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Jung-Hsien Lin

Claremont Graduate University

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Intimate Stranger, Strange Intimacy
Towards the (Sinthôm)Ethics of Transference Love in Lacan's Analyst's Discourse

by
Jung-Hsien Lin

Claremont Graduate University
2019

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APPROVAL OF THE DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Jung-Hsien Lin as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Cultural Studies.

Dr. Eve Oishi, Chair

Claremont Graduate University
Associate Professor of Cultural Studies

Dr. David Luis-Brown

Claremont Graduate University
Associate Professor of Cultural Studies and English

Dr. Darrell Moore

Claremont Graduate University
Visiting Professor of Cultural Studies

Dr. Joshua Goode

Claremont Graduate University
Associate Professor of Cultural Studies and History

Abstract

Intimate Stranger, Strange Intimacy

Towards the (Sinthôm)Ethics of Transference Love in Lacan's Analyst's Discourse

by
Jung-Hsien Lin

Claremont Graduate University: 2019

This dissertation explores one of the four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis, as suggested by Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), which is transference. Broadly defined, transference refers to the relationship between the analyst and the analysand transpiring during the analytic process. Although Sigmund Freud and Lacan have presented contrasting views with regards to the term, both of them share one common ground, that is, taking transference to be the aim of the psychoanalytic practices. Due to its theoretical divergences and convergences, debates about transference have focused on whether or not such an analytic aim is truly ethical. What complicates the discussion of ethics in the field of psychoanalysis is the role of desire, along with its intervention in transference and love, specifically the nature of its intersubjectivity and the question of authenticity. *If transference marks the aim of an analytic treatment, what kind of Lacanian subject awaits at the end of the process and in what way could this new subjectivity and praxis be ethically useful?* This is the main question this project sets out to investigate.

The central claim of *Intimate Stranger, Strange Intimacy* is that transference love opens up an ethical condition in which the subject could recognize the truth concerning one's own desire, which provides the opportunity for radical change in one's subjectivity but the subject must *act* in accordance with the truth. In the Lacanian terminology, the act is ethical because the

subject must be held accountable for such an act, which should be distinguished from actions. The ethics in question is the ethics of psychoanalysis, *qua* an ethics of desire. As the recognition of truth alters the subject's relation to the desire of the Other, it thus denotes a reconstitution of the subject's symptom and a reconfiguration of its own subjectivity, corresponding to what Lacan means by "traversing the fantasy and identify with the *sinthôme*." To illustrate such a process, I designate an original model, *the sinthômethics*, built on several of Lacan's core concepts (i.e. Four Discourses, ethics of desire, transference etc.), and I unpack its intricacies by conducting two case studies, André Aciman's *Call Me by Your Name* (2007) and Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013). Different from traditional literary analysis, my method traces the unfolding of desire but not of text; that is, what I attempt to illustrate through my reading of these two texts is concerned solely with Lacan's teaching and to what extent psychoanalysis is, in effect, a praxis approachable as a way of life, but not with making a generalizable literary theory applicable for approaching literature at large.

With *the sinthômethics*, I hope to demonstrate the ways in which transference love provides an ethical condition for the subject to return to the Self, the truth of one's own desire. Such a model issues forth both a reminder and a reconsideration of the analytic goal in the Lacanian framework, that is, the core of any theoretical endeavors should be *praxis*. Yet, rather than to "cure" or "free" the subject of its own symptoms, what Lacan aims to achieve at the end of all analytic processes, I argue, is to produce a subject *that is capable of taking care of its Self*. To that end, the subject must first be able to acknowledge the truth of its own desire, which is the main objective of transference love. To know the Self *truthfully* as a way to care for the Self—that is the way of *the sinthômethics*, and it is the (*Real*) ethical imperative of a Lacanian subject.

To Eve Oishi,

who transformed my writing from a perverse symptom into an act of love.

Acknowledgements

The most rewarding part of writing a project on ethics and love is that I have been surrounded by a committee that are living embodiments of what ethics and love truly mean. Without my committee, this project would not be possible. I owe my profound gratitude to Dr. Eve Oishi, who has never ceased to inspire and encourage me through her moral courage, her words of wisdom, and acts of kindness. She brought hope, clarity, and integrity into my academic odyssey and taught me how to “love the Self” when I almost gave it up. Dr. Oishi has turned this project into a scholarship of mine, a scholarship that I had never dreamed of having. My dedication of this dissertation to her is not the end of my gratitude but its beginning.

I am truly grateful to Dr. David Luis-Brown for having attended to all details and logical inconsistencies in the project and for leading me into ways of “knowing the Self.” I was very fortunate to have him as my advisor in the Master’s program in English, which further motivated me to pursue a doctoral degree in Cultural Studies. Dr. Luis-Brown has been, from the early stage of my graduate studies, a major influence on my growth as a graduate student.

So much thanks to Dr. Joshua Goode, I did not lose sight of “what’s at stake” in the field of Cultural Studies and discovered the niche for my project through “the alienated Self.” Dr. Goode also showed me that sharing is indeed caring by always sharing cookies with me when I felt overwhelmed by the academic aloofness. I learned to do the same for others.

This project is indebted to Dr. Darrell Moore, who not only kindly allowed me to borrow the term “unfolding” in framing my method but triggered me into reevaluating and rearticulating the implication of my project. Dr. Moore reminded me that my theory can and does matter inasmuch as it doubles as a practice; it is in unfolding my own theory for practice that I can truly “take care of the Self.” I am deeply touched by his genuine care and unflinching encouragement.

Lauren Morrison and Francesca Gacho proved that friendship *is* a way of life. Their presence has sustained me through some of the most difficult times in my life, and I love them just as much as they have been caring for me under all circumstances. Dr. Megan Gallagher has been more than a loving friend but an incredible mentor. My early days of cluelessness in graduate school would have been tragic without her advice. I benefited so much from their wit, knowledge, and experience. They have spoiled me with an enormous amount of care and humor that powered me through this very long, sometimes lonely, journey into the wild wild West.

I also wish to express my appreciation to Dr. Marcus Weakley and Dr. Greer Murphy for their thoughtfulness and high tolerance of an irresponsible employee like me. This project would require a much longer time to complete if they did not allow me the flexibility in my work schedule. They are not only extraordinary supervisors but, most importantly, invaluable friends.

It is amazing that Yu-Ting Sun and Po Shin Huang have never doubted my ability to finish. Karen Lee Hsu and Craig Hsu have never forgotten me. Eileen Lo and Ting-Hsuan Su always have faith in me. I can never thank them enough for seeing the end for me when I did not.

Melody Hui-Chi Lin, Claire Tien Lee Chen, Pi-Ju Marian Liu, and Susan Shuo Lee are my role models. I admire them for the true spirit of “She said she could so she did.”

I did not know if I could, but I am glad that I did. I did it for love. My love goes to Yu-Chen Yang, Wei-Chen Lin, and Yi-Chen Lin, to whom I owe everything, and to James Hideki Nguyen, who has given me everything. It is extremely difficult to find the right words to thank them, but words may not be necessary as they always have my heart. My family has indulged me with all the love in the world; without them, I would not be possible.

In loving memory of

林天永
Ting-Yung Lin
(1945-1997)

and

楊林愛治
Ai-Chih Yang-Lin
(1926-2015)

Preface

“Love that Lives Life”

“If I am mobilized in a war, this war is *my* war; it is in my image and I deserve it.”
Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (1943)

“I do not know what meaning classical studies could have for our time if they were not untimely—that is to say, acting counter to our time and thereby acting on our time and, let us hope, for the benefit of a time to come.”
Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations* (1876)

Initially I intended this preface to be a letter to my committee, yet (un)fortunately, in one of these restless nights, it struck me that this “thing” I have deemed so dear and intimate may no longer remain simply between my committee and me. How terrifying!

In *How to Read Lacan* (2007), Slavoj Žižek does not actually show us how to read Lacan; instead, he presents how Lacan would read. Are the two the same? In this case, yes. That is, to read about “how to read Lacan” is to read “how Lacan would read [fill-in-the-blank] through Žižek.” It is Žižek’s how-to-read, Lacan or not Lacan.

A similar logic applies here. If this dissertation serves in any way as an attempt to demonstrate “how to read Lacan on love,” then I must say that “how to” would not make sense without “the eye/I.” Admitting this project is on intimacy—or more specifically, on the love and ethics of the Self—this “thing” is an intimate part of me; in showing “how to read love and ethics,” I am also revealing my own relationship to *my* Self as well as *my* ethics to you. It is terrifying because “this reading” will start my relationship to you, and perhaps, to *your* Self, and *your* ethics.

It is also terrifying because “this reading” does not promise a happy ending, which is why I am writing a letter to you.

Once I came across a professor of Positive Psychology, who claimed that he had never met a Lacanian who was happy. To this I immediately responded, “happiness is overrated.” He was appalled. But I must stand with Lacan here—it is not that Lacan makes us unhappy; rather, it is that those who are unhappy find Lacan compelling. I think this is what draws me to Lacan. I must confess I am not a happy subject. For someone has been battling with depression and anxiety for almost two decades, Lacan offers an alternative language that is reassuring.

For one, at the end there is love. Lacan never says that “one is born to be happy” or that happiness is the goal of one’s life. It is fine to be “other-than-happy” as long as *I am that*. The end of the analytic process is not to produce a happy subject but to produce love (transference). It is to produce a subject that could finally see the Self in the eyes and acknowledge “I am that (but no one or nothing else).”

For the other, in this love there is a will to live. This love must live life. In my reading of Lacan’s ethical imperative, to traverse the fantasy and live as the *sinthôme* highlights the verb, “*live*.” To live as one’s *jouissance* is to live as the pleasure in pain. That is the evil of life—one must live. In love I live. This is the ethics of desire, with which I live not for the good, but for the beautiful.

I might not be good (or happy), but I can be beautiful. This is my reading of how to read Lacan. If you happen to find this project, and if you happen to be anything but happy, I hope that my reading leads you to your own writing, that my writing to your reading. If you are, like me, at war with the Self and sometimes find it difficult to seek peace, keep in mind that we have the war we deserve, and we have only this life to live.

This project itself is an untimely meditation. It is untimely because the Lacanian subject of love is, by definition, untimely. I do not know what meaning *the subject of love* could have for our subjectivity if it were not “un-subjective”—that is to say, acting counter to our subjectivity and thereby acting on our subjectivity and, let us hope, for the benefit of a Self to come.

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Introduction

“Love that Acts Strange”

“When in love, I solicit a look, what is profoundly unsatisfying
and always missing is that—
You never look at me from the place from which I see you.
Conversely, *what I look at is never what I wish to see.*”
Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XI* (1964)

“Wo Es war, soll Ich werden.”
 (“Where It was, shall I be.”)
Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1933)
Quoted in Lacan, “The Freudian Thing” (1955)

I. “In You More than You”

The sense of alienation becomes strangely intimate when a subject encounters an other.¹

With an “alien” inscribed, it seems that alienation makes us strangers, and this estrangement produces disjunctions in our subjective experiences.² Despite its negative connotation, this

¹ It is important to note that the Other and the other are not the same; the most simplified distinction is as follows, “In Lacanian psychoanalysis, there is the other and the Other: the former signifies that which is not really other but is a reflection and projection of the ego; the latter signifies a radical alterity irreducible to any imaginary or subjective identification” (Julian Wolfreys 169). For an elaborated definition of the Other, see Julian Wolfreys’s entry on “Other” in *Critical Keywords in Literary and Cultural Theory*, pp. 169-77, as well as Dylan Evans’s entry on “other/Other (*autre/Autre*)” in *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, pp. 132-33. In addition to the other in the Imaginary register, the lower case other in this project also refers to the other individual, but the context should make it clear which “other” is involved.

² Alienation is a common thread among social and philosophical inquiries across different theoretical lens and disciplines, such as Marxist critiques, postcolonial studies, and psychoanalysis. Karl Marx, as an example of how the term is discussed with a not-so-positive attitude, presents the term as the consequence of the capitalist, industrial mode of production, in which the workers become detached through the objectification of not only their selves but their own labor. As such, the commodification of social relationships has presented barriers and challenges to the ways through which human subjects could possibly relate to one another; see Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx’s Concept of Man in Capitalist*

specific form of *estrangement* also paradoxically consolidates our sense of being, specifically if we situate the term in a psychoanalytic framework. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the “mirror stage” is crucial, as it initializes our process of becoming a subject, a stage in which the baby sees the image of the self and perceives it as an imaginary “other” which later develops into a symbolic “Other.” That is, it is precisely this “seeing the image of the self” in the place of the Other that triggers the primary identification in the individual (most likely as a baby), an identification that has led to the debate in the field of psychoanalysis as to whether love is possible. For this reason, “Love your neighbor” itself seems an innocent aphorism, whereas “Love your neighbor as thyself” becomes a problematic command. If love (by way of loving an object-choice deriving from the ego) is impossible as it cannot escape completely the shadow of narcissism, how, then, is human relation possible, or, how should intimacy be conceived in relation to alienation and its vicissitudes? This dissertation, *Strange Intimacy, Intimate Stranger*, attempts to address such disjunctions by reassessing a specific form of intimacy, that is, love. To be more precise, my project focuses primarily on a specialized category of love in the Lacanian terminology—transference love.

The term “transference,” both as a concept and a phenomenon, plays a crucial role in psychoanalysis due to its paradoxical nature; being simultaneously an end and an aim, it thus poses an obstacle to the treatment while functioning as the motor that drives the treatment forward. In *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1964), Lacan names transference to be one of the four concepts (i.e. the unconscious, repetition, transference, and the drive), an act that affirms its theoretical importance. Although Lacan acknowledges the theoretical heritage of his notion of transference is Freudian, the two of them have proposed

Society, 2nd ed., Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976, for more details concerning Marx’s theoretical development of alienation.

almost antithetical definitions of the term. Sigmund Freud originally defines transference as “the displacement of *affect* from one idea to another”; later on, he employs the term to describe “the patient’s *relationship* to the analyst as it develops in the analytic treatment” (*SE V* 562, qtd. in Evans 211), a definition that still provides the central meaning in psychoanalytic theory today (specifically among the ego psychologists). Lacan, nevertheless, departs from such an (ego psychologist) approach to transference in terms of affects³ and contends that “transference often manifests itself in the guise of strong affects, such as love and hate, it does not consist of such emotions *but in the structure of an intersubjective relationship*” (Evans 211, emphasis mine). Simply put, transference should not be considered as an affect but as *that which emerges in the structure of the unconscious*.

What, then, is the unconscious? Lacan has one consistent (and concise) answer: “*It is language*” (*Écrits* 714; *Seminar XI* 216-22). As Bruce Fink nicely puts, “language is that which makes up the unconscious” (*Lacanian Subject* 8). The phrase “makes up” is indicative; it points to ways in which *parts become whole*, or *whole consists of parts*. It underlines that it is *constituted*. Without language, there is no such thing as the unconscious. However, Lacan also states that “the unconscious is the Other’s discourse” (*Écrits* 312), meaning that it is “the Other” who structures that language. But Lacan’s Other is never a person; it designates a “locus,” a symbolic network of signifiers. It is the signifiers that constitute language, and it is by language that the subject comes to be. The Lacanian subject is an *effect* of language. What does that mean?

I will now return to the function of alienation. In Freudian terminology, alienation is “castration”; in Lacan’s words, it denotes, *symbolically* that the subject *has given up* something

³ Although Lacan does not present a general theory of affects, he does insist that the network of affect is located in the Symbolic (i.e. in the social, as opposed to the Imaginary, the personal), and affects are not signifiers but *signals* (*Seminar VII* 102-3).

(i.e. *jouissance*) in its own being in order to become a subject. In the Mirror Stage, as stated in the beginning, the baby *must choose* to accept language (of the Other) in exchange for its status of a subject. In other words, the subject is *subjected to language, the discourse of the Other*. This is why, the Lacanian subject is written as (S), read as the split subject or the barred subject (Evans 192). The split or bar is what defines the subject, and there is no subject without its split. Language splits the subject into two “parts”: the conscious and the unconscious, and the subject is never “whole.” This is why, once the subject accepts language, the Other punctures a hole in its core. Due to the unconscious and language (as in alienation), “there is no sexual relationship” (“*Il n’y a pas de rapport sexuel*”) but precisely as such, Lacan declares, “there is love” (*Seminar XX 45*). There is no sexual relationship for reason that in “the formula of sexuation” (78) masculine and feminine *positions* are two sites that contain two distinctive sets of signifiers; therefore, the two “sexed positions” have *nothing* to relate with “the Other (sex).”

But Lacan does not leave the subject without hope. In fact, besides “alienation,” there is also “separation”⁴: “Lacan’s second operation, *separation, involves the alienated subject’s confrontation with the Other, not as language this time, but as desire*” (Fink 50). In this second operation, “*the subject is caused by the Other’s desire*” (50); therefore, what is central to separation is “lack.” However, what distinguishes the function of separation from that of alienation is, while alienation is a “forced choice”—*Your money or your life!*—separation is not. As it is a contingency of desire (and the subject’s relation to desire), it could lead further to an ultimate separation—the subject’s traversal of fantasy (61-63). This explains why, if in alienation, the subject is invented by way of *an identification*, then, in separation, the subject could create *an identity* by “*subjectifying the cause*” (Fink 63). If we read this separation in

⁴ The following explanation is based on Bruce Fink; see “Chapter 5: The Subject and the Other’s Desire” in *The Lacanian Subject*.

conjunction with Lacan's statement that, while there is no sexual relationship, "[w]hat makes up for the sexual relationship, is quite precisely, love" (*Seminar XX* 45), then we could agree that transference love does have the potential to become a "transformative force." *The transformation must come through at the level of the subject.*

Influenced by Hegelian dialectics and Saussure's structuralism, Lacan describes "symbolic transference" as "something that takes place chang[ing] the nature of the two beings present" (*Seminar I* 109); that is, what is symbolic in the process resides in *the transformative force* accompanying such an exchange (of signs, as in the speech act).⁵ If transference seems to emerge in the appearance of love, it concerns primarily with one specific type of love, which is the "love of knowledge (*savoir*)" or symbolic knowledge.⁶ This is one of Lacan's theses of transference in *Seminar XI* (1964) when he introduces the term, "the Subject-Supposed-to-Know," which remains central to Lacan's conceptualization of transference. What "this [Other] Subject [is] Supposed to Know" is the *truth* of one's desire; as such, transference love is inseparable from the subject's yearning for truth and knowledge. From this perspective, transference connotes the structural attribution of knowledge to the Other, meaning the Other is not actually a *subject* but a *site* of knowledge; "as soon as the subject who is supposed to know exists somewhere [...] there is transference" (*Seminar XI* 232). This move away from the love associated with the realm of *the Imaginary* (i.e. narcissistic, interpersonal love as suggested in

⁵ Lacan has revised his teaching of transference over several stages, such as the one quoted here in *Seminar I* and later in *Seminar VIII* and *XI*; for details of the development of the term, see Dylan Evans's entry on "transference (*transfert*)," pp. 211-14.

⁶ Lacan distinguishes two types of knowledge: one is symbolic knowledge (*savoir*) and the other is imaginary knowledge (*connaissance*). The former is a knowledge found in the Symbolic realm as opposed to the latter is found in the Imaginary realm, and therefore, *savoir* is a knowledge that "means" in relation to the Other (i.e. Law) and desire, while *connaissance* is limited to an illusory knowledge that is tied to misrecognition (*méconnaissance*) and fantasy. I will also return to these two forms of knowledge later in Chapter Two.

the mirror stage) and into *the Symbolic* underscores the discursive formation—or the intersubjective structure—of transference love, considering the Symbolic in the Lacanian terminology always entails the structures of society (i.e. language, the Other, and Law).⁷ What defines this transformative force in transference is the *structural* changes in the subject (and in Chapter One, I will present a structure for illustrating such a change). That is, *it must alter the relationship between the subject and the Other*. Since there is no such a “relationship” between the subject and the Other in love (between two sexed positions), what is being altered is, symbolically speaking, the subject’s relation to the Other as language (that is, as set of all signifiers), as demand (for love), as desire (*qua* the *objet a*), or as *jouissance* (via the symptom).⁸

If transference in its broadest sense describes *that which exists* between the analysand and the analyst, then for Freud, it reveals what hides in the folds of the subject, whereas for Lacan, it is precisely *in the unfolding of the subject* itself. This may justify why, in Freudian analytic setting, it is the analyst who must tell the subject his/her truth, and the end of the analytic process is determined by whether or not the analyst has successfully “interpreted” the analysand’s desire. Lacan, on the contrary, rejects such a projection of the analyst’s desire—it is an *interdiction*, something that cannot be said.⁹ It seems that Freud focuses on alienation whereas Lacan thinks of separation; the key here is not language but desire. What the analyst needs to say is “nothing” but “no” (and I will take on this “no” again in Chapter Two). The analyst must refuse the subject’s demand (for love) and denounces its own position as “the Subject-Supposed-to-Know.” Only in so doing could the subject come to terms with its own desire.

⁷ For more concerning “the Symbolic” and its relation to the social, see Evans, pp. 201-03.

⁸ Here I follow Bruce Fink’s categories of the Other in *The Lacanian Subject* (13).

⁹ For more comparison between Freudian and Lacanian positions regarding transference and the analytic practices, see Colette Soler, “The Aim of the Analytic Act” in *Umbr(a): Incurable*, No. 1 (2006): pp. 53-63.

Transference, as Lacan suggests, should not be dismissed as a consistent, permanent “effect” (i.e. the affects or emotions as love or hate produced at the termination of an analytic exchange); rather, it captures a discursive, dynamic “process” in which the subject *re-constitutes* its relationship to the Other in *re-configuring* the subject as the Self, capable of being held accountable for such “strong affects.” Note that in transference, it is a “re-constitution” of subjectivity because the subject of psychoanalysis is always already an effect of the unconscious. Without the Other, “I” would not come into being, Without the senses of the subject, one’s being would become disoriented. The quest for self-orientation gives birth to the love of truth and knowledge. It is by virtue of the command for love of knowledge and truth that transference intersects with ethics. In “The Freudian Thing” (1955),¹⁰ Lacan stresses that “[psychoanalytic] ethics are not individualistic” (*Écrits* 346); while it is about the subject, it should not be bounded by the individual body. Precisely because it is about the subject and “it is the [subject’s] duty to come into being” (348), alienation and separation present two major ethical operations in which subject must *act*. The psychoanalytic ethics is of desire, and desire is always for *something else*. In transference, the desire for the “Subject-Supposed-to-Know” is love of knowledge, the One for truth that the subject has given up in order to become a subject. The desire for truth is always a desire for more. The truth is, there is always more than the subject, for there is the Self.

The link to knowledge inspires Lacan to describe love as “philosophical” (*Seminar XX* 68). As transference is the love of knowledge, it is a love to *know oneself*; in Greco-Roman philosophical tradition, to know oneself is the most genuine way to *take care of oneself*. Before it came to represent a way of knowing, philosophy, or “the love of wisdom,” has long been a way

¹⁰ In “The Freudian Thing” Lacan also refers to Freud’s “Wo Es war, soll Ich werden” (347) as the psychoanalytic ethics of the subject: “It is my duty that I come into being” (348).

of living.¹¹ What this practice of living aims for is the care of oneself. Read in conjunction with this line of thought, transference love is, in essence, *a way of life*, for it aims to produce the “know-hows” for taking care of the Self. *Transference is thus a transformative process* in which the subject moves from “the love of knowledge” to “a life of truth,” from identification to identity. In exploring an alternative “way of life” for an alienated, desiring subject and in reevaluating the possible condition for human relations, my dissertation intervenes in this critical conjunction of transference and subjectivity.

II. Intimate Stranger, Strange Intimacy

The main part of my dissertation title, *Intimate Stranger, Strange Intimacy*, resonates with two other texts: Patrice Leconte’s French film, *Confidences Trop Intimes*, translated as *Intimate Strangers* (2004), and Nayan Shah’s scholarly investigation, *Stranger Intimacy* (2011), with each representing different approaches to reading intersubjective potential in our contemporary society.¹² The film follows the tradition of a comedy of errors, starting with Anna, the main female protagonist, having mistaken William, a tax specialist, as her new therapist once she had walked into the wrong office that is only one-door down. William, who has missed the initial opportunity for clarifying his true identity, silently accepted his new role and played along. Leconte’s *Intimate Strangers* thus highlights a pessimism under which individuals could only relate through mistaken/masqueraded identities, or, even more radically speaking, human relationship is a sheer fantasy—two strangers could share the most intimate secrets of their lives

¹¹ This is often associated with Socratic ethics and politics; for details concerning Greco-Roman philosophical traditions, please see the entries of “Ancient Political Philosophy” and “Socrates” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

¹² “Intimacy” is, in fact, a quite popular topic among theorists across disciplines. Other well-known scholars in this field who share similar interest include (but not limited to) Julia Kristeva, Leo Bersani, Alain Badiou, Mari Ruti, Lauren Berlant, to name a few.

precisely because they “do not matter” to each other. Shah’s book, *Stranger Intimacy*, however, proposes an alternative reading to such pessimism by analyzing the ways in which international workers/subjects navigate in contemporary transnational empire of capitalism. *Stranger Intimacy* examines, specifically, South Asian male migrants and the diverse social bonding and relationships these immigrant-workers form as a resource for survival. On the one hand, Shah interrogates whether all ties of intimacy are worth celebrating considering it is the law (backed by the state) that determines which subject is considered qualified as “intimate” (as an inclusive ideological apparatus); on the other hand, this unique intimacy shared among these strangers also constitutes a site for subverting (if not threatening) the legitimacy of the state that has marked them as “a subject to the law.” By offering a critical historical approach to the law and the norms in the North American West starting from the early mid-twentieth century (i.e. United States and Canada), Shah’s thesis in *Stranger Intimacy* destabilizes the binaries between the nation and the alien, the proper and the perverse, and ultimately, heteronormative citizenship and queer socialities.

My title, in revising both Shah’s and Leconte’s works, thus indicates a shift of emphasis between my project and theirs—while their works explore the possibility of relationship *between* subjects, mine probes into the potentiality of how subjects “relates” *within* a subject. In other words, by focusing primarily on the *inter*-subjective ties but not directly on the *intra*-subjective ones, my project commands a redefinition or reimagination of the social link. Though not completely speaking in the same logic as the feminist slogan of “The personal is the political,” this project underscores the confluence of the individual and the social in the formation of a subject. According to Lacan, the unconscious is never an isolated system that rejects communications with the social; quite the contrary, it is an intersubjective network contingent

upon the existence of an “other.” One of the most quoted statements of Lacan is “the unconscious is structured like a language”; yet it is often misquoted and taken out of context. Lacan’s emphasis is on “structure” but not on *language*. The unconscious is structured, sharing the structure similar to the linguistic system, say, the ways of which language operates. Therefore, it is the unconscious (structured like a language) that speaks in the position of the subject. In this case, the Lacanian subject is a “speaking being” (*parlêtre*), as it is language that brings the subject into being. Desire is the remainder from demand; as human beings, any desire finds its origin in the demand for love. To address such a demand through speaking by way of desire, the subject articulates the lack—“I want...”—for what one “wants” one does not have. Desire, is thus, by definition, insatiable. To approach the Lacanian subject as a subject of desire is to approach the intersubjective link between the subject and its (m)Other. To consider desire in the Lacanian framework is to discuss subjectivity at the level of the social. By centering on an alternative social link and intimate possibilities suggested by Lacanian psychoanalysis, my project highlights the ethical possibility related to desire, a concept to which I will return. We live with a stranger in us—a *site* of knowledge that we do not know that we possess—sometimes it is called the self, other times, the id or the unconscious. Love at this first “site,” being the quintessence of intimacy, becomes quite strange indeed. Our sense of alienation precedes the discourse of capitalism; it is what makes us human. By suspending the convention of locating intimacy in *between* subjects, I am able to present a new synthesis of a strange intimacy that simultaneously incorporates two contending forces, external and internal, *within* a singular subject.

Arguing against the general critiques that transference love in the analytic process is neither ethical nor authentic since it could only be either a product of manipulation (of the

analyst) or an act of imitation (of what “true” love is), my dissertation contends that *transference* love is an *ethical* condition, which opens up a possibility, as *an event*, for the subject to return to the Self. Thus, transference love is not at all a romantic feeling or an emotion; instead, it represents a subjective response, a procedure, and it leads to the final *act*¹³ to which the subject must be held accountable. This final stage at which the subject arrives, I designate the name of “the *sinthômethics*.” My neologism makes a direct reference to two critical notions in Lacan’s teachings that may affect the trajectory of current debates on transference vis-à-vis subjectivity: *the sinthôme* and the *ethics of desire*. While the term “sinthome” has evolved from the concept of the symptom, the two are not the same (at least in the later Lacanian teaching of 1975-76). In analytic settings, a symptom is the manifestations of the underlying psychic dysfunctions in the structure (i.e. neurosis or perversion). Two subjects may be showing the same symptom but not sharing the same structure, which is why symptoms are “metaphors” that stand in for something else; they are messages that demands interpretations. The sinthome, in effect, is a move away from the decipherability of the symptom; it “thus designates a signifying formation beyond analysis, a kernel of enjoyment immune to the efficacy of the symbolic. Far from calling for some analytic ‘dissolution’, the sinthome is what ‘allows one to live’ by providing a unique organisation of *jouissance*” (Evans 188-89). For that reason, the aim of the analysis shifts from *a dissolution of the symptom to an identification with the sinthome*.

Taking to heart Lacan’s theory of the sinthome (and how it departs from the symptom), I propose a hybrid model of unconscious intimacy built on Lacan’s seminars on the transference and ethics, and his theory of Four Discourses, which is a theoretical framework of

¹³ The choice of word “act” is intentional; in Lacanian psychoanalysis, an act is a human act—as opposed to “behavior” shared by all animals—and it relates to ethics in that the subject has to be held responsible (see Evans, pp. 1-2).

intersubjectivity operating the unconscious, specifically the Analyst's Discourse.¹⁴ To do so, my project includes two major steps. The first step is to construct the model by incorporating several fundamental concepts and theoretical frameworks of Lacan, specifically those related to love and ethics. Most of my materials come from *Seminar VII* (ethics), *Seminar VIII* (transference), *Seminar XVII* (four discourses), *Seminar XX* (sexuation), and *Écrits*.¹⁵ The second step is to put this model to work. To demonstrate the application of the sinthomethics and the implication of this new way to subjectivity, I engage two narratives of love in this project as case studies—André Aciman's *Call Me by Your Name* (2007) and Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013)—so as to facilitate a Lacanian reading of literature and to better orient my investigations of transference towards the discussion of ethics of desire and the aesthetics of being.

The phrase “case studies” announces the status of literature in my project. Although I engage with two literary texts, I do not attempt to engage in the field of Literary Theory (with the “T”). Instead, my method of reading is a Lacanian one; that is, my theory for these two specific literary texts is by no means a literary theory, or theories of literature—it does not intend to provide a “template” for reading or interpreting the texts. I do not expect that anyone, after learning the moves in decoding the sinthomethics, would be able to read and fit *every text* into the model of the sinthomethics (which is the goal of traditional Literary Theory). Quite the contrary, the sinthomethics would only appear where the structure contains it. In the last section of this chapter, I will return to what literature and writing means *to Lacan* and how exactly he

¹⁴ In my project, I would refer to Lacan's theory of Four Discourses as “Four Discourses” and the discourse of the analyst as the Analyst's Discourse in order to distinguish between this particular set of theory and the other social discourses.

¹⁵ For readers who are familiar with Lacan's seminars might be surprised that *Seminar XI* is not part of the main sources since it discusses the transference as lists it as one of the four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis. However, as most of the existing scholarship has explored and examined *Seminar XI* in great length and depth (considering the text was one of Lacan's earlier works being translated officially into English), I choose to focus on primarily the theory in *Seminar VIII* instead.

approaches it, so here I will be brief. When Lacan approaches a literary work, his goal is to illustrate a psychoanalytic concept. For instance, when he reads Edgar Ellen Poe’s “The Purloined Letter,” his argument concerns “the function of compulsory repetition in the unconscious”; in his reading of James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, he is investigating “how a subject could fall out of the Symbolic (language) and still prevents itself from falling into psychosis.” As Colette Soler explains, Lacan rejects Freud’s perspective of literature and insists that analytic interpretation does not translate into a literary interpretation *in relation to the author*, literature as such is not the product of the unconscious (“Literature as Symptom” 214). In a similar fashion, my theory concerning the texts also does not make claims for the texts but only for transference and the sinthomethics. Therefore, they are *case studies*.

On that note, my idiosyncratic Lacanian approach to the theories of literature, to the act of reading, and to the status of literary texts does not attempt to offer a picture but a *blueprint* of what constitutes a Lacanian subject of transference. What’s unique to the Lacanian subject (that differentiates itself from other theories of subjectivity) is in the ways in which it conceives subjectivity as an effect of both language and *the act*. The subject is not simply a subject “to” the Law (of language and of the Name-of-the-Father),¹⁶ but also a subject of his *act*. The *act* (and the subject) is, thus, inseparable from desire. The Law places the subject in a closed system—or a given structure—whereas the act introduces an opening (i.e. a hole or a void) to this system to which only the subject has access. In that case, to understand how a Lacanian subject comes into

¹⁶ Lacan often writes with a capital “L” when referring to law, which does not indicate any particular piece of legislation but the fundamental principles underlying all social relations; his discussion of “the Law” is under the influence of Claude Levi-Strauss. As Dylan Evans explains, “The law is the set of universal principles which make social existence possible, the structures that govern all forms of social exchange, whether gift-giving, kinship relations or the formation of pack [; s]ince the most basic form of exchange is communication itself, the law is fundamentally a linguistic entity—it is the law of the signifier” (See Evans’s entry on “law (*loi*)” (pp. 98-99).

being is to read desire both structurally and *post*-structurally.¹⁷ As Lacan insists in “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious” (1957), it means to consider the grammar of subjectivity as a dynamic process of signification, not so much as in catachresis, but more as in metaphor and metonymy as in a “signifying game” (*Écrits* 430). The unconscious, “whose development is inscribed in formulas for connection and substitution” played out by the signifier, is why Lacan gives the “signifier its *transference* function” (434). Subjectivity, as an effect of language and its act, is neither speech nor action; rather, it poses a rhetorical question to the Other, for it is to the Other that the subject represents an ever-shifting sign (S/s), with the signifier forever slipping under the signified.¹⁸

This psychoanalytic approach to understanding subjectivity (along with alienation and intimacy) evolves around the formation of meaning, *qua* signification in/of the unconscious. The term “structure” in Lacanian framework also indicates “a categorical classification system based on discrete series, rather than a dimensional system based on a continuum” and it emphasizes not so much the difference between surface and depth, but the relations between the positions: “whatever elements may be placed in the positions specified by a given structure, the relation between the positions themselves remain the same” (Evans 194). As such, my project focuses primarily on the synchronic (non-historical) dimension of our subjective experiences and not so much on the diachronic (historical) dimension. In other words, I evaluate the narratives of love as the *historiography* rather than the *history* of the subject, a distinction at which Lacan has hinted in *Seminar XX* but did not specify as such. The main difference lies in that the former

¹⁷ See Lionel Bailly’s *Lacan*, specifically Chapter 3, “In the Beginning Was the Word: Structural Linguistics and Lacan,” pp. 41-64.

¹⁸ For details concerning Lacan’s appropriations and improvisations of Saussure’s linguistic structuralism, see Lacan’s “Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud” (in *Écrits*, pp. 412-41); for Lacan’s position on language and speech in general, see “The Function and Field of Speech in Psychoanalysis” (“Rome Discourse,” 1953).

highlights the potentiality of being while the latter refers to the actuality of being. That is, my analysis attempts to unveil the possible entries to ethics available to the subject of love, rather than to assess if that love *per se* is ethical or unethical.¹⁹ In my project, the Self is defined as the “pre-signified” signifier of the unconscious, whereas the subject is the “post-signified” signified of the unconscious, which is why I place the Self in uppercase so as to distinguish my own appropriation from other scholarly tradition. In addition, the Self is associated with Lacan’s use of the term, “the letter” (to which I will return in the later section in this chapter); it also designates the “truth” concerning one’s own desire (as opposed to knowledge). The difference is that truth precedes knowledge and exists in the Real, denoting its radical elusiveness and the subject’s inability to fully access to “the whole (of it/id),” whereas knowledge, either Symbolic or Imaginary, crystalizes only partially the truth of one’s desire. As Lauren Berlant suggests in *Desire/Love* and which I paraphrase, for any studies of identity and sexuality, it is not uncommon to start with desire; to talk about desire, there is no escape from love (5). To “act” as a speaking being, following Lacan, denotes the assumption of responsibility, an *accountability*. The Lacanian act is an “ethical” one for the reason that the subject must be held accountable for the act. The ethics in question is the ethics of psychoanalysis, *the ethics of desire*. In other words, love does not just happen to you, but *you happen to love*. My dissertation, therefore, makes a rather simple argument: as subjects of language and of desire, we are all intimate strangers to the Self due to the alienating effects of language, and it is transference love, the love of knowledge and for truth, that opens up the situation in which a subject could reflexively constitute itself as an ethical being through the strange intimacy with the Self. Love as such does not aim at

¹⁹ To demonstrate, Lacan often turns to Antigone and her feminine *jouissance* (or the *other* *jouissance*, so named for its mystic nature in *Seminar XX*) that exceeds the signification of the Symbolic, thus her undecipherable desire; Žižek enlists a more controversial example of such “loving beings” through the monstrous heroine figure, Medea.

“refinding”²⁰ (in Freud’s words) its love-object in another stranger, but in the very *act*²¹ of returning the subject to the Self.

III. Ethics, the Myth of Love

The interpretation of love (or similar affects such as compassion) as a social and political dynamic that orchestrates intersubjective relationship is not at all a new argument. Scholars across disciplines have shared similar observations of love functioning as a social bond and apprehension regarding national rhetorics of love utilized as an “otherizing” mechanism that sets the boundary between self and other, and thus normalizes practices of inclusion and exclusion. When not being so pessimistically framed, a more “ideal” portrait of love that brings the human race together is also common, as in Martin Luther King Jr.’s vision of “agape love” and Alain Badiou’s ideal of love through the figure of Saint Paul. Sara Ahmed, in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), details her analysis on the mechanism through which, in the political realm, bodies operate and are operated by different sites of emotions, such as pain, hate, fear, and love. In a similar vein, Lauren Berlant in *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion* (2004) investigates and delineates the historiography of one specific kind of emotion—compassion—in discussion of its role in the birth of a nation. Despite compassion is not the only expression of love, the discussion of the former is often embedded in the latter. Read in conjunction with other “politics of emotions” that are articulated through the logic of love as a binding force, compassion and love are, in effect, no longer sheer feelings or emotions, but *affects*. The differences between the three, to quote Brian Massumi, would be that affect is not *personal*

²⁰ The original quote of Freud is as follows: “The finding of an object is in fact a refinding of it” (1905) (*Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* 88).

²¹ As stated, it is an “act” but not “action” as the former is inscribed in the formulas of a Lacanian ethics but the latter is not.

while feelings are; emotions, on the other hand, are *social*: “*L’ affect* (Spinoza’s *affectus*) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act” (*Thousand Plateaus* xvi).²² Affect, in this context, is considered beyond simple mental processes but physiological responses derived from our judgments that must be translated into an embodied experience.²³ As Ann Cvetkovich explains, considering the difficulty to provide an unambiguous definition of the term, it may be the best to understand “affect” as “both a ‘mental’ and ‘a bodily’ disposition [...] that challenges distinctions between mind and body” (*Keywords for American Cultural Studies* 13). In the framework of affect, love and compassion represent that which expose the apparatus of power *on* and *through* and the body. Following such a definition in terms of affects, specifically of love as an affective event that integrates or disintegrates the body, I am intrigued by the contemporary rhetoric of love that frequently conflates love into ethics without ever clarifying what ethics stands for. As is often the case with national speeches or in popular culture, love is rendered as the integrating force that binds us together as one (as in the motto of the United States, “*E pluribus unum*” or “Out of many, one.”), whereas the lack of love, *qua* evil, is the disintegrating violence that harms the good humans. Take for examples, popular superhero movies, from the classics of *Superman*

²² As Brian Massumi explains in the translation notes in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987) by beginning with defining “affect” and/or “affection,” in which he underscores the distinctions between affect, emotions, and feelings: “Neither word denotes a personal feeling (sentiment in Deleuze and Guattari). *L’ affect* (Spinoza’s *affectus*) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act. *L’ affection* (Spinoza’s *affection*) is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body (with body taken in its broadest sense to include ‘mental’ or ideal bodies)” (xvi).

²³ In addition to Ann Cvetkovich, scholars who support such a stance include Teresa Brennan (*The Transmission of Affect* 2004); Jean Halley and Patricia Clough (*The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* 2007); Brian Massumi (*The Autonomy of Affect* 2015).

series (1978) to the recent blockbuster, *Wonder Woman* (2017). Particularly, in the ending of the movie *Wonder Woman*, the heroine and goddess Diana has refused and resisted to save the entire human race (from another god, Ares, who aims to annihilate humans) until the male protagonist, Steven, taught her the meaning of love by sacrificing his life, and, in doing so, that humans are worthy of gods' love. Specifically, Steven died in an attempt to fight against Ares, another god, which proves to Diana that there is good in humans precisely because there is love. To be good is to love (your neighbor), while "being evil" is associated with "a refusal to love." In a quite similar vein, most superhero movies often promote the idea that not only is love the answer to all evil (or all the problems in the world), but to prove that "you" are good, *you must love* to be one of "us"; further, if you refuse to love *as* one of us, you are as evil as the Other.²⁴ Ethics hereby operates through a false binary of love and evil that dictates the subject's consent to certain moral codes or norms, which are already inscribed in a larger network of power.

In this light, to challenge such a binary of love and evil is to not only suspend the power of love but also bring to the fore what is considered *ethical when the subject and its Other are both in question*. It is this fine line between subjectivity and Otherness in love that my project investigates. The popular rhetoric of love and ethics is itself the synthesis of various systems of binaries and dichotomies that are complicit with power or the law that, on the one hand, allows us an illusion of resistance and empowerment while, on the other hand, impoverishes our vocabulary of human agency and responsibility. The conceptualization of love and ethics is also where Lacan and Freud diverge, despite the common scholarly conflation of the two under the same umbrella term of "psychoanalysis." In the following section, I will map out the details in

²⁴ In the movie *Wonder Woman* (directed by Patty Jenkins), this notion that "love is the answer" becomes the most evident. Near the end/climax of the movie, the main protagonist Diana (a goddess), played by Gal Gadot, finally becomes convinced (by the male, human, protagonist, Steve Trevor) that humans are worth saving because of the ability to love (and be loved in return).

terms of how the two of them stand in contrast, but for now I will briefly outline the main distinctions: (1.) Freud regards love and its effects rather positively, whereas for Lacan, there is always a shadow of pessimism in his discussion of love; (2.) For Freud, love is a libido that targets its direct love-object, while for Lacan, love is desire that has no direct object of its own; (3.) Freud sees love as what displaces narcissistic libido, yet for Lacan, love never really transcends narcissism, if narcissism is defined as a love for the self. However, I would like to make a case for the Lacan's take on narcissism in love—it is precisely because love is a form of “self-love” or narcissistic relation-through-projection which is not identical to narcissism that transference love is the “possible impossibility” for the loving subject to recollect²⁵ knowledge concerning the Self.

With the *sinthomethics*, I hope to recast the doubts about Lacan's “pessimism of love” that have never ceased to vex his readers since *Encore* and to pursue the possibility for love and intimacy that entails the introspective practices on the Self. Here I return to the argument that I have previously stated for this project—that love sets the condition for every human subject to become an ethical being in the *act* of *re-finding* the Self within the subject, despite love meaning more than “to be oneself” or “to know oneself.” By reassessing the articulation of intimacy in nonconventional love (doubled by evil) narratives, I am able to illustrate through these case studies how a Lacanian psychoanalytic approach can provide us with a coherent and consistent structure for analyzing these “potentially ethical” conditions, an approach which disentangles the discourse of love and ethics that is often bound up with alterity.²⁶ For this purpose, staking out a

²⁵ As explained by Dylan Evans, Lacan also link the unconscious to memory: “The unconscious is also a kind of memory, in the sense of a symbolic history of the signifiers that have determined the subject in the course of his life” (219).

²⁶ Specifically, Alain Badiou's works on love and ethics as in *Ethics* (2001), *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (2003), and *In Praise of Love* (2012).

new position for re-interpreting the Lacanian structures of the unconscious along with the ethics of psychoanalysis in relation to love is thus imperative. My proposed new structure of love and ethics, whose objective is to set up a new platform that stands free from heteronormativity, may offer a critical alternative for subjects whose lives are alienated from existing identity categories.

Prior to nuancing my arguments on the issue of love and ethics, I will start with some preliminary definitions of the key terms involved in this project. The detour is imperative admitting both notions of love and ethics may denote different interpretations based on the theoretical frameworks in which they are situated; cultural and social conventions also add to their complexity. As Calum Neil explains in his introduction to *Lacanian Ethics and the Assumption of Subjectivity* (2011), the question of ethics persists because it speaks to human conception of morality, “perhaps best exemplified in Plato’s notion of the good (*to agathon*) which ‘persists’ beyond being (*epekeina tés ousias*)” (1). After Plato, a few other major historical transitions in the taxonomies of the term have attributed to our conception of ethics today being inseparable from the discussion of morality: Aristotle’s definition of ethos as individual virtues (i.e. justice, charity, and generosity), the Abrahamic tradition that sees God as the guarantor of “the good”; the Enlightenment thinkers, including Descartes and Immanuel Kant, specifically the Kantian emphasis of the moral duty that is central to the categorical imperative defining a rational being, and a utilitarian view asserting such code of conduct should aim for the greatest happiness or the common good. The definition of ethics, despite its shifts in meanings, generally involves a system of moral principles that pertains to “doing the right thing”—an *imperative moral judgment that needs to be translated into actions*.²⁷ That is, it is not sufficient for an individual to be cognizant of the right conduct without executing such rules of right conduct.

²⁷ For details, see Calum Neill’s “Introduction—A Brief History of Ethics” in *Lacanian Ethics and the Assumption of Subjectivity* (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 1-11.

Love, as a form of desire or even an emotion, an affective experience, does not necessarily mandate such an execution in actions based on reasons, love can “put a spell on us,” and it seems also sufficient if one chooses to “love, and be silent.” Put simply, ethics and love, however defined, are not identical or interchangeable terms, but their heterogeneity does not preclude that love, as a psychic response conditioned by human judgments, may be key to ethics.

In order to investigate the possibility of becoming an ethical being through the most fundamental human concept of love, I propose a new set of definitions of love and ethics that read these two terms against the grain. By “against the grain,” I refer to going outside limits set by the three mainstream approaches to ethics introduced earlier, but resorting to a theoretical framework that is often considered a revolt against ethics—psychoanalysis. As stated earlier, Lacan insists that the ethics of psychoanalysis must be approached from the side of desire. An ethical act as such is to assume full responsibility *from the position of a desiring subject whose desire is the Other’s desire* vis-à-vis one’s true desire. Ethics, therefore, entails an assumption of subjectivity. In response to the Lacanian ethics of desire, most critics have mistaken the hyper-visible appearance of conscious desire (i.e. I want what I want) as the Lacanian desire, while ignoring the truth that when Lacan involves the word “desire,” he has always and only referred to unconscious desire, which is not simply “I want what I want” but “I want what I want *that which is what the Other wants.*” That is, the ethics of psychoanalysis is about the desire of the subject that is always already embedded in the desire of an-*Other* subject. This “ethical concern” brings to fore two main objectives in my investigation of intimacy: first, *to rethink binary through Lacan*, specifically the ways in which we draw boundaries between oneself and others as we formulate our own senses of the subject; second, to explore possibilities for expanding our vocabulary—or *to change our way to discourse*—regarding subjectivity and agency, if we were

to articulate desire and love not from the perspective of affects but from structure, that is, a lover's discourse independent of its object. My approach aims to provide an alternative to address issues of intimacy and alienation. It also aims to define subjectivity by that which is not completely exterior to our being, yet not completely internal, either. *That* is my interpretation of what reading “the unconscious as *intersubjectivity*” means, following Lacan.

At present, the popular rhetoric of love (either as a form of divine love or romantic feeling) treats love either as a magic or sorcery—it cures and it kills; it drives us crazy and it keeps us sane; it is pure good and it is pure evil. Love becomes an existence that eludes definitions. For my purpose here, I define love as a specific form of desire as opposed to an affect or emotion. Discussions of the term “affect” have tended to focus on the role of an object as crucial for understanding the way power influences the body and its orientation²⁸: “This seems to imply that the object or person that elicits feeling wields power over the person who is ‘made to feel’”(Cartwright 31). To be more specific, “I love” is an incomplete or “inaccurate” sentence structure. Rather, “I love X” or “I feel loved (by Y)” would be that which is considered acceptable. The distinction between desire and affect is such that, while love as an affect often requires an object, love as desire could do without one. Therefore, inasmuch as the discourse of love as an affect underscores an external relationship between the subject and the love-object, the discourse of love as a desire highlights an internal relationship between the subject and the Self. This reasoning supports my agreement that a psychoanalytic approach—specifically Lacanian psychoanalysis—provides a critical positioning for intervening in the contemporary taxonomy of

²⁸ Besides Lisa Cartwright (2015), Ann Cvetkovich (2014) also acknowledges the role of an object of affect while complicates such an object-subject relationship in affect theory. In *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), Sara Ahmed's main approach of “phenomenology” is also premised on the existence of an object towards which the body orientates.

love and ethics, as it shifts the focus from an interrogation of the love-object to a self-inspection of the subject.

Lacanian psychoanalysis is useful for this analysis, considering that the initial inquiry is to investigate how ethics, in the name of love, may either fortify or undermine the dichotomy between the subject and the object and the related opposition between the Self and others. Psycho-analysis, literally, concerns with analyzing the psyche. It is a study of the unconscious, or the desire of the subject, and desire as such is always embedded in the Other. In particular, it analyzes the way in which one (psyche or unconscious) becomes a “subject” through being subjected to the desire of the Other and this Other does not exist “out there” but within us. There is always an Other in our unconscious—or, according to Lacan, the unconscious is “the discourse of the Other” in the subject (*Écrits* 16, qtd. in Evans 218). We are subjects by alienating this intimate stranger—the Self doubling as the Other—living with us, which is why I argue that an ethical possibility should be found in the strange intimacy between the subject and what is once masquerading as an “alien” standing an opposition to the Self.

The complexity of the Self, the subject, the Other, and the object leads to my theory of *intimate stranger* and *strange intimacy*—as we are all intimate strangers *within ourselves*, love sets the condition for a subject to become an ethical being, not through the process of refinding its love-object, but rather, in the very act of re-establishing an object-relation between the subject and the Self. It is at this point that the theory I am outlining becomes an alternative to understanding alienation in the construct of subjectivity. My theory provides an alternative in that it postulates a positionality between the subject and the object that is not simply a contingency of an alterity. We are all intimate strangers not only in terms of the relationship between different subjects or between the subject and other object(s), but also in terms of the

connection (or disconnection) the subject shares with the inner Self. This strange intimacy captures the social and psychological tension in the formation of a subject. Our sense of alienation is not simply a result of modernity or other “larger” social contexts, but it is the ground zero that constitutes a subject. The sense of not-belongingness is germane to the pieces of “Other”—*qua* desire—that all individuals carry within us.

As love is conditioned in the realm of desire, ethics—as far as this project is concerned—thus refers to an ethics of desire. An ethics of desire does not follow Aristotelian, Kantian, or utilitarian conventions; it does not meddle so much with the common good or ideal moral righteousness beyond the reach of an individual. What such an ethics of desire asks of the subject is whether it has acted in accordance to its intimate desire, or not. That is, on account of desire being always symbolic, it is perceived in opposition to “demand.” Needs are biological requests that can be met and satisfied. Demand, springs from the demand for love that has its root in needs, but as it must be made through speech, there creates a part that always eludes satisfaction. In other words, what one demands is always more (or less) than what one needs. Desire, by definition, is the forever insatiable command or request for love; it exists precisely from the gap between a need and a request being made. I will return to the notion of desire later, but first, let us agree to terms pertaining to ethics, or the ethics of desire.

As mentioned earlier, this project does not intend to assess if certain desire/love is ethical; rather, when ethics is involved, the focus is on whether or not love provides a possible path for the subject to reconnect with the self. This path is a path of desire. The unconscious desire, as defined by Lacan, is always the desire of the Other, which should be interpreted in two ways, first, the subject desires to be recognized by the Other; second, the subject desires from the position of the Other (Evans 35-39). Ethics in this framework consists of a set of principles for

the subject to act in conformity with one's "pure" desire, or, according to Lacan, "not give ground relative to one's desire" (*Seminar VII* 247-49; 321). By "pure" it does not mean that it will necessarily exclude the existence of the Other in one's desire, but it signals a *knowledge* for discerning the place from which the subject desires: "the joint between the consequences of language and the desire for knowledge—a joint that the subject is" (*Écrits* 195, emphasis mine). Pure desire aims at the "unknown knowledge" of the Self, as far as the subject is concerned.

