

Workshop: Sexuation, the clinic & the neighbor

Reinhard Essay—selected passages

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... it is precisely in redemption that we can find the possibility of a political theology other than that of the friend-enemy dyad—a political theology of the neighbor. In the *Star of Redemption*, his articulation of the three primal elements of human, world, and God into the three basic relationships of creation, revelation, and redemption, Franz Rosenzweig argues that redemption enters into the world through the act of neighbor-love, as the condition for messianic transformation, social revolution, and the radical revaluation of all values. For Rosenzweig, messianic temporality is not indefinitely postponed to the future, but happens now, as an incursion into the presentness of the present by the nearness of the neighbor: “If then a not-yet is inscribed over all redemptive unison, there can only ensue that the end is for the time being represented by the just present moment, the universal and highest by the approximately proximate. The bond of the consummate and redemptive bonding of man and the world is to begin with the neighbor and ever more only the neighbor, the well nigh-highest [...] For Rosenzweig, love of the neighbor is not merely the first step on the path to redemption, the good deed that might help make the world a better place in some hypothetical future, but its realization *now*, the immanent production of its transcendental conditions. The nearness of the neighbor materializes the imminence of redemption, releasing the here and the now from the fetters of teleology in the infinitesimal calculus of proximity.

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Arendt argues that thinking is a *social* discursive process that can only arise in *solitude*, and as such must be distinguished from the loneliness of totalitarian society, which, even in a crowd, only talks to itself. The dialectic of real thought requires that the difference which defines the social be taken on as self-difference, self-alienation: we become singular, “unexchangeable,” only insofar as we have allowed ourselves to enter into discourse with internalized “fellow-men.” For Arendt, totalitarian loneliness is not simply a function of the disappearance of traditional social relationships of neighboring, but results from the overwhelming *presence* of this neighbor, who is neither fully interiorized nor exteriorized, but whose unbearable closeness makes the self “equivocal,” interchangeable rather than singular, and thus threatens its ability to speak to others within a symbolic order.

For Arendt, the primary characteristic of the failure of the social relations under totalitarianism is the disappearance of the space between people and the correlative unleashing of “a principle destructive for all human living-together.” Unlike tyranny, which is still a form of politics, totalitarianism is the annihilation of the political: “By destroying the space between men and pressing men against each other, even the productive potentialities of isolation are annihilated ... if this practice is compared with that of tyranny, it seems as if a way had been found to set the desert itself into motion, to let loose a sand storm that could cover all parts of the inhabited earth.” Arendt’s analysis suggests that what is lost in totalitarianism is the spacing proper to the function of the neighbor. To destroy the relation of the neighbor is to eliminate the breathing space that keeps the subject in proper relationship to the Other, neither too close nor too far, but

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in proximity, the “nearness” that neighboring entails. The emptiness of the social sphere, the “desert” left by tyranny, itself materializes as a horrific “sand storm” in totalitarianism, a solidification of the void that fills up all space, allowing no room for either subject or society.

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Insofar as the paranoiac forecloses the signifier of the paternal law that regulates the partition between the symbolic and the real, we could say that paranoia involves the failure to accede to the imperative to judge the *Nebenmensch qua* commandment. Hence, Freud’s formulation of the structure of paranoia as “they love their delusions as themselves” reflects the paranoiac’s refusal of the “thou shalt” implicit in the Levitical injunction, reducing the imperative to a statement, a mere description of reality bereft of the commandment that configures it in a symbolic order. Whereas for the neurotic, the agency of the Name-of-the-Father mediates the subject’s relationship with its primary maternal object, the psychotic’s lack of this paternal metaphor reveals the overwhelming presence of *das Ding*, no longer shielded by the spacing required for refiguration or substitution. Hence, the paranoia’s too immediate experience of *das Ding* as it materializes in such objects as the neighbor’s probing gaze and mocking gossip disrupts the familial structures of subjectivity. On the other hand, the neurotic subject, the subject as such, finds its place within the family circle demarcated by Oedipal complex only at the cost of attenuating the social relation, which, in the face of the unbearable proximity of the neighbor, gives way to a social order itself modeled on the family.

