 1897, he writes to Fliess, "It has become clear to me that various compulsive movements represent a substitute for the discontinued movements of masturbation" (Freud 1985, p. 275). Compulsive repetition produces time in the protracted unconscious to the same extent that it obliterates it in the pulsation of regular intervals.

Time is doubled from the outset: it is already bifurcated in its forfeited origins. It is situated on the edge of melancholia, resemioticization, at the limit of the Symbolic, in a doubling that again and again attempts to take possession of the Thing in its impossible, perpetual intermediacy. We can repeat retroactively: *Omni animal post coitum triste*. In this impossibility, in this photic interval, in this clearing *between* always too early and always too late, all that remains, following Freud, is to add, "The time intervals would fit [*Die Zeitdifferenzen wuerden stimmen*]" (Freud 1985, p. 94).

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