The Self precedes the subject. When one is born, the Self is born to the world. In Freud's term, it includes both the ego and the id. It is a cluster of "hidden" knowledge—both known and unknown—to the subject. When the term "Self" appears in this project, it refers to "the unconscious knowledge"—it is what the subject does not know that it knows. Despite its paradoxical undertone, in a Lacanian framework, the unconscious is not what the subject thinks it knows but does not; quite the contrary, "the unconscious" designates an unknown knowledge that—though unbeknownst to the subject at the conscious level—the subject "*under-consciously*" knows (yet without direct access to). I am not, therefore, referring to the conventional, pre-theoretical notion of the "self" as being "untouched" by the unconscious since, according to Lacan, there is no subject prior to the unconscious. In my reference, the Self (thus the capital "S") is that which co-exists with the subject *as a site* where the "truth" of the subject harbors. The subject, on the other hand, is a construct of social relations. In other words, the Self is a "self-contained" concept that is independent of the Other (or could be discussed as such), whereas the subject is premised upon the existence of the Other (albeit imaginary, symbolic, or real. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the Other is not a subject but designates a symbolic place, which Lacan also refers to as "the Other scene"; in my project, the Other is also a symbolic reference of "where" the Self first encounters its own split and becomes a subject. Consequently,

an analysis of the ethics of desire focuses on how the subject of desire might re-find its own Self. If, to paraphrase Freud, all processes of finding the love-object is a re-finding of it,²⁹ then through love, the subject is reconnected with the Self. The Self here is the object-love, or the *objet a*, what Lacan calls the “perfect object” (*l’objet par excellence*). My rendition of the *objet a*—to run the risk of oversimplifying Lacan’s highly convoluted concept—is the “missing piece” that we all thought that we had lost, and thus we endeavor to retrieve it in order to cover our internal lack. When I refer to the term *object* (or the term *subject*), it does not necessarily indicate something material but as a *symbolic position*. Correspondingly, subjectivity and objectivity apply to the process of occupying such a position.

Ethics, as ethics of desire and psychoanalysis, deals with desire in its purest form. As Lacan suggests in *Seminar VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, the cornerstone upon which the ethics of psychoanalysis is founded is the tenet of “*ne pas ceder sur son desir*”—or, not “giving ground relative to one’s desire” (321). To discuss ethics as such in relation to subjectivity and love is to explore possible venues for this *form of purest desire* to be considered “achieved”—since ethics is the *real-ization* of such “pure desire,” according to Lacan (282; 321). What, then, is considered to be the purest form of desire, and how does love, as a specific form of desire, opens up hope for us to become an ethical subject? What is at stake if we situate ethics and determine our ethical position in the name of love, *qua* desire? Or, how to prevent love from degrading into an ideological apparatus working for the law (or, “the Law of the Father” as a function in the unconscious formation), one that designs the boundary between “one/self” and “the other,” as shown in *Wonder Women* or similar popular discourses of love? Perhaps, on the condition of love making a scene³⁰ in which a desiring subject could occupy an ethical position

²⁹ See *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, pp. 88.

³⁰ For Freud and Lacan, the Other refers to “the other scene,” a locus but not a subject.

in relation to an Other through self-knowledge, the discourse of love could answer for a radical cultural politic. This condition sets the parameter of my project. My approach is to take the strange intimacy we inhabit in our subjectivity at face value and to identify possible ways for us to befriend and then, *love*, the intimate stranger within us. To better investigate the current discourses of love and how they are framed in relation to ethics and/or subjectivity, we need to first ask ourselves a cliché question—*What are we talking about when we talk about love?*

IV. Desire, the Condition of Subjectivity

The following section reviews the scholarly positions that have evolved around two main questions underpinning the project: *What role does love play in discussions of subjectivity?* Furthermore, I ask *if such a role of love is “in trouble”?* Each school of thought intersects with my project from a slightly different angle; therefore, it is not my intention at all to delineate for my reader a comprehensive contour of love. My main objective for this selective review is to first show my reader what is at stake both in and according to existing critical scholarship of love, and then to identify potential pockets for interventions. The question of whether love is “in trouble” finds its answer in contemporary discourses where the emphasis is on the love-object, a point I will nuance further in the following discussion in order to return to my main argument of intimate strangers. Present discussions on love as an affect fail to take into consideration the structuralist position fundamental to understanding the Lacanian subject. As “structure” signals a crucial immutability in Lacan’s construct of human psyche, existing scholarship that focuses on the diachronic reading of love as affect in our subjective experience leaves room for my synchronic intervention of love as desire through the lens of Lacanian psychoanalysis.

In the field of Cultural Studies, or in the discipline of humanities in general, the embodied experience of emotions has received considerable attention since the early 2000s.³¹ The explication of the relationship between love and its effects on the body has been, unsurprisingly, one of the favorite topics among such an affective exploration. Critical investigations and the theorization of love as a manifestation of the politics of affect are premised upon the movement of the body, or how the body relates (or dis-relates); affect as such, “accumulates across both relatedness and interruptions in relatedness, becoming a palimpsest of force-encounters traversing the ebbs and swells of intensities that pass between ‘bodies’ (bodies defined not by an outer skin-envelope or other surface boundary but by their potential to reciprocate or co-participate in the passages of affect)” (Gregg and Seigworth 2). Despite the shared interest in the mechanism of love as an affective rhetorical device, the approaches and attitudes towards various localities in which such an operation materializes seem to vary across the spectrum.

As briefly mentioned earlier, Lauren Berlant and Sara Ahmed each proposes, almost concurrently, similar projects on emotions as cultural politics that cross-examine how love and compassion function in a manner almost identical to an ideological apparatus that moves in and through the body that assists in consolidating and validating the nation and its citizens. On the one hand, both scholars seem to be making comparable contention that love (or/and compassion) as an emotion is far from naively being a “natural state of mind,” but a convoluted, discursive cultural, social, and political practices whose unfolding simultaneous forges and is forged by the production of a subject. On the other hand, they also continue their discussion on love and its

³¹ Such an “affective turn” has been widely discussed and confirmed in scholarly works; see Patricia Clough and Jean Halley, eds, *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007) and Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds, *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

affective undertone in two slightly different directions. Berlant, in *The Female Complaint* (2008) and *Cruel Optimism* (2011), has not ceased grappling with the concept of love. In *The Female Complaint*, love accounts for a specific form of sentimentality that marks the “affective space” (2) of the social world, in which the intimate public of femininity is not as liberating or subversive as the one proposed by Michael Warner, but full of contested subjective conventions. In *Cruel Optimism*, love and its objects authorize the affective operation in which “a relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing” (1). The sense of negativity progresses into “the unbearable.”

Critiques of psychoanalytic approaches to interpreting the meaning of life often center around this “unbearable,” as Freud is known for proposing this psychic principle that goes beyond the pleasure counterpart, the life drives (*Eros*)—the death drive (*Todestrieb*), a repetitive force that internalizes a massive aggression which counterbalance the force of life. The death drive, as a compulsory repetitive libidinal economy, epitomizes the negativity that thrives on its promise brought by such cruel optimism (of its own reoccurrence). Lacan revises the Freudian opposition between the life and the death drive while retaining the defining structure of repetition and argues that the death drive is not a separate drive but “the distinction between the life drive and the death drive is true in as much as it manifests two aspects of the drive” (*Seminar XI* 257). Moreover, the death drive, *qua* every drive, aims to reach “beyond the pleasure principle” to its excess, *the surplus pleasure* that is itself exceeds the experience of enjoyment and inaugurates suffering, which is the realm of *jouissance*, meaning “painful pleasure,” or “pleasure in pain” (Swales 92). This is why Lacan describes *jouissance* as “*le mal*” (*Seminar VII* 187), in French the word denotes both “the evil” and “the suffering.” I will return to the notion of “evil” in Chapter Three, but now the focus is on the “suffering.” In Lauren Berlant’s performative text co-

authored with Lee Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable* (2014), it is precisely through the notion of the death drive and *jouissance* that we are confronted with “the unbearable” central to traumatic encounters with relationality that are embedded in “negativity,” defined as “the psychic and social incoherences and divisions, conscious and unconscious alike, that trouble any totality or fixity of identity” (vii-viii). As (cruel) optimism is selected as a main form of “relationality” for investigating the unbearable in negativity, love and its objects, again, become the specter that haunts the dialogue. Before his duet piece with Berlant, Edelman has already approached compassion and its specific relationality to love from a psychoanalytic approach. In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), compassion is what stops us in the name of “love”: “If compassion in this takes love’s name in vain, it’s vain to think compassion *outside* the register of love” (68). Edelman, by evoking the psychoanalytic concept of the death drive in his reading of the (heteronormative) ideological operations behind the Christian maxim, “Love your neighbor,” he may be pushing the notion of negativity in/of the unbearable (i.e. “death”) into an impossibility through which love relates the body (i.e. “the drive”). Love, for Edelman, is but a fantasy (74, 76).

While Edelman’s employment of the death drive and his insistence on the *jouissance* as a countering force against heteronormativity are quite compelling, love, nevertheless, *should not* be considered as simply a fantasy. My disagreement with Edelman (or similar views) lies not in the position of love being the unbearable, but in the position of love as a sheer fantasy, specifically when the term is set in the Lacanian psychoanalytic framework, as Edelman does. Fantasy, whether it is in the neurotic fantasy or the perverse fantasy, always delineates the relation between the subject’s relation to the object. Fantasy assumes a crucial mechanism in both enabling the subject to sustain his desire (*Seminar XI* 185) and “that by which the subject

sustains himself at the level of his vanishing desire (*Écrits* 272). To put another way, fantasy is a self-defense mechanism that shields us from the unbearable Real. In the three registers of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real, fantasy is a term associated with the Imaginary. If all subjects are subjects of desire, and if desire in Lacanian psychoanalysis is always unconscious desire, then in order to do justice to Lacanian “futurism” of love, we need to move beyond love as a fantasy. In fantasy, love is situated at the level of “conscious desire” but not of “unconscious desire.” That is, if love is a fantasy *at the level of conscious desire*, it is how we would *love* it to be. On the contrary, when being at the level of *unconscious* desire, love embodies an act, and *the subject is what love wants it to be*.

My objection to Edelman’s fantasy of love and the negativity in Berlant’s texts persists in my other opposition to thinking love, *qua* an emotion, as an orientation from body to its object. On the other side of the continent from Berlant and Edelman, Sara Ahmed transitions from provoking her reader to “feel our way” to gesturing to offering us some sense of orientation in “finding our way”³² in *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006). The latter specifically highlights and brings to fore the quintessential role of objects and others in the formation of our subjective sexual orientations. In the context of queer (subjects) as an orientation towards queer (objects), “queer would become a matter of how one approaches the object that slips away—as a way of inhabiting the world at the point in which things fleet” (172). This sense of orientation (or disorientation) also carries into her next critical work on the cruel optimism of happiness. In *The Promise of Happiness* (2011), Ahmed examines how happiness serves as a promise of futurism to those subjects who do not become disoriented (or slips away), and in particular, she takes into account what it means if happiness is a condition of love (92).

³² The introduction chapter of Ahmed’s *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* is “Feel Your Way,” and the introduction chapter of *Queer Phenomenology* is “Find Your Way.”

Elaborating on such conditions for “happy love,” a seemingly more positive interpretations compared to Edelman’s and/or Berlant’s, Ahmed posits that “queer love might involve happiness only by insisting that such happiness is *not* what is shared” (100). This not-sharing-ness, nonetheless, leaves me wondering about the future and its possibility—what may be at stake in the ways of which the queer body (dis)orients or navigates in the social world? How does the queer subject achieve a “relationality” while, at the same time, not sharing and of chasing the object that slips away?

Now we have arrived at “the trouble of love”—if we consider love as a fantasy, then we also fail to “traverse the fantasy” and to identify with the *sinthôme* (*Seminar XI* 273), which is ironically, what Edelman claims with his proposal of “sinthomosexuality” (*No Future* 33-66). To most readers who are not familiar with Lacanian theories, Edelman’s argument of the sinthomosexual may not be unfamiliar, as it often appears in the discussion of subjectivity, resistance, and agency in queer and gender studies. Since my model of “the sinthomethics” resonates with Edelman’s “the sinthomosexual,” and considering the notion of the *sinthome* is pivotal to this project, it seems now imperative to address these terms. To understand what Edelman aims to achieve with the sinthomosexual, we need to first understand what is “the *sinthome*,” according to Lacan. As Evans nicely defines, the *sinthome* evolves from the symptom, detaching itself from the nature of a coded message (i.e. linguistic) while transforming into that which resists interpretation (i.e. topology), “a kernel of enjoyment immune to the efficacy of the symbolic” (189). Enlisting *James Joyce’s writing* as an epitome of the *sinthome* (note that the *sinthome* is not Joyce himself, but his writing, or more precisely, *Joyce and his relation to his writing*), Lacan highlights that the defining feature of the *sinthome* is *jouissance*. As *jouissance* is in the realm of the Real, the *sinthome* inevitably evades meaning. Taking to

heart these two feature of Lacan's *sinthome* to heart, Edelman constructs his theory of the *sinthomosexual*, that is, something that resists symbolization and consists solely of *jouissance*. To argue against seeing "the Child" (or the image thereof) as the Master-Signifier of the productive futurism in the heteronormative society, Edelman aligns queerness with *sinthomosexuality* that "by contrast, scorns such belief in a final signifier, reducing *every* signifier to the status of the letter and insisting on access to *jouissance* in place of access to sense, on identification with one's *sinthome* instead of belief in its meaning" (37). To be more specific, queerness must be recoded as *sinthomosexuality* because homosexuality in the contemporary society is at stake—itself has become a product of the heterosexual fantasy: "[with] the 'sin' that continues to attach itself to 'homosexuality'" and "by way of this infelicitous term, [Edelman means] to suggest that homosexuality, understood as a cultural figure, as the hypostatization of various fantasies that trench on the antisocial force that queerness might better name, is made—that is, both called forth and compelled—to carry the burden of sexuality's demeaning relation to the *sinthome*" (39). This is the context of Edelman's defiant figure as represented by the self-annihilating *sinthomosexual*.

Seen in this light, the *sinthomosexual* is itself a metaphor of a queer ethics. However, with the emphasis of *jouissance*, it depicts an ethics of death, not of life. Edelman maintains that to identify with the *sinthome* is to live as the death drive on account of

[the death drive's immortality] pertains to what the Symbolic constitutively forecloses: not reality, not the subject, not the future, not the Child, but the substance of *jouissance* itself [...] on which the *sinthomosexual* lives and against which social organization wields the weapon of futurity to keep the place of life empty—merely a hollow, inanimate form—the better to sustain the fantasy of its endurance in time to come. (48)

And this ethics of death is where Edelman and I diverge. In my project, my deployment of Lacan's *sinthome* underscores an ethics of "pure desire," which I insist should not be conflated with the ethics of the drive. I will return to this distinction in Chapter Three, but my point here is to clarify the distance between Edelman's *sinthomosexual* and my *sinthomethics*. Simply put, my model does not concern so much with *jouissance* and the drive when the *sinthome* is in view; rather, it highlights *the process of truth-seeking* as the subject traverses the fantasy as well as *the act* of identifying with the truth of one's desire, which is the Self. Not in opposition to the Child, but in the Self. And *that* is my way to the future.

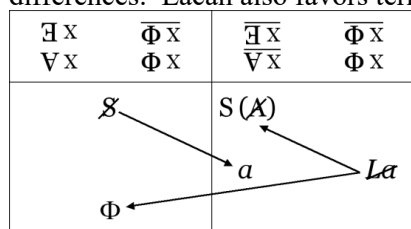
In addition to my disagreement with its pessimism, Edelman's *sinthomosexual* also leaves me a question: *what does love have to do with it?* My answer to this question is my objection to Edelman's ethics of *sinthomosexual* as well; it is precisely in that love has *nothing* to do with it. In Edelman's framework, resisting the heteronormative futurism is also a rejection of love, since love (for Edelman) is only a fantasy. However, if we adhere to Edelman's logic and premises (on Lacan) and consider love as what makes up of the non-relation between the sexes, namely, if love is only a "cover-up" of a skeleton that does not exist in the first place, then, to remove that "cover-up" so as to resist what lies underneath (i.e. the fantasy of heteronormative futurism) entails a complete eradication of love. As that which resists the heterosexual fantasy, Edelman's *sinthomosexuality* further insinuates that a *sinthomosexual* subject can never be a loving subject, and vice versa. What we should remind ourselves is, with *sinthomosexuality* comes *jouissance*, but the subject must move *beyond jouissance* into transference. This beyond is the key that distinguishes self-love from sheer narcissism. It is also what introduces an aestheticism of being into the ethics of desire, an argument I will return in my later chapter, specifically in Chapter Three. If the ethics of desire is so aligned to the drive, or the

death drive as Edelman (along with Žižek) insists, then my model of the sinthomethics is to remind the reader that there is more to *jouissance* and the drive, which is love. How so? Because “only love allows *jouissance* to condescend to desire” (*Seminar X* 179), one of Lacan’s aphorisms on love.³³ Therefore, while both Edelman’s sinthomosexuality and my sinthomethics find their roots in Lacan’s theory of the sinthome, my goal is to reach beyond the *jouissance* and seek the (im)possibility named love, which [love] has *nothing* to do with the sinthomosexual.

This negation of love or the impasse of desire so prominent in Edelman’s line of thought also suggest a failure in recognizing the caveat that Tim Dean proposes in *Beyond Sexuality* (2000) and is thus challenged, though indirectly, by another text reclaiming *Intimacies* (2008) by Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips. In acknowledging the complications regarding psychoanalytic criticism on sexuality and identity politics, Dean announces a new direction that moves “beyond” sexuality in which desire is not understood based on persons or the gendered body but on the unconscious.³⁴ With the word “beyond,” Dean is not simply advocating beyond the psychoanalytic practices of the talking cure. Instead, he accentuates the feature of the unconscious as what lies beyond the subject himself, or “outside the realm of persons” (17), which does not mean that the unconscious is detached from the social; quite the contrary, it suggests that it exceeds the boundary of a single body and always reaches out to the “outside” of

³³ See Lacan’s “Aphorisms on Love” in *Seminar X: Anxiety*, pp. 171-81.

³⁴ Dean’s argument does not mean that the unconscious is not related to the sexes; rather, it is “sexed” by a different logic, which follows Lacan’s theory of “sexuation.” In *Seminar XX*, Lacan presents the “formulas of sexuation” (see below), illustrating a complex system for understanding sexual differences. Lacan also favors terms like “sexual *position*” or “*relationship*” rather than “differences.”



“The formulas of sexuation”, *Seminar XX*, pp. 78.

that body—it is always “in your more than you.” Dean’s insistence on the “beyond” of the body as the object-cause of desire in current discussion of identity politics further distinguishes him from other psychoanalytic approaches that reckon sexual differences to be the main force dictating the discourse of sexuality. By provoking the critics to read beyond the “sexed” or marked body, he attempts to “push the critiques of sexual identity politics [...] towards an understanding of the radical impersonality of desire” (17). The impersonality of desire is what I found to be the alternative for approaching “the trouble of love,” that is, between love and its object. In my own re-interpretation of Dean’s argument, it is not through the body that the subject relates, but *through the unconscious*, and, hence, such impersonality of desire is considered “radical.” In Dean’s words, “*Beyond Sexuality* develops the counterintuitive thesis that we misconstrue sexuality’s functioning when we begin our analysis of it from the point of view of men and women, rather than from the perspective of language and its effects” (18). Considering the unconscious is “structured like a language,” it is thus not only logical but pivotal in our orientation of moving towards the beyond—precisely because of its nature being *historical, linguistic, and “transindividual”* (7, emphasis mine). Following Dean, while at the same time moving beyond his argument (pun intended), I find it necessary to not only see beyond existing identity categories or boundaries confining each individual and explore the relationship between each subject but, more importantly, to identify the *intersubjective* relationality (as I’d like to call it) that resides *within* the unconscious. The unconscious is the vehicle that carries the subject to traverse the fantasy of love.

Being wary of all the debates and quarrels concerning psychoanalytic practices and interpretations, concerning the divide between the subject and its object, as well as the boundary between the analyst and the analysand, Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips remind us to not lose

sight of “The It in the I”—instead of the other way around—by starting with a statement of humor, “Psychoanalysis is about what two people can say to each other if they agree not to have sex” (1). While the main argument of Bersani and Phillips is about the non-sexual relationship (or “intimacy”) that two subjects could establish during psychoanalytic exchanges, that argument also suggests that psychoanalysis offers a possibility in which two bodies could have a “relationship” that is not “sexual” but linguistic—not physical but virtual—in that it is intersubjective and of the unconscious. From there I take their argument further (away from the focus on psychoanalytic experiences): precisely because there is always an “it” in our “I/eye’s”—or, there is always a knowledge that we do not know that we know—we become subjects by alienating this intimate stranger living with us. In addition, we become an ethical being by reestablishing a strange intimacy with what is once deemed alienated. To this end, I envision and design a new psychoanalytic model of love that structures discourses of the unconscious at the level of a social “relation” or narrative that is always already *in and beyond* the subject—without giving ground relative to the Other’s desire. As ethics of desire compel a subject to act in conformity with one’s real, unconscious desire, love, as desire to be one, excavates such unconscious knowledge of the Self. What I aim to achieve at the end of this project, with the implications and possibility for the subject to occupy an ethical position in the structure of love, is also to leave hope to all subjects that feel “alienated” (as I am)—either from others or from the Self—and to shed some light not from an alterity without us, but from the lives we carry within us. We desire this strange intimacy. As humans and as intimate strangers.

My project is, therefore, driven by my initial objections to two contemporary mainstream discourses of love; one that considers love as a sheer fantasy that only represents to the subject a scheme of cruel optimism, filled with negativity and no future/solution; the other focuses on the

over-determination of affective politics, which understand the direction through which the subject relates, moves, and comes into being in the social world as oriented by its love-object. For the purpose of reevaluating love as the potential locus in which an ethical being is achieved, whose “future” is neither a contingency of an Otherness (i.e. the Law, the norm, the hegemony etc.) nor a singularity completely isolated from its own context, the Lacanian structures or Four Discourses, along with his ethics of psychoanalysis becomes particularly relevant. As mentioned earlier, the word *structure* underscores the non-continuity between the subject and his “Other(s).” Moreover, the structural reading facilitates our approach to the non-continual relationship and supports how the two interact with each other: “the relation between the positions themselves remain the same [and thus] the elements interact not on the basis of any inherent or intrinsic properties they possess, but simply on the basis of the positions which they occupy in the structure” (Evans 194). That is, my decision of a structural analysis of love and desire corresponds to my emphasis on the role of “positionality” in interpreting subject formation, as I have earlier defined the subject and the object as positions.

Before presenting a psychoanalytic reading of the subject, in the following section I first clarify Lacan’s framework of love, desire, and ethics. Not only is this step critical for helping the reader grasp the complexity of these terms in Lacan’s language but it situates my project therein. From there, I present my own model of transference love that moves not only *beyond* sexuality, *beyond* the object of affects, but also *beyond* the Lacanian “impossible” desire named love.

V. Love, the Impossibility of Desire

Our attitude towards love as a subjective force is rather ambivalent. As briefly indicated earlier, even Lacan, who claims a “return to Freud” in constructing his own psychoanalytic

framework, affirms such ambivalence in his own approach to love as opposed to Freud. Despite the fact that both Freud and Lacan had constantly modified and revised their theories of love, it may appear that they occupy two opposite ends of the spectrum of love. Freud remains optimistic about love, analyzes love from its direct object, and it transcends narcissism; Lacan, in contrast, perceives love as essentially “narcissistic,” that it does not have an object of its own (but only the object that triggers the insatiable desire), and with all things considered, love does not seem to be a positive construct. The truth is, the relation of love to desire is never simple. In *Seminar XX: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-73 (Encore)*, Lacan begins by identifying such complication between desire and love in the architecture of a subject: “[the] unconscious was invented [...] so that we would realize that man’s desire is the Other’s desire, and that *love, while it is a passion that involves ignorance of desire*, nevertheless leaves desire its whole import” (4, emphasis mine). That is, love is one configuration of desire that ignores its own desire. The ignorance of love, nonetheless, is not sheer negligence, but a form of *intentional* knowledge (that one does not know that one knows). When the unconscious ex-sists, the subject *is supposed*. The subject, in the Lacanian psychoanalytic framework, is always already a subject of language and desire. What complicates the relationship between love and desire in the formation of a subject, therefore, is the role of knowledge.

Love, despite being a specific form of desire, threatens desire, as it aims to achieve (the) One (*l’Un*) between two subjects (*Seminar XX* 5-6). Desire, to be exact, sustains itself by ways of permanently deferring the achievement of that One. Lacan carefully adopts “(the) One” for its mathematical and symbolic function, it starts as the number One but extends to a metaphor of unity. Sometimes it represents a subject. One loves something, but one is not sure if s/he truly *desires* it. To desire something, one must acknowledge its absence; that is, the desiring subject

must first secure its own lack (of that something). One may want what one loves, but one usually does not desire what one has. Therefore, to desire what one loves means to “give away” or renounces that object of love so as to transform it into an object of desire. Said otherwise, in order to desire what one loves, one has to give up “what one wants” (so that one could keep wanting it). Take the butcher’s wife’s dilemma for example: “She loves caviar, but she doesn’t want any. That’s why she desires it” (*Seminar XI* 243). This statement should be translated as such, “the butcher’s wife loves caviar, but she decides to *want nothing of it* (since, obviously, she could have some if she wants it), and that’s why she is able to desire it.” For Lacan, to talk about love—or the discourse of love—is to “echo” endlessly desires in the parameter of its impossible object: the *objet a*, *qua* the object-cause of desire and the object of the drive. Note that desire has no object of its own, but only an object that triggers its chase (of a void). Desire circles around its lack; as desiring subjects, we are barred/marked by this lack that defines us, thus in Lacan’s terminology, the subject is written with a bar splitting itself into two ($\$$). To reiterate the main problems with existing literature that I have introduced earlier: first, the love-object cannot be the object of our desire (or what desire is “after”), but it is what initiates desire; through the act of love, we “in-complete” ourselves by creating a surplus, the *objet a*; second, in love/desire, we are not bonded by any particular object, but quite the opposite, by the lack of such an object. Therefore, if an affect or emotion requires a direct object; love, defined as a desire, should be situated at the level of a psychic structure, rather than an embodied experience that works *through* the body. To put it another way, love assumes structural positionality that conditions the subject in response to desire, that is why “unconscious is structured like a language” (*Seminar XI* 203; *Écrits* 413) or that “the Unconscious is the discourse of the Other” (*Écrits* 16).

To illustrate the complications between love, the *objet a*, and the mechanism of identification, repetition and citationality, Lacan gives us Pablo Picasso's parakeet (*Seminar XX 4-10*).³⁵ How could we tell that the parakeet *is falling in love* with Picasso? Lacan explains:

From the way the parakeet nibbled the collar of his shirt and the flaps of his jacket. Indeed, the parakeet was in love with what is essential to man, namely, his attire (*accoutrement*). The parakeet was like Descartes, for whom men were merely clothes (*habits*) ... walking about (*en... pro-ménade*). Clothes promise debauchery (*ça promet la ménade*), when one takes them off. [...] To enjoy a body (*jouir d'un corps*) when there are no more clothes leaves intact the question of what makes the One, that is, the question of identification. The parakeet identified with Picasso clothed (*habillé*). The same goes for everything involving love. The habit loves the monk, as they are but one thereby. In other words, what lies under the habit, what we call the body, is perhaps but the remainder (*reste*) I call object a. (*Seminar XX 6*)

This long quote, to me, epitomizes the Lacanian polemic between love and desire. The parakeet loves “what lies under the habit,” or “the body,” because it is not what lies in the center of his desire (of love), but the body is the remainder that triggers this desire called love. The remainder of what? The remainder of the desiring subject. The parakeet's love for Picasso suggests a narcissistic process of identification with the ideal-ego, which, in the case here, is “Picasso clothed.” An ideal-ego is the imaginary perfection the ego endeavors to achieve. This parakeet is in love with Picasso because the signification of “Picasso clothed” represents a *bona fide* narcissistic love object. This love, as Lacan indicates, is driven by “what lies under the habit”—

³⁵ As a side note, Lacan was the famous artist Pablo Picasso's personal physician; for that reason (the ethics of the analyst), Lacan may be intentional in avoiding a direct discussion of Picasso but chose to provide a discussion of Picasso's relation to love by way of his parakeet.

the inaccessible body that the parakeet could only imagine, to which Lacan gives the name, the “*objet a*.”

In a way, we may say, the parakeet desires something in “Picasso clothed” that Picasso “the body” does not have, and this desire, in turn, sustains love. It may be safe to assume that Lacan’s choice of a parakeet rather than a human subject in this logical illustration is intentional; on one level, it mocks the fact that the One so central to love is itself a “cover-up” for the lack of relationship between the two sexes (i.e. there is no sexual relationship between Picasso clothed and the parakeet); on the other level, desire itself is inscribed in the *structure* or *logic* of language, but not in the speech of any particular language. That is, Picasso’s parakeet that nibbled the collar of Picasso’s shirt (and not simply any parakeet) shows us something about desire in its very act and that which gives the act its symbolic meaning. Ironically, it is precisely this nothingness beneath Picasso’s clothes that not only *gives birth to* but *nurses* the parakeet’s desire, whereas at the same time, it is the “Picasso + clothed” (as signification) that is the object of the parakeet’s love. This anecdote also makes references to the ways through which love signals a narcissistic identification with and an overestimation of the love-object and it is all about the desire to be One. Love exists to cover up the “asexual” relationship of (the courtly) love—“the only way to elegantly pull off the absence of the sexual relationship” (69). Love is, thus, a masquerade that covers up the void of the impossibility of the relationship between the two (or “them-two,” as stated in *Seminar XX* 6). Yet for Lacan, love offers more than a “specular mirage” (*Seminar XI* 268), or a specter of our void; it ventures beyond the sheer reflection of an image of its object. Love situates in the kernel of the Real, dances around the object *par excellence*—the *objet a*. The object of love is not about the body, but *what the body re-cites* in the desiring/loving subject.

In addition to the internal convolution so embedded within the Lacanian theory of love, desire, and the *objet a* in the discourse of the subject, Freud's perspectives on love—as mentioned earlier—contributes to additional confusions and complications. The chaos comes in twofold: for one, Lacan notoriously claims his own theory “a return to Freud”³⁶ and for another, scholars outside of psychoanalysis tend to assimilate Lacanian psychoanalysis to that of Freud disregarding drastic discrepancies between the two. Take love for instance. Freud, as opposed to Lacan, remains consistently optimistic towards love and its potential to make One, despite some ostensible shifts in developing his multifarious theories of love. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud considers love (or Eros) as a sexual drive that aims at a sexual union with its object: “We call by that name [libido] the energy [...] of those instincts which have to do with all that may be comprised under the word ‘love’. The nucleus of what we mean by love naturally consists (and this is what is commonly called love, and what the poets sing of) in sexual love with sexual union as its aim” (37). He also points out that love for others is constantly at odds with narcissistic self-love: “Love for oneself knows only one barrier—love for others, love for objects” (56). Indeed, Freud adds, it is love that “puts a check upon narcissism” (93) and becomes the foundation of human civilization. In referencing love for others as “a limitation of narcissism” or “a check upon” love for oneself, Freud thereby suggests a counter-libidinal energy in relation to the ego as involved in strict narcissism. Put another way, a “Freudian” loving sexual union with an-other—its love-object—is not only possible but, more importantly, at odds with narcissistic self-love. If we return to Picasso's parakeet, it, then, cannot be in love with Picasso, neither the clothed nor the body.

³⁶ Specifically in *Seminar XI*, when Lacan presents four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis which he contends to be true to Freud's teaching: the unconscious, repetition, the transference, and drive, in spite of Freud himself may not have employed these terms.

The conflicting views of love and its relation to narcissism between Lacan and Freud further affects how we determine what constitutes human “relationship” or social links in general. If in *Group Psychology*, Freud affirms that the existence of sexual love and the sublimation of it lay the foundation of human civilization, then, for Lacan, it is the “impossibility” of the existence of such a relation, along with the “transference” of it, that orchestrates the discourses of inter-subjectivity: “Love is impotent, though mutual, because it is not aware that it is but the desire to be One, which leads us to the impossibility of establishing the relationship between ‘them-two’ (*la relation d’eux*)” (*Seminar XX*, 6). Hereby Lacan gracefully negates the Freudian possibility of sexual union (between two sexes) in a loving relationship with his famous declaration of “there is no sexual relationship.” These challenges are handled in two stages. First, by claiming that “there is no such thing as sexual relationship,” what Lacan means is that “sex” (or our sexed position) does not define or determine any human relation, thus, the impossibility of maintaining such a relationship: “[t]here’s no such thing as a sexual relationship because one’s *jouissance* of the Other taken as a body is always inadequate” and that “all love is based on a certain relationship between two unconscious knowledges” (144), embodied by two subjects in love. Second, he composes a “love letter” (73-89) in which love “souloves” love (84) (an idea to which I will return in Chapter One on theoretical framework). That is, what is in love is never “the two sexes”—a subject with an object—but the knowledge of the unconscious structured in the psychic transactions in which we “soulove the soul” (85). Such a unique approach to love may explain Lacan’s “spin” on Freud’s view on love, concluding that the latter also equates love with narcissism: “In his text on the *Trieb* and the *Triebschicksale* [*Instincts and Their Vicissitudes*], the drives and the vicissitudes of the drive, Freud places love

at once at the level of the real [and] at the level of narcissism [...]" (*Seminar XI* 240), in spite of popular interpretations of what Freud may say.³⁷

The polemic within and between these Freudian and Lacanian positions pertaining to the triangulation of love/desire, the object, and the subject is what I found utterly unsettling. If love is considered an emotion, it must include an object at its core towards which these “upheavals of thought” could direct (Nussbaum 2001). If love, as a venue for the cultural politics of emotion that, through its direct object of love and the manipulation of its related phantasy, orients the body (both individually and collectively) towards a shared affective bond in civilization (Ahmed 2015: 125), then the confirmation of *such existence of the object* of love becomes imperative—not in the name of love, but in the name of “psychoanalysis.” My dissertation, on the one hand, continues the ongoing scholarly discussion that endorses the pivotal role, politically and ethically, that love plays. On the other hand, my method defies the overgeneralization or oversimplification of “the” psychoanalytic framework as “Freudian,” whose theory of love is rendered as an “economy (*qua* libido)” of emotions and/or affect, resulting in an interpretation of love as a contingency of its *direct object* and *the body* at work. By nuancing the distinctions between Freud and Lacan, I can, thus, propose an alternative approach to read love critically independent of its object. My main proposition is to elevate the definition of love from being an affective, embodied experience centering around its object choice (of love/desire) to locating love at the level of a psychic structure of “soulove” that is “structured like a language.” In other words, I contend that *love should be read as a structure of human relation, a structure of the intersubjective discourse, operating solely within the logic of the One (between two subjects)*

³⁷ To name a few, Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, Diana Fuss and Teresa de Lauretis.

independent of the other (the objet a).³⁸ To that end, my project examines a specific site of love, which is the transference, one of the four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis.

VI. *Lituraterre, the Writing of the Unconscious*

If we consider love as an inter-subjectivity³⁹ transpiring within “(the) One”—whether it refers to the signifier “One” or the sign of the One⁴⁰—rather than between a subject and an object, then Lacan’s theory of Four Discourses could provide us with a new perspective for structuring love in conjunction with social and political discourses of desire. Four Discourses represents Lacan’s endeavor to “socialize” subjectivity with Other-ness. Love, as one specific form of desire, purports the oxymoronic logic underlying all processes of subjectivation (or subject formation) in modern society, where the most viable possibility for each alienated subject to reclaim its subject position is by way of desire. As intimate strangers, the desiring subject secures the position of a subject through the objectivity of the Self (or self-knowledge), given two fundamental premises of love that “*love is the desire to be One*” (*Seminar XX*) and that “*the desire to love is always to be loved in return*” (*Seminar VIII*). It also aims to delineate the convoluted transpositions between the four agents in Lacanian discourses: The Master-Signifier (S1), the knowledge (S2), the barred subject (S), and object a, *qua* surplus-jouissance (a). In my dissertation I select two case studies for demonstrating, first, that the dynamics of love in each narrative should be determined by its structuring relationality but not by its deceiving object-

³⁸ See Lacan *Seminar XX*, pp. 131-32 and 144. Bruce Fink also elaborates this point in relation to desire that distinguishes between masculine and feminine jouissance in *Reading Seminar XX*, where he suggests that what Lacan means by a *love beyond desire* is to obtain a jouissance beyond the phallus (“Knowledge and Jouissance” 45).

³⁹ While in Lacan’s later phrase, he uses the term *transindividuality* instead.

⁴⁰ In *Seminar XX*, Lacan has shifted the referents of “the One” several times, but they are, more or less, related to mathematical or linguistic concepts (see pp. 5-7, 10, 47, 49, 66-67, 102, 127-29, 131, 143).

choice of love (as in the Lacanian framework, the love-object is what causes desire, but not the object at which desire aims). I consider both narratives as an “articulation” of desire *in its own right* rather than as a byproduct or a literary imagination of the author. In Chapter Two and Three, I offer a more nuanced account to illustrate what that means, but my proposition also demands a preliminary understanding of the Lacanian terminology as well as my model of the sinthomethics. I will first address the Lacanian injunction of *reading desire literally*.

What does it mean to read desire literally? That is, Lacan’s goal is not to say something about the text, but to use the text to illustrate a concept in psychoanalysis. Lacan himself has demonstrated such a reading method in several of his teachings, as he often resources to literature for examples supporting psychoanalytic concepts and theory. That decision is related to the role of literature and of writing for Lacan. To begin, “writing” should be considered as a *symbolic* concept, not that it does not have its own materiality (because it does); instead, its materiality is inscribed in “language.” According to Lacan, language as we have previously discussed, is itself a *conceptual system*, “a network of signifiers,” as opposed to any specific languages (i.e. English). Writing, correspondingly, becomes “the trace in which an effect of language can be read” (*Seminar XX* 121).⁴¹ To read desire literally is to following the writing, the trace that leaves us clues for solving the puzzle of the unconscious. As all writing consists of a basic unit, the writing of the unconscious consists of “the letter” as its basic unit as well: “The letter reveals in discourse what is called—not by chance or without necessity—grammar. Grammar is that aspect of language that is revealed only in writing (*à l’écrit*)” (*Seminar XX* 44).

⁴¹ Lacan’s view of writing is similar to that of Jacques Derrida, and this intersection between the two has drawn much attention from scholars that are interested in either (psychoanalysis or deconstruction) or more (such as post/structuralism); in this project, my understanding of Lacan’s position on writing derives primarily from *Seminar XX* and *Écrits*.

Thus, what writing makes manifest respecting the effects of language is *grammar*, which is also the logic of the subject.

In addition, a letter is a “trace,” which “reads” and “links” presence to an absence, gives meaning to an empty place, the void. In “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious” (1957), Lacan indicates that the letter is precisely the materiality (*Écrits* 413) that can be “read” both by being heard and being seen, an additional dimension that is missing from speech. This fashion of reading of/f the letter is most commonly associated with Lacan’s “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’” (1966) and his *Seminar XXIII: The Sinthome* (1975-76). In “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’,” Lacan re-reads Edgar Allan Poe’s detective novel, “The Purloined Letter,” to highlight the double function of the letter—it is both an (material) object a (immaterial) message. As the title suggests, a letter addressed to the Queen is “purloined,”⁴² and a detective is on the mission for finding it because the letter should be kept a secret from the King. Crucial for any detective novel, once the mystery is solved, the story ends. Therefore, the narrative structure—or “discourse”—is sustained precisely by the *absence*, the lack of the letter, rather by its presence. In Poe’s narratives specifically, the content of the letter remains *unknown*. What the reader knows is the “significance” of the letter (i.e. the Queen will be in trouble because the King will not be pleased etc.), but not exactly the substance (i.e. who wrote or sent the letter, what is the reason that King should not know of it, etc.). Lacan specifies that Poe never truly “opens” the letter to/for the reader, yet knowing only its significance is self-sufficient for assuming its full function in the narrative—i.e. to make it a story worth reading. Thus, Lacan’s reading of Poe’s “Letter” is an illustration for the ways in which the unconscious operates as the discourse of a subject. “The Seminar on ‘the Purloined Letter’” epitomizes Lacan’s approach to reading “the

⁴² I used the word “purloined” rather than “lost” or “stolen” because Lacan insists that the letter is never truly lost, but its arrival is simply postponed, “awaiting delivery or unclaimed” (*Écrits* 21).

writing” for psychoanalysis, which seeks not so much the meaning of the text from with-out. Quite the opposite, it traces the discourse from *within* by following the letter, or, by reading desire literally.⁴³

Why does it matter to read desire literally? It matters because, as Lacan demonstrate, this is the only path to access the core of our being, the sinthome *qua* writing. As Colette Soler explains in “Literature as Symptom,” when Lacan analyzes literature, the question concerns him is not a literary one, but an “analytical” one (213). James Joyce’s writing provides a beautiful illustration. Lacan in *Seminar XXIII: The Sinthome*, aims to show what “living as a core of our being” may look like by maintaining that James Joyce’s “indecipherable” writing as a symptom of Joyce himself. He coins a new word, the sinthome, from Joyce’s writing. With the sinthome, Lacan presents three fundamental functions that further define a *symptomatic literature*: (1), “to read” (*lire*), (2), “to link” (*lier*), and (3), “to litter” (*litière*) (first two are from *Seminar XX* 120; the last one is in “The Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’” 18). In other words, the symptomatic literature that “shakes up” the core of one’s being must serve three purposes for the subject: the capability to read, to “link” and connect, and to *leave traces*. As such, literature becomes “lituraterre,” the locus of jouissance of the signifying process, of a quilting point, and of *the letter*, which again foregrounds the relationship between reading/writing and the signifier.

Moreover, let us not not forget Lacan’s emphasis on the signifier but not the signified; the key here is not to read *words* literally, but rather, *desire* itself. When words are read literally, it is the conscious desire that we encounter. Lacan insists that it is not until the moment of articulation that one’s desire comes into full existence and can, then, be recognized: “*desire must be articulated*, that we must refrain from imagining [...] that desire *is inarticulable*” (Copjec 14).

⁴³ Or in Lacan’s words, it is to read desire “à la letter” (*Écrits* 17).

However, Lacan warns us of a limit of desire in its articulation through words realized as a contingency of an “incompatibility between desire and speech” (*Écrits* 275). Desire as such must be articulated through speech, allowing the opportunity for some truth of desire to escape speech so as to become a surplus jouissance (*Seminar XX* 84). To read desire literally is also the subject’s confrontation with the truth of its own desire.⁴⁴ Another caveat for reading desire through words is that desire “may register itself *negatively* in speech” (Copjec 14); that is, desire is not only what is left unsaid, but what may be said *otherwise*. In existing literary scholarship whose tradition is to read *texts* truthfully and meticulously, there is a tendency of falling into the trap of misreading desire, specifically if desire is approached at face value—either from the side of conscious desire or through reading directly through the object involved. The misguided desire culminates in two major complications in reading love in conjunction with subjectivation: (1.) the discussion of the loving/desiring subject is restricted to love as an emotion or affect, which is interpreted directly through the protagonist’s narratives instead of the overarching structure of the literary text; (2.) the analysis of the loving/desiring subject and its relation to the object sometimes ironically validates the logic of Law (hegemony, heteronormativity, ideology etc.) that the analysis intends to subvert. In other words, the very moment “I” utter an attempt to justify any non-conventional narratives of love as subversive to the Law, “I” have become a subject of that Law (in order to take a position as such). That is, when a specific form of desire is described to the reader as such (i.e. the homosexual desire in André Aciman’s *Call Me by Your Name* (2007), our reading of unconscious desire of/in the novel should, by no means, be confined to that explicit conscious desire. We should keep in mind that this unconscious desire is knowledge that the protagonist does not know s/he knows. It is our responsibility as literary

⁴⁴ Desire, in the Lacanian framework, always refers to unconscious desire, “not that which *is not known*, but that which *cannot be known* [to the subject itself]” (Evans, 36).

critics or “analysts” to decode what the *text* does not know (but not simply the character or narrator, as “the text” also involves a “con-text” that exceeds the subjective boundary of the narrator/character), to assemble and reassemble the sequences of the unconscious knowledge and how they hold together, rather than simply accepting what the protagonist re-presents to us as the unknown. As in another text of my choice, Ruth Ozeki’s *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013), the truth of desire has remained consistently and coherently *unknown* to both the narrator(s) and to the reader, what complicates the reading is that the unknown is not the unknowable; the narrators, in effect, *know what they do not know*, and so would we.

I will return to a detailed analysis of these two texts in Chapter Two and Chapter Three respectively, but it may be useful to briefly review my approach to the literary texts here. Following Lacan, my intention is not to argue about the texts, but to argue about psychoanalysis. As stated earlier, in using these two texts as case studies, a demonstration for my model of the *sinthomethics*, I am not trying to make a claim about what the texts teach us about desire, but about what the texts show us about psychoanalysis (and it is psychoanalysis that further teaches us about desire). As my primary goal is to show how desire/love operates in these texts in a way that supports the Lacanian theory of an ethical subject (as discussed in Chapter One), and most importantly, what it may look like when a subject is “traversing the fantasy,” my methodology thus diverges from a more “orthodox” or conventional literary approaches, such as reading the texts closely, or to read them in conjunction with the larger historical, social and cultural context. My use of the literary texts is not a revolt against the disciplinary tradition in which theory assumes a subsidiary role (i.e. using texts to “validate” the Lacanian theoretical framework); my method aims, nevertheless, to illustrate that how the conceptual structure I am proposing is

already grounded in the cultural artifacts, such as literature, while its application is not limited to the category of literature alone.

In this dissertation, my question to love in an ethical setting is not “What is love? (as a noun)” but “*What does love do?* (as a subjective act)” by posing two sub-questions of “*What place does love take?*” and “*When does love take time?*” My position with regards to the effect of love is not simply “What does the loving subject want from its love-object?” but rather, “*What does a subject in/of love want from the Self, and vice versa?*” With these questions in mind, I first flesh out my readings of unconscious desire and of how the desiring subject(s) navigates through the structure of love in order to answer “How does love make an ethical subject out of the Self?” in André Aciman’s *Call Me by Your Name* (2007) and Ruth Ozeki’s *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013) by transferring the subject to the Self through the coordinates of space and time, which comprise the two major impotence of our Being. These two texts provide us with a perfect window for analyzing the unconscious desire. Both narratives are case studies *par excellence* as Lacan has personally favored writing as the best medium for uncovering the ways in which the unconscious expresses itself, translating itself from the networks of signifiers into some specific signified.⁴⁵ After the first step, I continue to demonstrate to what extent each text construes a seemingly atypical case study of love that, nevertheless, conforms seamlessly to Lacan’s Four Discourses of (inter-)subjectivity. I will do so by specifically investigating how the strange intimacy of love sustains the narrative structure of each text, and how such narrative structure sets the scene for the main protagonists to refind the Self in “not giving way to desire.”

⁴⁵ This explains why his earlier collection of writing is titled *Écrits*, and how the seminar on *sinthôme* focuses solely on James Joyce’s writing.

As the formation of objective knowledge matters in the larger social context, so does subjective knowledge in the miniscule structure of texts.⁴⁶ It is precisely in this intersectionality of the social and personal knowledge (which one does not know that it knows) that my interest lies—the intersectionality is embodied in the intimate stranger. The Lacanian theory of desire functions in a fashion similar to the Foucauldian notion of power or the Althusserian construct of ideology; its working is the most manifest and effective in the microphysics of individuals, but not in the macrophysics of society as a whole. As such Lacanian intervention advances “an account of desire as unconscious [in which] human desire is constituted through the displacements of language and the real (*real* as a term for the blockages in language), not through imaginary recognition” (Dean “*Queer Desire*” 157). My method is to read the discourse of desire as the thread that binds the subject and the Self together, that is, to introduce *inter*-subjectivity in becoming better intimate strangers.

The key here is, ironically, *not to* take the entire forest for the trees, but to look at each individual tree and find the trace of the forest. The forest is the jungle of desire concealing the root of truth. The fruit from the Tree of Knowledge is not of desire but of fantasy, and as Žižek indicates in *The Plague of Fantasies*, it is fantasy that mediates our desire. Every subject is a desiring subject, for desire originates from the essential lack that, at the same time, “in-completes” the subject. To read maps of desire in the structure of literary works is to take human subjectivity and alienation literally. As my project sets out to interrogate the microphysics of *intimacy*, to investigate the metaphysics of *transference love*, and to ultimately instigate new

⁴⁶ To quote Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, it is because the hegemonic microllogical principle “cannot account for the microllogical texture of power” (279), suggesting that representation of a given (artistic) object always operates in two forms concurrently: one preserves its political function while the other serves as an artificial or artistic representation (*vertretung*) (“Can the Subaltern Speak” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. By Cary Nelson, U of Illinois P, 1988, 271-313).

metalanguages of *ethics of desire*, my main chapters magnify the dynamic relations of love/desire and the processes of becoming an ethical subject, particularly in the ways they offer an alternative reading to subjectivity and “objectivity” (a term that aims to circumvent the negativity attached to objectification). My goal is not to present a comprehensive map for tracing all the trajectories that the intimate stranger has taken. After all, it is not so much about the intimate stranger, but about what the subject does not know that she knows of the strange intimacy—of the specific, tiny molecule of knowledge that the Lacanian “extimacy” may have given to the subject *otherwise*. Hopefully, with this project, we can all find our own tale for the time being and the one name by which we wish to be called.

IV. Outline of the Chapters

Intrigued by Lacan’s neologism of “extimacy” that seems to challenge simultaneously the possibility of human intimacy while confirming the intimate alterity within the human subject, my dissertation pursues a Lacanian illustration of what such an extimacy may look like through the notion love. Specifically, I take the psychoanalytic category of transference love and situate love as such at the kernel of an ethical subject. The ethics of psychoanalysis prescribes “desire in its purest form” with one caveat that any unconscious desire is always the desire of the Other. How, then, could we envision an ethic that both respects other subjects as “an other (subject as “I”)” while preserving the boundary of the self (*qua* “I” as the Other) in the discussion of intimacy? My answer is *by way of* love. To elaborate, I start with a defense for what Lacan means in terms of “love is impossible” and “there is no sexual relationship.” I continue to illustrate my Lacanian position by arguing against “the object-oriented” emphasis in scholarship on affects that considers love as an emotion. Then, I land on a clarification of the Lacanian ethics

of psychoanalysis, regarding specifically to “traversing” the fantasy of love and identifying with the *sinthôme*. Building primarily on Lacan’s construct of Four Discourses (as in *Seminar XVII*) by synthesizing several of his other teachings on ethics (as in *Seminar VII*), love, knowledge, and *jouissance* (as in *Seminar VIII*, *Seminar XI*, *Seminar XX*), I define love opens up an ethical condition in which the subject return to the Self. I contend that love is the “impossibility” that is fundamentally ethical given that it is not only a respect for an Other, but more importantly, love preserves the Self. Operating at the conjunction of transference love and the ethics of desire, my dissertation attempts at two main objectives: first, to unveil the potential of “negativity” associated with Lacan’s theory of love as the impossibility through the *act*; second, to develop a structure of ethics *in and of* the subject//Self. My project thus contributes to the scholarship in two steps: first, I address the polemic of love within the Lacanian scholarship; second, I design an original theoretical structure for identifying the ethical condition of love as event in which the traumatic encounter changes the subject *for good* and *for the Self’s own good*. Therefore, the three major chapters in this dissertation function as a two-step verification to unlocking the Lacanian unconscious, specifically the truth of knowledge it holds about love and ethics.

The first step I take in approaching the Lacanian subject of love in order to reconcile the seemingly contradictory positions between psychoanalytic emphasis on “pure desire” and ethical responsibilities is to determine the role of love in Lacan’s conceptual framework. For this I resort to Lacan’s Four Discourses, with which Lacan presents four structures of “social link” encapsulating how the subject relates (to an Other). **Chapter One: “Love that Changes Everything: Event, Four Discourses, and the (*Sinthôm*)Ethics”** unpacks the structure of Four Discourses by offering my own interpretations of the two “disjunctions” embedded in the structure; to do so, I design a model based on Lacan’s structure/formula of the Analyst’s

Discourse, which I call *sinthomethics*. As Lacan indicates, human relations are hindered by two inherent (or “structural”) disjunctions: “the *impossibility*” and “the *impotence*.” In the first chapter I investigate what these two may be by consulting and synthesizing several teachings of Lacan. I conclude with that, in one of the Four Discourses (the Analyst’s Discourse), love is the impossibility *between two subjects* while the impotence *ex-sists*⁴⁷ *within the individual*, that is, *between the subject and the Self*. The Lacanian impossibility situates between subjects owing to “there is no sexual relationship”; the Lacanian impotence is embedded within the individual as long as the unconscious is the knowledge that one does not know that it knows. The impotence in Four Discourses is an inability related to truth, and the truth concerning the unconscious also concerns the Real. I interpret the impotence as a defense mechanism of the subject against the traumatic encounter with the Real. To answer what may account for the impotence, I import three other psychoanalytic concepts that assume important roles in the discussions of the traumatic encounter—event, abjection, and aporia—if “trauma” is defined as what goes beyond the Symbolic and the experiences in the Real. To make clear, I employ these concepts *metaphorically*, that is, they do not exert dominance over any Lacanian concepts; rather, they offer points of reference for illustrating the impotence. In incorporating *event*, *abjection*, and *aporia*, my model is thus able to introduce a faithful Lacanian Lack into the existing, seemingly closed-circuit, schemes of desire, and to further unfold the ways of which Lacan’s “disjunctive psychic negativity” could be ethically, socially, or even politically useful in reading strange intimacy *vis-à-vis* alienation, a point of which I want to drive home for this dissertation.