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What is truly radical in Levinas’s thought is precisely this impasse, the fact of the unbridgeable gap between ethics and politics; insofar as ethics involves the encounter of the *two* of the neighbor and the self, it cannot conceive of the *three*, the symbolic representation and mediation on which politics is based; ethics is inherently apolitical, must willfully ignore what would be fair or for the general good. To shift the other as neighbor into mediation with the other in the polis is precisely to *give up* on ethics; moreover, to try to bring politics to the immediate level of the singular face of the other, to see the other as a singularity, can only mean to give up on politics.

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Moreover, it would be even more misleading to imagine that we have made a historical transition from the epoch of the (modern) All to that of the (postmodern) Not-All, characterized by increasingly feminine and neighborly values. Such modes of political messianism, whether gradualist or apocalyptic, would propose the neighbor as the path to completing political theology by restoring its missing feminine complement. In addition, just as the sexual relationship between men and women remains fundamentally impossible, so there can be no theoretical paradigm that simply combines these modalities in a unified field theory. We must avoid the fantasmatic structures such accounts imply, both as wishful illusions and as veils cloaking the irreducible trauma of the neighbor’s *jouissance*. The political theology of the

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neighbor is the *decompletion* of the political theology of sovereignty, the *supplement* that both supplies something that was lacking and inserts something heteronomous into political economy. As Eric Santner has argued, if the politics of sovereignty is defined by the exception, the neighbor constitutes the exception to the exception, the interruption of sovereignty. The politics of the Not-All can be thought of as the decision to say no to the superegoic insistence on All, on jouissance as an obligation ...

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The political theology of the neighbor opens up where the one truth procedure passes into the other, love into politics or politics into love, precisely at the point of contact of the two “ones” and the two “infinities,” the seam where the equality and sameness of the political encounters the singularity and difference of love (see fig. 3). If we think of the relationship between “politics” and “love” in figure 3 as that of the two sides of a Möbius strip, the neighbor marks the point where the strip twists and the one merges into the other—a position with no intrinsic “place” of its own, but always shifting along the continuum created by the ligature of the political and the amorous (see fig. 4). Because the three of politics remains forever incommensurable with the two of love, this moving point must be thought of not as the positive intersection of overlapping sets or topological surfaces, but as the approach of heteronomous truth procedures in an infinite calculus of proximity that we name “the neighbor.”

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The Borromean knot is characterized by the fact that each loop holds together the other two; to cut one is to unravel the connection between the other two. In terms of the three loves, this implies that the relationship between any two terms requires the third: the subject loves the neighbor only by means of the love of God, and loves God only by means of the love of the neighbor. Moreover, these relationships involve what Lacan characterizes as a kind of salutary “*dupery*”: the nondupes err, according to Lacan, insofar as they believe themselves free of the traps of fantasy, the eruptions of the unconscious, and most of all, the chains of religious ideology. It is only those who know themselves “duped” by these structures, ensnared in their logic, who are able to find a kind of nonerrance. Lacan comments to the analysts and academics in his seminar, “I know quite well you’re not believers, right? But you are all the more conned, because even if you aren’t believers . . . you believe. I’m not saying that you assume it: *it assumes you.*” For Lacan, the force of religious discourse is not contingent on whether or not we believe in God, whether we take commandments such as “love your neighbor as yourself” seriously as binding, as *law*, or dismiss them as naive moral recommendations. Our subjectivity is itself a function of the intransigent signifiers called “scripture,” which, needless to say, are often mobilized for dupery, knavery, and some of the worst crimes perpetrated against humanity. Nevertheless, these signifiers are weighted with a reality that is ignored only at the cost of even greater errors, foolery, and suffering. To be a dupe is, of course, not a guarantee of nonerrance: a “fool for God” is still a fool. But to fail to take the risk of dupery by resorting to the lures of cynical reason is surely to err.

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Lacan, Seminar XX—selected passages

Chapter 7 ...

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In effect, a discourse like analytic discourse aims at meaning. By way of meaning, it is clear that I can only deliver to you, to each of you, what you are already on the verge of absorbing. That has a limit, a limit provided by the meaning in which you live. I wouldn't be exaggerating if I said that that doesn't go very far. What analytic discourse brings out is precisely the idea that that meaning is based on semblance.