⁴⁷ Lacan coins the term to suggest how the unconscious persists as “another place” that is a constant process of projecting oneself onto the outer world. The unconscious does not simply “exist” but it “ex-sists” (persists exterior to the subject).

In my unorthodox rendition of the Lacanian impotence as a counterpart of the event of love, I connect abjection to the lack of knowledge in relation to *space* and aporia to *time*, two pillars that uphold respectively Chapter Two and Chapter Three. This lack of knowledge leads to disorientations and vertigos, which I claim to be the corresponding “impotence” in the Analyst’s Discourse. Ontologically speaking, an entity exists *in relation to us* in space and time. Existence is a contingency of meanings. According to Lacan, that which *means* is the letter. The letter is the threshold for all processes of signification if we place meaning in the network of the unconscious. Slavoj Zizek defines an event in Lacanian psychoanalysis as a traumatic encounter with the Real that only retroactively creates its own causes, and thus relating love as an event.⁴⁸ I situate my analysis regarding these three “concepts of ontological negativity” by engaging the theory of event, abjection, and aporia, distinctively. I find it effective to explain through the “metaphor” of abjection the impotence that confines the subject in space (i.e. the spatial gap between the subject and the Self), and through the “metaphor” of aporia the impotence that debilitates the subject in time (i.e. the temporal gap between the subject and the Self). That is, if love is *the event of impossibility* in which the two desiring subjects encounter (or, between the agent and the other in the Analyst’s Discourse), then what bars the end “product/loss of the subject” from contributing back to the “truth of the Self” that initiates the event, I argue, is the individual inability (*qua* impotence) to *traverse* the fantasy structured through space and through time. Conversely, if the subject could “traverse through” the fantasy staged in one’s temporality and/or spatiality, that is how the ethics of psychoanalysis come into focus.

⁴⁸ Slavoj Zizek has referred to love as an event on several occasions, such as in his recent work, *Event: A Philosophical Journey Through A Concept* (London, UK: Penguin, 2014), in “Slavoj Zizek: Events and Encounters Explain Our Fear of Falling in Love” (*Big Think*, personal interview, Nov. 25, 2014), and in “The Three Events of Philosophy” (in *International Journal of Zizek Studies*, vol.7, no.1, accessed 11 November 2018).

Chapter Two: “Love that Takes Place: Abjection, Displacement, and *Call Me by Your Name*” demonstrates what a Lacanian subject of sinthomethics would look like as it traverses the fantasy, returning the subject to the Self, specifically by passing through space. In addition to framing an event as “*the effect that seems to exceed its causes*,” Žižek specifically points to the function of “space” in this reverse causal relation in that “the *space* of an event is that which opens up by the gap that separates an event from its causes” (*Event*, 5). This logic of space still rings true even if we turn to Lacan’s Four Discourses and substitute event with love (*qua* the impossibility). In this case, “the space of love” (*qua* the impotence) is that which opens up by the gap that separates love from its causes, which I argue, creates a metaphor of *abjection*. What I borrow from Kristeva’s abjection is its emphasis of a displacement between the subject and the object; specifically, in that it threatens—if not completely erases—the boundary between the subject/object and self/not-self (*Powers of Horror* 1982). My re-definition of the concept *abjection* underscores the inability (or the impotence) that bridges the spatial negativity between the subject and the Self. To illustrate such a metaphor of “dis-place-ment” in abjection, I turn to the narratives in *Call Me by Your Name* (2007) by André Aciman. I contend that the main narrator, Elio, has reached the place for becoming an ethical subject as the novel concludes, and that we could claim that Elio “has truly loved” upon the final return in space where it marks the cause of the event (despite the cause only becomes the cause in retrospect, according to Žižek). In my analysis, I focus on the encounters between two protagonists, Elio and Oliver, in order to demonstrate *where* love intervenes as the event in the text that changes the structure of the discourse, *why* abjection functions as the impotence in the relationship, *how* abjection as an inability occupies the spatial gap between the subject and the Self and prevents the event of love from its causes, and *who*, at the end of the narratives, has become the ethical subject. What

constitutes Elio as an ethical subject is in his *subjective transformation* from the beloved to the lover. At the end of the narrative, Elio *chooses* to give up the place of “being (*in*) Oliver (as the site of the Other)” and takes up the place of “being (*via*) Oliver (as the *jouissance of the Other*).” This final displacement between the subject and its Other illustrates the ways in which the sinthomethics is about reconfiguring the subject, and that transference opens up the condition for such an ethical reconfiguration. As such, *Call Me by Your Name* stages the event of love where the intimate strangers cross paths by traversing the spatial gap.

Chapter Three: “Love that Takes Time: Aporia, Representation, and *A Tale for the Time Being*” follows a similar trajectory that Chapter Two has taken. However, this chapter investigates the event of love in relation to *temporality* as a gap that discombobulates the relation between the subject and the Self. Lacan distinguishes between “logical time” and “chronological time” and insists that logical time is the “*intersubjective time that structures human action.*”⁴⁹ Logical time is thus “the virtual time of the unconscious” while chronological time is manipulated by forces beyond of our capacity to control; in other words, logical time defines our intersubjective narrative as oppose to chronological time, which determines our intrasubjective temporality. As *Four Discourses* represents Lacan’s attempt to address how the unconscious could be useful in explaining the social or the intersubjective link, it is not illogical to inscribe time in these structures. Accordingly, in the case of the Analyst’s Discourse, the temporality of the event as manifested through love—or “the time of love” (qua the impotence) produces a metaphor of *aporia*. Lacan himself links *aporia* to love as he discusses love and its object,

⁴⁹ See *Écrits*, in “Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty: A New Sophism” where Lacan presents an example of a thought experiment observed from three prisoners and how they come to determine “who/what I am” by simultaneously taking into consideration of “who/what I am not” by way of both “who/what the others are” and the others’ reaction to their actions; the goal is to illustrate how the unconscious is itself an intersubjective response to the existence of other beings, pp. 161-75.

specifically, how love is to give what one does not have, and that *aporia* describes that which “without resources” (*Seminar VIII* 208), which I extend to interpreting the impotence in the *sinthomethics*. Understanding that *aporia*, first and foremost, denotes a logical impasse or paradox that is not necessarily specific to time, in this chapter I relate time as the main site for exploring *aporias*. In addition to Lacan’s reference of *aporia* as a lack (of resources), I also turn to Derrida. Derrida adopts the Greek term *aporia* (“unpassable path”) to describe the effects of uncertainties and indeterminacies, such as the theory of *différance*: “Now” is the name for this impossible possibility [for the being] (*Margins of Philosophy* 53). If time consists of several present *nows*, but since these multiple *nows* cannot “coexist” in a single moment as current and present *now*, then the logic of the present *now* is itself an *aporia*, the impossible possibility (53-67). I employ Derrida’s “paradox of the present *nows*” as my metaphor of “re-present-ation” through *aporia*. That is, in my re-interpretation of the term, *aporia* stands in for an inability (or the impotence) that collapses the temporal gap between the subject and the Self in an event. In Ruth Ozeki’s *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013) the paradox of the present *nows* takes the center stage, and I aim to show with this text how an ethical subject comes into being as a result of traversing the boundary of time in the event of love. Both Ruth and Nao represent two co-present “*now*’s” that both initially refuse to “be present” (for the moment being); therefore, I adopt the metaphor of *aporia* for examining the impotence construed by the binary logic of presence and absence, and for how “the moment being” in the text functions as *both* a site of infinite possibility *and* finite impossibility (in that it is not yet the past and never be the future). *A Tale for the Time Being* unwinds the event of love when the strange intimacy coincides upon traversing the temporal gap.

It is not possible to start a conversation on initiating social or cultural changes without first forming an understanding of what causes the subject “a structural change” by way of how the subject relates. It is also not possible to discuss any human relationship without first having an understanding of what constitutes a subject. Therefore, my project fulfills a critical “reimagining” of subjectivity for envisioning new possibilities for future radical discourse of love, desire, and intimacy. In my investigation of how love could transpire as an *event* that changes how the subject perceives the world (or reality), I demonstrate that transference love can generate an ethical possibility for the subject (of desire) to recognize the truth of one’s own desire, which I called the Self. Once the subject recognizes the truth of one’s own desire and acts in accordance to such desire, this is the ethical act. And this final act is what I mean by “returning the subject to the Self.” This project begins with the *event* of love by retrospectively allocating its cause of desire, and hopefully ending in ethics by way of the Lacanian act and its traversal of *place* and *time*. My approach offers an-*other* discourse to love in that it circumvents altogether typical categories of identities in reading the lover’s discourse, such as class, race, ethnicities, sex, gender, and age. At times, these tags of identities run the risk of pre-labeling certain texts or human relationships in a way that over-determines our way of reading intimacy, ended up only to find love in specific place and time. I wish to intervene in existing social and cultural discourses of subjectivity (and the radical changes thereof) by presenting a distinctive structure of intimacy, one that aims to alienate the un-isolatable—the Self within the subject. I hope that my project, as my own act of transference in response to Lacan’s *Other jouissance*, could offer my readers an alternative space and time in which strange intimacy emerges with the intimate stranger.

Chapter One

“Love that Changes Everything”:

Event, Four Discourses, and the (Sinthôm)Ethics

“Entre l’homme et la femme,
Il y a l’amour,
Entre l’homme et l’amour,
Il y a un monde.
Entre l’homme et le monde,
Il y a un mur.”

*You see, I foresaw what I would be telling you this evening—
I’ve been talking to brick walls.*

Jacques Lacan, *Talking to Brick Walls* (2017)

“Man is not a divided subject; he is a quartered being.”
Paul Verhaeghe, *Beyond Gender* (2001)

I. Introduction: From Intimate Stranger to Estranged *Extimacy*

To intimacy, Lacan prefers “extimacy (*extimité*)” (*Seminar VII* 139). Defined as “the intimate exteriority” (139), Lacan’s neologism highlights the oxymoronic nature of the unconscious with which an intrinsic exteriority orchestrates every intersubjective relation. Lacan extracts “extimacy” from both “in-timacy” and “ex-teriority” so as to problematize—if not to refute completely—the distinctions between conventional binaries or conceptual dualities that had provided the foundations for existing discourses of subjectivity (i.e. the self vs. the other). One popular quote of Lacan, “the unconscious is structured like a language,” shares a similar premise. The quote features two elemental principles for approaching a Lacanian subject: first, “the unconscious *is structured*”; second, “it is (structured) *like a language*.” The unconscious is not at all a puddle of randomness that hoards our animal instincts; quite on the contrary, it has a

distinct structure, and that structure is *similar to* (thus, “like”) a language (but not “the” language) or a linguistic system. It is not a language that our mind speaks; it is, instead, a linguistic system through which that the “Other” orchestrates one into a subject, if considering Lacan also stresses that “*the unconscious is the discourse of the Other*” (*Seminar XI* 131). Therefore, the unconscious is not only structured, but it is also structured by the Other with specific linguistic elements. These elements include signs, consisting of signifiers (that which points to something, as I’d call it) and signified (that which being pointed to). Since languages are systems of signifiers originated from the Other, this system is not innate or interior to the subject, but it exists *in-between* the subjects. The unconscious in the Lacanian system is, therefore, not an *inner*-subjective phenomenon but essentially an *inter*-subjective one: “This exteriority of the symbolic in relation to man is the very notion of the unconscious” (*Écrits* 468-69). The Cartesian *cogito* of “I think, therefore I am” is revised by Lacan into “I am thinking where I am not, therefore I am where I am not thinking” or, to be more precise, “I am not, where I am the plaything of my thought; I think about what I am where I do not think I am thinking” (430). That *I think about what I am where I do not think I am thinking* is precisely *cogito qua* the unconscious, which is also “what one does not know that he knows.” This unconscious knowledge is what’s held accountable for both the extimacy of the subject being and the inherent—a gap or a splitting—between the speaking subject (the “I” that speaks) and the subject of the statement (the “I” being spoken of).⁵⁰ This “none-sense” of the “speaking being” (*parlêtre*) existing as a separate (non-)entity from the signifier validates the rationale for this project, which argues for a critical investigation of a relationship within a speaking subject

⁵⁰ As Jacques Derrida argues in *Of Grammatology* (1986) that “there is no outside-text” (or, translated by Gayatri C. Spivak as “There is nothing outside the text,” pp. 158-59) and that in the act of reading, what the reader/critic should be concerned with is the “structural unconscious” or, the unconscious of the text.

specifically through the discourse of transference love—as either an intimacy or an extimacy—as it is constructed *in* and *by* the Lacanian unconscious.

In addition, Lacan’s emphasis on the “alterity” of the intimacy is not simply a wordplay that attempts to muddle with the existing dichotomy between the conscious or the unconscious, between the ego and the id, or between the Self and the Other, which are often associated with the “outward” and “inward” expressions of the psyche. To read Lacan and to interpret his words from any existing universal categories would be a regrettable oversight. The theory of extimacy is later developed further by Jacques-Alain Miller, who contends that such neologism is, in effect, necessary “in order to escape the common ravings about a psychism supposedly located in a bipartition between interior and exterior” (75); more importantly, this expression “must be formalized and dealt with apart from [the existing] structures and to “slide into this interior-exterior bipartition that we need, for our own use, to substitute for it another relation” (75). In other words, extimacy is not simply a term of bricolage that “merges” the existing dichotomy; instead, it mocks and ousts the existing structures and “emerges” as a new category of its own right. Miller insists on approaching the term extimacy as an autonomous concept because it aims to challenge the paradoxical nature of intimacy—what seems “the most intimate is not a point of transparency but rather a point of opacity” (76). As such, extimacy is not framed as an opposition to intimacy but captures the internal irreconcilable tension from “the intimate [being] Other—like a foreign body, a parasite” (76). To say that “the intimate is Other” is to question the *a priori* existence of an unconscious before the conscious, or id before the ego. Whereas Miller seems to give priority to the presence of the exteriority on the inside (of a subject), it is possible that Lacan may be reminding us of the presence of the interiority on the outside so as to redefine the limit of the unconscious, or, to redefine the realm of modern subjectivity by theorizing the

unconscious as an “intersubjective social link” (as suggested in “the unconscious is the discourse of the Other” to name the least).⁵¹ I consider Miller’s suggestion here (regarding the unconscious and the relation for which extimacy substitutes *within* the subject itself) to be the intimate stranger *par excellence*—a site that captures the intersubjective “insistence”⁵² of an objective existence. In other words, this strange intimacy of extimacy repudiates the binary of “inner versus outer,” “the self versus others,” and/or “the subject versus its object”; instead, it affirms that which substitutes is not simply an “and” for the “versus” but something else—perhaps a completely new discourse, one that articulates an encounter between the subject and what’s been previously submerged under the binaries in our everyday encounters.

Returning to my claim in the introductory chapter, this dissertation investigates the ethical possibility for the subject through the *event* of transference love in our subjective encounter with the Real, wherein the truth of one’s desire lies. The term “event” has its distinctive meaning in fields of philosophy, cultural studies, and even psychoanalysis, which deviates from the ordinary reference of the word as simple as something that happens. In *Being and Event* (2005), Alain Badiou defines event as “[a] type of rupture which opens up truths,” a term that stands in opposition to “situations,” considered as “nothing more, in their being, than pure indifferent multiplicities” (xii). If “situations” consist of the everyday norm that scripts our being, then an “event” is that which exceeds that constitutive norm, further opening up one’s

⁵¹ Another example of Lacan’s instance on the intersubjective emphasis in his definition of the unconscious would be “Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty: A New Sophism” (1945); in this piece, Lacan unpacks the ways in which human unconscious decides its “acts” only by referencing to an assumption of the other’s decision and suggests that human subjectivity is thus both a contingency and a presumption of its own certainty.

⁵² Lacan says the unconscious, as a discourse of the other, “insists” rather than “exists” for the subject: “the unconscious becomes a chain of signifiers that repeats and insists somewhere (on another stage or in a different scene, as [Freud] wrote, interfering in the cuts offered it by actual discourse and the cogitation it informs” (*Écrits* 799), another pun which again demonstrates the “intrusion” of the exteriority of the unconscious or the intersubjective nature of the psyche.

subjectivity to possible conditions of its own reconstitution, which is why, with its engagement with event, Badiou calls the subject “a militant of truth” (xiii). Badiou’s framing of the subject through the distinction between “events” and “situations” is therefore crucial for my project,⁵³ specifically, that “a subject is nothing other than *an active fidelity to the event of truth*” (xiii, emphasis mine). The emphasis on “an active fidelity” resonates with the definition of a Lacanian act, which involves more than “a deed” but “a will” supporting such a deed. Similar to Badiou’s characterization of an “event” as that which disrupts or contradicts the lineal progression of our everyday “situations,” the norms and logics in which our reality and being are grounded, Žizek in *Event: A Philosophical Journal through a Concept* (2014) expands the definition of the term for a reading of our everyday occurrences, specifically at capitalism. Despite their subtle differences, the term “event” for both shares similar distinguishing features in terms of its non-logicality and its nature of being a disruptive force. In Badiou’s framework, there are four (and only four) major “truth procedures”⁵⁴ in one’s subjective being: politics, art, love, and sciences, thus resulting in four types of subjects.

It is also by way of event that the sinthomethics functions as a response to the effects of alienation. For my project, I adopt Žizek’s modification of Badiou’s account of event mainly because of its accessibility for other applications than philosophical inquires. While Žizek’s definition of the term seems to take the Badiouian path, Žizek does not adhere to Badiou’s demand of accepting only four truth procedures in our subjective being, thus broadening the potential for answering the question: “*How is the subject possible?*”⁵⁵ In a similar vein, Žizek

⁵³ See Alain Badiou in *Being and Event* (2006) and *Philosophy and the Event* (2013).

⁵⁴ Truth procedures are “conditions” that produce truth as they are pursued; a “condition” is a set of quasi-complete “situations”; a “situation” refers to any consistent presented “multiplicity”; a “multiplicity or multiple” means general form of presentation, once one assumes that the One is not” (See Badiou’s “Dictionary” in *Being and Event*, pp. 498-526).

⁵⁵ Quoted from the Translator’s Note in *Being and Event* (2006), pp. 6.

also conceives love as a major event in our being; specifically, love provides the threshold through which he approaches an “event”—as “*the effect that seems to exceed its causes*” (*Event* 5) and thus “an inconsistent multiplicity [...with] the surprising emergence of something new which undermines every stable scheme” (6-7). Žižek’s emphasis, both on the disruption of the linear causal relationship and on the emergence of something new as the effect of an event, supports my previous argument that the *sinthomethics* designates a structure for the formation of new subjectivity. As noted, both Badiou and Žižek conceive of love as an event precisely because of its *effect* of changing the (dis)courses of our life. The original French word that Badiou employs is *dispositif* (*Philosophy and the Event* x), a term that had challenged the English translators a great deal due to its multiplicity in meanings; yet it basically means “to set up, to void” or even to suggest “an apparatus,” to name a few (x-xiii). According to Badiou, love is an event for “the amorous subject”⁵⁶ as long as it signals the “experimentation of difference, the experimentation of the world suspended” while “[constructing] a singular experience of difference” (44). In Žižek’s framework, it is also not the subject who decides its reasons for falling in love, but rather, once one falls in love, the reasons are thus re-covered and made manifest. Simply put, love “*reframes*” our reality and fantasy, our relationship to the Other, and most fundamentally, our subjectivity (*Žižek, Event* 24). The metaphor of “event as reframing” is critical for envisioning radical change in current discussions of subjectivity.

In this chapter, I start with a clarification of the unconscious in the Lacanian discourses in which the subject of love encounters an “opening” for becoming an ethical subject through a strange form of intimacy—transference love—an intimacy between the subject and the Self. The Self, is similar to what Badiou considers as the “truth” and what Žižek relates to the Real. To do

⁵⁶ As Badiou calls the event of love an “amorous encounter” or an “amorous procedure.”

so, I present a “hybrid” theoretical model—which I name “the *sinthomethics*”—for exploring this strange intimacy (or extimacy) in conjunction with Lacan’s theory of Four Discourses. My model builds specifically on the Analyst’s Discourse, Lacan’s theory of transference, and what he considers as an ethics of psychoanalysis. I contend that, the key to achieve a Lacanian *act* (itself ethical by definition) in maintaining an intimacy against the effects of alienation, also essential for understanding our intersubjective relation, is through transference love, a specific category of love. Lacan suggests that the transference (as an analytic practice) should aim to guide the analysand/subject through a traversal of its own fundamental fantasy to the Real. As movements and changes are often conceptualized in relation to space and time,⁵⁷ I translate transference love as an event that disrupts the spatiality and temporality of our being. The subject in love, in traversing the fantasy of desire (which is embedded in Other’s desire), *must* transgress the psychic boundary of space and time, two logics that structure the barriers in my model of *sinthomethics*. In his return to Freud,⁵⁸ Lacan underscores the function of the transference, claiming it to be the end/aim of a psychoanalytic encounter between the analyst and the analysand. For that reason, I isolate the structure of the Analyst’s Discourse from the other three discourses. If transference love is the “end game” of the Analyst’s Discourse, and if psychoanalysis does offer the (post-)modern, disjointed and alienated subject a way to secure intimacy, it is then imperative to disaggregate among our social relations who/what are the main actors in these encounters, and who/what are the main drivers and barriers in the social links. By focusing on the Analyst’s Discourse and offering a model named the *sinthomethics*, my

⁵⁷ My inspiration comes from Henri Lefebvre’s theory on space (and how it punctuates time) in *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2013). If we consider the unconscious as the psychic space as a site to be “traversed” by the subject in his journey through/of desire, then psychoanalysis is, in a sense, rhythm-analysis of the psyche, or an analysis of the rhythm and the repeating patterns of the unconscious discourse.

⁵⁸ As stated earlier, this return provides the foundation for Lacan’s *Seminar XI*.

dissertation seeks to answer the question with which Badiou is concerned as he composes *Being and Event*—*How is a subject possible*—by adding “*in the event of transference love?*”

In addition to devoting a year-long seminar to transference (*Seminar VIII*, 1960-61), Lacan also names the transference as one of the four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis in *Seminar XI* (1964), the other three being the unconscious, repetition, and the drive, thereby defining the caliber of these terms. The theory of the transference is not without debates or controversies, of course.⁵⁹ First presented by Sigmund Freud, considered simply as the displacement of affect from one idea to another (*SE V* 562, qtd. in Evans 211), the term “transference” was later appropriated by Lacan to describe the “relationship” occurring during the analytic process. The debates concerning the term thus are related to either transference is ethical or if the transference love itself is genuine or authentic, and whether or not it is in itself sufficient. The issue of ethics is a result of if at all the analyst should manipulate the analysand’s affects during the treatment, whereas the discussion of authenticity of transference love (and the relationship thereof) could be considered as an elaborated concern of the former. To these questions, Lacan responds and insists that transference “does not consist of such emotions [such as love and hate] but in the structure of an intersubjective relationship” (Evans 211). In this structure, if love appears as transference, it is the love of knowledge (*savoir*, the symbolic knowledge) that is in question. It is through this emphasis on knowledge that the subject comes into view. More precisely, it is through the concept of “Subject-Supposed-to-Know” that transference holds psychoanalysts responsible for the unconscious (Soler, *The Unconscious* 40). As Colette Soler states, “A subject supposes nothing, he is supposed” (*The Unconscious* 11), a

⁵⁹ For debates and discussions surrounding the transference (as well as the development of the related theory), see Russell Grigg’s “Signifier and Object in the Transference” in *Lacan, Language, and Philosophy* (2008), Colette Soler’s *Lacan—the Unconscious Reinvented* (2014),

formula through which Lacan introduces the matheme of the transference in 1967. Soler further contends, without transference, “there is no unconscious either, for the unconscious [...] is not just one thing among others”; because “the subject [is] supposed to knowledge” and it is “the transference that makes it supposed” (*The Unconscious* 39) because “the transference is a name of the unconscious [...] essentially tied to belief. We could even say that *it is in essence itself belief*” (40, emphasis mine). This supposition refers to the structure of transference *qua* the unconscious, and it designates the Other as a place, or a position. On account of “the supposition belongs to the analysand, the position to the analyst,” the analytic act is thus prescribed: “to position an unconscious, which in itself is not positioned, and from this fact the analysand will be able to suppose, for *supposition is a retroaction of positioning*” (40, emphasis mine). That “supposition is a retroaction of positioning” overlaps with Žižek’s definition of *an event* which I mentioned earlier, given love is “eventual [for] it is a manifestation of a circular structure in which the eventual effect retroactively determines its causes or reason” (Žižek, *Event* 4). To be more precise, it is similar to an event as they both denote “*the effect that seems to exceed its cause*—and the *space* of an event is that which opens up by the gap that separates an effect from its causes” (5). To re-present my argument from this perspective, if transference love is the event or the effect that disrupts the situation, suggesting that it has exceeded its cause, which is the *objet a* (the cause of desire). In the structure of transference love (to which I will shortly return), whereas it is the analyst that occupies the position of the “Subject-Supposed-to-Know,” the cause of desire, it is *the subject* that needs to be “supposed” in relation to the position of the analyst” in order for the situation to become an event, since “to be supposed” (*être supposé*) means to be *expected*. In other words, in the Analyst’s Discourse, there is no need to “expect” the Analyst to come into being (for it is the cause but not the effect); quite the contrary, what needs to be

expected is the subject. This justifies my proposal of taking transference to be the main event, and the Analyst's Discourse as the singular "space" for hosting such an event in that "it opens up the gap that separates an effect from its causes," just as Žižek's rationale of love being eventual.

As this chapter aims to clarify Lacan's structure and to establish my framework of the *sinthômethics* in which transference love opens up such an ethical possibility for the subject to achieve intimacy by returning to the Self, the next two chapters delineate the contour of such ethics and love as the subject traverses through fantasy and across the psychic impasse to knowledge contingent on the space and time of one's being. In other words, both of the following chapters function as case studies for illustrating the ways in which the *sinthômethics* could facilitate our reading and interpretation of the unconscious of the textual narratives, specifically, the structure of desire that not only attends to the intimacy between different subjects but to the extimacy within the subject. The word "hybrid" denotes that, admitting all the fundamental theoretical concepts involved derive from Lacan's teachings, the *application* of these concepts, as manifested specifically in my readings of lover's discourses, is my own. Therefore, before we proceed, I offer a brief justification for the organization and my principles of selection as these concepts unfold throughout the project. Considering these Lacanian concepts are highly convoluted (not only are they complicated and abstract in nature, but they are often framed in cross-references with each other), it is not my intention at all to provide a comprehensive and thorough analysis of all the concepts. Such an intention may be futile as it involves conflicting interpretations presented by scholars across disciplines (literary critics, social/cultural theorists, philosophers, and even psychoanalysts), and what further complicates a potential resolution is due to the fact that Lacan has consistently revised these concepts throughout the course of his career.

To be clear, my primary objective for this chapter is to present my hybrid model for structuring an ethical intimacy through love, and in order to substantiate its validity, I first unpack some relevant Lacanian constructs essential for bolstering my framework. Therefore, the following sections are organized according to such logics of relevance (rather than the chronology of the corresponding seminars with which these concepts are often associated): after delineating the contour of Lacan's Four Discourses (from *Seminar XVII*), I present my own model and hypothesis. Admitting that my framework also involves several crucial Lacanian concepts that may need further clarification for readers who are not familiar with Lacan, the section continues into a brief account of what love does for Lacan. The concluding section previews the two corresponding case studies in the chapters on space and time, which marry my model of Lacanian structure of intimacy to reading "the writing" as a symptom of love, as writing *qua lituraterre*, according to Lacan, contains the best repertoire of desire for applying such a structural investigation of ethical possibilities regarding strange intimacy.

II. Structuring the Analyst's Discourse in Deconstructing the Narratives of Love ***Lacan's Four Discourses and the Intersubjective Entanglement***

Lacan presented his theorization of Four Discourses in his year-long seminar of 1969-70, also known as *Seminar XVII, L'envers de La Psychanalyse*, officially translated as *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* (1991). While not completely misleading, the translation could be limiting, specifically concerning what Lacan may have attempted to achieve with the term "l'envers."⁶⁰ Prior to its official English edition, the seminar had also been previously translated

⁶⁰ Bruce Fink, Dylan Evans, Russell Grigg and several other scholars have pointed out the difficulties associated with the translation, but the following interpretation is my own.

as *The Reverse of Psychoanalysis, From an other to the Other, or Psychoanalysis Inside Out*.⁶¹ As all these translations suggest, “*l’envers*” signifies turning, flipping, or reversing, the “inside” of psychoanalysis to be situated on the outside. It is not at all the “opposite” side opposing psychoanalysis (i.e. the surface versus the underneath), but the “reverse” (or reversal) of psychoanalysis, or the other side *in* the Other. What does this mean? As psychoanalysis is an analysis of the psyche (for Freud) and of the unconscious (for Lacan), flipping psychoanalysis from one side to the other means that it is no longer simply looking into the inner-side the subject, but it is looking at the subject from the inside-out. This is why in *Seminar XVII*, Lacan involves Freud, Marx and Hegel, for moving towards the question and/or *tension* between psychoanalysis, the function of science, and the issue of truth and knowledge. Its emphasis on the “social” and/or “political” side of psychoanalysis is unequivocal, explaining why scholars often employ *Seminar XVII* in the political discourses and cultural criticism in investigating potentials for social change.⁶² That is, most scholarship takes advantage of the structure of Four Discourses and places “society” as a whole in the center of their analysis. To read against the grain, I would like to call attention to “*the other side*” of this “*Other’s side of psychoanalysis*.” When there is “one,” there is not necessary an “other”; however, whenever there is “the other,” there must be “one.” Namely, as Lacan specifically points to “the other hand,” we should immediately remind ourselves of “the one hand” that remains unsaid. That is why, instead of inscribing Lacan’s Four Discourses in larger social structures from which we analyze the positionality of the subject in its social network, my project adopts a perspective of “reverse-

⁶¹ Translations appear in Dylan Evens *Introductory Dictionary* as well as the most known version of the unofficial translation online, “Lacan in Ireland” by Cormac Gallagher.

⁶² To name a few, Yannis Stavrakakis in *Lacan and the Political* (1999), Mark Bracher in *Lacan, Discourse, and Social Change* (1993) and *Lacanian Theory of Discourse* (1994), Slavoj Žižek (in several of his articles and books actually, but specifically) in *Cogito and the Unconscious* (1998) and “Jacques Lacan’s Four Discourses” (2006).

seeing” to approach these networks of (m)Other or the Law (*qua* “the-Name-of-the-Father”;
 these terms indicate *functions* or *positions* rather than any specific person or individual)⁶³ so as
 to identify the structure *from within the subject*. Therefore, not until I unpack two specific terms
 or theories from Lacan—Four Discourses and the unconscious—would my model appear
 warranted to the reader.

The following algorithms are Lacan’s Four Discourses as they first appear in *Seminar XVII* (29, 39, 69): the Master’s Discourse, the University’s Discourse, the Hysteric’s Discourse, the Analyst’s Discourse.⁶⁴ There are four discourses, four “terms” (or mathemes, the algebraic symbols), and four positions. Despite their visual presentation/order here, the Master’s Discourse provides the matrix for the other three, as it originates from the most “primary” relation between one and its Other.

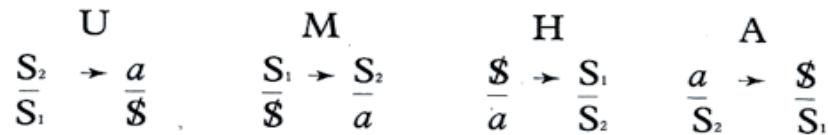
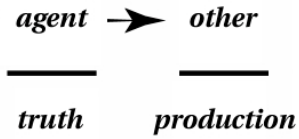


Figure 1. Lacan’s Four Discourses in *Seminar XVII*, pp. 29, 39

The following descriptions, however, appear later in *Seminar XX* (pp. 16-17):

⁶³ It is also the “Law” but not “power” of the Father, since Lacan does not use the word power.

⁶⁴ This is the original algorithm from Lacan and the one I will be using in my project. He also later returns to the Four Discourses and elaborates the details in *Seminar XX*, “*To Jacobson*,” pp. 19-25, which shows a more complicated graph that I will also later discuss. There are, however, other scholars offering algorithms with minor to major modifications for better illustrations, such as an extra arrow, flows, and directions; in a 1972 lecture, Lacan also added one more discourse, the Capitalist discourse, to the existing one (see Jean-Michel Rabaté’s *Jacques Lacan*).

<p>The four “terms” or <i>mathemes</i> are:</p> <p>(S1): The Master-Signifier, (S2): Knowledge (<i>le savoir</i>), (S): The Subject, (a): Both the <i>objet a</i> and Surplus-Enjoyment.</p>	<p>The four “places” or <i>positions</i> are:</p> <p>agent (upper-left), truth/motor (lower-left), other (upper-right), product/production, or loss (lower-right).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">  </p> <p>Figure 2. Four positions of Lacan’s Four Discourses</p>
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Lacan’s Four Discourses build upon the matrix [S1/S → S2] in which “a signifier is that which represents a subject for another signifier” (*Seminar XI* 207). Prior to his seminars, in one of Lacan’s earlier writings, “The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious” (1957), several key features have foreshadowed this matrix: the emphasis that the unconscious is structured like a language, thus, the subject is a being of language; “signifier over signified (S/s)” (*Écrits* 414), in which a bar represents the “over” separating the two levels that constitutes the subject; in addition, there is a constant sliding of the signified under the signifier, suggesting both the subject and/or the structure of the unconscious is not a stable but a dynamic system (*Écrits* 412-39). Moreover, in the beginning there was “the letter,” defined as “the essentially localized structure of the signifier” (418), further associated with “it’ or “id” because “‘*Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*’—where it was, I must come into being” (435) or “where It was, shall I be.” After all, the unconscious is a sea of signifiers, and it is the signifier that articulates the subject into being, an emphasis to which I will also return and elaborate once my model is presented.

Not only do Four Discourses lay the foundation for *Seminar XVII*, but more importantly, they parade Lacan's insistence on "the letter" that is core to the unconscious, along with the productive potential in his reducing the subject to a kernel of mathemes. As Bruce Fink explains in *The Lacanian Subject*, "the unconscious is nothing but a 'chain' of signifying elements, such as words, phonemes, and letters, which 'unfolds' in accordance with very precise rule over which the ego or self has no control whatsoever" (8-9). Four Discourses operate with four designated mathemes in a circular rotation, starting with the Master's Discourse: $S_1 \rightarrow S_2 \rightarrow a \rightarrow S$. They alternate their positions by following a strict order, which could only rotate either clockwise or counter-clockwise. The four positions involved are "the agent" (the dominant position), and "the Other" to which the agent is addressing; sliding under "the agent" is the "truth" (about the agent), simultaneously being hidden (from the Other, up the sleeve of the agent) and provides a driving force that sustains the agent and the discourse; under "the Other" is the end "product" (for the agent), doubled as the "loss" (for the Other). As Lacan insists, there are only four discourses rather than the possible 24 combinations given that Four Discourses, as a set, produce each other, one set generating the next by the simple rotation. Consequently, after four rotations, the last discourse returns to the beginning discourse (i.e. the Master's Discourse).

Despite the reference to "hysteria," Four Discourses are not pathological categories; that is, they do not overlap with the discourse of the neurotic, of the pervert, or that of the psychotic. The term *discourse* accentuates Lacan's linguistic/structural priority in conceptualizing the subject; contrary to speech, discourse "[stresses] the *transindividual* nature of language, the fact that speech always implies another subject, and interlocutor. Thus, the famous Lacanian formula, 'the unconscious is the discourse of the [O]ther' designates the unconscious as the effects on the subject of speech that is addressed to him from elsewhere" (Evans 44, emphasis mine). For

Lacan, “discourse” is not simply any particular form of speech but the underlying system and organizing principles—or *structure*—of the intersubjective ties in which the subject of language is situated. The unconscious, to borrow Bruce Fink’s words, “rather than being the privileged seat of subjectivity, [it...] is itself Other, foreign, and unassimilated” (*Lacanian Subject* 9); with “the unconscious is structured like a language, Lacan did not assert that the unconscious is structured in exactly the same way as [any specific languages], but rather that language, as it operates at the unconscious level, *obeys a kind of grammar, that is, a set of rules that governs the transformation and slippage that goes on therein*” (8, emphasis mine). Adding to this linguistic view, Russell Grigg in *Lacan, Language, and Philosophy* (2008) highlights two cardinal linguistic rules for addressing the “grammar” of the unconscious, which are metaphor and the metonymy: “the subject is a metaphor” for the most prominent part, yet “this theory ‘metaphor’ is still recognizably linked to its usual meaning, it is nevertheless understood in a particular way, on that deviates significantly from its customary usage” (151). The reference to metaphor and metonymy and the function of speech in the operation of the unconscious are also key to two of Lacan’s seminal texts, “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis” (1953) and “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud” (1957). What is crucial here is that the concept of “speech” or “the subject of language” here should not be confused with any verbalized human communication; rather, as the unconscious is itself a “linguistic” system introjected into the ego, the “subject of language” refers to any individual who is capable of desire, or more precisely, who is *articulated* by the language of desire.⁶⁵ This

⁶⁵ My references here concerning the unconscious and its relation to language derive primarily from Bruce Fink’s *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (1995), Russell Grigg’s *Lacan, Language, and Philosophy* (2008), and *Lacan and the Subject of Language* (1991), edited by Ellie Ragland-Sullivan and Mark Bracher.

emphasis on “language” thus spells out Lacan’s intention with Four Discourses to be four “blueprints” for tracing the theoretical edifice of the Lacanian subjectivity (by way of desire).

For Lacan, Four Discourses constitute a rather comprehensive network sufficient for generalizing and analyzing most signifying chains of the society, if taking the way of which each subject relates for a process of signification. The four structures epitomize human “relations”—or the social links, to quote Lacan—for the following reasons. The short, simpler version is, they flip psychoanalysis “inside out” in subverting the conventional psychoanalytic practices that often concern solely with one singular subject. These discourses complement such a narrow scope by underscoring “the *other* side of the subject” that extends to the surrounding society of the subject, of which the practices of psychoanalysis should not lose sight.⁶⁶ How, then, is this Lacanian reading of the social sufficient (which means, not simply theoretical but *practical*)? The first Lacanian justification is that “there is no such thing as a metalanguage” (*Seminar XX* 118), namely, there is no *outside* of language; thus, there is no *metadiscourse* that would escape the network of Lacan’s Four Discourses. Every (inter)subjective communication is structured by its *position*, by the function of the subject in between the signifiers, and by its object *qua* surplus-enjoyment (*objet a*). Furthermore, if counting the subject as “one,” then everything else comprises “the Other” (other than one); more precisely, “the Other” *is everything else (but one)*, logically speaking. Consequently, with its emphasis on the “intersubjective link” between the *objet a*, the cause of desire (as it acts as the agent) and the barred subject (who sits in the position of the Other), the structure presented in Lacan’s Four Discourses becomes ethically and politically relevant for any discussion of subjectivity and agency, especially the structure of the Analyst’s Discourse. The *a priori* algorithm for any analysis of social dynamics (be it racial,

⁶⁶ Specifically, Lacan is challenging the ego-psychologists’ view of an “autonomous ego.”

sexual, or class) thus requires the ability to distinguish, in the given discourse, between who/what the cause of desire is, and who/what the subject is.

It further suggests that, for Lacan, Four Discourses are not simply theories of the subject in a fixated, static structure (as the structuralist approach) but theories of *change*, implicated in movements and progressions. Four Discourses are the theory of *acts* (ethical inasmuch as the subject is held accountable), whose aim is to shift or rotate the current discourse, explaining why my argument of the ethical and “the social” is intrinsic to the logic of Four Discourses. In my project, ethics denotes the fundamental principles for understanding any human relationship, and the primary “social relationship” that defines a subject, I contend, is one between the Self and the Other. To be more specific, two human subjects could simply co-exist in either a same time or a same space, but my interest is in how exactly that co-existence, that sharing or *splitting* of the same time or the same space of the Being “subjectivates” the Self and destabilizes the “future” or each current moment to multiple uncertainties. In this sense, these four combinations are comprehensive enough for capturing most of the “social links” not by way of any specific *category of identities* in a relationship (i.e. race, sex, gender, class etc.), but more in terms of the *uncategorized singularity of non-identities* within such an encounter.

Before focusing specifically on the Analyst’s Discourse and how it sets the condition of the ethical acts for transference love to take place and time, I find it beneficial to first provide a preliminary understanding of Four Discourses in general. These discourses differentiate from one another with the positions of the four mathemes, with their position determining the function and the signification of the discourse. The upper-left position is the “agent” that dominates and defines the discourse. In the Master’s Discourse, the agent is occupied by the Master-Signifier (S1), representing the subject (S) for another signifier (S2), which could be *any signifiers other*

than the Master-Signifier; however, due to the nature of language in the signifying chain, there is always surplus, or an object “in excess” (*a*) that marks the “impossibility”—or the incongruity—of the social relation.⁶⁷ A Master-Signifier, according to Žižek, is an empty signifier, or “the signifier-without-signified” (*Indivisible Remainder* 142); that is, it is a signifier that points to itself but not to other signifiers, existing as an impasse in the network of signifiers. Lacan describes the Master’s Discourse as that which “masks the division of the subject” (*Seminar XVII* 118); therefore, the Subject (S) is what slides under the agent, hiding in the position of “truth.” As explained by Bruce Fink, the Master’s Discourse provides the matrix for the other three discourse for both “historical reasons and because it embodies the alienating functioning of the signifier to which we are all subject” (“Master Signifier” 31), or as Paul Verhaeghe describes, a Lacanian subject must first mistake itself as the Master-Signifier so as to relate to the Other, or other signifiers (178). The Master-Signifier is “the nonsensical signifier, the signifier with no rhyme or reason” and “must be obeyed [...] because he or she says so. No justification is given for his or her power: it just is” (Fink, “Master Signifier” 31). Fink also reads the Master’s Discourse as the prototype for all master-slave relation in which the (*a*) being produced is “surplus value” in the capitalist society. The subject is barred because there is a split between conscious and unconscious (S) but shows up in the position of truth as “dissimulated truth” (32). Consequently, the Master’s Discourse illustrates a play of domination between two signifiers (S1, S2) so as to hide the traumatic “split” or the void in the Subject (S).

The Master’s Discourse, after turning counterclockwise by a quarter turn, becomes the University’s Discourse. Unsurprisingly, Knowledge (S2) now sits in the dominant position. Behind all endeavors to achieve an apparently “neutral” or “objective” knowledge (*a*) in the

⁶⁷ In the Lacanian framework, the impossibilities related to the order of the Real is the *objet a*; for more discussions, see *Seminar XI*, pp. 67-119.

Subject (S), the truth being hidden is that, it is the Master-Signifier that demands such knowledge: “The product or loss here is the divided, alienated subject [s]ince the agent in the university discourse is the knowing subject, the unknowing subject or subject of the unconscious is produced, but at the same time excluded” or becomes the loss (Fink “Master Signifier” 33). The University’s Discourse, therefore, both directly and indirectly mocks the institutional knowledge and repudiates its hegemonic position.⁶⁸ In “Four Discourses, Four Subjects,” Zizek attributes the “truth” of the University’s Discourse to the position of power, while cautioning the reader against a misreading through a Foucauldian lens: “the produced subject is not simply the subjectivity that arises as the result of the disciplinary application of knowledge-power, but its *remainder*, that which eludes the grasp of knowledge-power” (78). What’s at stake here? It is the end-product of the subject (S), which becomes an “indivisible remainder” (78) or the loss, as a casualty of the discourse that disintegrates the subject from its subjectivity resulted from the discursive operation of power, but what refutes its inclusion. Ironically, any intersubjective relation⁶⁹ in the University’s Discourse is “powered” by the Master-Signifier (S1), itself an empty signifier. This reminds us of Lacan’s famous statement of “*Il n’y a pas de rapport sexual*” translated as “there is no such thing as a sexual relationship” (*Seminar XX 47*), or simply, there is no relationship between “two” because there is no signifier to represent the sexes to each other. What hides beneath such a “non-relation” is always an empty signifier that loops back to itself.

Spinning clockwise the Master’s Discourse by a quarter turn, we arrive at the Hysteric’s Discourse. As stated earlier, the Hysteric’s Discourse should *not* be conflated with the pathological category of hysteria; that is, the word “hysteric” here describes the structural dynamics between four positions, rather than any individualized desire of a hysteric subject. The

⁶⁸ Lacan targets particularly at the hegemonic dominance of science in modernity.

⁶⁹ Or “transindividual” link, as Lacan later prefers the term.

Hysteric's Discourse is a structure in which any subject could be inscribed. The agent in the dominant position is the *barred* subject ($\$$), which is itself a symptom of desire (thus "barred"). In *Écrits*, Lacan considers the symptom as that which "inscribed in a writing process" as a message that can be interpreted, admitting "symptom is a metaphor [but] not a metaphor to say so" (439). In this discourse, the subject relates to the Master-Signifier (S1) through a question: "What does the Other want from me?"; therefore, the final product is the answer to this question, which further becomes the Knowledge (S2) for the subject, the loss in the Other. The secret (or truth) that the subject has up its sleeve is the *objet a*—the remainder of the subject's enjoyment (*a*) in the process, which is also what drives the Hysteric's Discourse. Initially Lacan associates science with the University's Discourse while later on identifies the discourse of science with the Hysteric's Discourse because hysteria "maintains the primacy of subjective division, the contradiction between conscious and unconscious, and thus the conflictual, or self-contradictory nature of desire itself" and "provides a unique configuration with respect to knowledge" (Fink "Master Signifier" 35). That is, in attributing our scientific inquiries and establishments to the Hysteric's Discourse but not so much to the University's Discourse, Lacan points to the problem underlying contemporary obsessions with science in our everyday life misses its mark as long as the aim of its application is to produce the knowledge as commodity (S2) rather than to produce the intellectual as the subject ($\$$). In other words, the major distinction concerning the function of knowledge between the Hysteric's Discourse and the University's Discourse is whether the unconscious knowledge (S2) dominates the structure (as the agent) or what is produced or lost.

The fourth and last discourse is the Analyst's Discourse, which, I contend, encapsulates the foundational structure for my model of transference love as an event (where an ethical act becomes possible). This time the *objet a* (*a*) usurps the dominant position of the agent

and is working over the subject ($\$$) in order to tease out the Master-Signifier ($S1$), which marks the end point of the analysis: “the task of analysis is to bring such master signifiers into relation with other signifiers, that is, to dialectize the master signifiers it produces” (Fink “Master Signifier” 38). The symptom may masquerade itself as a Master-Signifier; the difference is the symptom can always be deciphered or interpreted whereas the Master-Signifier is “a piece of nonsense produced by the analytic process itself” (Fink 38) which Lacan calls “*la bêtise*” (stupidity or “funny business”) in *Seminar XX*. As the *objet a* is the object-cause of desire, it corresponds to the fact that the “analyst” must become the cause of the desire for the analysand (*Seminar XVII* 41). Lacan also indicates, specifically, that the Analyst’s Discourse is the “flipping” of the Master’s Discourse, implying the subversive potential of the (psycho)analytic discourse that confronts all attempts of mastery or dominance. Such attempt could only be a fantasy, or at least “fantasmatic” in nature. In addition, the word “flipping” signals that the Analyst’s Discourse “flips”—reverses or even traverses—the fundamental fantasy that sustains the Master’s Discourse. Fantasy in the psychoanalytic framework designates a specific psychic operation: for Freud, it is the residue of memories associated with unconscious desire, whereas for Lacan, fantasy is a defense against the traumatic loss of *jouissance* (specifically the subject’s castration). Fantasy, neurotic in nature, is formalized in Lacan’s matheme ($\$ \diamond a$), to be read as “the barred subject’s relation to the object,” illustrating the subject’s response to the enigmatic desire of the Other. The pervert, in contrast to the hysteric, has no questions concerning what the Other wants or what the pervert-subject is for in answering the Other’s desire, which is why the pervert’s fantasy inverts this relation to the object and becomes ($a \diamond \$$), which is exactly the upper-level of the Analyst’s discourse. What prevents the Analyst’s Discourse from falling into a perverted trap, as clarified by Žižek, is thus “grounded in the radical ambiguity of *object petit a*

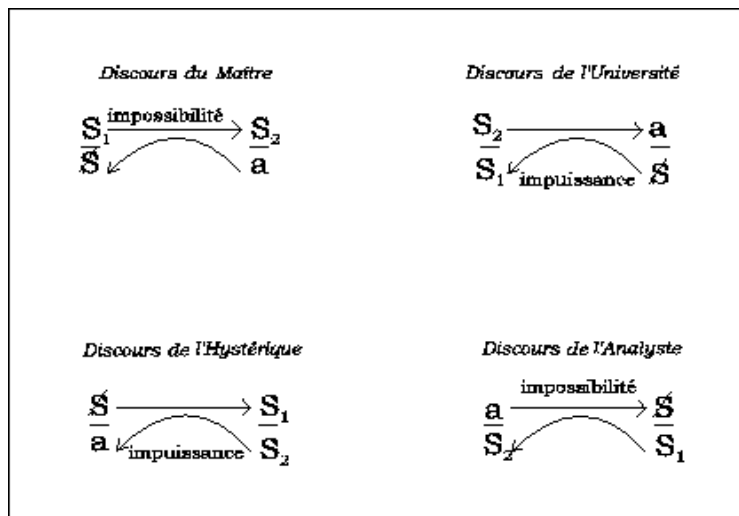
in Lacan, which stands simultaneously for the imaginary fantasmatic lure/screen *and* for that which this lure is obfuscating, for the void behind the lure” (“Four Discourses” 80), also related to the existence of other two positions, S2 and S1, which disrupts the economy between *a* and *Œ*. What does this mean? It means that the “truth” underneath the agent and driving the discourse holds the key—as “Knowledge” (S2) here is the “supposed” knowledge of the analyst/cause of desire, which is different from the neutral “objective” knowledge of power. This “Knowledge” (S2) is concerned only with the barred Subject (*Œ*) in relation to the “truth” of its own subjective position. As Lacan makes clear in his later seminar,⁷⁰ it is this Knowledge (S2) in the truth position that determines whether or not the *objet a*, as an agent, consists of the masculine or feminine *jouissance*, which further determines if the symptom is decipherable. While stating that *jouissance* is essentially phallic, meaning that it “does not relate to the Other as such” (*Seminar XX* 14), Lacan acknowledges a specific feminine *jouissance* as “supplementary” (58) to the masculine, phallic *jouissance*; it is supplementary but not complementary because the two of them do not add up to a complete set (mathematically speaking). As Bruce Fink explains, this feminine *jouissance* is also “supplementary” for reason that it is a “potentiality” but not a “necessity”; it is an “excess” to which those who occupies in the feminine position *may* have access, but it is never guaranteed. What is guaranteed for both masculine and feminine positions, however, is the phallic or masculine *jouissance* (*Lacanian Subject* 119-21). This is why feminine *jouissance* is also called “the Other’s *jouissance*” or “the *jouissance* of the Other.” It has the potential to relate to the Other, thus appearing “supplementary” to the masculine *jouissance* as an addition, but Lacan never says that the *feminine position* is supplementary to the

⁷⁰ While leaving the reader suspended and contemplating the nuances between knowledge and truth, Lacan did not conclude Four Discourses in *Seminar XVII*; in particular, with the Analyst’s Discourse, he return to this relationship and to this specific discourse in *Seminar XX*.

masculine position (because there must be two sexes; “sexuation,” Lacan’s formulas of sexual differences, is the *cause* of the subject, not its *effects*). The feminine *jouissance* is also unspeakable, “for women experience it but know nothing about it” (*Seminar XX* 71); and it is by virtue of the distinctions between two types of *jouissance* that love and knowledge are thus linked in *Seminar XX, Encore*.

Three years later in 1972, Lacan returns to Four Discourses in *Seminar XX: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge* with an elaborated model by adding two barriers, or “disjunctions” as Paul Verhaeghe calls them, to the original Four Discourses we have seen.

The new version is as follow:



Top: “*impossibilité*”

(translated as “impossibility” in the standard English edition)

Bottom: “*impuissance*”

(translated as “impotence” in the standard English edition)

Figure 3. Lacan’s Four Discourses in *Seminar XX*, pp. 16.

As illustrated in Figure 3, what comes between the agent and the Other is a form of “impossibility” whereas what bars the product from the truth is named “impotence.” The impossibility is associated with Lacan’s famous claim that “there is no such thing as sexual relationship (*Il n’y a pas de rapport sexual*),” suggesting that, whereas the signifier represents the subject to another signifier, it is impossible to truly capture the “truth” that drives the agent to

the Other-signifier. The “impotence” here, which Verhaeghe describes as an “inability” (“Causation and Destitution” 176-78) and which Lacan shows in his new graph, “curves” the non-relationship between the position of the product/loss and that of the truth. Verhaeghe calls this an “inability” in the discourse because he sees the product as a result in the *Other*, which does not contribute to the truth for the *agent*; that is, what is produced as the product *is not able* to interact with the truth that drives the agent. In my own interpretation, I revise Verhaeghe’s explanation of “inability” by returning to Lacan’s original word choice in French—*impuissance*, which highlights the sense of “impotence” or “vigor” (the lack thereof). Two reasons support my revision: first, the term *impuissance* may connect better to the Lacanian pun and allusion to “*Il n’y a pas de rapport sexual*” (there is no relationship that sex as signifier could represent) in the upper-level position of the discourses. Second, as Lacan only re-presents “visually” the graph in *Seminar XX* without explaining “verbally” these two barriers in his lecture, the visual trace of the “curve” between the product and the truth is thus critical. The shape itself *means*. The “arch” here that springs from the product/loss to the truth goes upward, becoming very close to—or *towards*—the impossibility between the agent and the Other *is telling what it shows*, or vice versa. Indeed, the arch projects to the viewer an image that resembles an *impotent* organ without the body (itself a remainder of the body), which embodies *the lack* of vigor (or “power”)—*impuissance*—thus not potent or powerful enough (as I call it, *il ne peut pas* or *il n’y a pas de puissance*) to change the discourse at large.

In spite of Lacan’s intentional reticence about these two additions⁷¹ to the discourses, he is offering a new element “in passing” (as he *passes* the discourse *through* the discussion of Jacobson’s linguistic theory of signs and signifiers): “one must pay careful attention to *the*

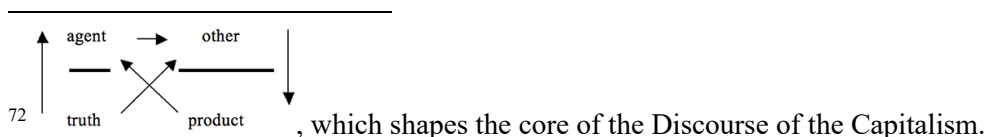
⁷¹ Namely, impossibility and impotence.

putting to the test of the truth that there is some emergence of analytic discourse with each shift from one discourse to another. I am not saying anything else when I say that *love is the sign that one is changing discourses*” (*Seminar XX 16*, emphasis mine). It is in this statement that Lacan’s Four Discourses and my earlier section on *love as an event* reconvene. That “love is the sign that one is changing discourses” corresponds to the main feature of event by virtue of its inconsistent multiplicity and how it “re-frames” our subjective experiences and being. “Changing discourses” not only implies a radical shift in the unconscious that breaks through the relationship between the loving subject and its beloved object (i.e. the *intra*-subjective link) but also indicates a shift in the relationship from the “inside-out.” In other words, the shift itself infers a connection, or an *extimacy* between the subject of love and its loving Self (i.e. the *inter*-subjective knot between the Imaginary, the Symbolic, the Real, and the *sinthôme*).

As mentioned earlier, as Lacan (by way of Freud) explicitly prescribes transference love as the end point of the psychoanalytic treatment, it is upon the Analyst’s Discourse that my model for structuring an ethical intimacy is built. To that end, it is with these two “imps” (*impossibilité* and *impuissance*) along with “the new sign of love” (*qua* an event) that I conclude this section of Lacan’s Four Discourses and transition into my own theoretical model, which I name the *sinthômethics*. In bringing to the fore these two barriers or *negativities* between the agent (*a*) and the Other (*S*), the product (*S1*) and truth (*S2*), my model aims not only to inspect the event of love as the sign, but more importantly, to investigate what kind of possibilities—or *singularities*—these two “imps” would lead us with making the One, should they hold the key to the ethics of desire that unlocks the strange intimacy for a Lacanian subject.

From the Analyst’s Discourse to the Sinthômethics

My project, as stated earlier in the introduction, commences with a desire to “see from the inside-out” of the subject with Lacan’s Analyst’s Discourse, specifically in the ways through which the event of love engenders an encounter with the Real for the subject to become intimate with the Self. Contrary to popular approaches among scholars (Mark Bracher, Paul Verhaeghe, Ian Parker, Slavoj Zizek, to name a few) who adopt Lacan’s Four Discourses to investigate possible ways of intervening existing social discourses with all four, my argument starts precisely with “the other side” of these Four Discourses by only considering the Analyst’s Discourse. On the one hand, most applications of Four Discourses have examined what disrupts the functionality of the social links by analyzing the relation between the agent to the Other [agent \diamond Other], which involves primarily the upper-level of the four positions across discourses. On the other hand, few discussions explore possible ways to “invigorate” the link between product/loss and the truth that drives the subject [product \diamond truth], which concerns mainly with the lower-level of Four Discourses. For those who stay faithful to the original discourses (i.e. Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Alain Badiou, Slavoj Zizek, to name the most known), one attends either to the truth hidden under the agent [agent // truth], or to the product/loss the Other suffers [Other / truth], sometimes addressing the ways in which the truth being delivered to the Other or how the loss/product may affect the agent, representing either the left-side or the right-side of the positions.⁷² Simply put, as one group brings the fore the social, each runs the risk of silencing the personal; while the other group calls attention to the personal, it may sacrifice the big picture of the social. My model, therefore, aims to keep both in sight.



With the keywords of love and discourse, my project may also remind the reader of Roland Barthes's work, *A Lover's Discourse* (1978); despite the titular semblance, our premises do not converge. While Barthes argues for the necessity to "listen to" the utterances of the lover as these utterances are often dismissed as "noises" or meaningless complaints. Barthes's main contention, however, is that "the lover's discourse is today *of an extreme solitude*" and that it is "completely forsaken by the surrounding languages" and "thus driven by its own momentum into the backwater of the 'unreal,' exiled from all gregariness, [having] no recourse but to become the site, however exiguous, of an *affirmation*" (1). An affirmation of what exactly? An affirmation of the "extreme solitude" of the lover's discourse, which is why Barthes studies the "figures" of love—the fragments of discourse of the lover (3). Diverging from Barthes, my project conceives the lover's discourse as an affirmation of its gregariness and argues that these discourses cannot be analyzed unless they are situated in relation to "Others" (figures, elements, actors etc.). Barthes further contends that "the lover is not to be reduced to a simple symptomatic subject, but rather that we hear in his voice what is 'unreal,' i.e., intractable"; therefore, "[t]he description of the lover's discourse has been replaced by its simulation, and to that discourse has been restored its fundamental person, the *I*, in order to stage an utterance, not an analysis" (3). And it is against this interpretation that my premise is set; that is, my model seeks the possibility for an analysis that moves towards the "*symptom-atic*" subject instead of simply re-staging the utterances. Yet in terms of constructing a structural platform for approaching the lover's discourses, our goals overlap. As Barthes aims to delineate a "portrait [...] a structural one which offers the reader a discursive site: the site of someone speaking within himself, *amorously*, confronting the other (the love object), who does not speak" (3), my project also investigates this discursive site through the speaking being (*parlêtre*) while, at the same time, reminding the reader of how not to

lose sight of the Other. That is, the Other also speaks—*through and within* us—amorously, and the dialogue of such lover’s discourse is the unconscious.

In addition to Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva in *Tales of Love* (1987) also adopts a psychoanalytic approach to love and transference, focusing on the eruptive and transformative force of the “basic emotions that affect the human psyche” (vii) and contends that love must be “reimagined” (379-83). Starting with her own personal reflections on motherhood, specifically on the affects and horror experienced as love, Kristeva then presents a history of love⁷³ in Western culture by extending her investigation to Christianity and literature (Don Juan, Romeo and Juliet, Baudelaire, etc.). Admitting the similarities between Kristeva’s approach and mine, which also underscores the therapeutic value of transference love, neither our premises nor objectives are the same. In particular, Kristeva considers transference love (following a more traditional psychoanalytic definition) as an imitation of love that appears with the analytic cure, undermining the “authenticity” of such an act (as in “Not I” 41).⁷⁴ Moreover, her conclusion that it is love that must be reimagined—“Now imagination is a discourse of transference—of love” (381)—in order to achieve its “power to the imagination” for overcoming narcissism in love, as far as I am concerned, fails to elevate transference from the realm of Imaginary, thus falling short of becoming a true Lacanian act. As indicated earlier, the act must suggest some degree of the subjective traversal of its fundamental fantasy and an arrival at the Real. In other words, rather than arguing for “love must be reimagined,” my project insists that it is the subject must be reimagined—or reconfigured—in the event of love.

⁷³ The original French title is *Histoires d’Amour* (1983), which translates literally into *Histories of Love*, slightly different from its official English title, *Tales of Love* (1987).

⁷⁴ See her section on “Freud and Love: Treatment and Its Discontents” (21-56).

With these theoretical allies and predecessors in mind, from Badiou and Žižek to Barthes, and Kristeva—including our shared objectives of love and our divergences of what “to do”⁷⁵ with the psychoanalytic aim of transference—I hereby present a model that highlights simultaneously the four positions in the Analyst’s Discourse by integrating some major Lacanian propositions—such as “love is a desire to be One,” “love is a metaphor,” “to love is to give what One does not have,” as well as “love as the sign that one is changing discourses”—and propose a synthesized ethical position in which the subject could assume an accountability for potentially shifting the discourse of the unconscious, *qua* the discourse of desire. That is, in order to truly locate the ethical potential in “acting out of” love—an act that returns the subject to the Self—it is imperative to first trace the trajectory of these two “imps” (impossibility and impotence) and how they formulate a new sign. The two disjunctions—the “impossibility” in/of the subject vis-à-vis the “impotence” in/of the Self—(ex-)merges as a new sign of the One that represents the *sinthôme* of ethics for the subject-Self, or the *sinthomethics*:

III. *My Model: the Structure of Unconscious Intimacy*

<i>The impossibility of the sexual relationship</i>	\approx	<i>Love as desire</i>
<u>[the Self as the Signifier (S)]</u>		
<i>The impotence of Being</i>	\approx	<i>Knowledge for orientation</i>
[the subject as the signified (s)]		

The Sign of the One [Transference Love] \cong S/s \cong *sinthomethics*

⁷⁵ Another text that also examines Lacan’s theory of love through the “acts” would be *Amorous Acts: Lacanian Ethics in Modernism, Film, and Queer Theory* (2006) by Frances L. Restuccia. Restuccia’s main goal is to demonstrate how queer theory itself functions a form of transference love that radically disrupt the heteronormative Symbolic order of desire, specifically through her analyses of cinematic texts from British modernism.

As I have previously discussed in the Introduction Chapter, in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), Lee Edelman posits his (anti-)futurism of queerness built on his reading of Lacanian psychoanalysis, one that he names “the sinthomosexual.” Queerness must be defined in relation to *jouissance* that resists heteronormativity. I have also explained that, despite sounding similar, our positions are quite different. In a way, the sinthomosexual articulates the ethics of queerness and/or homosexuality. Whereas Edelman accentuates the death drive (which he considers as non-futuristic, future-negating force) in Lacan’s teachings, my model pivots to the “becoming (though undone)” and “opening (to future possibilities)” of transference love associated with the sinthome. If not completely “future-oriented,” my model, at least, seeks to *move beyond the “impossibilities”* but not so much to *counteract the negativity*, as in Edelman’s endeavors. My model of structuring the ethical intimacy through transference love, nevertheless, requires a few steps that are either implicitly or explicitly prescribed by Lacan. Taking into account that “the unconscious is the discourse of the Other,” in my model, **the Analyst’s Discourse illustrates the structure of unconscious intimacy that provides the organizing principle for examining the ethical possibility through love for the subject**, which are grounded in the Analyst Discourse as Lacan suggests through the notion of transference love (*Seminar VIII*). The ethics is an ethic of psychoanalysis (*Seminar VII*), defined as whether one has “acted” in conformity with one’s desire. In this light, the ethical possibility through love commands love to go beyond an emotion or passion (or a tender feeling, as Freud would have call it)—and it must be *performed* as **a Lacanian act**. The Lacanian act (*Seminar XI 50*) is an ethical construct because, different from a “behavior” or an “action,” the act infers responsibility of the subject. The subject must be held accountable for its act, be it consciously or unconsciously. From Lacan, the model of sinthomethics inherits the same terms or mathemes

(S1, S2, S, *a*) and positions (agent, Other, product, truth), along with their operating principles. In addition, I incorporate a few new variables into my **structures of intimacy** as the following: (1.) “**the One**” as a **sign** ($s \triangleleft S$, read as the subject’s relation to the Self), (2.) the **impossibility of the sexual relationship as love as desire** in the **Self** (uppercase S, the Self as the signifier), (3.) the **impotence of Being regarding the knowledge for orientation** in the **subject** (lowercase *s*, the subject as the signified), and (4.) the *Sinthômethics* as **Transference Love** that makes the **One**. The theory of *sinthôme* is Lacan’s answer to the kernel of the Lacanian subject—the instruction is to traverse the subject’s fundamental fantasy and to then identify with the Real. In *Seminar XXIII*, Lacan sees the writings of/and James Joyce as the epitome of what *sinthôme* means, evolving from the notion of the symptom and has been revised several times in its significations and implications. In its initial stage in *Seminar II*, the symptom is associated with signification, while later on in *Écrits*, Lacan calls it a “metaphor” which is to be taken literally: “if the symptom is a metaphor, it is not a metaphor to say so, any more than it is to say that man’s desire is a metonymy” (439). In *Seminar VIII*, the symptom evolves from a metaphor to a message “which the subject thinks [as] an opaque message from the real instead of [recognizing] it as his own message” (Evans 204). In *Seminar XXIII*, as demonstrated through the example of Joyce’s writings, the symptom eventually shifts away from the realm of the Symbolic to a form of pure *jouissance* that eludes meaning (for reason that *jouissance* is in the realm of the Real, and meaning or signification belongs to the Symbolic).

It may be logical to begin with “**the One**” as a **sign** as the event of transference love. Lacan states that “love, of course, constitutes a sign (*fait signe*) and is always mutual” (*Seminar XX 4*). If love is a sign, it consists of a signifier (S) and a signified (*s*). In “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious,” Lacan reverts the Saussurean model of the sign by situating the

Signifier over the signified, arguing that the unconscious is the signifiers of the Other and that the language the unconscious speaks is all of signifiers but not of signs. In *Seminar XI*, Lacan defines the sign as that which “represents something for someone” as opposed to the signifier “which represents a subject for another signifier” (207). On top of that, “the unconscious is the discourse of the Other” (131); in other words, Four Discourses are essentially the discourse of the unconscious. By way of Four Discourses, we attain a better understanding of how the signifier (of/in the subject) represents the subject to another signifier (another subject and to the Self). The Self in my project is defined as the “pre-signified” signifier of the unconscious, whereas the subject is the “post-signified” signified of the unconscious. To speak in Lacan’s terms, the Self “in-sists” in the unconscious while the subject “ex-sists” between the unconscious. Therefore, to be able to truly analyze any discourse of love *structurally* (that is, in their positioning to each other), we should first identify the four terms and the positions each occupies. From there we further determine two disjunctions or two *negativities*: the *ex-timate* one that constructs the impossibility of love between the agent and the Other, and the *in-timate* one that composes the impotence between the Other’s product and the agent’s truth. The last step is to juxtapose the impossibility to the impotence so as to make manifest *in what way* the impotence comes the closest to the impossibility (in its trajectory of arch). It is in this **proximity** between the impotence and the impossibility that **makes the sign of the One** that I locate the *sinthomethics*.

The impossibility of love as desire is the key. Crucial here is that “the desire of love” (*qua* impossibility) should not be confused with “transference love” (as an event). As Lacan is notoriously known for his pessimist association of love to what makes up the impossible relation of any sexual relationship (*Seminar XX* 5-7). Indeed, Lacan should be held accountable for

repeating endlessly that there is no such thing as sexual relation—a statement that I have quoted several times thus far—but not in the sense that that there is no such thing as sex or that sex as a thing that we do is impossible. What he means is that what marks the differences between the two sexes—or sexuation as positions—is not any particular signifier but rather, *the absence of it*, whose absence is a non-signifier that represents the subject to another signifier. Therefore, between the two sexes (or two sexed positions), as the agent that tries to address to the Other, there exists an impossibility. With this I argue, what occupies this impossibility *is* precisely the desire of love. Love inhabits the impossibility of desire as it ends with a fulfillment of the desire, which is why Lacan does not say that it is impossible to love but to quote his words “literally” and verbatim, *love is the impossibility*. This impossibility *qua* love has its root in desire and demand, which I have discussed in my previous chapter. To recapitulate, desire is the residue of demand, and demand is always a demand for love. As animals, we have biological needs. As human/linguistic beings, our needs are replaced by drives. In finetuning Freud’s theory of the *trieb* (the drive, which was mistranslated earlier as “instinct” that is confused with *instinkt*), Lacan intends to remove the drive from the realm of biology: “The purpose of the drive (*Triebziel*) is not to reach a *goal* (a final destination) but to follow its *aim* (the way itself), which is to circle around the object” (*Seminar XI* 168, quoted in Evans 46). When the subject attempts to translate or transmit the drive into a demand for love, it simultaneously creates *both* loss (or lack) *and* surplus-enjoyment (or *jouissance*). The gap therein, is the vacuum of desire.

To put it another way, whereas language brings absence into being, it also sets limits to the absence (“the word [...] is already a presence made of absence” (*Écrits* 228); as a result, something is always “lacking” or “barred” from the limits. This loss further engenders surplus-enjoyment as a contingency of its own lack or void since when something is missing, one “says

more” in order to amend the loss; the signifier, therefore, becomes “the cause of *jouissance*” (*Seminar XX* 24). This “too-much-ness” is *jouissance*, a surplus enjoyment exceeds the simple pleasure (product) but signals the unpleasure (loss). It is in this gap—between the drive towards demand and that which is lost in translation—that desire is born. Such desire links us back to the impossibility *qua* love owing to “love is not aware that it is but the desire to be One, which leads us to the impossibility of establishing the relationship between ‘them-two’ (*la relation d’eux*) [them-two sexes]” (*Seminar XX* 6). But why, then, is this love as the desire to be One *impossible*, if we consider two other Lacan’s declarations that “There’s such a thing as One (*Y a d’ l’Un*)” (*Seminar XX* 5)⁷⁶ and “We are but one” (*Seminar XX* 47)? The answer is with the *objet a*.

The *objet a* is a double-reacting agent that is at stake as the (im)possibility for the One. As stated earlier, the *objet a* distinguishes between the pervert’s desire and the pure desire between the agent (*a*) and the Other ($\$$) in the Analyst’s Discourse. Returning to Four Discourses, the *objet a* functions both as the loss and as the product, which is why it is *the core* of being to both the lack and the surplus-enjoyment, specifically in the transaction from demand to desire. For love, this *objet a* means trouble. The trouble it brings into the One of love is that “there now [now] three of them, but, in effect, there are two plus *a*” which Lacan also has used in explaining “the inadequacy of the relationship between the One and the Other” (*Seminar XX* 49).

⁷⁶ The original French statement is crucial here, as the translator Bruce Fink details in his translator’s footnote in *Seminar XX*, pp. 5, which I quote in length for the sake of adding clarity to our understanding of its context: “*Y a d’ l’Un* is by no means an immediately comprehensible expression, even to the French ear, but the first sense seems to be ‘There’s such a thing as One’ (or ‘the One’) or ‘There’s something like One’ (or ‘the One’); in neither case is the emphasis on the ‘thing’ or on quantity. ‘The One happens,’ we might even say. A detailed discussion of *Seminar XIX* would be required to justify the translation I’ve [Fink] provided here, but at least two things should be briefly pointed out: *Y a d’ l’Un* must be juxtaposed with *Il n’y a pas de rapport sexual*, there’s no such thing as sexual relationship (see *Seminar XIX*, May 17, 1972); and Lacan is *not* saying ‘there’s some One’ (in the sense of some quantity of One) since he is talking about the One of ‘pure difference’ (see *Seminar XIX*, June 1, 1972).”

Both the impossibility and of impotence that disrupt the (Four) Discourses contribute to the “inadequacy.” As Lacan adds, “Between two, whatever they may be, there is always the One and the Other, the One and the *a*, and the Other cannot in any way be taken as a One” (*Seminar XX* 49), which corresponds to the epigraph I place at the beginning of this chapter: “Between the man and women, there is love; between the man and love, there is a world; between the man and the world, there is a wall”; therefore, all talking is directed to (brick) walls, every social link is (dis)joined by impossibility and impotence. The *objet a* is, ironically, the *remainder* of the One of which it is never a part, while love, impossibly, the sign of this remainder.

Love and the *objet a* are also joined in another notorious quote of Lacan: “Love is to give what you don’t have” (*Seminar VIII* 34; 357).⁷⁷ *How does one give what one does not have? Or, what is being given?* The answer to the latter is, unsurprisingly, the *objet a*. The answer to the former, in retrospect, is *by way of desire*. What one does not have, one “lacks” or “wants.” We “want” what we do not have; what we do have, we no longer “want.” Therein lies the most fundamental operating principle of desire: it is sustained by a lack. Love is the desire to be One, but this “One” is problematic now that “there are but three”—a *surplus* that brings in lack. As desire, love originates from the unsatisfactory attempt in its demand for (more) love. Being a remainder of demand, this desired named love “exists only for beings who can speak” (*Seminar VIII* 356) admitting demand must be made in order to be heard, just as desire must be articulated. Love, once spoken, “as a response implies the domain of not having” because “[o]ne cannot love without presenting oneself as if one does not have, even if one does” (357). That is, without first “having the lack,” one would not “want” or desire in return. This demand for reciprocal love as a

⁷⁷ Lacan had repeated this statement/notion several times throughout his teaching—for he loves talking around love—starting with *Seminar V*, the seminar of 1957-58. Depending on where the citation appears, sometimes there is a second half to this first clause, which is “to someone who does not want.”

demand to be heard is unconditional inasmuch as “it is not a desire for this or for that, but a question of desire *tout court*, [which] is why the metaphor of the one who desires [...] is implied right from the outset” (356). The outset of what? The outset of the subject and the unconscious— in the beginning was the letter (“The Purloined Letter”), in the beginning was word (“Instance of the Letter”), in the beginning was love (*Seminar VIII*), and in the beginning of an end, there was the *metaphor* of the one that desires to be One.⁷⁸

Love, for Lacan, is **metaphor**, and so is the symptom. Now we are confronted with a potential contradiction since love is also a desire to be one, but desire is **metonymy**. Can love function simultaneously as metaphor and metonymy? My attempt for a Lacanian response is, yes, but love as metaphor and love as metonymy would suggest different forms of love. In my model, I connect “love as metaphor” as the final product of transference love, *qua* love as event, whereas “love as metonymy” as the impossibility of the sexual relation, which is love as the desire to be one. In “Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious” as previously mentioned, Lacan specifies the mechanism of metonymy and metaphor, asserting that “the symptom *is* a metaphor” insofar as “just as desire *is* metonymic” (*Écrits* 439). The symptom, being “not a metaphor to say so,” is what “links metaphor to the question of being and metonymy to its lack” (439). It is now clear that, even though both love and the symptom are “metaphors,” Lacan does not consider the

⁷⁸ This *objet a* also relates love to the position of seeing: “Where you see something, I am nothing” (*Seminar VIII* 154), which is why “love is to give what one does not have” suggests the imaginary object of desire. In addition, “What holds the image together is a remainder” aka *objet a* (*Seminar XX* 6). The *objet a* as an object of love that is ethically tragic is explained through the figure of Antigone: “Antigone reveals to us the line of sight that defines desire [, which] focuses on an image that possesses a mystery which up till now has never been articulated, since it forces you to close your eyes at the very moment you look at it. Yet the image is at the center of tragedy, since it is the fascinating image of Antigone herself” (*Seminar VII* 247) and “the beauty effect [of Antigone] is a blindness effect” (*Seminar VII* 281). The *objet a* also becomes the gaze in a loving relationship: “When, in love, I solicit a look, what is profoundly unsatisfying and always missing is that—*You never look at me from the place from which I see you. [//] Conversely, what I look at is never what I wish to see*” (*Seminar XI* 103).

two to be identical; nonetheless, it designates a structural similarity between love and symptom. As illustrated by Lacan,⁷⁹ the structure of metaphor is defined as “in the substitution of signifier for signifier that a signification effect is produced that is poetic or creative, in other words, that brings the signification in question into existence” (*Écrits* 429). In the metaphoric structure, there is a “+” sign suggesting the “crossing of the bar” between the signifier and the signified in the topography of unconscious (S/s). The “+” sign implies the potential for signification to emerge. The counterpart of the metaphoric structure is the metonymic one.⁸⁰ In the structure of metonymy, “the signifier-to-signifier connection that allows for the elision by which the signifier instates lack of being [*le manqué de l'être*] in the object-relation, using signification’s referral [*renvoi*] value to invest it with the desire aiming at the lack it supports” (*Écrits* 428). A marking difference between these two structures is the “barred” (–) in metonymy. This “bar” serves as a visual remainder of the “irreducible nature of the resistance of signification as constituted in the relations between signifier and signified” (*Écrits* 428). Now we arrive at the mystery of love—the mystery in which love is “impossible” as it appears as a dilemma for the desiring subject. If we consider love as “a desire to be One,” and as desire *qua* metonymy, love should maintain the bar between the signifier and the signified.

However, if love *were to* exist solely as desire, Lacan *would have said* that love is a metonymy. Instead, Lacan maintains that love should also be a metaphor, suggesting that there is love more than love that acts as the metonymy of desire and this love *in excess* realizes—or substitutes—an “impossibility” of desire. As such, the metonymy of love “implies *what it*

⁷⁹ $f\left(\frac{S'}{S}\right) S \equiv S(+)_s$: The structure of metaphor (*Écrits* 429).

⁸⁰ $f(S \dots S') S \equiv S(-)_s$: The structure of metonymy (*Écrits* 428)

replaces in the metaphor—in other words, the one who is desired. What is desired? It is that which is desiring in the other [, ...w]hich is precisely what he demands when he demands to be loved” (*Seminar VIII* 356-57, emphasis mine). That is to say, **love as metaphor** underscores the mechanism of substitution, or one “takes the place of” an Other. Far from contradicting himself, Lacan is affirming that love, similar to the double-acting *objet a*, comes in different forms—as metaphor, for one, and as metonymy, for the other. Thus, in my model of sinthomethics, I reinscribe both “figures” of love: on the upper-level, “love” refers to the desire to be one (i.e. metonymy), and “love” as the final sign that changes the discourse leads to the sinthomethics (i.e. metaphor). In both the Analyst’s Discourse and my model, the four terms/mathemes rotate one position at a time; that is, the shift between each discourse a result of this metaphoric substitution as well—the discourse “spins” with one signifier taking the place of another signifier (S1-S2-a-S). Therefore, this metaphor or sign of love as an event of “*transference*,” whose metaphoric structure produces “the crossing of” or “traversing” the divisive subjective bar, signals a potential dramatic—or traumatic—transformation of any existing position and/or temporality (which are the elements of impotence).

With the notion of “traversal,” we arrive at the fantasy. Considering Lacan (thanks to Žižek) is known for prescribing the (ethical) act as such—one must “traverse the fantasy and identify with the subject’s sinthome”—to fully grasp the event of transference love, we need to situate the place of fantasy. To begin, how does one “cross the bar” (as “traverse the fantasy”) in the Analyst’s Discourse? What does it take to initiate changes by way of fantasy? If transference love is the end point of the psychoanalytic “relationship,” what would be the signal for such an end point that tells the analyst/agent that the bars have been “traversed”? To this Lacan respond, “love is the sign that one is changing discourses” (*Seminar XX* 16), a statement which I have also

quoted earlier. I must stress the importance to read Lacan “literally” here. Note that he does not say that “love is what changes discourse” but that “love is the *sign* that one is changing discourses.” That “love as the sign” suggests that love itself is a two-item package that includes a signifier and a signified, two of which I have earlier explained as “that which points to something” and “that which being pointed to.” A sign also points to something—a signification. *Together as One*. My reading of Lacan’s statement is as follows: “love is [=] the sign that one [S/s] is changing the discourse (of the Other) [= the unconscious].” This metaphor of “love as the sign of One” introduces fantasy into the big picture, and it is fantasy that “constitutes our desire [and] provides its coordinates; that is, it literally ‘teaches us how to desire’” (Zizek, *The Plagues of Fantasy* 7). Unfortunately, such desire is not our real desire, but the desire of the Other; fantasy as a “phantasmatic formation, is an answer to the enigma of ‘*Che vuoi?*’ [...] which established the subject’s primordial, constitutive position. The original question of desire is not directly ‘What do I want?’, but ‘What does *the Other* want from me?’” (*Plagues of Fantasy* 9; which Lacan also discusses in *Seminar XI* 214). Lacan gives fantasy the matheme ($\$ \diamond a$),⁸¹ translated as the barred subject in relation to the object (*Écrits* 774). If we apply this to the Analyst’s Discourse, the upper-level ($a \diamond \$$) is this fantasy, though flipped.⁸² To *traverse* the fantasy and *identify with the sinthome* in such a structure mandate transgressing the boundary of the two “walls” (*//*)—the bars that constitutes the impossibility and the impotence. Literally, the trajectory transcribes a traversal that entails moving from the position of the product/loss (in the Analyst’s Discourse, it is S1) back to the Other ($\$$), from the Other ($\$$) to the agent (a), and

⁸¹ Specifically, this matheme ($\$ \diamond a$) designates the neurotic fantasy while the perverse fantasy serves as its reverse ($a \diamond \$$). However, for both the neurotic and the perverse structures, fantasy also denotes the relationship between the barred subject and the object.

⁸² I have discussed in the Introduction Chapter as well, along with the discussion of the pervert’s fantasy.

ultimately, from the agent (*a*) to the truth (S2). It means that one is driven by the truth into knowledge—the *sinthome*, the *unknown known* to the subject, doubled as the “Self.”

Now, we are confronted with **the impotence of Being as knowledge (or the lack thereof) through which the subject orients towards the Self**, the site in which the truth of the Self gives birth to the unknown known. Prior to traversing the fantasy and be held accountable for its act, the Subject must first be equipped with the knowledge for navigation so as to “orient” oneself across different positions. In the Analyst’s Discourse, the motor for the *agent* and the discourse lies in the position of *truth*. What fuels the agent-subject to traverse the fantasy should also arise from this truth.⁸³ In the Lacanian framework, “truth always refers to truth about desire” (Evans 215). To “unveil” fantasy, both the desire for truth and the truth of one’s desire must coexist and sustain the subject, even if the truth may be unknown to the subject *consciously*. The truth concerning the unknown knowledge that “the subject does not know that he knows” exists at the level of the unconscious. For Lacan, the truth we repress is situated in the Real (*Écrits* 433). However, there are two streams of knowledge related to this truth in the Real: knowledge of the Imaginary realm (*connaissance*) versus knowledge of the Symbolic realm (*savoir*). *Connaissance*, as *imaginary* knowledge, is orchestrated through fantasy; *savoir*, as *symbolic* knowledge, pertains to the truth of the unconscious, or the truth about one’s unconscious desire (Evans 94). This symbolic knowledge is *intersubjective* in nature, thus crucial for understanding any social link; it transcends the boundary of any individual subject and is located in the Other

⁸³ Paul Verhaeghe explains that this view of “truth” as the driving force is shared both by Freud and Lacan, which is why in psychoanalysis, truth needs to be located in language, or what is unsaid by the subject; similar to Lacan, Freud believes that when we speak, we are driven by a truth unknown to ourselves, which is why “truth” is the driving force of the Four Discourses, and the agent is only a “carrier” of such force (“Causation and Destitution of a Pre-ontological Non-entity”).

(not as a subject but as a locus, “the Other scene”).⁸⁴ In Lacan’s own words, “the subject goes far beyond what is experienced ‘subjectively’ by the individual; he goes exactly as far as the truth he is able to attain—which will perhaps come out of the mouth you⁸⁵ have already closed again” (*Écrits* 219). Psychoanalysis, consequently, aims at *savoir* but not *connaissance*. One approach to accessing the truth of one’s desire, the symbolic knowledge of the subject concerning the truth of one’s desire, is transference.⁸⁶ What motivates transference is “Subject-Supposed-to-Know” (*Seminar XI* 225; 253-54; *Seminar XX* 144), a phrase that may be deceiving. Similar to “The Names of the Father” that does not refer to any specific person but to a position or a function, “Subject-Supposed-to-Know” also does not refer to any particular subject as a person but as the locus in which knowledge (of the truth about the subject’s desire) is located (*Seminar VII* 65-66). The “Subject-Supposed-to-Know” is critical as it creates the transference effect *that is love* (*Seminar XI* 253); in addition, “all love is based on a certain relationship between two unconscious knowledge” (*Seminar XX* 144). Transference, in this sense, is a love *from* and *of* knowledge. With knowledge, we now arrive at the second disjunction—the other “imp” besides love as impossibility—of the *sinthomethics*, which is impotence.

“*What knowledge is, what impotence is*” (*Seminar XVII* 52, emphasis mine), the *sinthomethics* takes this as its foundation. It structures the sign of the One in Lacan’s Analyst’s Discourse, in which I attribute impotence to knowledge as the “sense of orientation” that defines

⁸⁴ Not only this symbolic knowledge being intersubjective, but Žižek underscores the importance that the corresponding fantasy (or the fantasy related to this symbolic knowledge along the line of desire) is intersubjective (see *The Plagues of Fantasies*, pp. 8-11).

⁸⁵ The use of “you” is in juxtaposition to the subject as “he” in this statement, which “you” represents the Other in this context.

⁸⁶ For Freud, transference emerges as the displacement of effects; later on it evolves into the patient’s relation to the analyst in the psychoanalytic treatment. For Lacan, the term also had gone through several stages of development, but the one that is commonly used and accepted in the field is his concept of the “Subject-Supposed-to-Know”; see Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, pp. 211-14, for an elaborated explanation and definition.

our Being (as existence). Our Being “makes sense” to us as a contingency of time, and time is materialized in terms of space. Knowledge as such is *impotent*—*without power*—because truth can only be half-said (*mi-dire*), or accessed by way of half-saying (*Seminar XX* 92; *Seminar XVII* 51-52).⁸⁷ Truth, as Lacan insists, is tied to “this knot of the half-saying (*mi-dire*)” bundled up with the impotence of knowledge. The futility is a contingency of that truth “cannot be said completely [;] for the reason beyond this half there is nothing to say. That is all that can be said. Here, consequently, *discourse is abolished*” (*Seminar XVII* 51, emphasis mine). This knot of half-saying tethers knowledge in Four Discourses as the wall that bars any product from reuniting with truth. On the other hand, the truth can only be half-said because the “Other” half does not exist: “This is why it’s a logical articulation that is at stake in the formation that knowledge is the Other’s *jouissance*—the Other’s, of course, insofar as—since there is no Other—in the intervention of the signifier makes the Other merge as a field” (*Seminar XVII* 15). This truth of “there is no Other” thus undermines the fantasy that teaches the subject how to desire in relation to Other’s desire. As Paul Verhaeghe contends, “the Other does not exist” is the “fundamental knowledge” that ultimately unveils the fantasy (“Causation and Destitution” 182). That is, precisely because “the Other does not exist,” “the Other of the Other” cannot in any way be taken as a One. In the Lacanian terminology, the Other is a place that contains “words” or the signifiers, a site through which synchrony is introduced, “that in which the Other may discover itself as the Other of the Other [that] only exists as a place” (*Seminar VII* 66). However, the “fundamental knowledge” proposed by Verhaeghe is what I argue to be “the love of truth” for Lacan, as it involves the traversal of the fundamental fantasy that contextualizes our sense of

⁸⁷ As Lacan explains, it is impossible to speak the whole truth because “the truth requires us to go out of our way. we cannot do so by simply getting used to it. We get used to reality (*réel*). The truth we repress” (*Écrits* 433).

being. The love of truth is also the knowledge that truth tries to hide from the subject because it is “something that mocks the lack in being [*manqué à être*] of truth” (*Seminar XVII* 52). This “love of truth” is how the impotence as knowledge opens up an ethical possibility for shifting the discourse, but the knowledge must *orient towards* the impossibility as love since it takes a “sign” to shift the discourse. This “sign of love and knowledge” that changes discourses as the subject traverses its fantasy is *the sign of the One*. Once traversed, fantasy that veils the truth of Other’s desire becomes itself a lack thereof (for the Other does not exist), and we have finally arrived at the Real (of the symptom) with which we could identified, the *sinthôme*.

Therefore, the last stop is **the *sinthômethics* as “the metaphor of love that makes the sign of the One,”** *qua* the event of love. In the opening of his *Seminar VII* on the ethics of psychoanalysis, Lacan extracts the moral principle for psychoanalysis from the Freud ascetic experience, “*Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*” (translated as “Where it/id was, so shall I/Ego be”) (*Seminar VII* 7). This moral experience provides the point of departure for Lacan in developing his entire theory of ethics for psychoanalysis, or Lacanian psychoanalysis at large. Following Lacan, my model adopts such a “moral” principle that leads to the *sinthômethics*—*where the knowledge of the Self was, so shall the love of the subject be, or where impotence was, so shall impossibility be*. If we accept this proposition, we see clearly why in traversing the fantasy, the subject is en route to ethics. The key between following the trace or the “remainder” of the unconscious (as “*Wo Es war*” or “where it/id was” is in the past tense) and the ethics of psychoanalysis concerns the truth of one’s desire. Behind the veil of fantasy that screens the Other’s desire as the subject’s desire (or the desire of the ego), one re-finds id—the unconscious *qua* the knowledge that one does not know that one knows. Or, the “I” finds the place where “it, the signifier,” used to be, *and then the “I” takes the place of the “it.”* That is, in “*Wo Es war,*

soll Ich werden” a substitution takes place; thus, a metaphor or a sign is born. This new sign that adheres to the Lacanian moral law is ethical, considering it is itself what the “I” has become after traversing the fantasy and “identifying with the real” (almost literally, by occupying the place of where it was). It also corresponds to Lacan’s description of the *sinthôme*. With all things considered, in my model the new sign becomes the *sinthômethics*, or perhaps, another name for the pure desire that sustains the ethics of psychoanalysis.

The desire is in its purest form when the truth of one’s desire converge with one’s act. And it is in ethics these two ends meet. Ethics, defined by Lacan, “essentially consists in a judgment of our action, with a proviso that it is only significant if the action implied by it also contains within it, or is supposed to contain, a judgment, even if it is only implicit. The presence of judgment on both sides is essential to the structure” (*Seminar VII* 311). The reference to the “both sides” and “the structure” in this definition is pivotal. These two sides are the side of “judgment of action” and of “truth of desire.”⁸⁸ In the Lacanian terminology, an act is an ethical concept because one can be held accountable for it, as I have briefly explained in the first section.⁸⁹ The human act is synonymous with behavior, given that “a true act, always *has an element of structure*, by the fact of concerning a real that is not self-evidently caught up in it” (*Seminar XI* 51). Returning to Lacan’s definition, the term “ethics” denotes a judgment of our action in relation to desire that is essential to its own structure. The ethics of psychoanalysis, in effect, is paradoxical because it asks the subject only one question: “Have you acted in conformity with the desire that is in you?” (*Seminar VII* 311; 314). The emphasis on “have you

⁸⁸ This connection to action and desire in Lacan’s discussion of ethics could be supported by another statement of his: “What I call the point of view of the Last Judgment [meaning] by that choosing as the standard of that reconsideration of ethics to which psychoanalysis leads us, the relationship between action and the desire that inhabits it” (*Seminar VII* 313).

⁸⁹ See Dylan Evans’s entry on “act,” where he also explains the difference between a true act as opposed to “acting out” or “a passage to the act,” pp. 1-2.

acted” is consistent with the Lacanian notion of such an act being an “ethical” one, for an act is always embedded in the structure of ethics and contains within the subject’s judgment. However, the paradox of this moral question lies in its answer; whichever side one chooses, it would be caught up in a Catch-22 between desire and action. Desire must be sustained by forever deferring its satisfaction. In other words, if one does act in conformity to one’s desire, there will be no longer this desire *a priori*. If the subject does not act in accordance to the desire in the Self, then it betrays its truth, the truth of desire. This unfaithfulness to the truth of one’s desire is “giving ground relative to one’s desire” according to Lacan, which involves a betrayal of one’s Self *qua* “pure desire” and the abandonment of one’s own position; thus, “the only thing one can be guilty of is *giving ground relative to one’s desire*” (*Seminar VII* 321, emphasis mine). Transference love, in light of truth, aims to “not give ground relative to one’s desire” with the subject’s final act of identifying with the *sinthome*, once the fantasy is traversed.

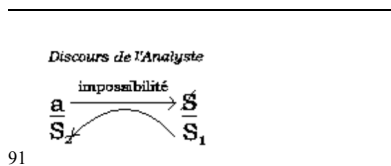
Desire in such an ethical context is often referred to as “pure desire” (*Seminar VII* 247-49). Lacan sees Antigone as the embodiment of such pure desire (*Seminar VII* 247-49). As mentioned earlier, one does not desire what one has; what one has one does not want (as lack). Yet this form of desire does not speak the truth of the subject’s desire but speaks the desire of the Other. In order to act in conformity with (the truth of) one’s desire, the subject needs to traverse the fantasy first so as to identify with the Real (of one’s desire). In the case of Antigone, it is not that her desire is pure, but “Antigone” herself is a pure signifier that points to nothing. To quote Lacan, “What does one find in *Antigone*? First of all, one finds Antigone” (*Seminar VII* 250). To illustrate such pure form of desire, Žižek reads this “purity” of desire alongside the drive, specifically the death drive: “‘beyond fantasy’ there is no yearning or any kindred sublime phenomenon, ‘beyond fantasy’ we find only drive, its pulsation around the *sinthome*. ‘Going-

through-the-fantasy' is therefore strictly correlative to identification with a *sinthome*" (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* 139).⁹⁰ In league with Žižek, Alenka Župancic in *Ethics of the Real* elaborates on both Žižek's interpretation of pure desire as the death drive to *jouissance* and Lacan's reading of Antigone as pure desire as an ethics in/of the Real (238-45). My position may appear to side with Žižek's and Župancic's regarding, specifically regarding the *sinthome* being situated beyond fantasy (as it is also Lacan's). However, I disagree with their equating the death drive with pure desire. If pure desire were to be doubled as the death drive (rather than simply sharing structural similarity to the drive), I assume Lacan would have said so. Since Lacan had persistently referred to this pure desire as "pure desire" (rather than the drive), I contend that this notion should remain on the side of desire rather than that of the drive. That is, if we wish to achieve any changes to an existing discourse (or to traverse any social or cultural fantasies), what we should aim at is desire at its purest form instead of the drive.

Having said that, it is by way of *jouissance* and its relation to pure desire that we now return to my model of *sinthômethics*. The connection between the two is, again, knowledge. Lacan sees "knowledge as a means of *jouissance*" (*Seminar XX* 39); in other words, knowledge is one way or manner of *jouissance*. Pure *jouissance*, defined as "*jouissance* that has no need of [the Other and] is sufficient unto itself" (*Seminar X* 125), is also associated with symptom. As the symptom is a metaphor that can be interpreted, which introduces knowledge and redirects us to *jouissance*. Earlier we came across Lacan's claim of "love is a sign"; now with *jouissance* we encounter its counterpart: "What is not a sign of love is *jouissance* of the Other, *jouissance* of the other sex" and, in particular, "of the body that symbolizes it" (*Seminar XX* 17). That *jouissance* of the Other is not a sign of love because it is not a parasitic existence of an Other; the

⁹⁰ For more of Žižek's discussion on ethics and pure desire in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, see pp. 132; details about fantasy and drive, see pp. 138-39.

knowledge that leads us to this *jouissance* cannot form a sign in itself because it is inadequate or impotent. This pure *jouissance* only “makes sense” when it slides underneath pure desire and renews a sign out of love. And no desire is purer than love, which is a desire to be One. As such, desire aims at its own demise. The metaphor of love is “*Real-ized*” as pure desire when the subject acts in conformity with this desire to be One, which is to form a new sign, or to substitute one’s subject with the remainder of the Self—*Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*. If Lacan’s Analyst’s Discourse provides us a blueprint for structuring extimacy, my model is a reverse-engineering for excavating the potential for intimacy. **The new sign of the *sinthômethics*** is formed when, topographically speaking,⁹¹ the impotence (*qua* knowledge) comes closest or traversed into the impossibility (*qua* love), and the knowledge is that which orients the subject towards the Self. Together, love denotes an ethical act that “purifies” desire, since, to do so, the subject must acknowledge and accept the “pure desire” that reveals the truth concerning exclusively with the Self, separating itself from the desire of the Other. The overlapping of knowledge and truth in the Analyst’s Discourse justifies the Lacanian insistence in *Seminar XX* that “love is the sign that one is changing discourses”; transference love, after all, is a real Lacanian act. The proximity of impotence to impossibility formulates a new metaphor of ethics, making the sign of *sinthôme*. Now the subject is returned to the beginning, where the Self once was. In the beginning there was “it/id” and there was love. It is in the *act* of transference love that the subject could traverse the fantasy and re-find the Self, thus signifying a new One of *sinthômethics*.



IV. Conclusion: From Estranged *Extimacy* to Strange *Intimacy*

As stated at the beginning, my goal is to “see from the inside-out” of the subject—to see from the other side of any intersubjective link—and to explore the ways in which Lacan’s structure of the Analyst’s Discourse constructs and de-constructs the subject from within, that is, in *how the unconscious unfolds the subjectivity* (but not the reverse). To this end, I propose a hybrid model of synthesis, the *sinthômethics*, one that highlights simultaneously the four positions by integrating what Lacan has suggested of “pure desire as ethical,” “love is a desire to be One,” “love is a metaphor” and “the sign that [O]ne is changing discourses” into four structures of intimacy. It is in *looking at* the four positions and, most essentially, at the disjunctions embedded in the structure that we could truly identify and articulate the ethical possibility for the subject. Moreover, it is in *becoming (undone through)* the *sinthômethics* that the subject in the event of love could potentially account for shifting the unconscious discourse, *qua* the discourse of desire. To be able to read beyond our intersubjective experiences or to even initiate changes to these encounters, we must return to desire in its purest form and to examine whether one has acted in conformity to the truth of one’s desire.

The articulation of desire in the ethical act of love provides the focal point of my reading of the literary texts in the following two chapters: *Call Me by Your Name* (2007) by André Aciman and *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013) by Ruth Ozeki. In examining the ethical potential of love for excavating the truth (or some failed attempts it involves), we are also tracing the trajectory of the *sinthômethics* in which the subject and the Self encounter in spite of the disjunctions within the discourse. My hybrid structure for intervening discourses provides an alternative position from which we could articulate the subject of desire—as Jacques-Alain Miller insists in terms of approaching extimacy—if we wish to intervene “for Real” any existing

discourse and to initiate changes. As speaking beings, it matters how we articulate things differently into existence; as it correlates with how we are being articulated differently. I consider this alternative to be the ethical responsibility of one's being the subject of discourse. With this responsibility in mind, Chapter Two and Chapter Three not only demonstrate a structural re-reading of the Analyst's Discourse of love but they also represent my attempt to establish a new relationship to intimacy through the medium of literature.

Diverging from the sheer pessimism or hedonism often associated with the Lacanian ethics of desire (as suggested by Lee Edelman's notion of the sinthomosexual and Slavoj Žižek's emphasis on the symbolic suicide), my own re-orientation in terms of finding the strange intimacy is to not give up on hope and to not give way to the Self's desire. Both situated in the Analyst's Discourse, Chapter Two and Chapter Three highlight different possibilities in countering the impotence in **the discursive structure of intimacy** through transference love, as suggested in my model of the sinthômethics. In the analysis of *Call Me by Your Name*, the impotence is the contingency of the spatial impasse (or positionality), whereas in the reading of *A Tale for the Time Being*, the impotence is that which challenges our temporality. I will flesh out how *the metaphor of abjection* assists our understanding of the spatial impasse by answering the question of "*What place does love take?*", and how *the metonymy of aporia* answers the temporal paradox of "*When does love take time?*" To do so, both chapters start with breaking down the narrative into the fundamental "elements" according to the Analyst's Discourse—the four mathemes (S1, S2, S, a), four positions (agent, Other, product/loss, truth)—as they provide the foundation for us to determine the impossibility as love and the impotence of knowledge in relation to space and time. These fundamental elements give birth to the final "sign" that consists of these two disjunctions in the discourse, from which we move forwards into the sinthômethics.

This reading of/for the *sinthômethics* doubles as my own ethical act in speaking the unspeakable, that is, *what does love do* (for the speaking “I”) and *how is a subject possible?*

Lacan repeatedly reminds us that any attempt to speak of love is an act of “stupidity” (*la bêtise*) (*Seminar XX* 12-13, 14-16; 20-21). One cannot speak directly of love for all that we can speak of is the love letter “*la lettre d’amour*” (*Seminar XX* 12). It again designates that love—as it is encountered by the subject of discourse—can only be written as a sign, articulated as a metaphor.⁹² This “stupidity” comprising all utterances of love justifies why I look for/at transference love in literary works—literature speaks symptomatically, and love speaks metaphorically. Literature holds a special place to Lacan, so special that he coins a new word for it—“*lituraterre*” or the “cloud of language that constitutes writing” (*Seminar XX* 120). In “*lituraterre*” the subject of language becomes a symptom: “[t]hat ‘I’ is not a being, but rather something attributed to that which speaks [dealing] only with solitude regarding the aspect of the relationship I can only define by saying, as I have, that it cannot be written” (*Seminar XX* 120). The “I” attributed to that which speaks is lacking, constituting is the fundamental “lack” which marks the desire in the subject, and desire as such “stops being written” because there is only “nothing” to be written. Nevertheless, what must be written is that solitude itself, which is the

⁹² This is why Lacan’s best attempt to speak of the nature of love is always through either, as he calls it, “the metaphor of love” (*Seminar VIII* 154-56) or the “myth” (*Seminar VIII* 52; 178-79). The following is the “metaphor of love” between Socrates and Alcibiades: “I exposed to you the structure of substation or actualized metaphor that constitutes what I call the miracle of the appearance of *erastés* [the loving agent] at the very place where *erómenos* [beloved] was. It is precisely because this is lacking here that Socrates can only refuse to give, so to speak, a simulacrum thereof. If he presents himself to Alcibiades as not being able to show him signs of his desire, it is insofar as he challenges the idea that he himself is, in any way, an object worthy of Alcibiades’ desire, or of anyone else’s for that matter” (*Seminar VIII* 155). With this, Lacan concludes that what Socrates refuses to give Alcibiades is “the metaphor of love” (*Seminar* 154), or it would be as long as Socrates would “admit to being the beloved *unconsciously*” (154, emphasis mine). Note that it is not “love” that Socrates refuses, but the *metaphor* of love; in other words, what Socrates rejects is the substation: “Socrates can but refuse to do so because, to him, there is nothing in him that is lovable [...], which] represents Socrates’ central position” (*Seminar VIII* 154-55).

desire for desire that “as a break in knowledge, not only can be written but it is that which is written *par excellence*, for it is what leaves a trace of a break in being” (*Seminar XX* 120). It “does not stop being written,” just as James Joyce’s writing, proposed by Lacan to be the symptom *par excellence*, the pure *jouissance* of his *Seminar XXIII: the Sinthôme*.⁹³

And it is through the concept of *sinthômethics* that we can move from the impossibility of human relationships and the impotence of being to “the singularity of being.” The singularity is “the other side” to pessimism. My dissertation intends to see “from the other side” of the intersubjective encounters into both *beyond* and *within* the subject of discourse so as to capture how the unconscious, as the discourse of the Other, unfolds the subjectivity. To read against the pessimistic prophesy delivered by Žižek—one that is submerged under the destructive force of the death drive once the subject traverses the fantasy—Mari Ruti (by way of Eric Santner) envisions for us a more positive rendition of the *sinthôme*, the “singularity” found in the Real. This singularity or “perseverance in being” is also “life in its excessive,” which “prevents the subject from becoming a mere ‘moment’ of discourse [and keeps] the subject from being completely swallowed up by the collectively” (Ruti 3). The *sinthômethics*, or the ethical potential in discourses of love, answers the question of how to maintain/sustain love (as the desire to be one) at the level of pure desire (or drive). That is, the ethical possibility of love is in the product/loss of Four Discourses (which is why the product is always double-reacting as loss). And this is how “the unspeakable (of the traumatic event of love)” emerges in the *sinthômethics*, if we enlist “the unspeakable” as a destabilizing force that un-says the Laws in the Symbolic within the (sexual) relationship. To keep re-making and re-articulating love into a new sign that

⁹³ Colette Soler also explains in greater details regarding how literature functions as the symptom in “Literature as Symptom” (in *Lacan and the Subject of Language*, edited by Ellie Ragland-Sullivan and Mark Bracher, New York and London: Routledge, 1991, pp. 213-19).

shifts discourses is to “not to ‘stop not being written’” (*Seminar XX* 144-45)⁹⁴ into a fulfilled moment in the act of forever *re*-finding the Self within the subject—*encore*. This articulation of “love as an event (that exceeds its cause)” that desubjectivizes the subject by liberating the Self revises Žizek’s stance of “(psychoanalytic) ethics as suicidal” by taking into consideration Ruti’s proposal of “the singularity of Real being.” It is with this ineffable, unspeakable, and *traumatic* sign of love that I leave you Lacan’s myth of love (*Seminar VIII* 52-53; 178-79):

This was our point of departure: Love is a god, in other words, a reality that manifests and reveals itself in the real. As such, we can only speak of it through myth. This is also what allows me to lay out before you our orientation here, by directing you toward the formula, metaphor, or substitution of *erastés* for *erómenos*. This metaphor generates the signification of love.