If analytic discourse indicates that that meaning is sexual, that can only be by explaining its limit. [...] Meaning indicates the direction toward which it fails.

Having posited that, which should make you beware of understanding too quickly, having taken all these precautions dictated by mere prudence [...] here is more or less what is inscribed on the blackboard ... [Lacan goes on to describe the table of sexuation]

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On the side of the man, I have inscribed \$, certainly not to privilege him in any way, and the Φ that props him up as a signifier and is also incarnated in S_1 , which, of all the signifiers, is the signifier for which there is no signified, and which, *with respect to meaning, symbolized the failure thereof*. [italics added]

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What analytic discourse contributes—and perhaps that is, after all, the reason for its emergence at a certain point in scientific discourse—is that to speak of love is itself a jouissance.

That is assuredly confirmed by the tangible effect that saying whatever [comes to mind]—the very watchword of the analysand's discourse—is what leads to the *Lustprinzip*—what leads to it most directly, without requiring the accession to the higher spheres that constitute the foundation of Aristotelian ethics.

The *Lustprinzip* is, in effect, based only on the coalescence of a with $S(A)$.

A is barred by us, of course. That doesn't mean that it suffices to bar it for nothing to exist thereof. If by $S(A)$ I designate nothing other than woman's jouissance, it is assuredly because it is with that that I am indicating that God has not yet made his exit.

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What we want to know—in what constitutes feminine jouissance insofar as it is not wholly occupied with man, and even insofar, I will say, as it is not, as such, at all occupied with him—what we want to know is the status of the Other's knowledge ...

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A woman can, as I said, love in a man only the way in which he faces the knowledge thanks to which he souloves. But, concerning the knowledge thanks to which he *is* [italics added], the question is raised on the basis of the fact that there is something, *jouissance*, regarding which it is not possible to say whether a woman can say anything about it, whether she can say what she knows about it.

[...] I have thus arrived, as always, at the edge of what polarized my subject, namely, whether the question of what she knows about it can be raised. That is no different from the question whether the term she gets off on beyond all this “playing” that constitutes her relationship to man—the term I call the Other, signifying it with an A—whether this term knows anything. For it is in this respect that she herself is subjugated to the Other, just as much as man.

Chapter 8 ...

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It is only on the basis of the clothing of the self-image that envelops the object cause of the desire that the object relationship is often sustained—that is the very articulation of analysis.

The affinity of *a* to its envelope is one of the main conjunctions put forward by psychoanalysis. To me it essentially introduces a point about which we must be suspicious.

This is where the real distinguishes itself. The real can only be inscribed on the basis of an impasse of formalization. That is why I thought I could provide a model of it using mathematical formalization, in as much as it is the most advanced elaboration we have by which to produce *signifierness* (italics added). *The mathematical formalization of signifierness runs counter to meaning* (italics added) [...]

That is why I do not believe that it was in vain that I eventually came up with the inscriptions *a*, the \$ of the signifier, A, and Φ . Their very writing constitutes a medium that goes beyond speech, without going beyond language’s actual effects. Its value lies in centering the symbolic, on the condition of knowing how to use it, for what? To retain a congruous truth—not the truth that claims to be whole, but that of the half-telling, the truth that is borne out by guarding against going as far as avowal, which would be the worst, the truth that becomes guarded starting right with the cause of desire.

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On the other side, what is $S(A)$ but the impossibility of telling the whole truth, about which I spoke earlier.

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Do we need this whole detour to raise the question of knowledge in the form, “What is it that knows?” Do we realize that it is the Other? — such as I posited it at the outset, as a locus in which the signifier is posited, and without which nothing indicates to us that there is a dimension

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of truth anywhere, a *dit-mension*, the residence of what is said, of this said whose knowledge posits the Other as locus. The status of knowledge implies as such that there already is knowledge, that it is in the Other, and that it is to be acquired. That is why it is related to learning.

The subject results from the fact that this knowledge must be learned ...

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The hitch is that the Other, the locus, knows nothing. [...]

That is why I say that the imputation of the unconscious is an incredible act of charity. The subjects know, they know. But all the same, they don't know everything. At the level of this not-everything, only the Other doesn't know. It is the Other who constitutes the not-everything, precisely in that the Other is the part of the not-at-all-knowledgeable in the not-everything.