To illustrate for you, I will take the liberty of completing my image and of truly making it into a myth.

The hand that extends toward the fruit, the rose, or the log that suddenly bursts into flames—its gesture of reaching, drawing close, or stirring up is closely related to the ripening of the fruit, the beauty of the flower, and the blazing of the log. If, in the movement of reaching, drawing, or stirring, the hand goes far enough toward the object that another hand comes out of the fruit, flower, or log and extends toward your hand—and at that moment your hand freezes in the closed plenitude of the fruit, in the open plenitude of the flower, or in the explosion of a log which bursts into flames—then what is produced is love.

⁹⁴ In *Seminar XX*, Lacan defines the sexual relationship as “that which ‘doesn’t stop not being written’ [and] there is an impossibility therein”; on the other hand, the subject is “but the effect of unconscious knowledge—stops not being written” (144).

But we must not stop there. We must say that what we are looking at here is love—in other words, that it's your love when you were first *erómenos*, the beloved object, and suddenly you become *erastés*, he who desires.

Consider what I mean to emphasize with this myth. Every myth is related to the inexplicable nature of reality [*réel*], and it is always inexplicable that anything whatsoever responds to desire.

The structure in question is not one of symmetry and reciprocity [*retour*]. For this symmetry is not symmetrical, since insofar as the hand extends, it extends toward an object. The hand that appears on the other side is the miracle. But we are not here to orchestrate miracles. We are here for something quite different—to know. What must be emphasized in this context is not what happens between here and hereafter, but rather what happens here—in other words, the substitution of *erastés* for *erómenos* (or for *erómenon*). (*Seminar VIII* 52)

To know would be my goal here, as an act of love. It is to know where “I” am in the event of love, *with* Lacan. It is also to know the art of making poetry in *the event* of Lacan.

Chapter Two

“Love that Takes Place”:

Abjection, Displacement, and Call Me by Your Name

“I have been loved,” she said,
“by something strange, and it has forgotten me.”
Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* (1936)

“Perhaps everybody has a garden of Eden, I don't know; but they have scarcely seen their garden before they see the flaming sword. Then, perhaps, life only offers the choice of remembering the garden or forgetting it. Either, or: it takes strength to remember, it takes another kind of strength to forget, it takes a hero to do both.”
James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room* (1956)

I. Introduction: *If Not Later, Where Are You?*

A famous Freudian conundrum would be female sexuality. Perplexed by the question of “What does a woman want?”—or to be more precise, *if she does not want a “man”* (or the symbolic *phallus* therein)—Sigmund Freud seems to have successfully sublimated his traumatic encounters with the enigmatic female desire, starting with “Anna O.” and punctuated by the Dora case, into developing psychoanalysis. At the end of his career, despite still a refusal to advance a definitive conclusion for addressing female sexuality, Freud proposed the transference love to be the best solution.⁹⁵ In other words, if psychoanalysis as a discipline is founded on the enigma of female sexuality, the tentative Freudian answer to such an enigma would be “nonetheless, give

⁹⁵ With his own traumatic encounter with the case of Dora, Freud introduced the theory of transference as “new [phenomena] of tendencies and fantasies [...] of which the characteristic feature is to replace a formerly known person with the person of the doctor” (see “Further Recommendations in the Technique of Psycho-analysis: Observations on Transference-Love,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, XII, 1915, pp. 157-171; London: Hogarth Press, 1971).

her (transference) love.” Therefore, achieving the transference becomes the aim of Freudian analytic practices. The delicate dynamics between knowledge (or the lack thereof), desire, female sexuality (sexuation), and transference love have thus been confirmed since the beginning of the 20th century. In *Seminar XX: Encore*, Lacan pushes these issues to the forefront (admitting that all these themes are the usual suspects pervaded through his lifelong teachings) by presenting several controversial arguments that have ever since troubled his audience, such as the infamous declaration, “There is no such thing as sexual relation” or “[The] Woman (*la femme*) does not exist.” However, for my purpose in this chapter, I’d like to call attention to his constant references of “There’s such a thing as One” (*Y a d’ l’Un*), which is “to be understood in the sense that there’s One all alone (*il y a de l’Un tout seul*). We must grasp, thereby, the crux (*nerf*) of what we must clearly call by the name by which the thing resounds throughout the centuries, namely, love. In analysis, *we deal with nothing but that*” (67, emphasis mine).⁹⁶ This statement is not as easy to unpack as it may appear *simple*. Lacan intentionally adopts the number “One” (*l’Un*) and plays with its malleability; sometimes it stands for a mathematical concept, sometimes a linguistic concept, and other times, an ontological concept of unity. In all cases, my understanding is that “One” comes to represent a “pure signifier” for Lacan; it is the signifier One (other than the rest, Two, Three, or more) that points to *nothing but itself*, as long as *everything else* points back to (the) One. My emphasis, then, is on the last sentence when Lacan affirms that in the analytic setting, “*we deal nothing but that*”—but what exactly? Is it love, is it One, or both? My interpretation is, “*that*” refers to how the analytic process, by way of love (transference), makes the subject (analysand) come to realization that “there’s One all alone”—

⁹⁶ In addition to this section, “God and ~~Woman~~’s jouissance” (pp. 61-77), Lacan also continues in the following section, “A Love Letter” in *Seminar XX* (pp. 73-82), where he nuances the positionality of the ~~woman~~ in relation to the signifier, the masculine position, and how love is the sign of the two.

and that the subject *is* itself One, “split” but One all alone (*il y a de l’Un tout seul*). This further explains why, driven by such a “logic of One,” Lacan feels compelled “but to speak to [us] of love,” as he sees it the “singular pathway” through which analysis operates (67). Speaking of love is the pathway to the desire of the Other, justifying why psychoanalysis is labeled as “*the Talking Cure*” since Freud. Yet, what is “cured” through the words of love is not the problem of (female) sexuality; instead, what the “talking” solves is the question of the subject. In talking, the Self encounters the “I,” the subject position in language.

Returning to Freud’s consideration of the “What the woman wants (is not a man)” as the initial encounter between the two sexes, Lacan contends that “as opposed to what Freud maintains, it is man [...] who approaches woman. [...] But what he approaches is the cause of his desire that I have designated as object *a*. That is the act of love. To make love (*faire l’amour*), as the very expression indicates, is poetry. But there is a world between poetry and the act” (*Seminar XX 72*). In my interpretation, it does not mean that poetry and the act is “a world apart”; rather, it incubates a (new) world where the subject takes place. This statement thus sums up nicely the operation of the Analyst’s Discourse, in which the agent (*a*) comes close to the subject (Other) while it is the subject that must approach his cause of desire, and *that* is the act of love, which marks the transference that would eventually lead to the sign of the One. A sign consists of two parts: a signifier and a signified. In metaphor, something stands in for something else; therefore, in the metaphor of love, something is being substituted. The act of love *is like* making poetry. In this poetry-making, words and meanings (signifier and signified) are always a substitution for the “love letter,” the pre-signified signifier. As mentioned earlier, Lacan insists that “there’s no such a thing as sexual relation” despite that “there’s such a thing as One” (*Seminar XX 45*); yet this “One” is only possible *as a sign*. In the metaphor of love, or as the

myth of love (*Seminar VIII* 52), it is love that indicates the sign that one is changing discourse (*Seminar XX* 16). Love, then, situates in the place where the relationship between the sexes is absent (39), and the “the sign of the One” becomes the only place where a speaking being could articulate the metaphor of love. Therefore, the sign of the One includes “love” that could only be articulated by way of something else. In this light, love, as a strange form of intimacy between the sexes, can only *be spoken metaphorically* but not directly; speaking the love letter is the *act* of love par excellence (83). This *act* accounts for the subject’s attempt to “bring into discourse” that unnamable “world” between the two sexes. Hence, love is *metaphor for and of the speaking being*.

Granting my previous chapter ends with Lacan’s myth of love quoted from *Seminar VIII*, this chapter commences, *encore*, with *it*—a letter of love.⁹⁷ Contrary to Freud, who considers transference love solely as the concluding sign of an analytic experience, Lacan situates love beyond the end, reaching back to its beginning (“In the Beginning Was Love,” *Seminar VIII* 4). The myth of love epitomizes, for Lacan, transference love itself:

The hand that extends toward the fruit, the rose, or the log that suddenly bursts into flames—its gesture of reaching, drawing close, or stirring up is closely related to the ripening of the fruit, the beauty of the flower, and the blazing of the log. If, in the movement of reaching, drawing, or stirring, the hand goes far enough toward the object that another hand comes out of the fruit, flower, or log and extends toward your hand—and at that moment your hand freezes in the closed plenitude of the fruit, in the open

⁹⁷ In *Écrits*, Lacan states that the unconscious (that structures like a language), as the process of signification, begins with the letter “it” (in “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’”), while in *Seminar VIII*, the first lecture of Lacan that begins his teaching on transference is “In the Beginning Was Love”; in *Seminar XX*, he states that “a love letter” is also “the only place where it is possible to speak of love” (83).

plenitude of the flower, or in the explosion of a log which bursts into flames—then what is produced is love. (52)⁹⁸

Lacan’s myth of love captures vividly the beauty, the horror, the passion, the disillusion, the sensual, the unattainable, the chase, the disturbances, as well as the fixation—all the pigments that are not uncommon in our picture of love. As such, the myth of love is transference love itself transpiring metaphorically beyond the Symbolic and the Imaginary; it is “a reality that manifests and reveals itself in the real” and that such a “formula, metaphor, or substitution of *erastés* for *erómenos* [is] the metaphor that generates the signification of love (52). In *Seminar VIII*, Lacan illustrates this point not only by way of myth, but also through his reading of Plato’s *Symposium*, specifically of the encounters and exchanges that take place between Socrates and Alcibiades.⁹⁹

For most readers who are familiar with the *Symposium*, Plato’s depiction of Alcibiades accentuates Socrates’s integrity, self-discipline, and his will to resist temptation. Moving away from such an emphasis, Lacan’s approach in *Seminar VIII*, on the contrary, addresses the nature of transference love as metaphor through the dialogues between the two, specifically, the mechanism of *enamoration*, or, falling in love (154-56). In Lacan’s re-reading, Alcibiades is first “desired” by Socrates—that Socrates treats Alcibiades as the beloved (*erastés*); what seems troubling, however, is that once Alcibiades responds to Socrates’s affection by turning himself into the desiring lover (*erómenos*), Socrates rejects his demand for love and refuses to surrender himself into becoming the beloved: “Socrates can but refuse to do so because, to him, there is nothing in him that is lovable” (155). Socrates remains consistently in the place of a loving subject throughout their encounter, leaving Alcibiades shuffling from phase to phase, starting

⁹⁸ The myth of love is mentioned several times in *Seminar VIII*, pp. 52, and pp. 178-79.

⁹⁹ For Lacan’s analysis of the exchanges between Alcibiades and Socrates concerning the lover, the beloved, and the *objet a*, see “Ágalma,” (pp. 135-148), “Between Socrates and Alcibiades” pp. 149-63, and “Transference in the Present” (pp. 167-79) in *Seminar VIII*,

with (1.) the place of being the object of desire (*erastés*), to (2.) the subjective place of desiring (*erómenos*), and finally then, to (3.) the concluding place of *knowing* that he will remain in such a desire (*ágalma*). The beloved-turned-lover recognizes and acknowledges to himself, at last, the *truth* that the Other in this exchange has *nothing* to offer him—as Socrates cautions him, “where you see something, I am nothing” (154). Only upon his own falling (in love), through the act of love, Alcibiades becomes this *nothing*, which, initially arises as the phantasmatic object in the encounter, representing the symptom (*ágalmata*, or the *objet a*) that indicates a betrayal of one’s true desire, while subsequently evolving into the *sinthome*, a sign of fidelity that acknowledges the truth of one’s own desire. In Badiou’s terminology, a subject is made possible by remaining faithful to the event of truth. This “fidelity” to the truth procedure, as Badiou calls it, is the nexus of his framework of ethics; evil, hence, is defined by whether the subject betray the truth.

This “trans-position” of Alcibiades (but not so much for Socrates), according to Lacan, *is the metaphor of love*, and it is where I locate my model of the *sinthomethics*. In my previous chapter, I have introduced briefly the most distinctive characteristic about Lacan’s theory of the transference, which is not so much about the affect but about the structure. The subject is “supposed” in (op)position to its Other. The metamorphosis of the subject of desire, in Lacan’s words, begins “from the knowing to the known, and ascending to the known in the knowing via knowledge, we can see in it the outlines of our own form of revelation—namely, that things go from the unconscious toward the subject who is constituted in his dependence, and ascend toward the core object that I call *ágalma*” (*Seminar VIII* 162-63). The transference love in this dialectics of desire holds the key for the subject to traverse the fundamental fantasy, to recognize the vanity of the Other’s desire as a sheer semblance to one’s own *objet a*, then returning to the Self—first as the beloved, then as the lover, *and then* the “be-lover” (as I’d call it). As metaphor,

transference denotes substitution: “in this dialogue [between Alcibiades and Socrates], the action [*passage*] of metaphor lies precisely herein. The eulogy of another person is substituted, not for the eulogy of Love, but for love itself” (*Seminar VIII* 149-50). Note that the eulogy (words) is substituted for love rather for another words; what Lacan underscores here from the *Symposium* is that love as metaphor generates not harmony or equality, but asymmetry and disparity between the lover and the beloved. There is no reciprocity between two lovers (*erastés*) without the beloved (*erómenos*) but only differences; despite of constituting a pair, the subjects are not at the same level. When one substitutes one’s right hand with the left, it will not be the same, a logic consistent to the myth of love. The asymmetry underlying the encounter between Alcibiades and Socrates also raises another question—whether or not there exists a “relationship,” as the two subjects involved in the encounter are not sharing reciprocal demand or desire. Lacan calls it a “dance” (163). It is a dance as it demands movements on both ends—*Wo Es war, soll Ich werden* (where it was, shall I be). Love is mutual, but impotent,¹⁰⁰ for this futile desire is a contingency of a mutual deception regarding truth and knowledge: “Alcibiades demonstrates the presence of love, but only insofar as Socrates, who knows, can be mistaken about its presence, and only accompanies him in being mistaken. The deception [*leurre*] is mutual. Socrates is just as caught up in the deception—if it is a deception and if it is true that he is deceived [*leurré*—as Alcibiades is” (163). Consequently, the persistent “no” of Socrates when confronting Alcibiades’ demand is critical—it is a “no” to “know” as well. To be more specific, Socrates’s no defies what Alcibiades thinks that Socrates should know, inscribed in the logic of an analytic discourse. In the Lacanian psychoanalytic framework, as illustrated by the structure of the Analyst’s

¹⁰⁰ Lacan also states this elsewhere, “Love is impotent, though mutual, because it is not aware that it is but the desire to be One” (*Seminar XX* 6).

Discourse, the analysand (or the barred subject, \mathfrak{S}) sees the analyst in the place of the “Subject-Supposed-to-Know” (a):

$$\frac{a}{\mathfrak{S}_2} \rightarrow \frac{\mathfrak{S}}{\mathfrak{S}_1} \quad \frac{\text{agent}}{\text{truth}} \longrightarrow // \frac{\text{other}}{\text{product}}$$

Yet ironically, for the analytic discourse to be successful—denoting the subject has eventually produced the Master-Signifier (S_1)—the analyst must be clearly aware of the “truth” of its own position, which is that the analyst must not lose sight of the knowledge (S_2) that one, in fact, does not know.¹⁰¹ It is imperative that this knowledge remains true to the analyst, and the analyst must resist and should not venture into the production of the S_1 for the subject. Once given in, the desire of the analyst generates countertransference, signaling that the analytic practice has ended in the wrong direction (Evans 29-30; Fink 232-33).

The asymmetric desire structuring the discourses/dialogues between Alcibiades and Socrates (based on Lacan’s reading) pivots my thesis about transference love as an ethical act in the *sinthomethics*. For the process to be considered complete, the subject must traverse its own fundamental fantasy and identify with the *sinthome*, the truth of desire. The fantasy, in the Lacanian scheme, is a contingency of desire. In love, the desire is a desire to be One. In the transference of Alcibiades, we see the desire to be One is most evident as a desire to be in the same place/space—but here lies the complication—while occupying two opposing positions at the same time. How is it possible, then, for a subject to assume both the positions of a subject

¹⁰¹ This is also why Žižek constantly jokes about, in psychoanalysis as well as in the capitalist logic, that the real secret is that there is no secret at all; see “The Truth Arises from Misrecognition” in *Lacan and the Subject of Language*, edited by Ellie Ragland-Sullivan and Mark Bracher, New York and London: Routledge, 1991.

and of an object in a love encounter, and still avoid falling into a sheer narcissism?¹⁰² My answer is, love is the impossibility. In this chapter, I will demonstrate this “paradoxical juxtaposition” is why and how I interpret Lacan’s teaching of “traversing the fantasy” as *becoming undone with the fall of love*. That is, not only should we consider Alcibiades’s process of “becoming undone” as a constant shuffling between the position of the lover and the beloved, but we should also not neglect the ex-sistence of Socrates—an insistence being external to the desire of the analysand. As explained earlier, for the transference to be successful, the analyst must say no. Traumatic as it seems, it is the foundation of the Analyst’s Discourse, upon which my model of the sinthomethics is built. No as barriers, a structural negativity. By virtue of this traumatic encounter with/in the Real, the subject could return to the Self without falling back to the desire that is ultimately the Other’s desire.

Two main questions I examine in this chapter: *Where could we locate/identify the structure of the sinthomethics and how would it benefit our understanding of what constitutes an ethical subject? What differences would it make if we were to understand the (inter-)subjectivity in our “affective” encounters not simply as romantic, courtly, or sensual love/desire but as a (psycho-)analytic discourse that aims to produce new subjectivity at the end?* To do so, this chapter will first clarify some Lacanian concepts crucial for understanding the logic of transference in the model of sinthomethics, followed by a “case study” of André Aciman’s novel, *Call Me by Your Name* (2007). Though my answer may seem to be embedded in the questions proposed (in the added parentheses), I want to leave no room for confusion by reminding the reader of my chosen methodology—which is to adopt and incorporate Lacan’s Four Discourses—in order to flash out my thesis on love and ethics. Given that few scholars have

¹⁰² In my introduction chapter, I have discussed in greater details this polemics of narcissism and the diverging views that distinguishes between Freud and Lacan regarding possibility of loving an Other.

made the connection between Four Discourses and love, I consider ethics to be closely related to Lacan's thesis of the Four Discourses. It is important to point out Lacan's intention with these Four Discourses is to represent "the Other side of psychoanalysis." I read it to reach beyond the individual and not to lose sight of the social. My interpretation of this claim focuses on the ways through which psychoanalysis as a theoretical lens could enable us to excavate from every inter- and intra-personal/subjective encounter *the possibility* for becoming a better subject—even though the experience may not be perceived positively if we adopt the normative social standard. "Better" should only be a comparison between the subject and one's Self; better *in relation to my Self*.

Following Lacan, who presents us a reading of transference from the metaphor of love between Socrates and Alcibiades from the *Symposium*, in this chapter I trace the trajectory of the sinthomethics undertaken by the narrative structure of an eventual love in Aciman's *Call Me by Your Name*, which I considered to be a contemporary rendition of the tale of Alcibiades and Socrates. The novel, narrated from the perspective of Elio Perlman, a 17-year old American-Italian Jewish boy, chronicles an "ongoing his-tory"¹⁰³ since his initial encounter with Oliver, a 24-year-old American Jewish graduate student who is hosted by Elio's parents in Italy in 1987. The novel consists of four parts: (1.) "If Not Later, When?"; (2.) "Monet's Berm"; (3.) "The San Clemente Syndrome"; and (4.) "Ghost Spots." The story unfolds through a flashback, as Elio recalls some details that he still carries with him around Oliver, and then the memory evolves and springs towards the present (although it is not linear, with the current moments sporadically appearing in his narration). The highlights of these four parts, in my own transcription, could be

¹⁰³ I intentionally avoid the word "relationship" here because the two are not consistently in contact during these twenty years; Elio's attachment to Oliver, however, has never a moment ceased to exist in the text. What has persisted between them could be termed desire or even "symptoms," but the narratives also cover details that exceed the scope of desire.

thematized as such: (1.) the first impression; (2.) the first kiss; (3.) the first good-bye; and (4.) (love at) the first “sight.” I will attend to these details later in this chapter, but the current goal is to provide the reader a general sense of the text, and to justify my choice of the literary text as opposed to its more popular counterpart—the film adaptation—as my focus. In 2017, ten years after the novel was published, a movie sharing the same name was released and became an instant blockbuster, receiving substantial media coverage along with several major awards.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, I concur that the film is aesthetically pleasant and itself a compelling portrayal of desire. Yet, I found that only Aciman’s original novel contains the narrative structure of transference love. For instance, the film adaptation curtails two major parts of the novel (almost the entire part 3 and 4), where the real event of transference (the impossibility in the Analyst’s Discourse) and abjection (the impotence in the Analyst’s Discourse) is lost in translation. As a result, I consider the film delivers a “simplified” coming-of-age story in its inclusion of a romantic encounter.

In addition to their drastically different endings, the two texts (film versus novel) also produce different aestheticism, specifically, different effects of how the characters are being perceived. As with the novel, the only “real” action the reader comes into direct contact is “speaking”—Elio is speaking to us through words—and we receive all actions from his accounts. For example, when Elio mentions “a touch” or “a kiss,” it is up to the reader to bring these words into life. I want to underscore this distinction because, for me, the movie and the novel do not construct the personalities of Oliver and Elio in an identical manner. In particular, the Oliver we “see” in the film is more responsive to Elio’s desire, whereas in the novel, his affection “sounds”

¹⁰⁴ The movie *Call Me by Your Name* (2017), directed by Luca Guadagnino with the screenplay by James Ivory, has received four nominations at the 90th Academy Awards, including Best Picture, and won the award for Best Adapted Screenplay. The film began to develop in 2007, and in January 2018, a sequel to the film was also announced (see Katz, Brandon, “‘Call Me by Your Name’ Sequel Details Revealed” in *The New Yorker Observer* (January 25, 2018), retrieved on January 28th, 2019).

much more reserved and ambivalent (as it is the Oliver in the eyes of Elio). With all things considered, my analysis in this chapter focuses exclusively on the novel but not the film. The novel depicts for me more than an interplay of desire; rather, it stages an ethical act of Elio, the narrator, by which he recognizes the singularity of his own *sinthome*, and *event-ually* comes to term with *it*—the empty Master-Signifier (S1) that structures the core of his own being.

Not surprisingly, the reception of the film has a tremendous influence on the existing scholarship on the novel, or, at least, shapes the trajectory of current conversation respecting the written text. To my knowledge, most of the scholarship on *Call Me by Your Name* has focused primarily on the film; if the novel appears in the discussion at all, it is referenced only in conjunction with the film.¹⁰⁵ These reviews unsurprisingly highlight the “love” theme of the story, yet their emphasis is on how such a beautiful, moving love story between two “men” is *both* beyond gay *and* as gay love. However, the “beyond” is not subversive of heteronormative norms; rather, the “beyond” suggests that it speaks to an aesthetics that could be appreciated by the heteronormative audience. In other words, the “beyond” of such a “queer stance” only exists so as to make manifest that “there is no beyond” in terms of the hegemonic heteronormativity. Despite the scarcity, there are still reviews that examine either the film or the text from less conventional approaches across disciplines, too. In this group, Paolo Giaccaria and Claudio Minca in “The Mediterranean Alternative” (2011) investigate the role of the Mediterranean

¹⁰⁵ In addition to its scarcity, most of the literature on *Call Me by Your Name* also comprises mainly of book/movie reviews, as seen in Colm Toibin’s article in *The New York Review* (54, no. 6, 2007:12), Catherine Wheatley’s review and Pamela Hutchinson’s reviews, both in *Sight & Sound* (Nov. 2017, Vol. 27, no.11: 63 and 32, respectively), S D Erasmo’s article in *The New York Times Book Review* (112, no. 8, 2007: 11), and a news article by Lapacazo Sandoval in *New York Amsterdam News* (25 January, 2018, vol. 109, no. 4: 18), calling it “more than a LGBTQ love story”—yet still an LGBTQ love story. These reviews all focused on either the queer love, romantic desire, or coming-of-age themes of the text, again rendering the story nothing more than a typical love story, yet “queer” and beautiful for the heteronormative audience.

through the lens of orientalism; in “Call Me by Your Name: Not Pedophilia, Still Problematic” (2018), Renee Sorrentino and Jack Turban address the problem of age, ethics, and “perverted” desire behind the romantic relationship. One analysis that adopts a psychoanalytic framework is Martin Stephen Formmer’s “On the Subjectivity of Lustful States of Mind” (2006), in which Formmer explores the issue of sexuality through the erotic subjective experience of lust and love. In fact, Formmer’s argument is almost in opposition to mine, as he contends that “lust” that sustains a love relationship must be maintained through a constant “alienation” of the otherness within the self. That is, what is vital is not to return the subject to the Self, but to forever keeping the self from becoming the subject, which generates the sense of eroticism *qua* “lust.” Through the notion of “lust,” Formmer’s interpretation of desire, on the one hand, conforms to a more classical yet conservative reading of desire (which is in no way Lacanian); on the other hand, such an account of desire deviates from the articulation of “rupture” or radical changes that Lacan’s (and my) ethics of desire aims to offer.

In “A Review of *Call Me by Your Name*, Courtesy of Philosophy 101” (2018), Justin Hudak explores Luca Guadagnino’s film by unpacking its allusions to philosophical themes; in so doing, he refers to part movie, part novel. When citing the novel, Hudak focuses on the names and the wordplay, specifically how Elio is inscribed in Oliver (though not the other way around). In his analysis of the film, he compares Guadagnino’s *Call Me by Your Name* to his previous works and discusses the soundtrack regarding how music/lyrics gives unity to the thesis of film. Hudak’s reading of Guadagnino’s film, while in the name of Philosophy 101, comes very close to a traditional literary analysis, as he unpacks the historical, thematic, and textual allusions¹⁰⁶ of

¹⁰⁶ Specifically, Hudak notes that the film fuses Greek and Roman elements that are not limited to just their names. There are also references to the names of Roman Emperor Hadrian, an allusion to T. S. Eliot’s poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” and the movie’s gay love precursor, *Brokeback Mountain*.

the film for the reader, urges the viewer to “play it again” as the film ends due to its dense intertextuality. Admitting that Hudak’s main objective (typical of a film review) is to facilitate his reader’s appreciation of the film/text through a close-reading of what’s *between the lines*, I found his approach a perfect “counter-example” of mine. That is to say, my approach to Aciman’s text is to read exactly that which is *in the lines*. I explained earlier Lacan’s use of literature is unique; when a literary text is involved, he is not trying to say something about the literature, but to use the literary example to illustrate the theory of psychoanalytic practices. Following Lacan, my goal is not to make an argument about *Call Me by Your Name* but to demonstrate the model of *sinthomethics* with the text, to illustrate how transference generates an ethical possibility for the subject to recognize the truth of its own desire, and thus, it is to make an argument about Lacan’s ethics of desire by way of Aciman’s *Call Me by Your Name*.

In the analysis to follow, I engage specifically with the workings of the texts respecting “love as a sign that changes the discourses” and its ethical implication through the notion that love is *to take One’s place*. Transference as the *sinthomethics* that sets the condition for the subject to re-find the Self in love narratives occurs through traversing the traumatic encounter with the impotence of knowledge, manifested as experience of abjections—as the subject takes the place of the object in another subject. To be more specific, the traumatic experience of abjection emerges when the beloved first turns herself into the loving subject, and more importantly, after recognizing that such desire is the Other’s desire, the loving subject returned to the initial “place” of being a beloved. Transference in this case, depicts the Lacanian ethical act, for it speaks to the paradoxical nature of love as the desire to be One—an impossible desire that aims at its own end. However, transference love does not stop there. On the contrary, it “doesn’t stop not being written” (*Seminar XX 94*), as Lacan puts it, “is the impossible, as [Lacan]

define[s] it on the basis of the fact that it cannot in any case be written, and it is with this that [he] characterize[s] the sexual relationship—the sexual relationship does not stop not being written” (94). Read through this lens, transference love, I contend, is the subject’s “act” of *becoming undone* (rather than unbecoming) as a subject—both desired and desiring. This process of becoming undone evolves around the truth and knowledge produced from the encounter between the phantasmatic object (*a*) and the subject (*Œ*) in the Analyst’s Discourse. My attention to the distinction between “becoming (undone)” and “unbecoming” in the *event* of love communicates my resistance to the shared pessimism among critics surrounding Lacan’s position on love and intimacy (as represented by Lee Edelman and/or Slavoj Žižek).¹⁰⁷ Again, the emphasis on “(un)becoming” as opposed to “undoing the becoming” highlights my approach of situating transference love in the intersubjective link of Four Discourses, from which the ethical condition for the subject to return to the Self emerges. Love as the impossibility that sits across the sexes (where relationship is no-thing) must be read as a metaphor—*something* is being substituted, displaced, and replaced—*cor cordium* (*Call Me by Your Name* 71; 242). It means one void for another void, lack for lack.

To that end, my analysis of *Call Me by Your Name* in this chapter traces the trajectory of *objet a*, the main cause of desire, doubled as the surplus enjoyment *qua jouissance* in the sinthomethics, from this seemingly “impossible substitution” in its narrative structure. The “void” in the four main parts is that which punctures through the “whole-istic” yet phantasmatic desire of the Other, and the symptom must keep returning to the same place in Elio’s narratives, as in “If Not Later, When?” Or, when Elio spends that afternoon with Oliver in “Monet’s Bern,”

¹⁰⁷ Specifically, as discussed in the Introduction Chapter, Lee Edelman considers love to be a sheer fantasy, thus, in turn, challenging the authenticity and possibility of human relation. Slavoj Žižek, while affirming love as a reframing event, underscores the deconstitutive force of love as well as the self-effacing aim in the Lacanian act.

he becomes forever frozen in the singular moment, as part of the postcard that drawn by Monet and “stolen” by Oliver as he leaves. As “The San Clemente Syndrome” gives this return of his symptom a precise name, every part of the story has undertaken a similar trajectory, leading to the lingering “Ghost Spot” in the Self. To escort the subject of language and to ensure the desire of the subject arrives at its destination¹⁰⁸ named the Self, indeed, articulates this dissertation into its own transference.

II. Call Me by Your Abjection and the Sinthomethics

Lacan contends that there are two effects of language as a gift of God for human to read as instances of saying (*di-res*): one is love, the other, *writing* (*Seminar XX 46*).¹⁰⁹ With language, not only does Lacan affirm the central place of subjectivity in “writing,” he further revises our notion of subjectivity—or intersubjectivity—in a provocative way. Adopting this Lacanian perspective, the following “case study” of *Call Me by Your Name* aims to investigate the structural dynamics in the writing (*qua* the speaking being) by way of the model of sinthomethics. Specifically, for better comprehending the event of transference in *Call Me by Your Name*, I first identify the corresponding elements for each of the four positions in the Analyst’s Discourse; from there, I outline the impossible desire of love and the impotence of knowledge. The final step is to locate the sign of the One that signifies the sinthomethics of the Self, and to flash out the significance of the ethical act therein. As a visual refresher, I will here present my model:¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ This is a reference to Lacan’s statement that “a letter always arrives at its destination” (30); see “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’” in *Écrits*, pp. 6-48.

¹⁰⁹ In Lacan’s words, “to give a shadow of life to the feeling known as love... [and there] is another effect of language, which is writing” (*Seminar XX 46*).

¹¹⁰ For details, please see my “Chapter One: Sinthomethics, Love as Event,” for details regarding the model, its four positions and four terms.

My Model: the Structure of Unconscious Intimacy

The impossibility of the sexual relationship \approx *Love as desire*

[*the Self as the Signifier (S)*]

The impotence of Being \approx *Knowledge for orientation*

[*the subject as the signified (s)*]

The Sign of the One [Transference Love] \cong S/s \cong ***Sinthômethics***

In this chapter, I incorporate the concept of abjection as a metaphor for illustrating the subject's traumatic encounter with the impotence of knowledge structured in the subjective sense of spatial confinement as one navigates through the discourse. The notion of "place/space" itself is an essential metaphor that consistently reappears throughout Lacan's teaching (perhaps as result of the linguistic and/or structuralist influence during his time); in particular, the Other is a place, or "the Other scene"; feminine and masculine sexuality are framed in terms of "positions," *qua* sexuation. Inasmuch as transference dictates an equal part of involvement for both the subject and its Other for returning the subject to the Self, the disruptive moment of "traversing the fantasy"—and the boundary set by such mechanism—comes very close to the state of abjection.

In *Call Me by Your Name*, abjection prescribes an alternative for the speaking subject ("I") to redefine meaning and uncertainties when the *jouissance* becomes too "Real" to speak, and the abject also facilitates our understanding of the ways through which knowledge, as the impotence of being, keeps at bay its *objet a* and the fantasy in order to sustain desire.¹¹¹ The term abjection is most often associated with Julia Kristeva, who intends to destabilize the stubborn

¹¹¹ As Slavoj Žižek explains, the fantasy is a double-reacting agent that the subject keeps at bay in order to avoid the traumatic encounter with the Real; it also is what keeps the desire at bay for the subject in order to sustain its desire (See "From *Che Vuoi?* To Fantasy: Lacan with Eyes Wide Shut" in *How to Read Lacan*, 2009, pp. 40-60).

binary construction in the theoretical conventions of psychoanalysis, specifically regarding the subject and the object. “[R]epelling, rejecting; repelling itself, rejecting itself. Ab-jecting” (13), as Kristeva describes in *Powers of Horror* (1982), the term abjection rehearses a process or movement that needs to be set/said in actions. It threatens and creates the existing structure by injecting a violent sense of disorientation to the speaking being as the “excessive jouissance” (9) or the “improper/unclean” (2):

Along with the sight-clouding dizziness, *nausea* makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. “I” want none of that element, sign of their desire; “I” do not want to listen, “I” do not assimilate it, “I” expel it. But since the food is not an “other” for “me,” who am only in their desire, I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which “I” claim to establish *myself*. [...] it is thus that *they* see that “I” am in the process of becoming an other at the expense of my own death. During that course in which “I” become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit. Mute protest of the symptom, shattering violence of a convulsion that, to be sure, is inscribed in a symbolic system, but in which, without either wanting or being able to become integrated in order to answer to it, it reacts, it abreacts. It abjects. (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 3)

The “I” that is set in quotations for two purposes: one is to highlight that abjection is unique to the speaking “I” (but may not be generalized to any others), the other, to juxtapose the divide between “I” and “myself” so as to show the location of abjection. The relation between abjection and the Self transpires when the subject of language feels “the Thing” in the Self that is *other than itself but still part of itself*. The abject is thus “neither subject nor object” (1) but “the jettisoned object [that] is radically excluded [from meaning],” an uncanny effect of horror that

pulls “I/me” towards “the place where meaning collapses” (2). The quote captures the psychic mechanism as the “I” experiences a violation of the boundaries of one’s subjectivity, which becomes “outside path of desire” (11) and destabilizes the process of signification, which produces meaning. Where meaning collapses is also where the separation of knowledge from truth takes place. My analysis of the impotence of knowledge regarding one’s sense of orientation in *Call Me by Your Name* will build on this framing of abjection, as it contains all the major elements central to this chapter, which are the subject, the Other, the Self, and the act.

Prior to offering my reading *Call Me by Your Name* as a case study for the sinthomethics, I need to address *the effects of reading desire literally* in approaching a text “psychoanalytically”; that is, what different “endings” my reading would generate that differs from a traditional literary approach.¹¹² For different psychoanalytic theorists, the specific methods may be different. As far as my own analysis goes, I want to highlight two levels of signification—regarding reading desire literally/psychoanalytically, “transference,” and intimacy—which deviate from existing literary conventions: the first focuses on the narratives within the text itself; the second, though not a direct “reading,” the effects examines the relationship between the reader—herein “I,” the barred subject—and the text as the *objet a*. I will return to this argument in my next chapter as I approach Ruth Ozeki’s *A Tale of the Time Being* (2013) by way of Lacan’s *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*; in particular, this is a stance that Lacan takes in his reading of Sophocles’ play *Antigone*, from which he formulates the ethics of the analyst. As Colette Soler explains, when Lacan turns to literature, it is *not* to argue that “the written text must be psychoanalyzed; rather, it is that the psychoanalyst must be well read” (“Literature as Symptom”

¹¹² Since I have previously discussed this reading methodology in my introduction chapter by way of Joan Copjec (*Read My Desire*, 1994) and Colette Soler (“Literature as Symptom” in *Lacan and the Subject of Language*, ed. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan and Mark Bracher, 1991), the explanation I provide here concentrates on the effects of reading desire literally and psychoanalytically here in this chapter.

214). To psychoanalyze the text is a futile attempt because “artistic works are not products of the unconscious”; of course, we can “well interpret a novel or poem—i.e. make sense of it—but this sense has nothing to do with the creation of the work itself” (214). To be clear, interpretation is possible, but what explains for the “text” cannot be deduced from the author’s life or its context. The text’s life must be live in its moment. Equally important is the implication that, to read psychoanalytically as Lacan does, the act calls attention to the subject who is doing the reading, but not so much the object that is being read.

To elaborate on the first level, I read the text/discourse independent of the author’s biography, as I consider it to be another “discourse” of its own. In a way, this approach is similar to structuralist literary criticism, except that I also explore the effects on the characters in the story based on the information these characters provide us. Some may critique this reading to be limited in scope, but as my main objective is to illustrate the Lacanian theory and my model of sinthomethics, my argument of the text is grounded in the theory, but not in its social context. It is far from sufficient to simply “interpret” a text, as interpretations are themselves a *language*—an effect of social and cultural construction. With the addition of one extra “layer” of textual element, it provokes another justification for missing another,¹¹³ which is why Soler contends in “Literature as Symptom” that it is impossible to “interpret” literature, even if we consider literature as a symptom: “certainly a novel is dedicated to meaning, while a symptom is real, outside of meaning” (217).¹¹⁴ My goal here, under those circumstances, is not to conflate the internal structure of the narratives with the added external structures (as these added elements are

¹¹³ This is what Jacques-Alain Miller calls “a metonymic process of thickening” rather than clarifying the text (“Reading a Symptom”).

¹¹⁴ Soler also notes that “this is a paradox only in appearance, since nothing opposes a unity of meaning as a novel does the one of the symptoms” (217), affirming that she also acknowledges the “meaning” of the novel always exceeds its words.

already filtered through the lens of the reader/interpreter) so as to tease out the irreducible point of resistance to meaning—the void or the lack—inscribed in the text itself. For Lacan, all art (my choice here is literature) incorporates a void which signifies its aim to/end in the Thing, which provides the organizing structure to its textuality. In his words, “This Thing, all forms of which created by man belong to the sphere of sublimation, this Thing will always be represented by emptiness, precisely because it cannot be represented by anything else—or more exactly, because it can only be represented by something else” (*Seminar VII* 160). According to this *Thing*, my limited attempt to assess and then access to the void—or the point of impossibility—intrinsic to the text is reasonable, as it follows the logic of the text to where it articulates its truth about desire symptomatically.¹¹⁵ The symptom, like love, is a metaphor; it is always a stand-in for something else. Desire, like truth, is metonymic and can only be “*mi-dire*,” half-said, yet there is more—I desire in you (*what you do not have*).

The second level of signification deriving from this approach of reading symptomatically and/or reading desire literally is, therefore, a contingency of the previous rationale, which is why it may appear somewhat paradoxical. According to Lacan, the symptom always preserves a certain degree of opacity in that it evades meaning, which is why a woman, as “not-all, on account of not being grasped, on account of remaining foreign to [a man],” is the symptom of a man (*Seminar XXIII* 97-98).¹¹⁶ This elusion concerns truth, specifically what truth means—according to whom and for whom—in any analysis. Truth has its unique and crucial role in my project as long as what motivates the Analyst’s Discourse is the position of truth, the engine of

¹¹⁵ Miller relates reading “symptomatically” to jouissance as well: “The discipline of reading targets the materiality of writing, i.e. the letter in so far as it produces the event of jouissance that is decisive for the formation of symptoms. Knowing how to read targets this initial shock” (“Reading a Symptom”).

¹¹⁶ Here Lacan also relates this metaphor of “not-all” to the impossible that situates in the center of a sinthome (i.e. James Joyce).

the sinthomethics. Lacan declares that “I always speak the truth. Not the whole truth, because there’s no way, to say it all. Saying it all is literally impossible: words fail. Yet it’s through this very impossibility that the truth holds onto the real” (*Television 3*). Here “I” functions as the subject of desire, through which “the truth” is spoken—*metaphorically*—as words fail where truth is. What Lacan means is that knowledge is what can be said, and it belongs to the Symbolic; truth, on the other hand, is “where words fail”—or, beyond the Symbolic—as it is in the Real. This statement is thus crucial as it distinguishes knowledge from truth in the Lacanian framework. As we “run after” (*Seminar XI vii*) the truth in a text, we would end up with knowledge of its traces. In every writing or text, the “speaker” (the author who articulates desire) has different relation to one’s own sublimated *objet a*, which creates different metaphors. To seek the truth behind such a sublimation/substation is the privilege of the one who *speaks*; as for the ones who *listen*, we need to recognize our own truth in us, which forms another strange intimacy in the act of reading desire *literally*. One’s own interpretation of what is heard verbalizes one’s own metaphors and desire, an emphasis that Kristeva also places in her depiction of abjection (quoted earlier). It is this unsettling uncertainty and anxiety that sustain the desire in/of the narrative structure, and the “object” doubled as the *objet a* providing the *jouissance* that fuels the discourse of the sinthomethics. My approach to reading desire *literally* through a Lacanian psychoanalytic lens does not assert to present an absolute resolution; rather, it aims to elicit the impossibility in the text that disturbs such a resolution between the subject and the Other, between the subject and the Self. It is a way to contemplate over the question stated earlier in relation to *event*: “How is a subject possible (in the event of love)?” as opposed to jumping to the conclusion and claim the subject is possible or impossible as a result of the presence or absence of love. After all, “it is the (*psycho*)analyst *must be well read*.”

In addition to affirming the function of the analyst as “the “Subject-Supposed-to-Know,” the asymmetric and non-reciprocal desire that structures transference event also stresses the uniqueness of Lacan’s theory of intersubjectivity through the discourse of the unconscious, the formation of a subject, and the place of the Other. In the Lacanian framework, each subject is split (thus the bar over the subject, $\$$) and the split is constitutive, which means, everyone is split *in its own way*. Lacan claims this to be the effect language as it intervenes in the formation of a human subject—language “divides” us, apart from the place of *jouissance*, which binds the subject to the letter.¹¹⁷ While leaving a void in the subject, but it creates a reminder, which Lacan calls the *objet a*. This reminder does not really exist but only *ex-sists*, or “insists... from the outside” (*Seminar XX 22*). Its ex-sistence effects the subject—it introduces a (w)hole in us, a space of wanting, or, a place of desire. Not realizing that this void/lack is its true being, the subject follows the eternal spiral of desire and its “object-cause”; as desire has no object of its own, every object the subject seeks for satisfaction is a substituted one. Desire is always *a desire for something else*—or to be more accurate *for something more*.¹¹⁸ It is this forever chasing of a substituted object that constructs the subject in fantasy. The fundamental fantasy, according to Freud, is what “coheres” the subject; Lacan adds, it is a defense mechanism of the subject in order to project itself from the traumatic Real (that one can never be whole, as the missing piece is either forever lost, or it simply does not exist). It is this void, the split, that leaves the subject with the myth of love—that “we are but One” (*Seminar XX 47*)—and further defines subjectivity

¹¹⁷ This is why Lacan starts the seminar on transference with the declaration of “In the beginning there was the Word” (4), since it is with the letter/word in the system of language that the subject comes into being; from there he moves into psychoanalysis, adding “In the beginning of analytic practice was, love” for it touches “the core of our being” (5), following the Freudian tradition (see *Seminar VIII* 3-18).

¹¹⁸ See “Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious” where Lacan states “if the symptom is a metaphor, it is not a metaphor to say so, any more than it is to say that man’s desire is a metonymy. For the symptom *is* a metaphor, whether one likes to admit it nor not, just as desire *is* a metonymy, even if man scoffs at the idea” (*Écrits* 439).

and its relation to knowledge and truth.¹¹⁹ With the theory of transference—via his myth of love and the metaphor of love—Lacan stresses that no knowledge of subjectivity is possible, if the subject fails to recognize the truth of his own constitutive lack-in-being. In “I love you,” what the subject wants and what is truly being said is always “in you more than you” (*Seminar XI* 263-73). Since to love is always a desire to be loved, saying “I love you” commands a response as “Me, too.” The irony of such a reciprocity is, it is never in the form of “I love you, too”; rather, “I love myself, too.” As Lacan explains, “I myself began with that [“We are but one”] because it affected me quite a bit myself. It could affect anyone, moreover, couldn’t it, to realize that love while it is true that it has a relationship with the One, *never makes anyone leave himself behind*” (*Seminar XX* 47, emphasis mine). In the transference, the analyst (*qua* the *objet a*) needs to lead the subject into an eventual recognition of its own lack-in-being to see through the veil that there is “no such thing.” The final product is always doubled as a loss because it is an acknowledgement of that which the subject seeks from the Other is “no such thing”—it is “no-thing” that is the real cause of his own desire.

“We are but One,” says Lacan, who also says love begins with “the Word.” We will, then, begin with the words where Elio ends, “*Call me by Your Name.*”

III. Call Me by Your Name

¹¹⁹ Lacan connects this knowledge to love, the mark-up of the lack of sexual relationship, the metaphor of love, and transference as a process of signification here; the original text goes as follow: “‘We are but one.’ Everyone knows, of course, that two have never become one, but nevertheless ‘we are but one.’ The idea of love begins with that. It is truly the crudest way of providing the sexual relationship, that term that manifestly slips away, with its signified. // The beginning of wisdom should involve beginning to realize that it is in that respect that old father Freud broke new ground” (*Seminar XX* 47).

The narrative of *Call Me by Your Name* (CMbYN), as briefly noted earlier, comprises four parts¹²⁰: (1.) “If Not Later, When?”; (2.) “Monet’s Berm”; (3.) “The San Clemente Syndrome”; and (4.) “Ghost Spots.” I consider the major events in these four as the following (while admitting the brutal oversimplification of the narrative into these categories): (1.) the first impression; (2.) the first kiss; (3.) the first good-bye; and (4.) the first “lack/void.” As suggested by their corresponding heading, there is a break between each part, either in terms of time or space. The first part, “In Not Later, When?,” takes place in the 1980s, when Oliver first arrives at Italy for staying at the Perlman’s in a small town, where Elio’s father, a university professor, hosts a doctoral student for six weeks every summer. The following two parts, still taking place in these six weeks, are accounted by Elio regarding “what matters to him” (57) throughout their encounter. “Monet’s Berm,” the longest section of the entire narratives, include details that nuance how Elio sees Oliver, and how Elio sees himself in the eyes of Oliver. In “San Clemente Syndrome,” the two travel in Rome for three days. The last part, “Ghost Spots,” marks the immediate point of absence right after Oliver returns to the United States. As I intend to read *desire structurally yet literally* in order to map out the sinthomethics in *Call Me by Your Name*, the following sections also reflect my emphasis on structure. To be specific, I first identify four positions in the Analyst’s Discourse, then I continue to investigate the impossibility of love and the impotence of knowledge, where I match the “parts” of Elio’s accounts to such this organizing principle; finally, I identify the sign of the One by which the subject is returned to the Self, thus completing the sinthomethics.

¹²⁰ Here I stay faithful to the word-choice from the original text, which marks it as “parts” but not “chapters.” I consider it more appropriate for my analysis as well, since I treat the text as “narrative” as opposed to a fictional, imaginary piece.

Four Positions and Four Terms: If Not Later, When?

In order to locate and to demonstrate the sinthomethics, we shall first determine the four positions and the four corresponding terms in the structure of the Analyst's Discourse. This first step is critical, for it may lead to a complete different "reading" if different choices of signifiers are placed at these four positions. In other words, even though the four positions stand in a fixed order to each other in this same discourse, if one's choice of the agent and/or the Other changes, the *meaning* (i.e. the sign that consists of the signifier and the signified at the end) would differ, as the product and the truth are a contingency of the agent and the Other.

$$\frac{\mathbf{a}}{\mathbf{S}_2} \rightarrow \frac{\mathbf{S}}{\mathbf{S}_1} \quad \frac{\text{agent}}{\text{truth}} \begin{array}{c} \longrightarrow \\ // \end{array} \frac{\text{other}}{\text{product}}$$

The first position is the **agent**, or the one that initiates the discourse. Every discourse starts with the "subject that speaks" but it does not simply talk to itself, hence the second position, the **Other**. If we follow the traditional route of literary analysis, it would seem obvious that Elio is the agent and Oliver is the Other, since Elio is the one who speaks in/through the text; however, my reading sees the otherwise. As the sinthomethics is the transference that takes place on the side of the beloved and who produces the final product, Elio in this model occupies the position of the Other. Specifically, Elio often confesses his feelings about the inability to be a speaking agent in the very beginning: "Perhaps, in this, as with everything else, because I didn't know how to speak in code, I didn't know how to speak at all" (17). There is yet another reason justifying and explaining why Oliver is the agent of the discourse/encounter, which is also emphasized in/by the structure of the text. That is, the text starts with Oliver's words—

“*Later!*”—while end with Elio’s final acknowledgment of that Oliver does not know what Elio desires (which I will unpack in a second).

In the Lacanian terminology, both *a* and $\$$ are effects of the signifier. That *a* is doubled as the *objet a*, the object-cause of desire and the *jouissance*, and the lost object, *qua* loss. $\$$ is the divided subject, and all subjects are divided subjects because we are barred by the void and the lack. For we have first determined Oliver to be the agent, he thus becomes the *a*, the object-cause of desire as well as the *jouissance* in the discourse. In the Analyst’s Discourse, this *a* is also the analyst; or the initial “lover” (*eromenós*) in the transference. It seems logical as we come across many incidences where he functions as the “Subject-Supposed-to-Know” for Elio, the beloved (*erastés*): “Would he *not* have noticed...? *Not* know that... *Not* sense that...?” (23); “My heart was racing. He must have known” (28). Elio also mentions several times in the novel, that Oliver is “more myself than I am” (223), who reads his own thoughts before he does.

Within the exchange between the “doer” and the “being-done-to,” between the agent and the Other, the goal is to “produce” something—the end effects are unknown to the agent for the moment being, since it depends on how the Other “responds.” Nonetheless, it produces an effect, whether it ends in felicity or infelicity. The third position, logically follows, is the **product**. As it is produced by the Other, it suggests a loss for the Other. For Elio, what he wishes to produce that would answer to his own void/lack, is precisely the knowledge that Oliver has concerning the Self. For example, “the egg scene.” When being asked if he wants more, Oliver answered “I know myself. If I have three, I’ll have a fourth, and more.” This leaves quite an impression on Elio: “I have never heard someone his age say, *I know myself*. It intimidated me” (34). What intimidates Elio is how Oliver knows *his own desire—if I have this, I would want that too*. However, this is also what Elio wants for himself; as a barred subject, his desire is to find the

answer to the Other's desire; "I knew I had no hold on him, nothing to offer, nothing to lure him by. I was nothing" (Elio in *CMbYN* 40).

For Elio, this answer is S1, the Master-Signifier. He questions himself quite frequently regarding his desire: "What did I want? And why couldn't I know what I wanted?" (30). Sometimes it refers to the "primary symptom" because it represents the subject's first attempt to fill up the void in the core of being. "Perhaps the very least I wanted was for him to tell me that there was nothing wrong with me, that I was no less human than another young man my age. I would have been satisfied and asked for nothing else than if he'd bent down and picked up the dignity I could so effortlessly have thrown at his feet" (Elio in *CMbYN* 30). S1, as that which guarantees to cover up the lack, is best grasped by the signifier "I" for all speaking beings. This is why every utterance is an attempt to fill up the void by identifying with the "I" in the structure.

The last position, theoretically speaking, is the most abstract one while being the most "Lacanian" position. Though I introduce this position as the last one, it technically should be the "beginning" position, since without it the doer won't *do*. This position is the **truth**. In Lacan's psychoanalytic framework, every subject of desire is driven by a truth unknown to ourselves (which Lacan calls the unconscious, the unknown known). As I have clarified in earlier chapter, truth is different from knowledge, the known (known or unknown). For Elio, Oliver is the one who knows, and also knows everyone else, including himself: "He saw through everybody, but he saw through them precisely because the first thing he looked for in people was the very thing he had seen himself and may not have wished others to see" (21). However, what Elio did not see at that time (but only realize this at the very end) is that, the very *thing* that Oliver does not want others to see him as is the "nothing" in him. That he, too, is also a barred subject, and he

knows that he is not—and cannot—be the answer to Elio’s true desire; rather, he is the fantasy that teaches Elio how to desire.

With the truth comes into play, we see why the agent is, in a sense, “an agent.” It is the one that “does the speaking,” the mouthpiece for articulating the unconscious desire—the desire of the Other. In the Analyst’s Discourse, S2 stands for symbolic knowledge (“*le savoir*,” as opposed to imaginary knowledge, “*le connaissance*”), which is knowledge pertaining to the truth of one’s unconscious desire. It is also a form of *jouissance*—the *jouissance* of the Other (*Seminar XVII* 13). However, S2 is now in the position of truth, which represents the “other” signifiers (that are not S1). It means that what Elio truly aims to produce, the Master-Signifier that fills in the void, lies beyond Oliver’s knowledge (S2); the truth of Oliver is that *he knows that he does not have what Elio wants*. In this case, Oliver could only mirror Elio’s desire. Because, as *a*, Oliver must not let Elio know the truth of Oliver’s own desire. This is the key to transference. The agent of truth is “*un semblant*,” a fake, as the “Real” lies underneath, which is the first complication. Another complication is that the structure becomes *not* streamlined. The positions are “barred” from each other—Elio does not know the truth that Oliver covers, and the response Elio makes, the product, is meant to be a loss. At the end, Elio has found the Master-Signifier, which is the real Self of “I/Elio,” but as Oliver has failed to respond to Elio by *calling Elio by his name* (Oliver), Elio has also missed the chance to respond Oliver by Elio, himself. The Real Elio has ceased to be known, by Oliver, *encore*.

In addition, there is “no such thing as sexual relation” (“*Il n’y a pas de rapport sexuel*”). In the case of Elio, there is no signifier that could signify what is between the two. Elio makes it very clear that he does not know what is “it” between them. It was not friendship: “But friendship, as defined by anyone, was alien, fallow stuff I cared nothing for” (Elio in *CMbYN*

30). Yet, could it be love? If it is, he may have been waiting forever (31). Lacan contends that the agent and the Other, due to their own fantasy, are ensnarled by Other's desire and could never fully articulate what they truly want. "Here was someone who lacked for nothing. I couldn't understand this feeling. I envied him" (Elio in *CMbYN* 26). Therefore, on the upper level of the Analyst's Discourse, what connects the agent and the Other is this **impossibility**.

When Lacan concludes *Seminar XI*, he leaves a puzzle: "*I love you, but, because in explicably I love in you something more than you—the objet petit a—I mutilate you*" (263). As now it is the *objet a* that sits in the position of the agent, the relationship between Oliver and Elio is rendered "impossible" since it falls outside of the realm of "a relationship" without a subject vis-à-vis another subject. This is illustrated by Elio's constant imagining of Oliver's death, it was not a terrifying idea; rather, it provides him with comfort: "I want him gone from our home so as to be done with him. I wanted him dead too, so that if I couldn't stop thinking about him and worrying about when would be the next time I'd see him, at least his death would put an end to it" (Elio in *CMbYN* 42). As the cause of desire, *a* also paradoxically functions for the Other (S) as the "Subject-Supposed-to-Know." Due to this asymmetrical desire between the agent and the Other in the Analyst's Discourse, Lacan claims that it is impossible *to be* an analyst (as a subject who also desires). Why? Because "you" (as a place) are supposed to have the answer to my desire ("What does the Other wants from me?" or "*Che vuoi?*"); because what makes me "want" or lack is precisely "you" (as a loss object). Moreover, this impossibility of the upper level further potentiates the **impotence** at the lower level.¹²¹ Whatever Elio produces at the end of

¹²¹ Paul Verhaeghe in *Beyond Gender* interprets these two disjunctions in Four Discourses in relation to Freud's notion of the pleasure principle and the communication theory; in his words, "In this sense, the four discourses are four different ways for the subject to take a stance towards the failure of the pleasure principle—that is the upper level, and four different ways to avoid the jouissance—that is the lower level. In that way, each of the four demonstrates a certain desire and the failure of it, resulting in a typical social bound" (25).

discourse would only fail to “add to” the truth under the agent, Oliver, leaving it unable to sustain the discourse.

Impossibility as Love: (There Is No Sexual Relationship in) Monet’s Berm

In spite of these two “imps”—impossibility and impotence—I argue that transference is radical *as far as the subject is concerned*, especially it is “the sign of the One is changing discourses” (*Seminar XX* 16). To this I add another contention, “the sign of the One is changing discourses” is also structured in Elio’s sense of orientation in the world, both psychical and psychological. This is most clear in Elio’s attitude towards speaking. “To speak or not to speak” is itself a metaphor of Elio’s own sense of being. We should not forget that “call me by your name” is only part of the (w)hole; it should be “Call me by your name and I’ll call you by mine” (*CMbYN* 134). Yet when we hear “call me by your name,” it is only a truth half-said; the “Real” is in the part missing—*I’ll call you by mine*. Even Elio states this clearly: “Yes, in a way—that’s how I always say things: in a way” (77). At the end of Part One (63), Elio narrates a story between a knight and a princess, between whom a romantic relationship is considered forbidden. No longer able to hide his desire, the knight confronts his love with the question: “Is it better to speak or die?” Elio, at the age of 17, would “rather die” than face the consequence of telling Oliver. But we see how his attitude towards speaking, about articulating of desire into being, has evolved drastically as the narrative progresses—even the entire narrative itself is the proof for this change—that he would rather speak than die without telling. This “change of discourses” is also structured in the break between part one and two. After the break, Elio begins to speak, marking the first sign of love as event that is shifting the discourse in the text. Stated earlier, this sense of orientation through the act of speaking, or, *becoming undone as a speaking being*, is

also in the structure of the text. The articulation of desire shifts in relation to where Elio is (in life and in structure of discourse). Therefore, when Elio finally arrives at the place where he finds a way to “speak” the knowledge concerning his own desire, where the *sinthomethics* is. To get there, we follow the discourse.

After the four positions, we will delve into the impossibility. Concerning impossibility, Oliver’s no to Elio has its structural necessity. According to Lacan’s reading of the *Symposium*, two conditions must be met in order for the transference to occur. First, an ego ideal must be present (“Do I like you? I worship you!” 103). The subject must consider the Other to be qualified for recognizing its being by articulating the knowledge of which the truth is held. Second, this idealized Other must withstand and not give in to the beloved’s demand of love. This nonresponse is what causes the anxious subject to elicit the sign (of confirmation) from the lover. The shift in function from the *eromenós* to *erastés* on the side of Elio in his relation to Oliver is, therefore, a structural *necessity* of transference love in the dimension of demand.¹²²

Keeping in mind the analysis from the *Symposium* discussed earlier, Lacan’s thesis is that it is precisely Socrates’s own resistance to the demand of love from Alcibiades that brings about the transference to occur.¹²³ Part Two, “Monet’s Berm,” *the place* that gives this part of Elio’s

¹²² This is so because the Other is, by definition, the one that fails one’s demand of love, thus giving birth to the subject of desire. In Paul Verhaeghe’s words, it is “the necessity of the turning-wheel” (33).

¹²³ “The Subject-Supposed-to-Know” produces “radical difference” in the other (S) at the end of the discourse, which “yields one subject, constructing and deconstructing itself throughout the process of analysis; the other party is nothing but a stepping-stone” (Verhaeghe 32). Love as a desire to be One; once transference is achieved, the impotence bars the product from the truth, and the discourse dies as the desire runs dry. What is also paradoxical is the position of knowledge (S2) in the discourse. The symbolic knowledge operates at the position of truth, but truth is barred from the product (S1) or the subject. As the agent is reduced to the *objet a*, whatever it “knows” becomes impossible to the other. The uniqueness of the Analyst’s Discourse is also related to this function of the analyst (*a*) that ensure the subject (S) could produce the S1: “albeit in a paradoxical way, [t]he analytical position functions through a non-functioning of the analyst as a subject, his/her being [is] reduced to the position of object” (Verhaeghe 32).

narrative a name of its own is crucial, not simply because it was romantic (where they first kissed); rather, this place contains an important exchanges between Elio and Oliver. It is where Elio first articulates his desire to Oliver—the beginning of a subject of language and of desire. It illustrates a critical shift in Elio’s positionality, in which “speaking” takes place in the narrative structure of Elio as he begins to transfer from the beloved to the lover. On their way towards the Monet’s Berm, the secret hideout place of Elio, Elio starts to “speak”:

“I know nothing, Oliver. Nothing, just nothing.”

“You know more than anyone around here.”

Why was he returning my near-tragic tone with bland ego-boosting?

“If you only knew how little I know about the things that really matter.”

[..]

“What things really matter?”

Was he being disingenuous?

“You know what things. By now *you* of all people should know.”

Silence.

“Why are you telling me all this?”

“Because I thought you should know.”

“Because you thought I should know.” [...]

“Because I want *you* to know,” I blurred out. “Because there is no one else I can say it to but you.”

There, I have said it.

Was I making any sense?

[...]

“Do you know what you’re saying?”

[...]

“Yes, I know what I’m saying and you’re not mistaking *any* of it. I’m just not very good at speaking. But you’re welcome never to speak to me again.”

“Wait. Are you saying what I think you’re saying?”

“Ye-es. [...]” (*CMbYN* 72-73)

We see how knowledge plays a central part here, and the truth is never fully spoken. In this scene, knowledge, truth, desire, and the speaking being converge. The act of “telling/saying” is itself the main *effect*, rather than the *cause*. In the opening, Elio acknowledges that “I know nothing.” But later on, he confesses to Oliver that this dialogue (or the speech acts here) is driven by a certain *cause* linked to knowledge: “*because* I thought you should know” and “*because* I want you to know.” Know what exactly? It is the “it” that Elio wants to deliver to Oliver: “*Because* there is no one I can say *it* but to you” and “There, I have said *it*.” If we put side by side that “I know nothing” but “I have it,” then we see what this “it” designates—*nothing*. It is the void, the lack that is the core of Elio’s being. In “speaking,” his articulation of desire, Elio is giving what Oliver what he does not have. He is giving Oliver, *the core of Elio’s being*, the truth of his desire. Why? Because Oliver is “the Subject-Supposed-to-Know.” To Elio, Oliver should know *whatever* there is to know. It is very clear that for Elio, Oliver knows and *should* know, as he occupies the position of “the Subject-Supposed-to-Know,” the only place from which Elio could speak of love, which is “a love letter (*une lettre d’amour*)”—*it*.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ This is what Lacan has said in *Seminar XX* when he attempts to address the topic of love, as love is itself a metaphor, a substitution, one can never directly speak of love—which would become stupidity, “*la bêtise*” (*Seminar XX*, pp. 11-13)—but all one can speak of is a love letter; see *Seminar XX*, “A Love Letter (*une lettre d’amour*)” (pp. 78-89).

Later as they arrive at Monet's Berm, Elio tries to push their relationship further but Oliver rejects his demand for love by the following no's:

"I think we should go." [Oliver]

"Not yet." [Elio]

"We can't do this—I know myself. So far we've behaved. We've been good.

Neither of us has done anything to feel ashamed of. Let's keep it that way. I want to be good."

"Don't be. I don't care. Who is to know?" (CMbYN 82)

In this specific moment, we see how Oliver's (*a*) refusal to "give ground relatively to the Elio's (*S*) desire" could later generate the effect of forcing Elio to traverse the fantasy into the traumatic encounter with the Real of his desire. It is only possible as Oliver's no infers the knowledge he has, and the lack of knowledge in Elio. It is for being "good" but not for *jouissance* or desire. Also implied here is that Oliver's no, in turn, points to the impotence of knowledge in the discourse, where the S2 belongs to the side of the agent/Oliver but not to the Other/Elio.

"But we must not stop there," as Lacan urges, "that it's your love when you were first *eromenós*, the beloved object, and suddenly you become *erastés*, he who desires" (*Seminar VIII* 52). For Lacan, an ethical love is "giving what you don't have" (34). In this light, Oliver gives Elio a name, an empty signifier. It is empty since "Elio" is already inscribed in "Oliver"; Oliver does not *mean nothing* prior to being spoken, yet it only *means nothing* once it is spoken. Few days later, Elio sends a message to Oliver saying "*Can't stand the silence. I need to speak to you*" (117). For Elio, not being able to speak is to muffle love/being while sustaining desire, since it is to "not being written" as a subject of language. Elio, *during* their love-making, reflects

on his being through the following stream-of-consciousness (which I intentionally quote in length so as to maintain the integrity of the narrative structure intact):

From this moment on, I though, from this moment on—I had, as I’d never before in my life, the distinct feeling of arriving somewhere very dear, of wanting this forever, of being me, me, me, me, and no one else, just me, of finding in each shiver that ran down my arms something totally alien and yet by no means unfamiliar, as if all this had been part of me all of my life and I’d misplaced it and he had helped me find it. The dream had been right—this was like coming home, like asking, Where have I been all my life? which was another way of asking, Where were you in my childhood, Oliver? which was yet another way of asking, What is life without this? which was why, in the end, it was I, and not he, who blurred out, not once, but many many times, You’ll kill me if you stop, you’ll kill me if you stop, because it was also my way of bringing full circle the dream and the fantasy, me and him, the longed-for-words from mouth to mouth, which was when I must have begun using obscenities that he repeated after me, softly at first, till he said, “Call me by your name and I’ll call you by mine,” which I’d never done in my life before and which, as soon as I said my own name as though it were his, took me to a realm I never shared with anyone in my life before, or since. (*CMbYN* 134)

While this passage screams “me, myself, and I”—*Where have I been all my life?*—it is also teemed with “where, when, how, what, why.” Elio’s paradoxical sense of subjectivity in this passage both answers the question “How is a subject possible?” and confronts us with more questions—“*How is history possible?*” (Where were you in my childhood?) and “*How is our being possible?*” (What is life without this?) Desire as such punctuates our being through language. It is a longing to be first called upon as an object so as to be able to return the call as a

subject “who speaks the truth,” as a speaking being (*parlêtre*). This is the “it”—*call me by your name*.

Love’s relation to truth and knowledge is also apparent in Elio’s unconscious narrative, specifically, in Elio’s exclamation of “You’ll kill me if you stop, you’ll kill me if you stop, because it was also my way of bringing full circle the dream and the fantasy, me and him, the longed-for-words from mouth to mouth.” Lacan distinguishes between two terms that are related to knowledge and truth: contingency and necessity (*Seminar XX* 94). Contingency is that which “stops not being written” (*cesse de ne pas s’écrire*), as opposed to necessity, which is the “doesn’t stop being written” (*ne cesse pas de s’écrire*). In the Analyst’s Discourse, knowledge and truth collides in the same position, supporting the goal of psychoanalysis is to shift the unconscious discourse of the subject from contingency to necessity, from knowledge to truth. In Elio’s case here, it is true that “You’ll kill me if you stop” if death is considered symbolically concerning one’s being. Elio at this moment is a contingency of knowledge, and has yet to find the necessity sustained by the truth of his own desire. Žižek explains that “we love because we do *not* know everything” (“The Real of Sexual Difference” 61); however, it does not mean that with love, we can know everything. Quite the contrary, “even if I were to possess all knowledge, without love, I would be nothing, [yet it] is not simply that *with* love, I am ‘something.’ For in love, *I also am nothing*, but as it were a Nothing humbly aware of itself, a Nothing paradoxically made rich through the very awareness of its lack” (61). And this “*acknowledgement*” is that which distinguishes truth from knowledge, contingency from necessity: “Call me by your name and I’ll call you by mine” for *it is my love when I was first eromenós, the beloved object, and suddenly I become erastés, one who desires*.

Admitting there are many other details to unpack, such as Elio's relationship with Marzia, a girl who is in love with Elio. If reading through the Analyst's Discourse, we may assume that she fails to become Elio's object of desire because she misses both requirements for transference—she is neither the ideal ego nor the one who refuses. I presented these two moments above as they culminate in the final sinthomethics: first, Oliver's no; later, Elio's name. After Monet's Berm, the speaking and places shift again. This time to Rome.

From the Impotence of Knowledge to Abjection: The San Clemente Syndrome

This impotence of knowledge is built into the shifts in places—the feeling of displacement—throughout the narratives; in “The San Clemente Syndrome,” it is especially so. The knowledge is impotent because it is not able to symbolize the whole truth. Truth, as opposed to knowledge, exceeds the limit of language. In Rome, after a night of celebration and drinking with some new friends met at a local bookstore, Elio reflects:

I'd never traveled in this world. But I love this world. And I would love it even more once I learned how to speak its language—for it was my language, a form of address where our deepest longings are smuggled in banter, not because it is safer to put smile on what we fear may shock, but because the inflections of desire, of all desire in this new world I'd stepped into, could only be conveyed in play.

Everyone was available, lived *availably*—like the city—and assumed everyone else wished to be so as well. I longed to be like them. (185-86)

The “world” refers to this new circle of friends, new circle of life, and new friendship and love. To be a part of this new “world” is to learned how to speak its language. Elio claims it to be his language—*once upon a time*—as it “was” his language. To follow the specter of desire, for Elio,

is to *speak in play*, as that is the way of life, a way to live availably. Elio longs for a life different from living in the world because it is life of which he is in want. I will return to this shortly.

As I argued earlier, Elio's sense of orientation is tied to the act of speaking, both of which are closely related to knowledge (and the impotence thereof). The sense of *becoming undone as a speaking being* is most portrayed as the experience of abjection. Abjection here prescribes an alternative for the subject of language ("I") to redefine meaning and uncertainties when *jouissance* becomes too "Real" to speak, and the object becomes an "Other" that *keeps out* the *objet a* and intimacy in order to sustain desire. These moments of "abjecting" run consistently throughout the narrative, such as Elio's nosebleed after their return from Monet's Berm (84-85), or as he starts crying hysterically after Oliver eats the peach with which Elio masturbates (147-50). In Part Three, the most illustrative moment in terms of the function of knowledge operating as the subjective compass for orientation is the one related to the San Clemente Syndrome.

The San Clemente Syndrome is the name of a poem from a poet, Alfredo, with whom Elio has twice accidentally crossed paths, first in his hometown and, later in Rome. In the novel, Elio makes references to the poem and describes it in segments across three separate sections (178, 186, 189) which corresponds *structurally* to the theme of "The San Clemente Syndrome." It is also not a coincidence that the book title of poem is "*Se l'amore*"—*If this is love, then...* (177; 179). When the poet asks Elio which poem is his favorite, "The San Clemente Syndrome" is Elio's answer. Though Elio reads the poem as an attempt to compare *life* to San Clemente, the poet corrects him: it is "the one comparing *love* to San Clemente" (178). The poem, is short, describes an odd sense of nostalgia and/or *déjà vu*, a sense of "un-belonging" to a place, or the feeling of displacement. We are only able to fully appreciate "one" place until we are no longer in the same place but in an "Other." "The San Clemente Syndrome" is a reflection of the poet's

experience in Bangkok, Thailand, where he had a romantic, yet “traumatic,” missed encounter at a local bar. It was a traumatic encounter because he was so troubled by the person’s gender and therefore, there was only “nothing” that has happened (192-96).

If there is a thread that interweaves Elio’s sense of life with the poet’s depiction of his missed encounter, then I’d suggest it to be this “non-sense” that exceeds our capacity for comprehension. It concerns that which does not make sense—for the poet, it is love (*if there is love...*), for Elio, life. It is through this “none sense” Elio sees “The San Clemente” as a metaphor for life. Now I can return to my opening paragraph for this section, concerning Elio’s longing to *be*. When Lucia, the poet’s wife, questions Elio, half-jokingly, about what is missing from his life, Elio’s immediate thought is “Everything” but answers friendship instead: “‘What’s missing in my life?’ I was going to say *Everything*, but corrected myself. ‘Friends—the way everyone seems to be fast friends in this place—I wish I had friends like yours, like you’” (184). In fact, Elio is not really thinking of Lucia either, what he means, is Oliver: “I wish I had one friend I wasn’t destined to lose” (184). Lacan indicates that truth could only be half-said (*mi-dire*) since it is impossible to say the whole truth; Elio is the half-sayer *par excellence*. Truth could only be half-said in the case of Elio is especially valid since the other “half” is the void, the “nothing” that cannot be said.

The “San Clemente Syndrome” is the metaphor of life for Elio as it mocks his being through time and place. It substitutes Elio’s sense of being with that of becoming through the notion of change. A detail worth noting is the cause for Oliver to be in Italy—to Elio’s room—is Heraclitus. Oliver is writing his doctoral dissertation on the Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, who is most remembered for his philosophy of changes (or “universal flux”). According to Plato, Heraclitus is responsible for stating that “all things pass and nothing stays, and comparing

existing things to the flow of a river, he says you could not step twice into the same river” (Plato *Cratylus* 402a = A6, qtd. in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). Elio himself associates San Clemente with the notion of change:

I began to wonder what all this talk of San Clemente had through us, *how we change and keep changing and come back to the same*. One could even grow old and not learned a thing but this. That was the poet’s lesson, I presume. In a month or so from now, when I visit Rome, being here tonight with Oliver would seem totally unreal, *as though it had happened to an entirely different me*. And the wish born three years ago here when an errand boy offered to take me to a cheap movie theater known for what went on there would seem no less unfulfilled to me three months from now than it was three years ago. *He came. He left. Nothing else had changed. I had not changed. The worlds hadn’t changed. Yet nothing would be the same. All that remains is dreammaking and strange remembrance.* (CMbYN 199, emphasis mine)

The allusion to Heraclitus is impossible to ignore.¹²⁵ And the last three lines are almost prophetic once we reach the end of the narrative; all that remains is Elio’s strange remembrance for the dream in which Oliver refuses to partake. For Elio, the experience of change itself is “unreal”; yet it is not because of its time is unreal, but its place is *surreal*. More specifically, it is in the ways of which the body experiences space as déjà vus, a phenomenon of repetition, and how the time changes and keep changing but still, the body returns to the same *place*. This sense of displacement triggered by change in Elio’s discourse is most evident in his description of abjection. Abjection are the dramatic reactions when the body has not yet “caught up” with the shift in subjectivity.

¹²⁵ As Justin Hudak points out, the constant references to Heraclitus are intentional, and there is indeed a river close to Elio’s house to which the two often pay visits.

With all things considered, we see the reason why “The San Clemente” becomes a metaphor of life that captures the moment of displacements when Elio locks his memory in place, disrespecting the river of time (*CMbYN* 203). When Elio’s the knowledge of time mismatches with the truth of his position/place, abjection erupts and emerges; in the narrative, it constantly disrupts Elio’s sense of being in the language of illness, “[a]s with a hangover, I kept wondering when the sickness would wear off” (141). After their carnivalesque evening, also Oliver’s last night before he leaves Italy, Elio feels ill (the wine may be the culprit) and leaves the group from the bookstore, and Oliver stays with Elio and helps him vomit out the food by putting his own finger into Elio’s throat. Elio describes it as an act of “intimacy,” after which Oliver pushes Elio against the wall and kisses him. In “Ghost Spots,” where Elio and Oliver reunite after fifteen years, Elio confesses that is the place to which he always returns, both in real life and in memory, “for this is *our* spot” (205). Thus it is not illogical to assume that, in these moments when incidents of abjection attacks Elio, they signal a traumatic encounter with the Real, as the subject senses a threat, coming from the lover, to its *position of being* (the beloved). These “gifts” of the abject—the feces, the semen, the vomit, and blood—embody the impotence of knowledge “ab-jected” by Elio at that moment when he fails to see himself as the subject. They are not signs of rejections; rather, they are tokens of love, the “excess” (or *jouissance*) that leaves its traces as the beloved crawls towards the position of the lover while not yet fully identify with his own *sinthome*. The excess that is being “abjected” and “displaced” punctures the moments in the unconscious when Elio infringes Oliver’s subjective position—abjection signals the transference love that is *taking place*.

The Sign of the One, Sinthomethics as the Ethical Act: Ghost Spots

Socrates falls where Oliver stands. This is the final place for the sinthomethics. In the last part of Elio's narrative, "Ghost Spots" focuses on two "moments" since Rome, beginning with fast-forwarding a fifteen-year period, followed by another five years. Elio has been in the United States since college, but he has finally decided to come to Oliver's university to see him. Despite that Elio has become very outspoken in terms of confronting Oliver regarding the past, he refuses to visit Oliver's family. Elio's refusal indicates that he is still in the same discourse since "The San Clemente," and still "in love" with Oliver, though he has taken the place of the lover but not the beloved. At the same time, the refusal also suggests Elio's failure in traversing his own fundamental fantasy. That is, he rejects the "reality" so as to keep Oliver as the *objet a*, the cause of desire. Elio, at this moment, has not yet identified with his own sinthome and is trapped by the lure, as Alcibiades is, and the desire is the Other's desire. Oliver is the new Socrates.

Socrates's "no" confronts Alcibiades with the Real of knowledge, that he is not the subject to be supposed, and that he does not have the object desired by Elio's ego ideal. The initial lover, as the fantasmatic site for knowledge, only proves to be incapable of returning the beloved the truth/knowledge concerning its own desire. In this sense, the Lacanian lover/analyst is *one that disappoints*—by refusing to "fill in the void" of the beloved, thus compelling the beloved into encountering the traumatic Real of his own lack. In other words, transference love is a "transferring process" involving moving between two directions in one subject: from the beloved to the lover, then from the lover to *the be-lover*, the object-cause of its own desire. It is thus an event that is possible precisely through the asymmetrical structures in the discourse (i.e. impossibility and impotence). Initiated as a response of the unconscious to the disjunctions in the discourse, transference must force the subject into recognizing its desire apart from the Other's desire, and further into identifying with the true cause of its own desire, which I call the Self.

Admitting Lacan illustrates his theory of transference through the *Symposium*, he also concludes that Socrates falls short of delivering Alcibiades to the final stage of identifying with the *sinthome*. The problem here is with Socrates' desire, or the desire of the analyst, which is also a concern central to Freud's theory of transference (Evans 211-14). As Lacan consistently reminds us that the desire is the Other's desire, and if, in the transference, the Other to the subject ($\$$) is the analyst (a), then the analyst must not let this desire of the Other be known to the subject; otherwise, it would fall back into the lure of fantasy. In addition, the analyst should never reveal to the subject the truth of his own desire, whether or not the analyst knows, since symbolic knowledge (S_2) is at the position of truth. In other words, the analyst must resist interpreting the symptom for the subject; rather, a should become the cause that triggers the subject's *desire for the Real*. This explains Lacan's insistence on the structure in psychoanalysis, since each position must abide by its own function for the discourse to run its own course. Socrates fails—giving in to his own desire—when he tells Alcibiades concerning the truth of his Real desire, that it is Agathon but not Socrates that his heart desires; for this Lacan declares, “Socrates is just as caught up in the deception as Alcibiades is” (163). Throughout the entire discourse, Oliver has never told Elio regarding the truth his desire. “*Che vuoi?*”—Elio has posed this question several times—What do I want? What does he want? What do I want from him? Oliver never for once claims to be the object of Elio's desire, nor has he directed Elio to another object as his desire. The desire of Oliver remains unknown to Elio, even to the very end. What Elio knows for sure, is that Oliver *does not* desire him in return, a truth/knowledge that is given as the final verdict, which completes the transference. It is not until the last word that Elio, as a speaking/desiring subject, finally returns to the Self (and the position thereof).

If considering the *transfer-ence* event in terms of positions—from the subject to object, and back to the Self—we find a structural parallelism between this transposition and Lacan’s metaphor of love. In this context we should not be concerned with what happens between here and the hereafter, but rather with “what happens here”—in other words, “the substitution of *erastés* for *erómenos*” (*Seminar VIII* 52). The miracle of love is precisely the substitution of the beloved for the lover, the object for the subject: “The structure in question is not one of symmetry and reciprocity [*retour*]. For this symmetry is not symmetrical, since insofar as the as the hand extends, it extends toward an object” (*Seminar VIII* 52). The sinthomethics of love is, therefore, an ethical condition not only because herein the subject traverses through the impotence/fantasy and arrives at the position of truth (the truth of its own desire) (S2), but more importantly, the subject is forced to recognize that the Master-Signifier (S1) is empty—as an open possibility not negativity—and that the real Self restores as the One “becoming undone.” It “signifies” an ethical act for reason that what transference achieves here is a reconstitution of the symptom; once the subject is able to see that the Master-Signifier is only an empty frame without any picture in it, the subject has to *choose to do something with it: whether find a picture to fill the frame (but still keep the frame), to keep the frame as is (though it thus is no longer functioning), or even, to dispose that frame altogether and starts anew (either to live without it, or find a replacement)*. This is my metaphor for identifying with the sinthome. It is ethical because it conforms to one’s own moral code of desire: now that you *know*, it is yours and yours alone—“*Il y a de l’Un tout seul*”—One’s responsibility and One’s own *jouissance*.

At the very end, this is *where Elio is*:

He said nothing. There was nothing to say. “Come, I’ll take you to San Giacomo before you changed your mind,” I finally said. “there is still time before lunch.

Remember the way?”

“I remember the way.”

“You remember the way,” I echoed.

He looked at me and smiled. It cheered me. Perhaps because I knew he was taunting me.

Twenty years was yesterday, and yesterday was just earlier this morning, and morning seemed light-years away.

“I’m like you,” he said. “I remember everything.”

I stopped for a second. If you remember everything, I wanted to say, and if you are really like me, then before you leave tomorrow, or when you’re just ready to shut the door of the taxi and have already said goodbye to everyone else and there’s not a thing left to say in this life, then, just this once, turn to me, even in jest, or as an afterthought, which would have meant everything to me when we were together, and as you did back then, look me in the face, hold my gaze, and call me by your name. (248)

The ending nicely brings all the elements/metaphor of love in Elio’s discourse together: the subject of language and of desire (or the lack thereof), place/space that indicates knowledge (and the impotence of it), and the truth about desire. “Call me by your name” along with its missing half—and I’ll call you by mine—what is missing marks the void, the lack, the *ghost spots*, that which remains. What is missing from the ghost spots are their names—Oliver *was* absent, and so *is* Elio. Elio has recognized that “Oliver” is an empty frame, S1—“If you are *really* like me, then...”—and eventually chose to live with it *by filling Elio in that frame*. This is why Elio is no

longer at the level of desire (or love, if defined as “a desire to be One”), but in the structure of the sinthomethics. At this very end of Elio’s narrative, what constitutes Elio as the ethical subject is in his *subjective transformation* from the beloved to the lover. He was not simply “mimicking” Oliver’s response when he said, “You remember the way.” In his final internal monologue (“If you remember everything [...] and if you are really like me, then before you leave tomorrow, or when you’re just ready to shut the door of the taxi and have already said goodbye to everyone else and there’s not a thing left to say in this life, then, just this once, turn to me, [...] and as you did back then, look me in the face, hold my gaze, and call me by your name”), it is also neither “wish for an impossible condition” nor a “possible prediction” because every situation is in the present tense. The ambiguity of the verb tense is, in fact, not an ambiguity at all (as a symptom, a slip for interpretation). It *signals* that Elio is no longer in the place of the desiring subject, but live as his own sinthome. Elio *has chosen* to give up the place of “being (*in*) Oliver (as the site of the Other, so the relationship is a fantasy)” and takes up the place of “being (*via*) Oliver (as the *jouissance of the Other*, and the pain is Real).” This final displacement between the subject and its Other illustrates the ways in which the sinthomethics is a reconfiguration of the subject, as stated earlier. And the new subject that emerges from transference is neither a beloved or a lover, but a *be-lover*.

Now that we have finally arrived at the Lacanian contention of traversing the fantasy and to recognize the constitutive “nothing” in being, it seems necessary to clarify what the Self stands for, along with the implication of *returning the subject to the Self*. The stake here is whether there is a “true” or authentic self, if the verb “return” denotes something existing prior or an “original” state. The short version of my answer is both yes and no. *Yes*, if the original Self simply refers to a “place” that in-sists as a placeholder in the Real; as it is in the Real, it exists

“prior to” or “outside” meaning. Therefore, *no* to “authenticity” if it is defined as a product of signification—that is, if “authenticity” itself *means* in relation to the Real. The Self does not “represent” the subject of language (or the signified); rather, the Self is closer to the empty signifier that constantly slips under the signified. My answer, on the one hand, corresponds to Lacan’s revision of the famous Austrian linguistic model of signification in “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious,”¹²⁶ where Lacan overturns the places between the signifier and the signified into S/s and stresses that “it should be read as follows: signifier over signified, ‘over’ corresponding to the bar separating the two levels” (*Écrits* 415). On the other hand, it takes into consideration the dynamics intrinsic to the sinthome, as it is the knot of three registers—the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real—that resists meaning. As Bruce Fink contends, the fundamental fantasy comes into view as it is the mechanism that “stages the way the subject imagines him- or herself in relation to the cause, the Other’s desire as cause” (*A Clinical Introduction* 56-57). The Other is in the Symbolic, while the *objet a* is projected from the Imaginary by the subject, thus barring him from the traumatic Real. To uncover the fundamental fantasy is to reach into “the core of our being” (*Écrits* 437; *Seminar VIII* 4), *qua* the sinthome.¹²⁷ As a consequence, “my” fundamental fantasy is already itself an embodiment of this “Self-construction,” a contingency of three different registers, as represented by the topology of “the Borromean knot” (Evans 18-20). What does this Self mean in view of the sinthomethics (and/or in the Analyst’s Discourse)? It means, following Žizek, becoming a Real subject of discourse demands a revolt against the narcissistic intimacy with the mOther, and it also means a possibility for claiming true freedom as an ethical agent, despite its associated pain in pleasure,

¹²⁶ See *Écrits*, pp. 412-39.

¹²⁷ With the maxim of “Know thyself,” Lacan links this “core” of our identity (*Kern unseres Wesen*), language, semblance, and desire through the discourse of the unconscious to present the complexity of intersubjectivity (see *Écrits*, pp. 435-37).

or *jouissance*, the “pleasure in pain” *par excellence* (*How to Read Lacan* 8-9). More importantly, it affirms that a “Real Self” is itself a complex process of negotiation of extimacy, an ongoing dynamic configuration of differences in which the subject returns to its own core of singularity.

IV. ... and I will Call You by Mine

“When [Oliver] came down for breakfast he was wearing my bathing suit” (141), thus began the morning after their first sex. Elio’s narration depicts the doubling of the two subjects has taking place: “Watching him wearing my clothes was an unbearable turn-on. And he knew it. It was turning both of us on. [...] But what turned me on [...] was *the porousness, the fungibility, of our bodies*—what was mine was suddenly his, just as what belonged to him could be all mine now” (141-42). Transference is the fungibility, the substitution, *Cor cordium*, heart of hearts; *Call Me by Your Name* is the transference love that takes place. In *Seminar XX*, Lacan points us to the truth of love that concerns the semblance (*le semblant*), that in the transference love, one is identified with the semblance (83-103).¹²⁸ The semblance is what explains the parakeet’s love for Picasso: “To enjoy a body (*jouir d’un corps*) when there are no more clothes leaves intact the question of what makes the One, that is, the question of identification. The parakeet identified with Picasso clothed (*habillé*)” (6), the parakeet I have discussed in my Introduction chapter. And Elio identifies with “Oliver clothed” as well. Before Oliver returns to the States, Elio asks for his blue shirt and gave it a name, “billowy.” The bathing suit is thus the semblance, the same sign of love indicating Picasso’s parakeet is in love with the artist through a nibbling of the collar. The parakeet “was in love with what is essential to man, namely, his attire

¹²⁸ “Love itself, as I stressed last time, is addressed to the semblance. And it is true that the Other is only reached if it attaches itself (*qu’à s’accoler*), as I said last time, to *a*, the cause of desire, then love is also addressed to the semblance of being. That there-being is not nothing. It is attributed to (*supposé à*) that object that is *a*” (*Seminar XX* 92).

(*accoutrement*)” because “clothes promise debauchery (*ça promet la ménade*), when one takes them off. But this is only a myth, a myth that converges with the bed I mentioned earlier” (6). The bed for the myth of love is, *encore*, to be found in Lacan’s *Seminar VIII*, where and when the hand reaching for the fruit. The myth of love is that which beings.¹²⁹ In *Call Me by Your Name*, the fruit is the peach:

I got up and reached for one of the peaches, opened it halfway with my thumbs, pushed the pit out on my desk, and gently brought the fuzzy, blushed colored peach to my groin, and then began to press into it till the parted fruit slid down my cock. [...] till I thought I heard it say to me, [...] *I’ll die when you’re done, and you mustn’t be done, must never be done?* (146-47)

Here the peach is the substitute for Elio himself, while Elio takes the place of Oliver in this scene. The last utterance reminds us of what Elio has said earlier to Oliver, “*You’ll kill me if you stop!*” and it is not a coincidence, as more details to be revealed once Oliver enters the scene. It is important to point out that this “peach scene” occurs after Oliver and Elio have had sex; therefore, it should not be read as simply as a sexual fantasy. Soon Oliver enters into the room after Elio is done with the peach (or himself). As Oliver *reaches for the fruit*, it becomes quite clear that the peach is the new Elio:

“Any idea how much work Anchise puts into each one of these?”

He was joking, but it felt as though he, or someone through him, was asking the same question about the work my parents had put into me.

[...]

He dipped a finger into the core of the peach and brought it to his mouth.

¹²⁹ I am referring to the same myth of love that I introduced at the beginning of this chapter, but also, it alludes to Lacan’s opening section for *Seminar VIII: Transference*, “In the Beginning Was Love.”

“Please don’t.” This was more than I could bear.

[...]

“Look, you don’t have to do this. I’m the one who came after you, I sought you out, everything that happened is because of me—you don’t have to do this.”

[...]

I watched him put the peach in his mouth and slowly begin to eat it, staring at me so intensely that I thought even lovemaking didn’t go so far.

[...]

I could tell he was tasting it at the very instant. Something that was mine was in his mouth, more his than mine now. I don’t know what happened to me at that moment as I kept staring at him, but suddenly I had a fierce urge to cry. And rather than fight it, as with orgasm, I simply let myself go, if only to show him something equally private about me as well. [...] I was crying [...] for last night as well, because, for better or worse, I’d never be able to undo it, and now was as good a time as any to show him that he was right, that this wasn’t easy, that fun and games had a way of skidding off course and that if we had rushed into things it was too late to step back from them now—crying because something was happening, and I had no idea what it was.

“Whatever happened between us, Elio, I just want you to know. Don’t ever say you didn’t know.” He was still chewing. In the heat of passion it would have been one thing. But this was quite another. He was taking me away with him.

His words made no sense. But I know exactly what they meant. (149-50)

All the elements for the *sinthomethics* are at work here: *objet a* and the subject, the lover and the beloved, knowledge and truth, transference love and abjection. Crying, letting go, is the only

way Elio could act as an object. Once the real Oliver enters the scene, Elio becomes “neither/nor”—he is neither the subject or the object, neither as Oliver or as the peach. For Elio, watching Oliver devouring the peach is more than he could bear because it is more “intimate” than lovemaking. It is more intimate because what is taking place at the moment is not at the level of the body, but at the level of the unconscious.

It is also more intimate because “something was happening” but Elio had no idea what it was. As Oliver insists, “whatever happened between” the two, what he wants for Elio is “to know”—more precisely, *to know myself*—as Oliver does. Knowing the Self, is the subject Oliver supposed to know, and it is what Elio wants to know. Indeed, it is not that Elio does not know “whatever happened between them-two”; rather, in Oliver’s “nibbling,” in his “taking away pieces of Elio with him,” Elio is confronted with the truth of his own desire—a truth that is different from knowledge—and he must *act* in conformity with this desire. Therein lies the impotence of knowledge, since the unconscious is the knowledge that one does not know that he knows, as Lacan contends, and truth could only be half-said because the other half is in the Real. Elio has “no idea what it was” but he is well aware of its existence; the truth is that which “makes no sense, but the speaking ‘I’ know exactly what it means.” At the end of the myth of love, Lacan says we [the analysts] are not here to make miracles, but we are here to know. What matters is not “what happens between here and hereafter, but rather what happens here—in other words, the substitution of *erastés* for *erómenos*” (*Seminar VIII* 52). And *what happens here* is the sign of the One, the metaphor of love.

A name is a signifier. Things are named into being. Adam, Eve. We grow into an identification with what we consider our name to be worthy of desire.¹³⁰ But desire, as Lacan

¹³⁰ Louis Althusser may call it an interpellation while Lacan names this an articulation.

never fails to remind us, is always the desire of the Other. There is no desire if there has not been prior a demand for love that is rejected, refused, left unaddressed. Love is a metaphor because where it “wants/lacks,” it is somewhere else. Desire is metonymic in that, when it speaks, it speaks partially. Truth can only be “half-said,” confesses Lacan, despite that “I” always speak the truth. As the subject of the sentence in the structure, “I” could only speak from the position of truth. To traverse the fantasy and identify with the sinthome means the recognition of the vanity of the desire, the miracle of love, and the singularity of our being. The recognition is traumatic in nature, since it is by definition so, as it is an encounter with the Real. To be able to see lack as lack and to embrace this “I” and this nothing, is to not give ground relatively to one’s desire. This is the ethics of psychoanalysis, according to Lacan. Sinthomethics is an ethical act because it is not a submission to lack, but a subjective decision to live with it—to come to terms with it, the Master-Signifier. Transference love is the sign that changes discourses of the subject because it is an act held accountable by the subject in acknowledging that the Master-Signifier is an empty one.

But one “does not stop” there, it is to also know that, as an empty place, it leaves room for more. The subject is returned to the place called the Self, the point of departure, and be reunited with the possibility for “something else,” thus re-turning to a new journey of desire for more, for amour. At the end there is the transference. In the Beginning Was Love.

Chapter Three: “Love that Takes Time”

Aporia, Representation, and A Tale for the Time Being

“He lay there and felt something and then her hand holding him and searching lower and he helped with his hands and then lay back in the dark and did not think at all and only felt the weight and the strangeness inside and she said, “Now you can’t tell who is who can you?””
Ernest Hemingway, *The Garden of Eden* (1986)

“So while they grew older together she did watch with him, and so she let this association give shape and colour to her own existence.”
“It was the truth, vivid and monstrous, that all the while he had waited the wait was itself his portion.”
Henry James, “The Beast in the Jungle” (1903)

I. Introduction: *If Not Now, Who Am I?*

In the previous chapter, I have examined in details regarding Lacan’s theory of transference and how it structures the discourse of the *sinthomethics*. The *sinthomethics* is my own rendition of what may be considered as “a subjective traversal of its fundamental fantasy,” a statement in which Lacan describes for becoming an ethical subject. I propose the *sinthomethics* for illustrating and exploring “structurally” the ethical condition in which the subject traverses the fantasy of Other’s desire central to one’s own being, and is, ultimately, able to recognize some truth regarding one’s own desire. With that goal, I have presented a structural reading of André Aciman’s *Call Me by Your Name* (2007) in Chapter Two, following Lacan’s approach to reading Plato’s *Symposium* through the lens of psychoanalytic theory, specifically, transference. Taking into account Lacan’s interpretation of the encounter between Socrates and Alcibiades, my thesis for this project, along with the *sinthomethics*, highlights the aspect of how the desiring subject returns to the Self (truth of one’s own desire) by acting on transference love. I contend

that this “return” through transference love itself is an ethical act, yet my discussion of “ethics” and “act” must be situated in the Lacanian framework. As mentioned earlier, this dissertation wishes to offer some alternative discourses for envisioning possibilities of intimacy and subjectivity through a Lacanian psychoanalysis by considering both Lacan’s main thesis of the (desiring) subject and my emphasis on the Self-(transference-)love. Therefore, my primary objective in this chapter is to pursue an ethics of desire inscribed in the sinthomethics, whose application may reach *beyond* its deceptively narrow concern with solely the individual into the social and the political.

To be clear, this “beyond” must be considered in conjunction with the intersubjective link that defines the Lacanian unconscious. To consider the unconscious as ultimately an intersubjectivity is to put at stake the agency of the subject and the senses of the Self. It is, again, to return to our previous question, “*How is a subject possible?*” If, for Lacan, a subject is possible only by way of desire, then we must also recognize ethics as a way to the subject. Ethics (in this project) refers to the ethics of psychoanalysis, of which desire is its imperative. And if, in the Lacanian theoretical edifice, the unconscious houses the desire of the subject and the core of its being, I argue for a Lacanian *ethics of desire* as an *aesthetics of being* with which the unconscious orients the subject in its constant negotiation between action and desire; however, this medium for navigation would only emerge *retrospectively* to the subject as a sense of orientation once the act is complete. Of course, my argument would not be as compelling without first offering some preliminary account of three fundamental criteria: (1.) the logic of an event, (2.) the aim of transference love, (3.) the paradox of an ethics of desire (and psychoanalysis). In Chapter One, I have discussed *the logic of an event*, specifically, by relying on both Badiou’s and Žižek’s conceptualization of the term. An event is unique as an effect that

exceeds its cause; it disrupts our being and opens up the subject for potentially radical changes. This defining feature of an event supports my argument that an ethics of desire would appear to the subject as an aesthetics of being *only in retrospect*. In Chapter Two, I focus on Lacan's theory of transference and offer an illustration of transference love as an ethical act through the narratives of Aciman's novel, *Call Me by Your Name*. What is crucial with my reading method is the aim of transference love; contrary to other theories of love, the product of transference concerns not so much with its object but the subject itself, or *the Self* in the subject. This principle of transference love explains how I relate ethics to aesthetics in the sinthomethics; considering that the truth of one's desire is idiosyncratic, ethics as such is the subject's most intimate way of life. *The aesthetics of being is what represents the Self for the subject*. With the first two criteria delivered, it is the paradox of ethics that is in question.

Instead of simply asking "*What is an ethic of desire?*" this chapter investigates the following questions: "*What good does such an ethics do for the subject?*" and "*How could the ethics of desire be useful without being in the context of psychoanalysis?*" This chapter takes up these questions by tracing some of Lacan's ideas about the ways that ethics, acts, and psychoanalysis coincide in order to further examine whether such an ethics renders the subject's acts as "good." And, if "the good" does not provide the principle for judgements, what is? To answer, I organize the following discussions into three themes, and each section would benefit from our understanding of the preceding one: (1.) *Antigone* and ethics, (2.) *the act* and "logical time," and (3.) the sinthomethics and Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013). The first two themes rely heavily on Lacan's teaching, specifically from *Seminar VII* and *Écrits*; the last section is a demonstration of my own model by conducting a Lacanian case study of Ozeki's novel, *A Tale for the Time Being*. In order to fully flesh out the "ethical" application and

implication of my model of the *sinthomethics*, not only should we first attempt at mapping the trajectory of transference love, but more importantly, we must also address what distinguishes the ethics of psychoanalysis from other ways to ethics (and morality) as insisted by Lacan; only then can we represent successfully the complexity of such an ethical framework, along with the aim of self-love pursued in this dissertation.

In *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959-60), Lacan concludes this year-long teaching with the paradoxes of psychoanalytic ethics (311-25), focusing on how it functions as a linkage between action and *judgment*: “an ethics essentially consists in a judgment of our action” and “it is to the extent that analysis in some way or other, no matter how minimally, offers something that is presented as *a measure of our action*—or it at least claims to” (311, emphasis mine). However, this judgment frames a “paradox” of ethics because such a measure could only appear (to the subject of the act) *at the end of the analytic process*, which Lacan calls “the point of view of the Last Judgment” (313). More precisely, the ethics of psychoanalysis “could only be thought of” as the Last Judgment of “the relationship between action and the *desire* that inhabits it” (313). According to Lacan, it could “only be thought of” because this reconsideration of ethics to which psychoanalysis leads us is itself a mental experiment, as *experimemtum mentis* that is “directly connected to something that our *experience points to whenever we try to articulate* it in its own *topology*, in its own *structure*, instead of reducing it to a common denominator or common standard, instead of making it fit into preexisting pigeon-holes” (313, emphasis mine). The quote condenses a few crucial elements that distinguish the Lacanian ethics from the canonical approach of equating ethics as moral code, which is to serve the common good(s). Quite the contrary, an ethics of psychoanalysis *serves “no good”* (240, emphasis mine)—if this “good” speaks to a “measure of our action” that has already been pre-inscribed in

the desire of the Other.¹³¹ With my emphasis from the previous quote, I want to call attention to Lacan's gesturing signs in the first part of his statement, from which we can infer this ethics as the designation of a mental orientation as the subject navigates between action and desire. It recognizes, therefore, a relationship of "something that our experiences points to" "whenever we try to articulate it" "in its own topology and structure." That "something that our experiences points to" refers to our action, while "whenever we try to articulate it" is the process of figuring desire (and an attempt to realize our desire), yet this realization of desire must also be contained "in its own topology and structure," independent of the discourse of the Other. This orientation finds its matching principle also in Sigmund Freud's prescription— "*Wo Es war, soll Ich werden.*"—where it was, shall I be.

In a sense, what I call the sinthomethics, the ethical act of returning the subject to the Self, follows quite closely the Freudian maxim, "*Wo Es war, soll Ich werden.*" If this maxim is to deliver certain moral or ethical judgments for our action, then we should not neglect the "time lapse/gap" represented by the verb tenses (past versus present) between the "I" and the "it" which puts the subjective action in question. It is not a coincidence that Lacan has presented this principle at the very beginning of *Seminar VII* (on ethics), calling it the "moral experience" that inaugurates the entry of the patient into analysis: "That 'I' which is supposed to come to be where 'it' was, and which analysis has taught us to evaluate, is nothing more than that whose root we already found in the 'I' which asks itself what it wants" (7). Here, what "it" wants must defy what the Other wants; one's desire is at odds with one's duty. The questions with which this "I" confronts itself are: "Will it or will it not submit itself to the duty that it feels within like a

¹³¹ Lacan discusses in length concerning what defines "the good" and why desire should be separated from the service of the common good specifically in the section of "The function of the good" in *Seminar VII*, pp. 218-230.

stranger, beyond, at another level?” and “Should it or should it not submit itself to the [...] command of [Law], whose jurisdiction is moreover revealed increasingly as the analytical exploration goes forward and the patient sees that he is committed to its path?” In response to these questions, Lacan returns with a firm “no”: indeed, the true “duty” of the subject is to “oppose that command” (7) of the Symbolic Law, whose aim is concerned with the “good.” Due to the insistence of the Other’s desire, often appearing as the service of the common good, the “I” falls behind where “it” was. Not only does this opposition explain the time lapse between the “I” and the “it” (or the subject and the Self), but it also accounts for the discrepancy of the time gap between action and desire. Our action always fails to catch up with desire, so claimed Lacan; all we can do is to follow its trace, its remainder (*Seminar VII* 313). Ethics, therefore, as an unconscious orientation that guides the subject in this chase, “*Wo Es war, soll Ich werden,*” asks the subject one repeating question, yet the question could only be answered *at last* in the form of a Last Judgment: “Have you acted in conformity with the desire that is in you?” (314). In other words, ethics confronts the subject regarding the relationship between action and desire, with whether or not “I” have always been, or tried to be, where the “it” had been.

If the imperative of “Where it was, so shall I be” provides some support to my overarching thesis that transference leads to a final ethical act the subject carries out to traverse the fantasy and recognize the truth concerning one’s own desire, or “the Self,” it also helps to clarify the ways in which “action” opposes to the act, along with their consequences (*qua* the product) should be conceived in the process. To demonstrate this relationship between action and desire, Lacan recurses to tragedy, considering “[a]ctions are inscribed in the space of tragedy” to the extent that “properly speaking, that *ethics implies the dimension that is expressed in what we call the tragic sense of life*” (313, emphasis mine). It is in the space of tragedy demarcated by

the incongruity between the subject's knowledge and the truth concerning its desire that ethics is located, which Lacan calls "the dialectic and progress of knowledge of the unconscious": "in the irreducible margin as well as at the limit of his own good, the subject reveals himself to the never entirely resolved mystery of the nature of his desire" (237). Setting aside the issue related to different kinds of "goods,"¹³² herein Lacan extrapolates the path to desire from the knowledge of good and evil (219). Yet what exactly defines "the good at this level?" (224); not surprisingly, Lacan suggests, the signifier (227). To view in the Analyst's Discourse, that "never entirely resolved mystery of the nature" of the subject's desire lies in the position of truth:

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \text{agent} & \longrightarrow & \text{other} \\ \hline \text{truth} & // & \text{product} \end{array} \quad \frac{\mathbf{a} \rightarrow \mathcal{S}}{\mathbf{S}_2 \quad \mathbf{S}_1}$$

We see that, if "the good" is the end game of the discourse ("product"), this good does not in any way contribute to the truth position, doubled as the knowledge of the unconscious (S₂), and thus this "good" is further precluded from the cause of the subject's desire (*a*). By the signifier, Lacan highlights that which is "good" for the barred subject (\mathcal{S}) should be evaluated only in terms of the subject, given that the Master-Signifier (S₁) is what gives meaning to the subject's being.

As I argue with the sinthomethics, the key here is the final "act" (of acknowledging some *Thing*) taken by the subject vis-à-vis its own traumatic truth. After traversing the fantasy and arriving at the place of the product and loss, which here as in the Analyst's Discourse is the Master-Signifier (S₁), the subject must *make its choice*—whether to live as the Master-Signifier (i.e. "identifying with the sinthome" or living as *jouissance*, "*le mal*," living as the pleasure in

¹³² See Bruce Fink's translator's note on both pp. 216 and pp. 218 in *Seminar VII*: "English usage, unlike French usage, generally limits the plural of 'the good,' namely, 'the goods' to a specific and material meaning. Here and in what follows, however, 'goods' in the plural is to be read as also retaining the ethical connotations implied by the singular."

pain), or to “restart” the discourse by creating another signifier, substituting it with another cause (i.e. reconstituting the symptom, and thus, living with new subjectivity). But the stake of living as the Master-Signifier is that “it is an empty place”; S1 is, by definition, that which points nothing but to itself, and that which stops the signifying chain. In this light, we could consider Antigone as someone that choose to live as the Master-Signifier, which is why she does not choose to live for the good, but for “*le mal*” and for the beautiful. It is in *that final resolution of the subject* that the ethical act concerning the Self, the truth of one’s desire, is complete. “To live as the Master-Signifier” is what Lacan calls “identifying with the sinthome” and to live as a sinthome; the latter, *sublimation*. Admitting that both are ethical acts,¹³³ in my model of the sinthomethics, I align only living as a sinthome with the act of transference love. To identify and live as/with one’s cause as an absolute choice is my way to ethics because it is to act “in conformity with one’s own desire” (*Seminar VII* 311). I will later elaborate these four positions regarding the ethical with a reading of Ruth Ozeki’s *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013) in the second section of sinthomethics in this chapter, but it is important to address, preliminarily, the question that I enlisted earlier, “*What good does such an ethics do for the subject?*” This is the moment when we should return to the space of tragedy. To my question, Lacan has already responded: the ethics of desire does us good—or more truthfully speaking, *it does us the “beyond-the-common-good”*—by giving us a way of expressing, of articulating, and of representing the tragic sense of life.

The effect of catharsis is what renders tragedy irreplaceable. The same reason supporting why tragedy has remained a classical art form that persists throughout civilization and why the

¹³³ There are also other types of ethical acts, among which the most notorious example is probably from Slavoj Žižek, who considers only suicide as the “real” ethical act; see “*Why is Suicide the Only Successful Act?*” in *Enjoy Your Symptom!*, pp. 31-46.

core elements of tragedy could move us with a timeless consistency across languages and cultures. To show us desire, Lacan turns to the meaning of catharsis,¹³⁴ which he defines as “the purgation of the [...] emotions of fear and pity” (247), not too far from the Aristotelean tradition, either. Before venturing to “The Essence of Tragedy” and its relation to the ethics of desire (*Seminar VII* 243-87), Lacan makes a few stops: first at “*Das Ding*” (The Thing), then “the Problem of Sublimation,” and “the Paradox of Jouissance.” In his last stop prior to tragedy, Lacan distinguishes between the function of “the good” and that of “the beautiful.” In this last section, Lacan begins with addressing the problem of the good as that “the whole relation of man to the real of goods is organized relative to the power of the other, the imaginary other, to deprive him of it” (234); however, “the movement of desire is in the process of crossing the line of a kind of unveiling [of the drive]” (236). That is, what enables us to cross the line and “to locate precisely an element of the field of the beyond-the-good principle” and beyond-the-pleasure-principle is the function of the beautiful (237). But the relationship between desire and “the beautiful” is “strange and ambiguous” (238); in Lacan’s words, “the beautiful has the effect [...] of suspending, lowering, disarming desire [;] The appearance of beauty intimidates and stops desire” (238). To paraphrase, *desire yields to the beautiful*. How, then, does tragedy move us across the line with the function of the beautiful but not with the good? Because, as Lacan states, the beautiful is cathartic; “*Catharsis is the ‘beauty effect’*” (286, emphasis mine). Tragedy, by way of this beauty effect in catharsis, purges the subject through “fear and pity” and is itself the experience of the beautiful. In other words, if “the tragic sense of self” is that which expresses an ethics of desire, it denotes that the motivation of our subjective action (or the lack thereof) speaks in the language of the beautiful, but not the good.

¹³⁴ Lacan has made several references to catharsis, Catharism, and the Cather in *Seminar VII*; see 244-246; 257-58, and 287.

This insistence on the beautiful is pivotal to my reading of transference love as the ethical condition for the *act* (i.e. the final, chosen action and non-action) as well as the “function” of an ethics as such. For example, when King Lear’s daughter, Cordelia, announces her decision to “love and be silent,” we could agree that it is an ethical act of *non-action*. Without any descriptions of her physical appearances, we encounter “the beautiful” in that articulation. Nevertheless, Lacan does not find true beauty in Cordelia; rather, he is enamored of “the splendor of Antigone” (*Seminar VII* 243-56).¹³⁵ On the one hand, the notion of the beautiful assists us in determining the weight of the final “subjective choice” mentioned earlier. On the other hand, Lacan’s intentional opposition between the good and the beautiful challenges existing binaries through which we contemplate ethics and morality, such as good versus bad, law versus crime, innocent versus evil, the beauty versus the beast, the monstrous, the ugly and the horror. When Lacan says “Antigone’s position relates to a criminal good,” he is pointing us to a “fundamental moment [for reaching] an essential reference point in [the] investigation of what it is man wants and what he defends himself against” (240). Instead, if the ethics of psychoanalysis, as Lacan insists, concerns “an absolute choice” that is “motivated by no good” (240), which means it reaches beyond the ethics of the Symbolic, then it must be valorized as “the ethics of the Real”¹³⁶ precisely because it is motivated by the beautiful. In other words, it is with the function of the beautiful that the ethics of desire in transference bestows the subject the “tragic sense of life,” a sense of lack that creates an opening for traversing the fundamental fantasy without making the life itself falling completely apart into a tragedy. The function of the

¹³⁵ “The splendor of Antigone” is the first section where Lacan unpacks his lecture on the essence of tragedy in relation to the polemics of ethics concerning the psychoanalytic experience; however, Lacan’s references to *Antigone*, the play by Sophocles, appears earlier in *Seminar VII*, specifically in the section on *jouissance* and the function of the beautiful; see pp. 231-40.

¹³⁶ Alenka Zupancic approaches the ethics of psychoanalysis as the ethics of the drive, *qua* the ethics of the Real; for details, see *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan* (2000).

beautiful in the ethics of desire designates a way to life for the subject—it is what I consider to be *the aesthetics of being*, the splendor of the sinthomethics. That is, in my model of the sinthomethics, the ethics of desire must be viewed in light of the aesthetics of being; as such, *aesthetics of being is what represents the Self for the subject*. How so? For transference love speaks to the aesthetics of being because it is a sign (of the One). The sign, as Lacan defines, “represents something for someone,”¹³⁷ whereas the signifier is “that which represents a subject for another signifier” (*Seminar XI* 207; *Seminar XX* 49). Therefore, transference love as a sign, represents “the Self for the subject.” What the ethics of desire *does* for us is precisely this idiosyncratic aesthetics of being, which is itself a *representation of and for* the subject.

To illustrate the aesthetics of being and “the tragic sense of life” in relation to the ethical condition for the *act*, Lacan brings us back in time, to the time of *Antigone*.

II. Tragedy, Aesthetics, the Ethical Act of Being

In this chapter, Lacan’s approaches to literature (or other forms of art) is extremely crucial because the thesis he produces as a result of such a reading is never about the text, but about the Lacanian subject.¹³⁸ In particular, without fully understanding his literary stance, we may fail to grasp the true implications of his arguments in his reading of *Antigone*. This position justifies my decision to pursue transference in relation to the sinthomethics by way of *Seminar VII* and Lacan’s reading of *Antigone* instead of *Seminar XXIII* where Lacan demonstrates Joyce’s

¹³⁷ “This someone,” as Lacan continues to explain, “may be many things, it may be the entire universe, in as much as we have known for some time that information circulates in it, as a negative of entropy. Any node in which signs are concentrated, in so far as they represent something, may be taken for a someone” (*Seminar XI* 207).

¹³⁸ As stated in the previous chapters, when Lacan approaches a literary work, he is “concerned *not* with saying something about the texts themselves, *but merely with using the texts to say something about psychoanalysis*” admitting his aims are “to illustrate a mode of analytic interpretation, and to illustrate psychoanalytic concepts” (Evans 14, emphasis mine).

writing as his *sinthome*. As it may be clear to my reader now, my thesis is concerned primarily with *the ethical condition of transference* (and how it leads to an identification with the *sinthome*) but not so much with *the sinthome that may appear under various guises* (or how exactly we may successfully identify them all). My thesis of the *sinthomethics* also underscores more heavily the *ethical act* (thus the subject's accountability in the act) but not the *jouissance* (that is central to the case of Joyce's writing). With *Antigone*, Lacan is not trying to say something about Antigone but to say something about psychoanalysis. In a similar fashion to all other Lacan's involvement of art or literature, Lacan does not "interpret" the text the same way as a literary critic, nor does he wish to produce a psychoanalytic literary criticism. Quite the contrary, he declares that it is impossible to "interpret" a literary text, if interpretation means an attempt to investigate the intention of the author or its hidden message, which would be the duty of the author, but not of the analyst (Evans 13-14).¹³⁹ To illustrate, at the beginning of *Seminar VII*, Lacan has already gestured that Antigone is, according to many, the epitome of ethics, from Aristotle to Hegel and Goethe (235-36; 243). But he also complains that other scholars have (mis)understood the ethics of Antigone "for the wrong reason" (240) by reading it in terms of the conflicts between discourses (i.e. family versus individual, law versus crime, dignity versus dishonor).¹⁴⁰ It is, thus, for the "right" reason Lacan takes up *Antigone* in the seminar on ethics of psychoanalysis—it is for the sake of "tragedy."

¹³⁹ See Evans in his entry on "art."

¹⁴⁰ Sophocles' play *Antigone* has consistently received critical attention from scholars; it is commonly analyzed and discussed in relation to the framework of ethics, questions of the law (both natural and legal), the function of the chorus, the portray of the gods and divine interventions as narrative strategies, issues concerning love and beauty, Eros and aesthetics. Specifically, Lacan rejects the readings of Aristotle, Hegel, and Goethe (240-43), who approached ethics in *Antigone* from the function of good but not the function of the beautiful. On the contrary, Lacan turns to Kantian ethics (249), considering the beautiful "closer to evil than to the good" (217).

In other words, Sophocles' play *Antigone* (441 B.C.) reveals to us some truth concerning the ethics of desire not simply in relation to Antigone, the heroine, but more so in terms of the *structure* of tragedy itself. As Lacan suggests in *Seminar VII*, the essence of tragedy in *Antigone* comprises of the following three elements: (1.) The splendor of Antigone (catharsis); (2.) The articulation of the play (movement and action); (3.) "Between two deaths" (limited time). Not only would these three elements help delineate the ethics of psychoanalysis as it plays out in the dimension of "tragic sense of life" but more significantly, these three elements are crucial for consolidating the structure of the *sinthomethics*. Following Lacan, I address them one by one. My emphasis on Lacan's methodology here is to also justify my own approach to my chosen text, Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013). The emphasis on the structure is paramount given my analysis by way of the text concerns also not so much with "saying something about the text" but with "what the text shows us about psychoanalysis." Admitting that Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* is undoubtedly a narrative full of traumatic encounters, including the school bully, the looming shadow of suicides, the War (War II), illness (Alzheimer's), natural disasters (tsunami and earthquakes), and the loss of loved one, most readers familiar with the text may not label it as a "tragedy" because of the hope it leaves us. At the end one lives on, with love. However, as I will demonstrate in the second part of this chapter, we find Antigone lurking in the narrative structure of *A Tale for the Time Being*. Before then, let us return to *Antigone*.

The "structure of tragedy" as represented by the genre of play is what Lacan tries to teach us about psychoanalysis, but not about Antigone. Therefore, his commentary on *Antigone* does not focus on the content but on the form: "*Antigone* is a tragedy, and tragedy is in the forefront of our experiences as analysts—something that is confirmed by the Freudian references Freud to

Oedipus Rex as well as to other tragedies” (*Seminar VII* 243).¹⁴¹ With catharsis, which we briefly mentioned earlier in relation to “the beauty effect,” tragedy provides “a means of accomplishing the purgation of the emotions by a pity and fear” structured “at the root of our experience” (244). And it is through this root of our experience that Lacan “has something to say”¹⁴² about *Antigone*, that is, the essence of tragedy. Its essence, simply put, is “the line of sight that defines desire” (247): it is “Antigone in her *unbearable* splendor” and “*the fascinating image* of Antigone herself” (247, emphasis mine) that attracts us. In other words, Antigone embodies an aestheticism that renders desire visible.¹⁴³

Juxtaposing the image of Antigone (as the cause of desire) to the audience (as the effects of pity and fear), Lacan teaches us something about the ethics of psychoanalysis. This specifies Lacan’s position of seeking ethics from Antigone for “the right reason”—which is not for the function of the good but for the function of the beautiful. The splendor, the beauty of Antigone, is “the beam of desire” (248), and *that* is what tragedy is about; “it is in connection with this power of attraction that we should look for the true sense, the true mystery, and true significance of tragedy—in connection with the excitement involved, in connection with the emotions and, in

¹⁴¹ Lacan also clearly states that Antigone’s tragic structure is not unique; hence, what matters here is the structure of tragedy but not the play: “The dimension involved here is not unique to *Antigone*. I could suggest you look in a number of places and you will find something analogous without having to search too hard. The zone defined in that way has a strange function in the tragedy” (*Seminar VII* 248).

¹⁴² I intentionally place the emphasis on the “say” because Lacan does not simply refer to the play simply as *Antigone*; rather, he insists on “the commentary on *Antigone*.” This section in *Seminar VII* is also titled as “The Essence of Tragedy: A Commentary on Sophocles’ *Antigone*” (241-87). I consider this a crucial distinction that Lacan tries to detach his own reading from literary criticism, for it is not. What matters here, is the “comments” on the play, but not so much about the play itself.

¹⁴³ In *Eros and Ethics*, Marc De Kesel presents a detailed discussion of the “radiant” effect of Antigone and the aestheticism it entails; he also opposes ethics vis-à-vis aesthetics by a reading the Antigone as a carrier of the signifier rather as a subject. My position is similar to his in terms of the function of the aesthetic effect in ethics, which is an argument that Lacan himself has made in *Seminar VII* (248); my reading, nonetheless, diverges from his regarding the purpose of sublimation behind such aestheticism. His reading is not uncommon; on the contrary, it speaks to a popular interpretation of reading Antigone from the aspect of the drive, its relation to *Das Ding*, and thus sublimation; see his Chapter 8: “Radiant Antigone” for more details (pp. 205-48).

particular, with the singular emotion that are fear and pity” (247-48). What is ethical about *Antigone* is in the “essence” of tragedy, the effects of catharsis it produces in us. If *Antigone* makes desire visible, it is visible to the “*I/eye*.” That is, *I*, the viewer—the “Other” to the play, to the place and time—am confronted by this tragic sense of life with its unbearable splendor of desire. I argue this is where the ethics of psychoanalysis and the aesthetic of being converge. The ethics of desire and the aesthetic of being must be framed through the “*I/eye*” of the viewer. *I* am the subject, the Other, while *Antigone* is the *a*, the cause of my desire, the agent of the discourse. It is *I* who must act.

After introducing the agent into the play, the next essence of tragedy is “articulation of the play,” which is “the action of the play” (250). Therefore, there must be the Chorus. The Chorus is exactly the “us who must act” on stage, as Lacan explains:

What is a Chorus? You will be told that it’s you yourselves. Or perhaps that it isn’t you. But that’s not the point. Means are involved here, emotional means. In my view, *the Chorus is people who are moved*. [...] The Chorus take care of [your emotions]. The emotional commentary is done for you. The greatest chance for the survival of classical tragedy depends on that. The emotional commentary is done for you. It is just sufficiently silly; it is also not without firmness; it is more or less human.

Therefore, you don’t have to worry; *even if you don’t feel anything, the Chorus will feel in your stead*. (Seminar VII 252, emphasis added)

As we see in Lacan’s explanation of the function of the Chorus, not only that the Chorus assumes a critical role in moving the play forward as part of the main actions within tragedy, but more importantly, they also act and feel on our behalves. If this second essence of tragedy is action, we must take note that it is not the agent, *Antigone*, who produces the real “act” but the Chorus, *qua*

the audience, or “you” the “I/eye,” the one being addressed. This emphasis also corresponds to the “act” in the Analyst’s Discourse, which is the barred subject ($\$$) who must act, transformed itself into an active “lover,” but not the agent (*a*). The Chorus articulates for us *a measure of life*, sees for us *a standard of the beautiful* as we are confronted with “the image” of Antigone; they are *moved and move* for us through the emotion of pity and fear.

With that in mind, before we discuss the last element of tragedy, let me take a detour into addressing my earlier questions: “*What good does such an ethics do for the subject?*” and “*How could the ethics of desire be useful when taken out of the context of psychoanalysis?*” These questions seem urgent now since the ethics of desire is doomed to end in tragedy. If we, however, consider the ethics of desire as an aesthetic of being, then, an ethics as such does more than providing us with a sense of “lack”—the tragic sense of life—but more importantly, it inscribes in us, *a sense a measure, a judgment*, an aesthetic effect that reminds the subject of staying “truthful” to Self, when confronted with the “unbearable image” central to our being. As strange intimacy, the ethics of desire that orients the subject towards the Self, commands us neither through the Law of the Symbolic Father nor in the Language (*Langage*) of the (m)Other, but through the splendor of the beautiful and in the *lalangue*¹⁴⁴ of the intimate stranger. And then, it is from this conjunction of the ethics of desire and the aesthetics of being that we could

¹⁴⁴ In Lacan’s terminology, there are *langage*, *langue*, and *lalangue*, which are three distinctive sites in the system of language. Though the first two may be translated from French into the same English word, under “language”; as Dylan Evans explains, “*langage* refers to the system of language in general, abstracting from all particular languages” whereas “*langue* usually refers to a specific language” (96). From 1971 on, “Lacan coins the term *lalangue* (from the definite article *la* and the noun *langue*) to refer to these non-communicative aspects of language which, by playing on ambiguity and homophony, give rise to a kind of *jouissance* (S20, 126). The term ‘language’ now becomes opposed to *lalangue*. *Lalangue* is like the primary chaotic substrate of polysemy out of which language is constructed, almost as if language is some ordered superstructure sitting on top of this structure: ‘language is without doubt made of *lalangue*. It is an elucubration of knowledge [*savoir*] about *lalangue*’ (S20, 127)” (Evans, 97).

truly appreciate “the beauty” of the “ethical act” in Ruth Ozeki’s *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013), and that is how we find Antigone.

With Antigone, Lacan illustrates the relation to love: “Antigone is the heroine [,] the one who shows the way of the gods. She’s the one, according to the Greek, who is *made for love* rather than for hate” (*Seminar VII* 262, emphasis mine). She herself also declare, “I am *made for love* rather than hate” (263, emphasis mine). Note that she does not declare “I love but I do not hate” but “I am made for love”—but for *whose* love? It is made for *my* love, so she is loved by the Chorus on *my* behalf.¹⁴⁵ Once the audience starts experiencing the catharsis, the purifying effects of pity and fear that is first initiated by Antigone and represented by the Chorus, it signals that we have also begun our own process of transference. How so? As Antigone declares, she is made for love; in that case, our “feelings of pity and fear for her” are our own symptoms of love. “The splendor of Antigone” is the *a*, the agent, *qua* the cause that moves us into the structure of desire. In catharsis, we are confronted with *our own tragic sense of life*, wherein hides the truth concerns our own desire.

The last element involved in the essence of tragedy would be *time*, or more specifically, the final moment of “Antigone between two deaths,” to quote Lacan. It is also this last element that defines the act. In my previous chapter with *Call Me by Your Name*, we see the desire to be One in love is most evident as a desire to be in the same place/space while simultaneously occupying both subject and object position. In this chapter, if Antigone is made for love, “I/eye,” *qua* the lover, must desire to be One with her. In her case, her place/space is also time. Antigone is, in effect, in the “zone” (272; 280; 320): “in a limited zone [...] between life and death” (272). Her place is time, her time becomes place: “From the moment she crosses the entrance to the

¹⁴⁵ For the scene where the Chorus shouts out love to Antigone in response to Creon, See Marc de Kesel on pp. 206, where Roberts Fagles’s translation of the play is cited.

zone between life and death, that is to say, when *what she has already affirmed herself to be* takes on an outward form [...] suspended in the zone between life and death” (280, emphasis mine). And what is it that “she has already affirmed herself to be”? Right at the beginning of the play, Antigone depicts herself as Niobe becoming petrified, saying “I am dead and I desire death” (281); therefore, her time and place collapse into a zone of *Atè* (262-64; 281),¹⁴⁶ the zone of a negative singularity, “the zone between-two-deaths” (320). Lacan explains the term *Atè* as a period of time that is “found in ‘atrocious’,” a period of time in which life is uncertain, and Antigone is thus the living dead, or *both dead and alive*. As it is a time “past” the Symbolic, it is beyond words to describe, beyond meaning as the *sinthome*. *Something* that comes close to the madness. But she is not mad, the Chorus told us that *she knows* very well, like the Delphic oracle, Antigone is attributed with that kind of self-knowledge (273). For the *I/eye*, *qua* the Chorus, Antigone is in the position of the “Subject-Supposed-to-Know.” So when she wants “*I/eye*” to be with her in *Atè*—since she has announced her death at the beginning of the play, “*I/eye*” technically are meeting her in *Atè*, “between-two-deaths”—what she gives, is precisely “the *I/eye*’s” own pity and fear (because she has no pity or fear), structured in the play as the Chorus. “*I/eye*” must “pity and fear” now that “*I/eye*” finds the Self in “a limit zone of time” as its heroine; as Lacan says, “Antigone, whose race is run in the most obvious of ways” (272). And it is precisely because time is limited, “the race is run,” one must *act*.

¹⁴⁶ About Antigone’s *Atè*, a term which Lacan repeats about twenty times in the text, a term he also considers “irreplaceable” (262): “It designates the limit that human life can only briefly cross. [...] Beyond this *Atè*, one can only spend a brief period of time, and that’s where Antigone wants to go. [...] One learns from Antigone’s own mouth testimony on the point she has reached: she literally cannot stand it anymore. Her life is not worth living. She lives with the memory of the intolerable drama of the one whose descendance has just been destroyed in the figures of her two brothers. She lives in the house of Creon; she is subject to his law; and that is something she cannot bear” (263). *Atè*, in my interpretation, refers to the time when one is *both dead and alive*.

As stated, this chapter aims to clarify two of Lacan's terms fundamental for the structure of sinthomethics: ethics, and the act. The ethical polemic unfolds with the questions of "Have you acted in conformity with your desire?" (*Seminar VII* 313) and "the only thing one can be guilty of is giving ground relative to one's desire" (321). Now we see how the two are interlinked in the Lacanian framework: ethics, as an ethics of desire, must designate the relation between desire and action. The act, on the other hand, signals *the choice of action* the subject has made following one's own desire, thus ethics. "Tragedy," according to Lacan, "is an *action*" (265, emphasis mine), and it is an action on account of it being the time of an ethics of desire. Without the limit of time, the act will not be concluded. With the principle of "between two deaths," Lacan hereby underscores the relationship between an ethical act and the time. To comprehend the intricacy of time, subjectivity, and the *act* in the Lacanian framework, we need to turn to Lacan's foundational piece on time, "Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainly" (1945).¹⁴⁷ Specifically in *Seminar XX* when Lacan discusses love and the signifier, he makes a direct reference to this writing (48). As the title suggests, "logical time" is different from our normal conception of time, which is "chronological time." It is logical time because Lacan starts with a "logical problem," a situation involving three prisoners. A prison warden tells them at the beginning, he decided to release one of them (for reason undisclosed). He has five disks of two colors, three white and two black, which he will be attaching to their back. They cannot see their own disk/color nor talk to each other, but they can see the other two. The warden also states that the color distribution is based on logic but not on probability. The first one to deduce his own color will be the one to be discharged, but he must explain how he has come to his conclusion. What matters, therefore, is not only the conclusion but the supporting logic. Let's

¹⁴⁷ See "Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty: A New Sophism" in *Écrits*, pp. 161-75.

look at Lacan's description, as it captures three corresponding modulations of time that culminate in the final "act": "After having contemplated one another for *a certain time*, the three subjects take *a few steps* together, passing side by side through the doorway. Each of them then separately furnishes a similar response [...]" (*Écrits* 162), and these three steps punctuate three modulations of time in the sophism's movement: 1) the instant of the glance, 2) the time for comprehending, and 3) the moment of concluding (167).

The importance of this analysis resides specifically in the way that time, the act, and intersubjectivity are contingent upon each other. To understand these three modulations better and to fully grasp its significance, allow me to examine the prisoner's solution and reasoning in greater details. The following illustrates the shared reasoning among the three as they conclude:

I am a white, and here is how I know it. Since my companions were whites, I thought that, had I been a black, each of them would have been able to infer the following: "If I too were a black, the other would have necessarily realized straight away that he was a white and would have left immediately; therefore I am not a black." And both would have left together, convinced they were whites. As they did nothing of the kind, I must be a white like them. At that, I made for the door to make my conclusion known. (*Écrits* 162)

What is fascinating in these three modulations of time and Lacan's discussion of sophism is that the reasoning demonstrates how the unconscious functions through the intersubjective dynamics, and how the temporal tension grounds the certainty of the "act," and how the act validates the subjective position in the moment of concluding. Most relevant to our discussion is that "*every judgment is essentially an act*" (171, emphasis mine), and "what makes this act so remarkable in the subjective assertion demonstrated by the sophism is that it anticipates its own certainty owing

to the temporal tension with which it is subjectively charged”; “based on this very anticipation, its certainty is verified in a logical precipitation that is determined by the discharge of this tension—so that in the end the conclusion is no longer grounded on anything” (171). The act becomes an intersubjective contingency because, as soon as *one of them* starts to move, *all of them* must not only stop thinking immediately, but each of them must also conclude that, at that very moment, a conclusion is no longer possible.

This analysis of “Logical Time” is central to my reading of Ozeki’s *A Tale for the Time Being* on account that it brings together all the major elements for understanding the structure in the sinthomethics, specifically, the ethical act, unconscious as intersubjectivity, logical time, the aesthetics of being, as well as the “truth” supporting the structure of the narrative. In “Logical Time,” Lacan accentuates that one’s subjectivity is inseparable from its *intersubjective* relation, with the final subjective act introduced by time into the intersubjective dynamics. The three modulations also support how the human subject comes into being with the determination of the “I”: (1.) A man knows what is not a man; (2.) Men recognize themselves among themselves as men; (3.) I declare myself to be a man for fear of being convinced by men that I am not a man” (174). Lacan’s conclusion supports the dimension of time as anticipatory—one anticipates a conclusion for which there are no sufficient reasons. It is only in the act of concluding that it becomes possible to justify *retrospectively* whether the reasoning is sound. The one who does not conclude in time will lose its own ground to start with. Therefore, the “logic” of Lacan’s “logical time” underscores not only the intersubjective dynamics of the unconscious desire but also its function of “anticipating” the subject’s concluding moment when the act is taken as an “absolute choice.” And it is in the “absolute choice” that we again find Antigone, whose race is run, and who has concluded her final *act* that makes her the tragic heroine “at the beginning.”

As with my previous chapter, I consider the sinthomethics as the subject's act of *becoming undone as a subject*—rather than unbecoming one; the process of becoming undone dances around the truth of the Self. Different from the previous chapter, here I take into consideration the element of “(logical) time” for investigating the event of transference through examining the narrative structure of Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*. In my thesis of returning the subject to the Self, “the Self” is not the know-how we already have, but a know-how we strive to make. It is not a pre-existing identity category into which we are born, but a site of constant negotiations of differences within existing identity categories available to us. To give a Self as the way to take on life is an ethical act *par excellence*. This is the ethics of desire that is itself doubled as an aesthetic of being. As stated earlier, the function of the beautiful in the ethics as such designates a way of life for the subject, which is *the aesthetics of being*, the splendor of the sinthomethics. Aesthetics of being is *that which represents the Self for the subject* once transference love produces the sign (of the One). To determine what qualifies as an ethical act is to identify a representation of the Self. This representation is an answer to the question, “*How is a subject possible?*” A subject is possible *for/as* the ethics of desire because it is precisely what such an ethics *does*—it inscribes in us an aesthetics of being that makes representation possible.

In the following case study, I will first return to my model of the sinthomethics, and then I trace the trajectory of desire and ethics in the “acts” of the narratives. If Lacan considers *Antigone* as the epitome of an ethics of psychoanalysis that is itself a tragedy, what I wish to present here is a counterpart of *Antigone* found in *A Tale for the Time Being* as the model of the aesthetics of being that turns itself into a miracle. The miracle, as Lacan mythologizes in *Seminar VIII*, is only possible on the condition of the possible impossibility named love.

III. The Logical Time of Being

When Lacan begins his commentary on *Antigone* regarding ethics and tragedy, he poses a question, followed immediately by an answer: “What does one find in *Antigone*? First of all, one finds Antigone” (*Seminar VII* 250). In spite of its seemingly simplicity, this rhetorical question and its answer underscore the distinction that my thesis attempts to make regarding the subject and the Self. On the one hand, there is a “public discourse” of the subject of *Antigone*; on the other hand, there is “something else other than” *Antigone* that is not yet completely integrated into existing public discourse. In the discourse of *Antigone*, there is an agent, named Antigone. Are the two the same? In what way does it matter—regarding the ethics of desire and aesthetics of being—if they are different? How would it affect the narrative or the structure of discourse if in *Antigone*, one does not find Antigone? These questions become particularly relevant, if we wish to read *A Tale for the Time Being* in the same way that Lacan reads ethics of desire in Sophocles’ *Antigone*. Whereas I intend to read *A Tale for the Time Being* methodologically as how Lacan reads *Antigone*, I do not consider *A Tale for the Time Being* as a tragedy. Rather, the text illustrates the “function of the beautiful” so underscored by. In other words, the text illustrates how the ethics of desire cannot be read independent of an aesthetics of being, which is the main argument I want to drive home for this chapter. To tease out other critical Lacanian concepts for discussing the ethics of psychoanalysis, the (ethical) act, and intersubjectivity in reading *A Tale for the Time Being* with *Antigone* in mind, I begin with the same question proposed by Lacan: “What does one find in *A Tale for the Time Being*?” And to be able to answer “First of all, one finds the Time Being,” we need to find the time being.

A Tale for the Time Being

There's so much to write. Where should I start?

You should start with where you are.

"You Are Here." (Time Being 15)

Similar to other narratives that are not lineal or completely “logical” (that is, conforming to our daily reality principle), it is difficult to do justice to the “beauty” of Ruth Ozeki’s *A Tale for the Time Being* (shortened as “*Time Being*” hereafter) with any attempt of a summary. At least I confess it is a daunting task for me to offer a concise account of the narrative without compromising the complexity, intensity, and witticism of the narrative. The text itself resists categorization; it is difficult to label it with a fixed genre (i.e. novel, non-fiction, autobiography, a detective fiction, trauma narratives, cultural conflicts, return literature, environmentalism or ecosocialism, or even magic realism?). The ending also remains open to “interpretations.” The narrative begins with Naoko Yasutani, a sixteen-year-old girl living in Tokyo, whose diary that “we” are reading. Her narrative is continued by Ruth, who lives on the other side of the Pacific, a small isolated island near the shore of British Columbia, Canada, who discovers, by chance, the diary wrapped in a Hello Kitty bento box, being washed ashore. The backdrop for their two worlds to converge is the tsunami that devastated Japan in 2011. What seems more tragic, however, is the life that Nao has been living. As she announces at the beginning of the narrative, this diary is a protracted suicide note, one that will only be considered complete once she finishes writing the tales of her 104-year-old great grandmother, Jiko, a Zen Buddhist nun. The reasons for Nao’s determination to end her own life are many; to begin, her father, Haruki Yasutani (Haruki #2), lost his job in Silicon Valley and thus relocated the family back to Tokyo from Sunnyvale, California, where Nao grew up. Upon entering high school in Japan, Nao had

been bullied by her peer and even teachers, who hosted her “funeral” and posted its video online. Her father has attempted suicide a few times but failed each time, worsening the family dynamics with each attempt. One day old Jiko shows up at the door, from whom Nao also discovers that her great uncle, Haruki #1, was a kamikaze pilot in World War II, who had left another secret diary for her to discover.

“*So what happens now, Nao?*” Ruth wonders, and with every page turned, “I/eye” wonder with her. The more Ruth discovers from Nao’s diary, from the Internet, from traveling through time, the more “I/eye” know. At the end Ruth writes a letter addressing to Nao, wondering if she has survived the 2011 tsunami, for it took place near Jiko’s temple, to which Nao is most likely to return for Jiko’s memorial after one year. But the letter is where we end—Ruth and “I/eye.” The narrative itself consists of multi layers, containing multiple time beings, multiple interpretations, and multiple possibilities. This is the ideal condition for an event, based on both Badiou’s and Zizek’s theory that I introduced in Chapter One. And we do see that radical changes occur to both Nao and Ruth. As Ruth becomes determined to save Nao, someone she has never met “for real,” Ruth is also saving herself. How so? For Ruth is a writer, but she has lost her own narrative; she is in a writer’s block with her own memoir. Ruth’s mother passed away from Alzheimer’s and her husband’s health deteriorates, too. Despite that Nao’s life seems loaded with traumatic incidents, Ruth’s life is no less saturated with sufferings, “*le mal de vivre*,” which is the truth discovered from Nao’s great uncle’s secret diary—the evil of life.

Before continuing into my model of the sinthomethics and identify the four positions, the impossibility and the impotence for locating the ethics and the act, I will provide a brief account of current scholarship and their approaches to Ozeki’s *Time Being* in order to both accentuate the versatility of the text and to introduce several of its themes that I have not included in the

summary. Published recently in 2013, the text has drawn much attention from diverse perspectives across disciplines, which again highlights its intention to defy the existing convention of setting boundary to an artwork. As the main social and historical context of the text is set in 2011, calling attention to the natural disaster and tragedy of the earthquakes and tsunami in Japan, 9/11 in the United States, several scholars have addressed this social aspect of the narrative, focusing on topics of ecologies, environmentalism, posthumanism, and their relation to ethics.¹⁴⁸ Some studies elaborate on that context in a reading of transnationalism, cosmopolitics, colonialism, trauma, and victimhood.¹⁴⁹ The discourse of trauma and victimhood further extends into a discourse of vulnerability, considering suffering is also a central theme (i.e. Ruth's mother suffers from dementia, Nao and Haruki #1 from bullies, Nao's father from depression).¹⁵⁰ Vulnerability unfolds itself into issues of memory (both cultural and individual), diaspora, identity and subjectivity, including discussions of Asian American acculturation, assimilation, racial melancholia.¹⁵¹ As the text also relies heavily on theory of quantum physics

¹⁴⁸ See Allison Carruth, "Wily Ecologies: Comic Futures for American Environmentalism" in *American Literary History*, 30.1 (2018): 108-33; Michelle N Huang, "Ecologies of Entanglement in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch" in *Journal of Asian American Studies*, 20.1 (2017): 95-117; Petra Fachinger, "Writing the Canadian Pacific Northwest Ecocritically: The Dynamics of Local and Global in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*" in *Canadian Literature*, 232 (2017): 47-64.

¹⁴⁹ See Hsiu-Chuan Lee, "Sharing Worlds through Words: Minor Cosmopolitics in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*" in *Ariel A Review of International English Literature*, 49.1 (2018): 27-52; Claire Gullander-Drolet, "Translational Form in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*" in *Journal of Transnational American Studies*, 9.1 (2018): 293-314; Chris D. Jimenez, "Nuclear Disaster and Global Aesthetics in Gerald Vizenor's *Hiroshima Bugi: Automu 57* and Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*" in *Comparative Literature Studies*, 55.2 (2018): 262-84.

¹⁵⁰ See *Victimhood and Vulnerability in 21st Century*, edited by Jean Michel Ganteau and Susana Onega, New York, NY: Routledge, 2017; Crystal Yin Lie, "'A Temporal Stuttering': Dementia and Disaster in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*" in *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, 13.1 (2019): 39.

¹⁵¹ See Patricia P Chu, *Where I have never been: Migration, Melancholia, and Memory in Asian American Narratives of Return*, Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2019; Heidi M Hahrahan, "'A Mash-Up World': Hybridity and Storytelling in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*" in *Liminality, Hybridity, and American Women's Literature: Thresholds in Women's Writing*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2018: 265-82.

and Buddhism/Zen, specifically in Ruth's "time travel" scenes (as a result of Ruth's determination to save Nao), several analyses examine this topic, as framed in postmodernist, posthumanist and transhumanist narratives.¹⁵² Discussions of the function of literature, besides the quantum machine and Zen, are the most popular ones as they are central to literary studies and philosophical inquiries, ranging from the studies of autobiography (Ruth Ozeki), narratology and narrative devices, the subject of narrative or the literary subject, dynamics between writing and reading, boundary-crossings, to epistemological and ontological investigations.¹⁵³

Coincidentally, it is also the *literary* investigation that leads us back to the main theme of the tale (or at least one of the main themes) pivotal to my argument, which is *writing*. In the scholarly conversation across disciplines, what constitutes a subject in/of/through writing and language has been a central concern and a reoccurring motif. In the case of Ozeki's *Time Being*, writing is specifically the primary condition in which the two subjects encounter. As my brief survey of existing literature validates the multiplicities and the significance of the function of "writing" in Ozeki's *Time Being* (both in terms of the social and the individual), it may appear

¹⁵² See Marlo Starr, "Beyond Machine Dreams: Zen, Cyber-, and Transnational Feminism in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*" in *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*, 13.2 (2016): 99-122; Mojca Kevel, "Postmodern Angst and Zen Buddhism in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*" in *Arts and Humanities*, 12.1 (2018): 56-72, & "Being A Time Being: Who is Who in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*" in *Becoming World Str.* (2017): 19-39, & "The Many Worlds of Being a Time Being: Quantum Mechanics as Narrative Strategies in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*" in *International Conference M@king It New in English Studies*, Str. 15 (2016).

¹⁵³ See Sue Lovell's "Towards a Poetics of Posthumanist Narrative Using Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*" in *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 59.1 (2018): 57-74; Rocio G. Davis, "Fictional Transits and Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*" in *Biography*, 38:1 (2015): 87-103; Mojca Kevel, "A Tale of Being Everything: Literary Subject in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*" in *Brno Studies in English*, 43.2 (2017): 111-25; Rebecca Hausler, "Schoolgirl Sex and Excess: Exploring Narratives of Japanese Girlhood and Compensated Dating in Ruth Ozeki's Novel, 'A Tale for the Time Being'" in *Hecate*, 43.1/2 (2017): 158-70; Guy Beauregard, "On Not Knowing: *A Tale for the Time Being* and the Politics of Imagining Lives after March 11" in *Canadian Literature*, 227 (2015): 96-112; Nicoleta Alexoae-Zagni, "Writing Herself as/in Reading the Others in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*," in *Women's Life Writing and Practice of Reading: She Reads to Write Herself*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2018.

lacking originality if my argument also stresses the role of writing in relation to subjectivity and agency. If, however, my project comes close to a “literary” investigation, it is not to read the *text* literally, but to read *desire* literally. It is to read the text of desire (i.e. desire’s writing), but not the text *around* desire (i.e. writing on desire). Lacan insists that *the reading* of *Antigone* teaches us the paradox of ethics of psychoanalysis, but he does not claim that the text of *Antigone* teaches us the ethics of the character Antigone, or the ethics of the author Sophocles. My contribution to the ongoing conversation regarding Ozeki’s *Time Being*, then, is to propose and demonstrate a new possibility for approaching desire, for presenting an ethics and aesthetics, for reimagining self-love and transference, for bringing about the final breakdown of the boundary between the Self and Other through a Lacanian subject. This is why I start this chapter with an emphasis on Lacan’s *argument about his reading* of *Antigone*—note that it is not his argument *about Antigone*, because his argument is not about *Antigone*, but about psychoanalysis, about desire, about the possibility to re/represent an ethics of desire through an aesthetics revealed in “writing,” which is the trace of the unconscious.

Therefore, if my reading of *Time Being* does highlight the role of writing and literature, it focuses on what this role teaches us about psychoanalytic practices. With that in mind, I can now begin my reading of *A Tale for the Time Being*. The narrative starts with Nao and ends with Ruth, whose time being now. Nao’s writing opens with a “self-introduction”: “My name is Nao, and I am a time being” (3). Ruth’s writing in closing also ends with a “self-introduction”: “You’re my kind of time being, too. Yours, Ruth” (403). *So*, we have found the time being(s), but there are more than one, or even more than two. At first glance, it seems that we are presented with two “time beings,” Nao and Ruth, considering the narrative alternates between the two “Names,” in spite of the two beings are not co-present existence at the same time.

However, the further in we are with the narratives, we become less certain if there are truly only two “time beings.” It seems there are more than two but “three.” Indeed, *there are but three*.

Nao’s narrative is sustained by Jiko’s narrative. Ruth’s narrative is sustained by Nao’s narrative. “My” narrative is sustained by Ruth’s narrative. “Her” being in my time, “her” time in my being. Said otherwise, Nao’s account of herself *re-presents* Jiko’s account to Ruth; Ruth’s account *re-presents* Nao’s account to me; my account *re-presents* Ruth’s account to you. (And I could only “anticipate” that your account would *re-present* mine to another being in another time.) Lacan would call this an intersubjectivity, or, that the unconscious is the discourse of the Other.

As in “Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty,” *there are but three* as well: “there are three of them, but in reality, there are two plus *a*. This two plus *a*, from the standpoint of *a*, can be reduced, not to the two others, but to a One plus *a*” because “[b]etween two, whatever they may be, there is always the One and the Other, the One and the *a*, and the Other cannot in any way be taken as a One” (*Seminar XX* 49). As long as love is a desire to be One, transference love characterizes precisely what happens between “the two plus *a*” which, from the standpoint of *a*,¹⁵⁴ *the two is nothing but One*.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, just as the color discs

¹⁵⁴ In the translator’s note, Fink explains the original text: “The French, *du petit a*, could mean ‘from the standpoint of little a,’ ‘on the basis of little *a*,’ and other things as well” (*Seminar XX* 49).

¹⁵⁵ This logic of the one should also be read in conjunction with Lacan’s theory of intersubjectivity and logical time, as Lacan states earlier, “‘We are but one.’ Everyone knows, of course, that two have never become but one, but nevertheless ‘we are but one.’ The idea of love begins with that. It is truly the crudest way of providing the sexual relationship, that term that manifestly slips away, with its signified. The beginning of wisdom should involve beginning to realize that it is in that respect that old father Freud broke new ground. I myself began with that because it affected me quite a bit myself. It could affect anyone, moreover, couldn’t it, to realize that love, while it is true that it has a relationship with the One, never makes anyone leave himself behind. If that, all of that and nothing but that, is what Freud said by introducing the function of narcissistic love, everyone senses and sensed that the problem is how there can be love for an other. The One everyone talks about all the time is, first of all, a kind of mirage of the One you believe yourself to be. Not to say that that is the whole horizon. There are as many Ones as you like—they are characterized by the fact that none of them resemble any of the others in any way—see the first hypothesis in the *Parmenides*” (*Seminar XX* 48). The last sentence corresponds to the “three” in “Logical Time,” which in the function of the unconscious as a subject, “the Other” exist as long as there are “One plus *a*.”

affixed behind the prisoner's back in "Logical Time," there must be "traces"—or the semblance—that exhibit the gap between the One and the Other, the One and the *a*. On the one hand, this logic of the "the two plus *a*" justifies why writing is key to transference love; it is, to quote Lacan, "insofar as something brutal is played out in writing (*l'écrit*)—namely, the taking as ones of as many ones as we like—that the impasses that are revealed thereby are, by themselves, *a possible means of access to being* for us and a possible reduction of the function of that being in love" (*Seminar XX* 49, emphasis mine). Writing is the key for the subject in love to access to its own being, just as what the writing of Nao and Ruth represents. On the other hand, the logic of "the three" in love also introduces an impasse that is revealed *only* as traces, or as an absence that is made present, since the "grammar"¹⁵⁶ of the subject as the effects of language, is only revealed in writing. As I will soon discuss in the following section, it is with this Lacanian impasse *in and of* writing that I "read, link, and trace" the *aporia* as the impotence in the sinthomethics through *Time Being*.

To tell time and to tell being is to articulate intersubjectivity and desire. To read the articulation of desire is to identify the sinthome in the desiring subject. Desire, in Lacan's framework, is born out of an absence, a constitutive lack, which is secured in reality by the construct of fantasy. Therefore, to read any tale for the time being is to give a presence to the absence. To read *Time Being* for the sinthomethics with presence and absence in mind, the first step is to determine the structural dynamics of intersubjectivity, that is, to determine the "time

¹⁵⁶ I have also quoted this section in the Introduction chapter where I discuss writing and literature for Lacan: "Following the thread of analytic discourse goes in the direction of nothing less than breaking up anew (*rebriser*), inflecting, marking with its own camber—a camber that could not even be sustained as that of lines of force—that which produces the break (*faille*) or discontinuity. Our recourse, in language (*lalangue*), is to that which shatters it (*la brise*). Hence nothing seems to better constitute the horizon of analytic discourse than the use made of the letter by mathematics. The letter reveals in discourse what is called - not by chance or without necessity—grammar. Grammar is that aspect of language that is revealed only in writing (*à l'écrit*)" (*Seminar XX* 44).

and place” of the agent, the Other, and the ethical act. The positionality is pivotal as it delivers different truth and product. The subject (S) approached by the cause of desire (*a*) is the one who assumes the ethical act; therefore, who is the “subject” of the discourse dictates the meaning of the final sign, which affects the ethical meaning of the act and the aesthetics supporting it.

IV. The *Sinthomaporía* of the Time Being

From the perspective of its narrative structure, Ozeki’s *A Tale for the Time Being* consists of four parts, and the appendices section that explains—still in the voice of Ruth the character (not the author)—some relevant concepts and theories that provides more context to the narratives, such as “Zen Moments,” “Quantum Mechanics,” a poem called “Rambling Thoughts,” “Schrodinger’s Cat,” while ending with a suicide note from the daughter of “Hugh Everett,” a quantum theorist. The note from Everett’ daughter, Liz, reads as follows,

Please burn me and DON’T FILE ME ☺. Please sprinkle me in some nice body of water ... or the garbage, maybe that way I’ll end up in the correct parallel universe to meet up w/ Daddy. (418)

Indeed, the novel thus ends with a happy face for death, a resistance to being confined, a quest for “litter-ing,” a wish for a “parallel universe,” along with the appeal for the Name-of-the-Father, or a demand for love. Admitting that neither Liz nor Hugh Everett had actually appeared in the “main” narratives, this “ending” is not at all a betrayal of the main structure of the discourse. On the contrary, I take this “last note” to be a summary that recapitulates all the vital “moments” in the event of transference in *Time Being*. What is included in the note also resonates with the desire of Antigone: a desire to die in order to be with the loved one. On the one hand, I choose to start my analysis with “the end point” in view of this quote being, in effect,

crucial and consistent to the internal structure of the narrative. On the other hand, beginning with the end also signals a traversal back in time through my own account in this analysis, as “I/eye” traces these moments backwards following the logic of the tragedy. As Lacan indicates, what defines the action in tragedy, as revealed in *Antigone*, “is that which spreads itself out in front so that that image may be produced. When analyzing it, we follow an inverse procedure; we study how the image had to be constructed in order to produce the desired effect” (*Seminar VII* 273).

Before I determine the four positions in the sinthomethics, let me return to the last item on the suicide note, “between two worlds,” as I read it also “in parallel” with Antigone’s *Atè*, her limited time zone “between-two-deaths,” where the ethical act is established. The discourse of transference in *Time Being* transpires, literally, *between two worlds*. As mentioned, there are two central voices alternating in continuing the narratives: Nao, and Ruth. Right after an ancient saying from Buddha on “For the Time Being,” the narrative begins from “Nao”:

Hi!

My name is Nao, and I am a time being. Do you know what a time being is?

Well, if you give me a moment, I will tell you.

A time being is someone who lives in time, and that means you, and me, and every one of us who is, or was, or ever will be. As for me, right now I am sitting in a France maid café in Akiba Electricity Town, listening to a sad chanson that is playing sometime in your past, which is also my present, writing this and wondering about you, somewhere in my future. And if you’re reading this, then maybe by now you’re wondering about me, too.

You wonder about me.

I wonder about you.

Who are you and what are you doing?

[...]

Do you have a cat and is she sitting on your lap? Does her forehead smell like cedar trees and fresh sweet air?

Actually, it doesn't matter very much, because by the time you read this, everything will be different, and you will be nowhere in particular, flipping idly through the pages of this book, which happens to be the diary of my last days on earth, wondering if you should keep on reading.

And if you decide not to read any more, hey, no problem, because you're not the one I was waiting for anyway. But if you decide to read on, then, guess what? You're my kind of time being and together we'll make magic! (3-4, emphasis mine)

The above lengthy quote with which the narrative opens assists us in approaching and unraveling the “truth” of desire for the subject in the discourse. In the last paragraph, Nao’s logic follows Lacan’s “Logical time”—if you decided to read, you are the one I was waiting for; if not, later!—the cause is justified only in retrospect. “*Together we’ll make magic*,” so said Lacan about his “Myth of Love” in *Seminar VIII* (52), that one hand reaches for the fruit, and the magic happens only if the other hand emerges from behind the fruit/object and reaches back. Whose hand is the “other”? Would it ever reach back? The answer is, if you are still reading, then the hand is reaching back. As we later learn that Nao speaks to us—or any Other—from another time. The opening “Hi!” we just read is no more than a trace of Nao’s time and her being. The “you/eyes” that are following the traces belong to Ruth, with “I/eye” following her. Ruth is a writer, a Japanese American living on an isolated Canadian island with her husband, Oliver, and a cat, name Schrodinger—the name we just came across in the appendices. Not only Nao’s

writing is a trace, a remainder *a*, Nao's diary is also in disguise, masquerading as Marcel Proust's French oeuvre, *À La Recherche du Temps Perdue*, "in search of its own lost time." As we read Nao's first page with Ruth, where Nao also announces, like Antigone, "her race is run": "the truth is that very soon I'm going to graduate from time" (6), forcing Ruth into the sophism of "Logical Time." Because the other (*a*) "has acted," the subject must act. Ruth, in this case, starts a search of "her own lost time" in order to unravel the truth concerning Nao's "why, how, when," and "if, at all." However, what anticipates Ruth at the finishing line of this race is not the truth of Nao's desire (though Ruth does not know that she knows yet); rather, the final product is an answer to Ruth's search of "(being as) lost time."

Thus far the narrative seems to suggest that Nao is the agent of the story with Ruth the passive receiver of the act, since Nao is the one that "wonders about [the Other]" and asking us to "wonder about [Nao]." However, contrary to what appears as "the obvious," in the Analyst's Discourse, if Nao is the agent (*a*), then she cannot be the subject of the act, since it is the subject (*S*) that acts *in response*. Consequently, it is Ruth who assumes the ethical act in the narrative and demonstrates an ethics of desire that is inseparable from an aesthetics of being, which only "emerges" as the cause when we reap its effects. I situate Ruth's side of the time being as the *sinthomethics* through whose account the event of transference will be examined. It is Ruth that, by Nao, discovers the truth of her own desire and through a transference in time, across the temporal confinements, eventually becomes "a time being." In *Time Being*, two intimate strangers never cross paths in reality, yet the strange intimacy penetrates through the splitting moment of their own singularity, between the *time* of the subject and the *being* of the Self.

Four Positions and Four Terms: "Antigone Between Two Deaths"

$$\frac{a}{S_2} \rightarrow \frac{\$}{S_1} \quad \frac{\text{agent}}{\text{truth}} \rightarrow // \frac{\text{other}}{\text{product}}$$

In Chapter One, I have explained that in Lacan’s Four Discourses, the Master’s Discourse¹⁵⁷ concerns domination and subjection (i.e. between the Master and the slave); the Analyst’s Discourse, quite the opposite, is about reversing that power structure. Being the “flip side” of the Master’s Discourse, the Analyst’s Discourse “deploys the power of the cause of desire in order to bring about a reconfiguration of the analysand’s desire” (Fink, *Lacanian Subject* 129). It should not be dismissed as simply one discourse among the four; rather, it deserves our attention for it “allows us to under the functioning of different discourses in a unique way” (Fink, *Lacanian Subject* 129). It is unique because the *objet a* (a) is the agent. When the cause of desire dominates the discourse, it means that the product of this discourse is the symptom of the subject, produced by the position of the Other as a result of jouissance. It also implies the symptom here is doubled as the Master-Signifier. As a product *and loss*, it mandates the subject to *act* as a response, either to seek another Master-Signifier or to identify with the symptom, “to bring such master signifiers into relation with other signifiers, that is, *do dialectize the master signifiers it produces*” (Fink, *Lacanian Subject* 135, emphasis mine). That is, the Analyst’s Discourse offers the possibility for the subject to embrace changes in its own relation to desire and jouissance. Considering these main features of the Analyst’s Discourse, I present the four position as following:

$$\frac{S_1}{\$} \rightarrow \frac{S_2}{a}$$

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The Master’s Discourse

Jiko	Nao	Ruth	The will to live: “writing”
TRUTH	AGENT	OTHER	PRODUCT/LOSS
S2 (Knowledge)	<i>a</i> (cause of desire)	Œ (subject)	S1 (Master-Signifier)

In *Time Being*, the one that initiates the discourse is Nao; therefore, Nao is the **agent**. If we consider from the perspective of “reality,” it also stays true. Throughout the narrative, Nao remains a “voice,” a phantasmatic existence, the object of fantasy without a body but a will to jouissance (*a*). She is the cause of desire, which triggers Ruth’s series of actions in the discourse; yet, Ruth is not the one that motivates Nao’s action. If we consider her role as that of *Antigone*, she is also the one who, at the beginning of the tale, declares “I am dead and I desire death,” an announcement that immediately situates her time zone in “between two deaths.” She is the agent that sets us time and invites “I/eye” to move, to respond, and to *act*. As we read on, she is also the one that gifts us the effects of catharsis, pity and fear, with her accounts of all sorts of traumatic experiences (bully, prostitution, suicidal thoughts, and the loss of her beloved, etc.). Nao is also the one that initiates the entire desiring process in the discourse, not only in Ruth, but also in us, the viewer.

Following that logic, Ruth is in the position of the **Other**. As a novelist, a writer “for a living,” Ruth is suffering from a writer’s block; hence, she becomes literally the “barred” subject (**Œ**), the subject in lack. Structurally speaking, Ruth is the subject to be held accountable for the final product/loss in the discourse. In addition to the fact that Nao sets the discourse in motion, it is Ruth who “delivers” the last word (prior to the death note in the appendices) of the discourse. In the “Epilogue,” Ruth writes a “letter” to Nao:

You wonder about me.

I wonder about you.

Who are you and what are you doing?

[...]

Whoever you are, I know you are writing.

[...]

I don't really know why I'm writing this. I know I can't find you if you don't want to be found. And I know you'll be found if you want to be.

In your diary, you quoted old Jiko saying something about not-knowing, how not-knowing is the most intimate way, or did I just dream that? Anyway, I've been thinking about this a lot, and I think maybe it's true, even though I don't really like uncertainty. I'd much rather *know*, but then again, not-knowing keeps all the possibilities open. It keeps all the worlds alive.

But having said this, I also just want to say that if you ever change your mind and decide you would like to be found, I'll be waiting. Because I really would like to meet you sometime. You're my kind of time being, too.

Yours,

Ruth

P.S. I do have a cat, and he's sitting on my lap, and his forehead smell like cedar trees and fresh sweet air. How did you know? (402-3)

It would be difficult to overlook the structural similarities between Ruth's concluding letter and Nao's opening remark. This final product, while it is physically represented as a piece of writing, also symbolizes the major transformation in Ruth's subjectivity, or the "eruption" of the

subjective discourse, which is also known as the true consequences attached to the *act*.¹⁵⁸ It represents both an ethical *act* and a form of her aesthetic of being, responding to her own writer's block. Therefore, Ruth's "writer's block," or her inability to produce writing, is her symptom, the symptom that she needs to "act" and from which set herself free. The final product, *qua* the **Master-Signifier** (S1), is related to one's symptoms. In *Time Being*, it is related to the being of Ruth. As a writer, S1 could be interpreted as writing; however, this writing is also symbolic, since the symptom is metaphor, it is also a message that needs to be interpreted. As we could tell from the narrative, writing for Ruth, is a way *of* and *to* life. She is stuck with writing her own life; once confronted by Nao, as *Antigone* who confronts us with our fear, purging our emotions through pity and fear. From the quote above, she is also the one who desires to know—as a barred subject who is searching for the truth of her own desire. She also considers Nao as someone that knows; in other words, for Ruth, Nao is in the position of "The-Subject-Supposed-to-Know" concerning the truth of Ruth's own desire. That is, a desire to be, or the will to *live*.

As mentioned earlier, there must be "three" in the (logical) time of intersubjectivity; in *Time Being*, the third of "two plus *a*" in love is Jiko. The word "Jiko, 自我" in Japanese means "the Self," and it is Jiko who "re-presents" the will to live in her final writing—"生 Five strokes. Sei. Ikiru. To Live" (362)—that "Nao has" all this time without being able to "represent" it; as she writes to Ruth, "others disagreed, claiming that writing *life* at the moment of death meant that she understood that life and death were one, and so she was fully enlightened and freed from duality. But the fact is, nobody understood what she really meant except me and my dad, and we weren't saying" (366). Note that Ruth's letter ends with a question: "How do you know?", which

¹⁵⁸ See Slavoj Žižek's chapter on "Why Is Suicide the Only Successful Act?" in *Enjoy Your Symptom*, pp. 31-46.

happens to be a fundamental question the analysand has for the analyst, or the subject has regarding its cause of desire. The question directed at the analyst's **knowledge (S2)**—"How do you know?" and "What do you know?"—is also the engine of the Analyst's Discourse. The knowledge is the engine for the discourse because of its place, which is the position of **truth**. Keep in mind that this truth position is what motivates and sustains the agent, which is Nao. In the narrative, it is very clear who is the truth *and* knowledge that sustains Nao's tale, time, and being—Jiko. As Nao writes, "The reason I decided to write about [Jiko] in *À la recherche du temps perdue* is because she is the only person I know who really understands time (24). Jiko understands time, and she understands life and being. As the knowledge here refers to unconscious knowledge, in the Analyst's Discourse, this knowledge assumes a double function, as I have previously discussed in greater details in Chapter Two. For the analysand/barred subject, it is what the subject does not know that it knows, whereas for the analyst/*a*, it is the secret that the analyst knows what the analysand does not know, and the analyst also knows that itself also does not have what the analysand wants in relation to desire. That is, the "Subject-Supposed-to-Know" knows that *a* does not have the knowledge, because the answer is knowable only for the analysand. Nao does not know that she knows about life, about time, and about being, and neither does Ruth. This is why Jiko, as the one who sits in the truth position and who also doubles as the site of knowledge, produces the Master-Signifier for both of them before she leaves—that is, "生"—to live, said Jiko, "For now" and "for the time being" (362).

From the Impotence of Being to Aporia: Both Dead and Alive, No Longer and not Yet

Now that we have determined the four positions in the discourse, we can take a step further into my model of the sinthomethics:

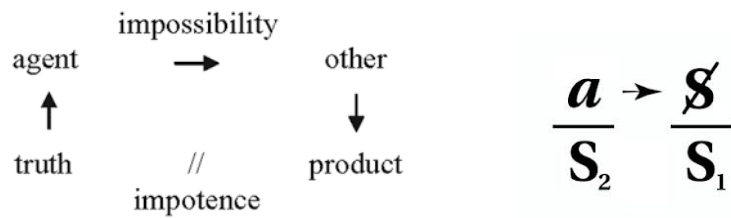
My Model: the Structure of Unconscious Intimacy

$$\frac{\text{The impossibility of the sexual relationship} \approx \text{Love as desire}}{\text{[the Self as the Signifier (S)]}}$$

$$\frac{\text{The impotence of Being} \approx \text{Knowledge for orientation}}{\text{[the subject as the signified (s)]}}$$

The Sign of the One [Transference Love] $\cong S/s \cong \textit{Sinth\^omethics}$

As stated earlier in Chapter One, this unconscious intimacy is constructed upon the Analyst’s Discourse. Therefore, it should not be read on its own; rather, it functions as an extension that expands the interpretation of transference love. According to Lacan, in the Analyst’s Discourse there are two major “barriers”; on top between the agent and the Other, there is the “impossibility.” Underneath the bars, between the truth and the product, there is the “impotence.” There is impossibility because “there is no such a thing as a sexual relation,” which suggests an impossibility for true communication between the agent and the Other. However, as I have demonstrated in Chapter One, I attribute transference to the impossibility in my model of the *sinthomethics*, considering that Lacan also admits that “love is the impossible” (*Seminar XX*). As transference is what takes place between the subject and the agent, and Lacan also says that “love is the sign of the One that is changing discourses” (*Seminar XX 16*). In order to complete the “sign” in this structure, we also need to identify the impotence.



The impotence exists between the product and the truth position; Lacan suggests the impotence for describing the futility of that which is produced at the end of the discourse. It is “impotent” because the product represents a “loss” for the Other ($\$$, the subject), and it also does not loop back to truth (S2, knowledge). This is why I equate it to “the impotence of Being,” for it describes a sense of loss in the subject’s knowledge, *qua* “know-how,” for navigating through the discourse. In the previous chapter, the impotence of Being is related to the subject’s sense of orientation through space, which is why I read it alongside the notion of abjection.

In this chapter, however, the impotence of Being is embedded in the subject’s ability to navigate through time and to move forward with time; therefore, I connect this “impotence” to the concept of aporia, which refers to an impasse or a contradiction in our thought system. Aporia and the aporetic, as defined by Julian Wolfreys, is a word often associated with Jacques Derrida. Cross-referencing Derrida’s theory on writing and its “effects of *différance*,” Wolfreys defines the term as “the experience of its excess [which] is figured in the *undecidable in meaning*, whereby contrary to the limits of logic, a concept is shown to be identifiable as being disturbed internally, on the one hand, *as neither this nor that*, while, on the other hand, *as both this and that*” (Wolfreys, 10). The focus on the effects of writing that simultaneously extend to both “neither/nor” and “both/and” is useful for reading Lacan’s assertions that “aporia” describes “without resources” (*Seminar VIII* 208) and that **to love** is “to give what one does not have” (158-59), thus making every subject of love an “aporetic,” not having what it is giving. With that said, Derrida’s application of the term ranges quite broadly, all of which could be summed up as paradoxes, or “likely impossibilities” (*Margins of Philosophy* 230). In *Aporias* (1993), the term becomes the lens through which Derrida examines the notion of “**death**,” specifically its relation

to one's being: "Is my death possible? Can we understand this question? Can I, myself, pose it?" (21). In both cases of *Antigone* and *Time Being*, death is also in question.

As an aporia, death, as time, becomes a *Real* condition that potentializes the event of love and potentiates the subject. In *Margins of Philosophy* (1982), Derrida names time as this "impossible possibility" (55). To illustrate, he begins with stating that "time is that which 'is not'" (39), its aporia involving being thought of in terms of its divisibility (40). The essence, or the element of time is the "*nun*":

the *nun*, which is most often translated as *instant*, but which functions in Greek like our word, 'now' (*maintenant*). The *nun* is the form from which time cannot ever depart, the form in which it cannot be given; and yet the *nun*, in a certain sense, is not. If one thinks time on the basis of the now, one must conclude that it is not. The now is given simultaneously as that which is *no longer* and as that which is *not yet*. It is what it is not, and is not what it is.

[...] Thereby time is *composed* of nonbeings. Now, that which bears within it a certain *no-thing*, that which accommodates nonbeingness, cannot participate in presence, in substance, in *beingness* itself (*ousia*). (39-40)

And here, what I have previously referred to as "paradox of the present nows" becomes lucid. Jiko is indeed the *nun*; therefore, Jiko is the third "person" or "time being" (in either Derrida's or Lacan's terms), in the discourse. What, then, does Derrida mean in stating that the now is either *no longer* or *not yet*, and that what *is* is nonbeing or *no-thing*? Therein lies the "aporia" or "absurdity" of time, which must be addressed based on its measure:

Time is divisible into parts, and yet none of its parts, no now, is *in the present*. [...] The *nun*, the element of time, in this sense is not in itself temporal. It is temporal only in

becoming temporal, that is, in ceasing to be, in passing over to no-thingness in the form of being-past or being-future. [...] Time is what overtakes this nucleus, in affecting [the now] with no-thing. But in order to be, in order to be a being, [the now] must not be affected by time, it must not become (past or future). (*Margins of Philosophy* 40)

The emphasis on the “not become” comes very close to my argument in the previous chapter regarding the subject in the transference, in turning itself from the beloved into the lover, is an *act of becoming undone*. As Derrida continues,

To participate in beingness, in *ousia*, therefore is to participate in being-present, in the presence of the present, or, if you will, in presentness. Beings are what *is*. [...] The privilege of the third person present of the indicative here yields all its historical significance (*sic*).¹⁵⁹ [...] And later it will be likewise for the form of presence that *consciousness* itself is. (40)

Consider this: if we take each moment in time as a singular “now,” then all these “nows” cannot exist “at the same time” or there would not be an end to now, and time would no longer remain “time” but “time-less.” Nevertheless, if we set a limit to each now (thus making them divisible), then the now is not immediate or “present.” As Derrida elaborates, “The current now is not time, because it is present; time is not (a being) to the extent that is is not (present)” (50). This is my attempt to give a preliminary description of Derrida’s theory of the aporia of the present-nows. As my main theoretical framework is with Lacan and psychoanalysis, I am only involving Derrida’s term, aporia, to facilitate my reading of the sense of conflicts regarding the tension between “being” and now, between presence and absence, so as to clarify the aesthetics of being through the effects of writing and *representation* in the Lacanian sense.

¹⁵⁹ In the translator’s note, “Heidegger underlines, from another point of view, the historical dominance of the third person of the present indicative of the verb *to be*” (Alan Bass, 40).

Therefore, taking into consideration both Lacan and Derrida's notion of love (possible impossibility) and time (impossible possibility), I incorporate the term *aporia* in my reading to capture the temporal disorientation, undecidability or uncertainty of the subject while navigating through the discourse. In both *A Tale for The Time Being* and *Antigone*, time assumes a central role. In *The Time Being*, the impotence of knowledge is related to time, or to be more precise, about "time being," or "being in time." Nevertheless, as suggested in the "Logical Time," time is not simply the limit but the condition of infinite possibility. Without the final moment of concluding, our pre-assumed subjectivity will not be confirmed and validated. The limits of time provide the necessary condition for the act to occur. We see how Ruth "travels through time" and leaves her traces (Haruki #1's letter) in Nao's moment being, thus reverting the "past" that is also "the future." Though not completely identical, in *Antigone* we observe a similar "logical time" sustaining the movement and action; it is because she is in the zone of "between two deaths," every impossibility (in the Symbolic register) becomes possible (in the Real). Whether it is to exist "between two deaths" or "to be both dead and alive," these are the aporias that, by definition, (ob)struct(ur)ing the movement in the Analyst's Discourse. Precisely because they become the impossible possibility in both narratives, we see how the ethical act is complete as the impasse being traversed.

In addition to Nao, who is "between two deaths" and thus could be considered as an "aporetic," Ruth is also "not able to move forward" as a time being. It is not a coincidence that Ruth is having a writer's block as she is writing a "memoir that she'd been working on for close to a decade" (31). In her section, we sense the "absence of time," which describes the eternal moment in which Ruth is caught. Her life in a way could be described as "peaceful," yet it could also be considered as "motionless." Situated in this context, Ruth becomes "an aporetic," not

being able to move ahead in her own being and time. Ruth's mother, Masako, suffers from Alzheimer's until her death; Ruth moves from New York to a small island, "Whaletown" in Canada partly for her husband, Oliver's health, but mostly for her mother; after her mother's death, she also starts to forget things easily, which is a sign of her lost touch of the reality, or becoming "aporetic" about her own being. She fears of forgetting about her mother, which is why in Ruth's sections of the narrative, her memories of her mother "forgetting" and "repeating" herself are a recurring theme. Since she cannot "let go of" the time with her mother, Ruth's mourning has become melancholia. In melancholia, Ruth's time is fixated in the time of her lost object—she becomes the lost time herself. It is not that she is unaware of her mother's death; rather, it is her knowledge of her mother's death that conflicts with Ruth's desire. Aporia, thus, describes these moments "of impasses in thoughts" when one's knowledge fails to produce changes in the subject *and the subject is aware of such failure*. In other words, aporia is also in the tragic sense of life described by Lacan in *Seminar VII* for the tragedy emerges when our action fails to catch up with our desire. The aporetic, as the consequence, is caught up "in between" where the subject ceases to be—for the time being.

Impossibility as Love: ~~The Woman Does Not Exist~~

In the model of the sinthomethics, impossibility of love is that which exists in lieu of the "non-relationship" between the agent and the Other. Contrary to the undertone of pessimism (love as a cover-up, a stand-in) of human relation, my reading of *The Time Being* reads transference as truly the impossibility that *completes* the "relation" between Nao and Ruth. That is, if we consider the three as three "nows," then the impossibility of love here is a Real contingency of the impotence of Being in relation to knowledge. It is not knowing how each

present/presence relates, or, not knowing how to make the sign of the One out of the asynchronous “two plus *a*” which always includes an excess. The impotence of Being, regarding the “three in love”—in this text, Ruth, Nao, and *Jiko*—the “other-Other” in this equation either does not exist or *ceases to exist*, though each being does, as the unconscious, *in-sist* (in a similar to the logic that Derrida conceives the aporia of each now being present “at the same time”). It comes very close to the impossibility of love in this discourse. The impossibility between Nao and Ruth not only symbolizes a “virtual” relationship but bridges two worlds, the worlds that share neither the same time nor place (and the impotence thereof). Because the impossibility is in close proximity to the impotence, transference love in the discourse truly becomes the “ethical act”, an act of ethics that does not simply fall upon Ruth or Nao; rather, the subject must commit to the act, however *impossible* or *impotent* it may seem, like the pure desire of Antigone.

In *Ethics of the Real* (2000), Alenka Zupancic extends this Lacanian reading to *Hamlet*, stating that when Hamlet commits two crimes—the crime of Claudius and the crime of his own father—he not only wanders “between two deaths” but also “between two worlds” (184). It is in this argument of “between two worlds” (which moves beyond “between two deaths”) that I situate my sinthomethics in discourse of *Time Being*. Ruth, symbolically speaking, lives in “death,” like a ghost in the society: she lives on a secluded island; as a writer, she stops writing (blocked); she loses track of time; “We’re nothing; We’re barely here at all” (59). She embodies an absence, a subject of lack; and this lack is introduced by her (m)Other since the day she was named “Ruth”:

Her own name, Ruth, had often functioned like an omen, casting a complex shadow forward across her life. The word *ruth* is derived from the Middle English *rue*, meaning remorse or regret. Ruth’s Japanese mother wasn’t thinking of the English etymology

when she chose the name, nor did she intend to curse her daughter with it—Ruth was simply the name of an old family friend. But even so, Ruth often felt oppressed by the sense of her name, and not just in English. In Japanese, the name was equally problematic. Japanese people can't pronounce "r" or "th." In Japanese, Ruth is either pronounced *rutsu*, meaning "roots," or *rusu*, meaning "not at home" or "absent." (59)

Between Japanese *rusu* and the English *rue*, Ruth is trapped in her own absence, looking for a place called home. In her account, she constantly confesses a feeling of homelessness, a sense of nostalgia; for instance, as Ruth first practices *Zazen*, she asks herself: "How could this be her mind awakening? It felt like boredom. It felt like what happened when the power went out. But Nao was right. It also felt like home, and she wasn't sure she liked it" (184). Ruth lives in, survived on the power that constantly goes out, and now is the home that she isn't sure if she likes. As a time being, she is also in between two deaths—"My whole life is a nap. I need to wake up"; "Her mind was her power [;] she wanted her mind back" (185). Yet different from *Antigone* or *Hamlet*, Ruth does not know what she truly wants, that is, she has not yet traversed the fantasy nor recognized the truth concerning her own desire. Not until Nao.

Nao is more than "a now" or "any now" to Ruth because, with Nao, here comes Jiko, "the Self." Let us not forget what Lacan says about "two plus *a*" in transference love: "Between the two, whatever they may be, there is always the One and the Other, the One and the *a*, and the Other cannot in any way be taken as a One" (*Seminar XX* 49). Jiko, in this light, is "between the two," the an-Other that cannot in any way be taken as a One, in other words, the excess. As Lacan suggests, the third is "as many as you like," meaning that besides the agent (*a*) and the Other (subject), everything else could be summed up as the "third." This also holds true for Jiko, since it is through Jiko, that *everything or everyone else that matters* is "linked," including

Haruki #1 and Haruki #2, *other than* Nao and Ruth. And this “whatever they may be” links, reads, and leaves its traces *all through writing*. As Lacan insists, that which writing unveils as the effects of language is grammar. How, then, should we read this “grammar” from all the intersubjective relation in *Time Being*?

If grammar dictates certain aspect of the being in order to “communicate” itself with an Other, then this grammar should designate certain codes of ethics. And if grammar is the aspect of language which articulates the subject, then this grammar must also rule desire. Since the ethics of desire, as I discussed in relation to Lacan’s reading of *Antigone*, is inscribed in the context of an aesthetics of being, my argument that writing is the site that reveals a grammar *that is the aesthetics of being* is now justified. It is especially true when factoring in Lacan’s definition of “a sign” as that “it is not a sign of something, but of an effect” that further represents something for someone (*Seminar XX* 49; *Seminar XI* 207). This grammar, the aesthetics of being, is therefore *that which represents the Self to the subject*, distinguished from the signifier, which “represents a subject to another signifier” (49). The Self, as in *Antigone*, is *Das Ding*, the “Thing” of the real, the point from which sublimation and catharsis derive. This is why the phrase, “le mal de vivre” (214; 219; 220; 315)—the evil of living, the sorrow of life—constantly appears in the narratives of *Time Being* through different subjects. When Nao first encounters the “ghost” of her great uncle, Haruki #1, the is the chanson he was humming. As mentioned earlier, in Lacan we find another “mal” which is *jouissance*. As the French word includes both meanings of “evil” and “suffering” while simultaneously denoting “enjoyment” and “pleasure,” *jouissance* is about “pleasure in pain.” What would seem more appropriate to describe “le mal de vivre” than the imperative of *jouissance*? If we think of *jouissance* with *Antigone* in mind, then, to choose *jouissance* is to opt for “le mal”—that is, to live for the

suffering or the evil. Yet, that is *only when* the evil is that which opposes to the good. Once we choose to live for *jouissance*, we must not stop there, since *jouissance* in the position of S1, the Master-Signifier, is “idiotic” because it “stops not being written” (*Seminar XX 94*).¹⁶⁰ To continue to *live* as opposed to just *be*, one must transform “*le mal*” into the beautiful, which is the function of *writing* in the ethics of desire.

Writing out of “*le mal du vivre*” into “the will to live”—*this* is the aesthetics of being when the subject *acts* in conformity with an ethics of desire. In the sinthomethics, as the result of the transference love, the subject is confronted with the truth of one’s own desire, “the Self”—like Hamlet or Antigone—to be or not to be? In other words, *are you dare to be the Self in giving up on being the subject?* This question is the Last Judgment of desire *qua* ethics. As for *how* one answers, therein lies the aesthetics of being. To live, to be, and to suffer “*le mal du vivre*,” that is the *knowledge* Jiko (and/or Haruki #1) holds in the truth position, and it is final product with which Ruth has to live. Yet it is also the loss of Nao, as she chooses to become “無, Mu-Mu” (382) and “(無有, “Muyu is the new yu” (383)—nonebeing as her new being—at the end of the discourse. The *aporia* of being a now, just as Jiko. Jiko (and *everyone else through her*), Nao, and Ruth are thus, in Derrida’s terms, the “possible-impossible” *aporia* of the present-nows. If taking into account Derrida’s *aporia* of nows in relation to the aesthetics of being: “Being is nontime, time is nonbeing insofar as being already, secretly has been as present, and beingness (*ousia*) as presence” (*Margins of Philosophy* 51), then, Jiko and Nao also represent the “lost time” for which Ruth is searching, as she found in *À La Recherche du Temps Perdue* by now/Nao. In the beginning of the narrative, Jiko seems timeless—“I’ve always been here as far

¹⁶⁰ S1, the Master-Signifier, is that which “stops not being written” because it is an empty signifier that points nothing but to itself. It is what “clogs up” the signifying chain.

as I remember” (18)—just as Ruth. At the end, Jiko, just like Nao who declares at the beginning about the “truth” of her Self, “drop[s] out of time. Time out. Exit[ing her] existence” (7).

Different ending, same *act*. Time is either too much or too little, too early or too late. To write one’s being with an aesthetics is an act of ethics that *re-presents* the Self for the subject *for the time being*, and for the subject faithfully, as in an event.

The Sign of the One, Sinthomethics as the “Logical Time” of Intersubjectivity

It is not until Nao’s writing, *qua the aesthetics of being*, comes into Ruth’s absence, that Ruth’s time starts to move again. Nao’s writing is the *a*, the cause of desire, in the Analyst’s discourse, and Nao’s “traces” assume the function of the Analyst, forcing Ruth to recognize the truth of her own desire. Transference love is, therefore, the impossibility *par excellence* between Nao and Ruth, since neither of their existence is situated in the same temporal or spatial dimension. Yet, since the agent (*a*) describes a function rather than a real “body,” Ruth, at the end of the discourse, is thus able to achieve an ethical act through her transference love for Nao. As mentioned earlier, “love is the sign that one is changing discourses” (*Seminar XX* 16) in the sinthomethics.¹⁶¹ Where, then, is the one? It is in final letter, and it is also in “now” in the

¹⁶¹ It may be useful to bring attention to what Lacan says about the sign specifically “in what respect the sign can be distinguished from the signifier” in *Seminar XX*: “The signifier [...] is characterized by the fact that it represents a subject to another signifier. What is involved in the sign? The cosmic theory of knowledge or world view has always made a big deal of the famous example of smoke that cannot exist without fire. So why shouldn’t I put forward what I think about it? Smoke can just as easily be the sign of a smoker. And, in essence, it always is. There is no smoke that is not a sign of a smoker. Everyone knows that, if you see smoke when you approach a deserted island, you immediately say to yourself that there is a good chance there is someone there who knows how to make fire. Until things change considerably, it will be another man. Thus, a sign is not the sign of some thing, but of an effect that is what is presumed as such by a functioning of the signifier. That effect is what Freud teaches us about, and it is the starting point of analytic discourse, namely, the subject. The subject is nothing other than what slides in a chain of signifiers, whether he knows which signifier he is the effect of or not. That effect—the subject—is the intermediary effect between what characterizes a signifier and another signifier, namely, the fact that each of them, each of them is an element. We know of no other basis by which the One may have been introduced into the world if not by the signifier as such, that is, the

presence of Ruth's own being. There are a few "signs" that signal "the one" is changing Ruth's discourse, and they represent her ethical "acts": for instance, when Ruth traverses back in time, going through the impotence of knowledge. In her being in "Nao's time" (346-55), Ruth performs two acts, one, she talks to Nao's father, Haruki #2, preventing him from his suicide attempt; second, she "restores" the secret journal of Haruki #1 in Jiko's temple for Nao to discover. Following Lacan, I read these two "acts" symbolically yet literally; they are the "necessity" for Ruth to recognize her own truth. In the first "primal scene," Ruth re-establishes the Name-of-the-Father, which is missing from her Self, by salvaging Haruki #2 from death. In the second scene of "logical time," Ruth introduces the truth by leaving the writing, *as the will to live* in Nao's time. That means she "restores" in her now/presence, both the writing as an object and the writing as a symptom, a metaphor of life, a will to live, which she stops producing.

The second sign, quite literally, is in the changes in the discourse or narratives (374-81). In Ruth's conversation with her friend, Muriel, she tells her friend that she "is not able" to finish Nao's diary because the ending keeps "changing" and "receding" (375). Her friend presents two possible interpretations, which actually support a Lacanian/psychoanalytical reading. The first theory is a "reverse writer's block":

"What you're describing is interesting," Muriel said, twisting the end of her braid around her finger. "The reader confronting the blank page. It's like writer's block, only in reverse."

signifier insofar as we learn to separate it from its meaning effects. In love what is aimed at is the subject, the subject as such, insofar as he is presumed in an articulated sentence, in something that is organized or can be organized on the basis of a whole life. A subject, as such, doesn't have much to do with jouissance. But, on the other hand, his sign is capable of arousing desire. Therein lies the mainspring of love" (*Seminar XX* 49-50).

Ruth thought about this. “You mean, as her reader, I’m blocked, and so her words disappear? I don’t like that. Besides, it doesn’t make any sense.”

“Hard to say. Agency is a tricky business. What was she writing about when the pages went blank?”

“She’d just caught up with herself. With the *now* of her story [...]. (375)

The other one is on the side of Ruth, as Muriel suggests:

“Well, it’s akin to my reader’s block theory. That it’s your doing. It’s not about Nao’s now. It’s about yours. You haven’t caught up with yourself yet, the now of *your* story, and you can’t reach her ending until you do.”

Ruth thought about this. “You’re right,” she said. “I don’t like it. I don’t like having that much agency over someone else’s narrative.”

Muriel laughed. “That’s a fine way for a novelist to talk!”

“I’m not a—” Ruth started to say, when Oliver interrupted. (377)

As Muriel suggests, Ruth has not yet “caught up with herself.” In Ruth’s responses to both theories, her problem is that “she does not like having that much agency”—either in Nao’s “presence” or in Ruth’s, which is why she remains an “absence” in her own life, as fated by her name. What then, is her act in this scene? It is by *saving the cat—that is both dead and alive* (379-81). Pesto, or to be more accurate, “Schrödinger’s cat,” has been missing, and reappeared at the end of this dialogue. Initially Oliver hesitates to save the cat, considering the vet is expensive and far, and it is “in town.” Ruth insists and, and the cat has “come back from the dead” (379), as in Ruth’s own words. The cat, being named “Schrödinger,” has a symbolic function in Ruth’s presence. As Ruth includes in the appendices to the novel (as Appendix E, which is also the longest appendix), “Schrödinger’s cat” is a thought experiment in quantum physics; simply put,

it represents an aporetic existence that, before the box is open, the cat in the box is *both dead and alive*: “However, *before* you open the box to measure it, the cat’s state must be smeared and multiple, like the blurred tiger. Due to the quantum principles of entanglement and superposition, until you observe it, the cat must be both dead and alive, *at the same time*” (414, emphasis original). Interestingly, Ruth’s emphasis is not on “both dead and alive” but on “before” and “*at the same time.*” For Ruth, or in Ruth’s discourse, the cat is the aporia in her being, signifying the impasse of (im)possibility. Only when Ruth *acts* and changes the current “now” of the dying cat, she is able to traverse the aporia in her own time being.

The last major sign is what we have previously “read”; it is Ruth’s writing to Nao that concludes the discourse. As mentioned, she is facing a writer’s block writing her memoir, which means she does not have access to neither her past (as memory, traces of the Self) or her writing (as the letter). She is not able to write a “tale of her own time being”; as such, she fails to give an account, or be held accountable for her own time being. With the writing produced at the end that she addresses to “Nao,” Ruth creates a new symptom for herself, which is the will to live. In spite of not knowing where to find Nao or where to send the letter, Ruth performs act *faithfully*—*it is more a Real letter than Nao’s letters*—suggesting the act is ethical in the sense that it is done in conformity to Ruth’s true desire. No address (place) is necessary as the receiver exists “in nowhere” but “in no time”; it is a letter addressed to Nao, and *Ruth is the new now*—“*where Id was, shall I be.*” She starts to *be the time being* as she comes to identify with the writing as her own symptom. From now on, assuming the role of writer and the “agency” of the letter speak truly to her own being. Ruth “wrote from the only place where it is possible to speak of love” (*Seminar XX* 83), which, according to Lacan, is in the Analyst’s Discourse, and the writing that

“we” read in our own time being, represents her tale of the *sinthomethics*. We are thus also “written” into her aesthetics of being, her ethics of desire—re-presented—for *the time being*.

V. “*Le Temps Retrouvé*”: The Miracle of Love

“In reality, every reader, while he is reading, is the reader of his own self. The writer’s work is merely a kind of optical instrument, which he offers to the reader to permit him to discern what, without the book, he would perhaps never have seen in himself. The reader’s recognition in his own self of what the book says is the proof of its truth.”

Marcel Proust, *Le Temps Retrouvé*
(qtd. in Ruth Ozeki’s *A Tale for the Time Being* 109)

Lacan claims that one does not need to be a heroic in order to be hero (*Seminar VII* 320). *A Tale for the Time Being* is not so much about the heroic, but everything about the heroes. And the heroes all seem to share one “SUPAPAWA” (176); that superpower is the will to live, live not for the good, but for the beautiful. In Nao’s/Ruth’s writing, we encounter the beautiful. It is an image of desire, framed in the aesthetics of being. As discussed earlier, “writing” has a special function in the structure of *The Time Being*. On the one hand, it occupies the position of “product/loss”; on the other hand, “writing” as a symptom for Ruth, suggests that it also must be conceived as a message, since *the symptom is defined by Lacan as a metaphor that awaits interpretation*. But more importantly, writing as a measure of life, is also the “intersubjective” act that connects the moments of Nao, of Jiko, of Haruki #1, Haruki #2, and of Ruth. When Ruth is searching on the Internet for the truth about Nao, she searched for Jiko’s writing, as Nao mentioned to her once that Jiko was one of the pioneers of feminist writers in Japan who wrote the feminist “I-novel” (148-49). Ruth’s search leads her to one result of “Yasutani Jiko,” and the article was entitled “Japanese Shishosetsu and the Instability of the Female ‘I.’” As we learn from Ruth at the end of the novel, the article is most likely written by Nao as her dissertation

(402). The article is indeed “instable” as it disappears from the Internet the moment Ruth was about to order it. Another writing Ruth comes across is from Haruki #2, Nao’s father’s writing on suicide from a Stanford professor’s website (87-90); when Ruth “travels back in time” and meets Haruki #2, he is also about to carry out another suicide attempt (350-53). The most crucial piece of writing would be Haruki #1’s secret diary (315-28). The diary, written in French, which Ruth asks her friend to translate into English, starts with “*le mal de vivre*,” the evil of life; however, it is precisely with the evil of life, that we see the stubborn will to live (“I don’t want to die” 322). As I have discussed, Ruth carries this will to live through time, leaving it for Nao and Haruki #2 to discover (346-55). Writing is not simply a materiality, an artifact, it also symbolizes the aesthetics of being interweaved into our ethics of desire. It is the logical time at work; with writing, our loss time is regained, whose absence returns to the present. Indeed, it does not make sense, this is the aporia. The impasse of being that resists meaning. And *that which resists meaning is the sinthome*. Without this aesthetics of being, our desire would only end in tragedy.

The relationship between desire and action often stages itself as tragedy owing to our true desire and action of desire are not symmetrical, as Lacan depicts in his myth of love. But Lacan also leaves us some hope for an alternative to this tragedy, which is a miracle. The following captures the “moments” of love:

The hand that extends toward the fruit, the rose, or the log that suddenly bursts into flames—its gesture of reaching, drawing close, or stirring up is closely related to the ripening of the fruit, the beauty of the flower, and the blazing of the log. If, in the movement of reaching, drawing, or stirring, the hand goes far enough toward the object that another hand comes out of the fruit, flower, or log and extends toward your hand—and at that moment your hand freezes in the closed plenitude of the fruit, in the open

plenitude of the flower, or in the explosion of a log which bursts into flames—then what is produced is love.

[...] The structure in question is not one of symmetry and reciprocity [*retour*].

For this symmetry is not symmetrical, since insofar as the hand extends, it extends toward an object. *The hand that appears on the other side is the miracle.* (*Seminar VIII* 52)

Our desire and action are not symmetrical because when one hand reaches out, it reaches towards the fruit, the object. Note that Lacan does not say that the miracle of love is when two hands meet; rather, the miracle is simply, in its being—“*that hand that appears on the other side is the miracle.*” Lacan claims in both *Seminar VII* and *Seminar VIII*, that psychoanalysis and its ethics is not here to produce miracle; instead, it is to produce knowledge and truth. Nonetheless, in *A Tale for the Time Being* we encounter a miracle, a miracle of love and of time. As Nao writes:

I will write down everything I know about Jiko’s life in Marcel’s book [À La Recherche du Temps Perdu], and when I’m done, I’ll leave it somewhere, and you will find it!

How cool is that? It feels like I’m reaching forward through time to touch you, and now that you’ve found it, you’re reaching back to touch me!

If you ask me, it’s fantastically cool and beautiful. It’s like a message in a bottle, cast out onto the ocean of time and space. Totally personal, and real, too, right out of old Jiko’s and Marcel’s prewired world. (26)

Indeed, Ruth has found it, and I have found it through Ruth. Hopefully, you would also find it through me. And *that* would be a miracle.

Coda

“Love that Writes No-Thing”

*“My brother may be whatever you say he is, a criminal.
As far as I am concerned, [...] my brother is my brother.”
Antigone, as quoted in Jacques Lacan, Seminar VII (1959)¹⁶²*

*“Oliver was Oliver.”
“Parce que c’était lui, parce que c’était moi.”
André Aciman, Call Me by Your Name (2007)¹⁶³*

*“Nao was now.”¹⁶⁴
“Do you feel special yet?”¹⁶⁵
Ruth Ozeki, A Tale for A Time Being (2013)*

I. Why Does Cultural Studies Need Lacan?¹⁶⁶

When I first started my graduate program at Claremont Graduate University, I received a t-shirt from my advisor at the International Student Office during our first meeting. It was a black, plain, oversized t-shirt with the school logo on the front. On the back it read, “I am in the world to change the world.” It reminded me of another quite popular quote often associated with Mahatma Gandhi, “Be the change you want to see in the world.”¹⁶⁷ It stuck with me for a while, both the t-shirt and the slogan. For a Cultural Studies student, the emphasis on changes, radical

¹⁶² pp. 278-79

¹⁶³ pp. 223

¹⁶⁴ pp. 98

¹⁶⁵ pp. 26

¹⁶⁶ The question was originally inspired by Lauren Morrison, a doctoral candidate in English at Claremont Graduate University, who asked me “*Why Lacan for Cultural Studies?*”; I intended her name to be here because I would not have completed this project without her love.

¹⁶⁷ Though it has been corrected that Gandhi did not exactly say that verbatim.

or not, sounded promising. The question, then, was *how*. And *how* is always embedded in a set of *why, who/whom, and what*. That is when this project had been, and where it began. *Wo Es war*. This dissertation investigates *that how* in relation to changes, and in my attempt to unravel the *how*, I address *why, who/whom and what* whenever relevant.

The most relevant to my project are ethics, self-love, and their relation to subjectivity. To investigate the ethical potential of the psychoanalytic concept of transference love, I presented my own framework, the *sinthomethics*, built on Lacan's Analyst's Discourse. The *sinthomethics* envisions a reconfiguration of the subject. It speaks to the ethics of psychoanalysis, which is not weighted by norms but by desire, motivated not by the good but by the beautiful. It is ethical insofar as it aims to open up the pathway to truth and knowledge (of one's desire), insofar as it is mediated by transference, a love of knowledge, the *sinthomethics* is a way of "Know thyself." And there is no better way to care for yourself than to truly know the Self. This care of the Self is specifically relevant to our time and place, given the effects of alienation and separation as irreversible and indelible on our structure, be it social and psychic. The effects are the causes that turn us into subjects. To exceed its own causes, the *sinthomethics* must *eventually* return the subject to the Self. *It was there; therefore I am. I am*, on its way to love.

Admitting that any radical change in a society is difficult to achieve yet more difficult to maintain, my dissertation attempts to offer an alternative frame to envision changes, with a specific focus on the subject. For a change to remain (in the status of) a change is to keep changing. Yet culture itself is a frame through which the subject perceives and interprets the world. It is that which "makes sense" of one's life. It is the senses of our life. Because it determines meanings, culture is entrenched in the *aesthetics of one's being*, and it speaks to the *ethics* that dictates our *acts*. In other words, to provoke change in the world is to activate a

“remaking” of the subject. “To be the change in the world” mandates a certain *reframing* of what one considers to be the *truth*. That reframing itself is an *event*. This is why this dissertation starts with transference love and its relation to an event. In Chapter One, I have addressed both theories of an event and the transference in Lacanian psychoanalytic framework. After outlining an event as “reframing” with its definition of being an effect that exceeds its cause, I explained the ways in which transference love shares those defining features of an event. Therefore, in my model, I consider transference as an event, and my project investigates the effect of this “evental love” in conjunction with its causes. To better map out the trajectory of radical change occurred in an event of love, I continue to construct and present the visual model of my own design—the *sinthomethics*. As stated earlier, this *structure of discourse* derives from Lacan’s theories of Four Discourses, particularly that of the Analyst’s Discourse. In this conclusion, I introduced these concepts as well.

On the note of love, I want to take a detour (since a lover’s discourse consists primarily of digressions), but the detour may also be the most logical route available. It is to answer, “Why Lacan for Cultural Studies?” To do so, I define what Cultural Studies *means* for me. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, it is about change, or, about *the know-how* for bringing about these changes. It is not only theory but more about practice, or *praxis*. If I were to revise the CGU slogan through the lens of Cultural Studies, it would not be “I am in the world to change the world” but “I am in the Self to change my subject.” In a similar fashion, rather than “Be the change you want to see in the world,” I’d suggest to “Be the subject you want to see in the Self.” Both new versions bring to fore my ultimate goal for this project, which is not only to theorize ethics and self-love, but to *know how* the discussion of ethics and self-love could eventually spark changes. With this in mind, I can now answer the question: “*Why* Lacan for Cultural

Studies?” or even “*Should* Lacan be for Cultural Studies?” “Why not?” would be my response, and it is not a tongue-in-cheek response. If the field of Cultural Studies is concerned with “culture as a way of life” and with “how the studies of that way of life” could potentially lead to radical changes in current discourses and/or structure, my suggestion is that Cultural Studies should “Lacan” because Lacan is not only the grammar but a verb, a change that never ceases to change itself. That is his *sinthome*. The practice of psychoanalysis, as Lacan insists, is neither a theory nor study of interpretation (i.e. hermeneutics or philosophy) but a framework for “treatment,” which aims at, and ends in, the final change made by the analysand/subject. Lacan, along with his psychoanalysis, is always “in the act.” The subject of psychoanalysis is, by definition, first-person present-tense. The unconscious is always in the world, or even the opposite, the world is in the unconscious.

This “being in the world” speaks also truthfully to the core of Cultural Studies. As Stuart Hall demonstrates in “Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies” (1992), concerning *how* to “look back to the past, to consult and think about the Now and the Future of cultural studies by way of a retrospective glance,” it is by way of oneself, the subject. To discuss Cultural Studies and its theoretical legacies is to speak “autobiographically” (277) for truths are “multiple.” The “truth” we re/present is only the truth *as we see it*. To see through Cultural Studies from its past to its future is to never lose sight of one’s own time and place. This also explains why Cultural Studies is a discursive formation, and, as Hall reminds us, it should remain so. If speaking “autobiographically” means, literally, “writing of the self,” then this project, faithfully, takes Hall’s command to heart as I follow Lacan. This emphasis on “writing of the self” and “being in the world” is another position in which Lacan and Cultural Studies converge. In Lacan’s terminology, it is to “make *lituraterre*,” a concept that I discussed in the Introduction and in

Chapter Three. Lacan coins the neologism in order to describe the function of writing (of the unconscious), which is to “read” (*lire*), to “link” (*lier*), and to “litter” (*litière*). Therefore, to “read” this *lituraterre* and to follow the grammar in the “writing of the self,” one must not forget the time and place for “being in the world.” In Chapter Two and Three, place and time, distinctively, provide two main sites for examining the logical impasse in the sinthomethics. In Chapter Two, abjection becomes the lens for inspecting barriers between the subject (and its product) and the Self (as in the truth position) in the narrative of Aciman’s *Call Me by Your Name* (2007). In Chapter Three, aporia frames the paradox of our “being in the world” through time, as it is structured in the discourse of Ozeki’s *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013). Keeping the time and place of the Lacanian psychoanalysis in mind (though diverging from Hall’s usages of these two terms), this dissertation aims to make Lacan relevant. *This* is my sinthome.

II. Keeping Lacan Relevant, Making Relevant *Lituraterre*

The relevance of my project, therefore, concerns the possibility for initiating changes in the social, yet this social must also be reframed. In other words, the ability to truly conceive “change” involves some revisions and appropriations of existing terms and/or social relations. Lacan’s playfulness with/in language delivers precisely this message. In my model of the sinthomethics, there are several key terms: *subject, the Self, the Other, intimacy/extimacy, event, transference/love, truth, desire, ethics, and the act*. Despite that most of the terms have its own specific meanings as they are defined in the Lacanian psychoanalytic framework, it by no means suggests that we should thus limit the application of this model or of Lacan’s teaching. (Quite the contrary, I assume Lacan would not oppose to being read “awry” or “purloined” with good intention, as he has often done with others, as long as the subject finds justification for such a

usage. That is, insofar as the “purloiner” makes an argument about the subject but not about Lacan on the subject, then itself may be excused.) Considering these terms are repeating themes in our current discourses of subjectivity, I hope to maintain the relevance of the sinthomethics to other ongoing dialogues precisely with this “new frame” for exploring and articulating these terms. This is why Lacan constantly refers to the notion of “anamorphosis”—how the meaning of an art/ifact may emerge or submerge in relation to the position of the viewer.¹⁶⁸ Put another way, in proposing a new model called the sinthomethics, I wish to contribute to existing scholarship (both among Lacanians and non-Lacanians) a new position of “looking” regarding these terms (whether looking directly at or looking awry).

As briefly summarized earlier, this project evolves around ethics and self-love, yet both ethics and self-love are defined against the grain. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, transference love leads to an ethical opening for the subject to reconnect with the Self, as the truth position of the Subject-Supposed-Know. If the ethics of psychoanalysis adheres to the most fundamental principle of a subjectivity conceived as a contingency of the “Other,” then this “relation to the Other” only becomes “Real” by way of a pure desire called love with which the subject traverses the fantasy (the subject’s relation to the *objet a*) and finds (p)ease with the Self. What is the implication of such a truth procedure as the sinthomethics then? As Lacan states, “as soon as there is the subject who is supposed to know exists somewhere there is transference” (*Seminar XI* 232). It suggests that, inasmuch as the subject is in relation to certain “knowledge” or “know-how,” it *can* and *must act on* this transference and recognize the truth about the Self. No Real love is possible without truly knowing one’s Self. To *know* one’s Self and be the change you

¹⁶⁸ This notion of anamorphosis constructs a huge part of Lacan’s theory of the gaze and *objet a* in *Seminar XI*. However, prior to *Seminar XI*, anamorphosis has already assumed a critical role in his reading of *Antigone* in *Seminar VII*.

want to see in the Self is the only way to relate to an Other as a subject. This relation between the subject and the Self that takes place through an ethical act to knowledge highlights my main thesis in Chapter Two as I read *Call Me by Your Name* apart from a sheer narrative of homosexual desire or queer romance but within the model of the sinthomethics.

This alternative approach for representing the divide amongst the subject/Self/Other and as a new framework for approaching ethics and self-love underscores my intention to make relevant *lituraterre* by way of keeping Lacan relevant. To that end, I have demonstrated a new reading of Lacan's position on love, specifically transference love. Those who are conversant in the field of psychoanalysis should also be cognizant of the ongoing debates around transference and love, particularly regarding whether it is "authentic" love or a sheer narcissism, and also whether love is possible. In my model, I take Lacan literally by reading love precisely as the possible impossibility, the negativity, the void *par excellence*, which "realizes" the subject's desire to be One with the Self while sustains the subject at the level of desire through the act of identifying with the sinthome. This is my main argument in Chapter One on event. Another new position I offer in reading the transference love is through *writing*. In effect, it is not an original position since Lacan himself discusses "writing" in *Seminar XX: Encore*, a seminar that dedicates to sexualization, love, and knowledge. However, he attributes writing specifically to feminine *jouissance* while aligns love to "the letter," defined as the part of writing that escapes meaning. With the sinthomethics, I situate my discussion of transference love *in writing* so as to flesh out my argument of reading the ethics of desire vis-à-vis the aesthetics of being. This insistence on aesthetics leads to my other attempt to respond to the current contestations surrounding the interpretation of what constitutes a true Lacanian act (and the ethics thereof). As Lacan has once suggested that "suicide is the only completely successful act" (*Television* 66-7),

a position that is so endorsed by Slavoj Žižek, it results in controversies and dissensions regarding how “suicide” should be conceived (i.e. symbolically or literally). For this I follow Mari Ruti’s path, chasing the bright side of our traumatic encounters with the Real, arguing that we should interpret the description of the act as “suicidal, detrimental, and destructive” *metaphorically*. For one, before Lacan presents us *Antigone* in *Seminar VII* on ethics, he gives us art. He starts with *Das Ding* and sublimation, suggesting that, in reading *Antigone* and her pure desire for death as an ethical act, that reading itself should be understood in conjunction of his emphasis on “the function of the beautiful,” which justifies my incorporation of aesthetics into the discussion of ethics. In Chapter Three on *A Tale for the Time Being*, this conjunction of the transference, writing, ethics, and aesthetics is pivotal, as it confers “Real” meaning on the final Sign of the One made out of love.

Taking into account both of my stances in respect to current dissensions in the field of Lacanian psychoanalysis, I highlight the singularity of being (by way of Ruti) in my conception of the “Real” and propose an ethical act that must be framed through the lens of aesthetics. Only in this way could such an ethical act (via love) function as a praxis, and only from there, psychoanalysis could truly act “*beyond*” theory. However, I am also aware of what I did not take into consideration in this project. Since that decision is an ethical act, I now give a brief account of those omissions. To begin, I intentionally choose not to discuss transference love in conjunction to Lacan’s theory of sexualization, *jouissance* and/or the drive, whereas I did make references to these two crucial sites in passing. Since sexualization provides the foundation for every other Lacanian theoretical edifice, discussions of love through sexualization have been taking the center stage, and compelling arguments are plenty in this respect. The same reason explains for my minimal inclusions of *jouissance*. Take for instance, Alenka Župancic’s “*What is Sex?*”

(2017) provides a model analysis for the ethical possibility of love by way of sexuation. Colette Soler, in *What Lacan Said about Women* (2006), also starts from sexuation, specifically the feminine position, to the hope that love may (or may not) provide. Despite that Slavoj Žižek has published excessively (almost compulsively) regarding both sexuation and *jouissance*, his current book, *Incontinence of the Void* (2017) which opens with an SOS: “sexuality, ontology, and subjectivity” while ends with “Love beyond death,” deserves more attention (while being buried amid his other works that received more media coverage). With that being said, some might consider this “oversight” of my project—intentional or not—to be the limitation of my model (though it should be). I myself reckon this “circumvention” to be quite liberating. Nonetheless, my next step would be to delve into that wave of sexuation and *jouissance* and see where love may take me. In addition, there are several of Lacan’s seminars that I did not have the luxury to include in this project, considering the depth and length with the inclusion of these seminars. In particular, *Seminar X: Anxiety*, in which Lacan presents, “only love allows *jouissance* to be condescend to desire” (179); *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, among which transference is one; and *Seminar XIX: ... or Worse*, which could be considered as a “prequel” to *Seminar XX*, focusing on the formulations of (the) One.

The One is also what Freud considers to be the ethical act: *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*. Love the Other in oneself, and love one’s Self. The ethical act of love must be performed by the subject, and this desire must be “acted out” in the same place and time as the *sinthome*. The strange intimacy (between the subject and the Self) should never be too early or too late; the intimate stranger (the Self in the subject) awaits right here, right now. The application, significance, and relevance of my project that proposes an ethics of desire and self-love as *praxis* must be framed through this here and now of my Self, *autographically speaking*.

III. “Later!”

“*You Are Here.*”—Jiko tells Nao this is where she should start with her writing.

Where, then, to stop one’s writing?

Now may be a good place. I would love to conclude by not concluding, which is to be caught in the most authentic Lacanian act. To conclude by not concluding is to introduce a lack, an opening. It is to make desire. In *Seminar X: Anxiety*, Lacan contends that “anxiety is *not without* an object” (89); “if there be an object of thy desire, it’s nothing but thy own self” (*Seminar X* 223). To conclude by not concluding is to conclude without it, or, with *no-thing*. Lacan also states that it is this no-thing between the sexes that makes the love. Therefore, to conclude with no-thing is a demand for love. And it is love itself that “cannot stop not being written” (*Seminar XX* 94). To conclude without concluding is the sinthome of my Self. *Lituraterre*, or writing *as* sinthome, is when the Self emerges to read (*lire*), to link (*lier*), and to “litter,” leaving its traces (*litière*).

José Estaban Muñoz, in closing his final project, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009), sends out an open invitation for instigating changes: “*Take Ecstasy with Me!*” in that “we must vacate the here and now for a then and there” (185). Ecstasy, *qua* jouissance, is an embodied experience that disrupts our positionality and temporality of the body; it *forces out* the singularity of being. *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*. Where ecstasy was, should the body be. Any radical changes to existing discourses demand (re-)imagining the subject, acting on ethics, and loving the Self.

“*Do you feel special yet?*”—a question you may be able to answer Nao.

To be able to love the Self, you must know yourself. To know yourself is to care for yourself. There is no other way to live, even if the Other seems to be in the way.

The Other will always be in our way to life. *It is the One way* in which the subject moves from alienation and separation to intimacy, from identification to identity, from unbecoming to becoming undone, from a will to live to a way of life.

Call *it* by your intimate stranger and the strange intimacy will call you by its name. It is not about interpellation but about articulation.

For being in time, make extimacy with *it*.

For the time being, take care of the Self.

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