

Language and Culture through the Rhetoric of Visual Analysis

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Language and Culture through the Rhetoric of Visual Analysis

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Abstract

This paper engages the rhetoric of visual analysis to explore how a photograph evokes linguistic and cultural norms that create and define who we are; the interplay of gender, identity, and social efficacy of the constructed self are also examined in this process. A photographic image is used as the entry point to the discussion of Jacques Lacan's basic forms and roles of desire in a subjective economy. Mark Bracher, in *Lacan, Discourse, and Social Change*, suggests that interpellation, in its philosophical usage—as the process by which cultural beliefs are simply “assumed” rather than questioned—sparks the fires of desire to perform this role. He contends we must understand the various roles of desire to “intervene in the interpellative forces of culture to have a positive influence on social change” (19). This paper provides analysis and suggests interventions by drawing on feminist as well as Lacanian theory.

Key Words : gender studies, feminism, photography, identity, Jacques Lacan, Mark Bracher, Susan Sontag, John Berger.

1. Introduction

This paper will use the photographic image, *Reflections in the Carousel of Desire*, as an entry point to the discussion of some of Jacques Lacan's basic forms and roles of desire in a subjective economy. Mark Bracher, in *Lacan, Discourse, and Social Change*, suggests interpellation, in its philosophical usage—as the process by which cultural beliefs are simply “assumed” rather than questioned—sparks the fires of desire to perform this role. He contends

we must understand the various roles of desire to “intervene in the interpellative forces of culture [in order] to have a positive influence on social change” (19). The *Carousel of Desire* photograph is neither a constructed nor a created image; that is, it was not physically orchestrated in terms of the placement of the foci, nor was it digitally altered. Rather, it was faithfully recorded through a lens aperture equivalent to the way a human eye would see the subject. From the perspective of the interplay of gender, identity, and social efficacy of

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the constructed self, this presentation will explore how the image creates us.

Bracher notes, “The fact that one originally attains one’s own desire only by means of the bodily images of another person means that like the Imaginary identification of the mirror stage, Imaginary-order desire is from the beginning a social and even fictional phenomenon [and that] this fictional, metaphoric nature of desire means that there is no intrinsic, essential, or absolute content to desire in the Imaginary order any more than in the Symbolic order and that desire in the Imaginary order is produced through the operation of images in cultural artifacts” (34).

Analysis of *Reflections in the Carousel of Desire* from a Lacanian perspective will explore how the images in this photograph, as signifiers qua cultural artifacts, seek to create the self.

2. Images Watch Us

2.1 The World through the Viewfinder as a Species of the Real: Background on the context of the photograph

The purpose of using a photograph and analysis of specific elements it contains to discuss particular moments in the economy of desire from a Lacanian perspective—with commentary from other scholars of gender, identity, and Lacan—is to offer a plausible interpretation that invites diverse impressions rather than claims to provide absolute definitions.

In using aspects of the *Carousel of Desire* photograph to consider features of Lacan’s philosophy, concise consideration of the mechanics of the image will be useful. First, relevant technical data will be summarized with explanation as to why this information is pertinent. Of course, the prequel question to be answered is why one would use a photograph at all; why not use a text extract or a work of art? My principle reason is connected to the argument that the documentary nature of

photographs and their power to create new realities, whether intended or not, may and should make us question their veracity as compared to correctly referenced academic writing or famous art works that have a body of scholarly critique that may be researched and cited.

Photographic images are ubiquitous and ambiguous. They are part of our everyday lives. They are also dialogic entities. On one hand, we regard photographic images as mundane. Like surveillance cameras, they simply record their context without analysis or interpretation. On the other hand, this function gives photographic images an authenticity that commentators, notably Susan Sontag and John Berger, have discussed as tracings off of the real.

Sontag comments that a photograph, unlike a painting, has the power of a tracing of the real because it had contact with reality in the way a death mask has physical contact with the contours of the face with which it is impressed. Sontag, in *On Photography*, comments on the photograph’s distinctiveness and its relationship with questions of identity. “No one takes an easel painting to be in any sense co-substantial with its subject; it only represents or refers. But a photograph is not only like its subject, a [sic] homage to the subject. It is part of, an extension of that subject; and a potent means of acquiring it, of gaining control over it” (Sontag, 155).

This description speaks to the power of the photograph. Sontag also identifies the primacy of the photography. She notes, “the images that have virtually unlimited authority in a modern society are mainly photographic images; and the scope of that authority stems from the properties peculiar to images taken by cameras” (Sontag, 151). Sontag uses the term “trace” in explaining the photograph goes beyond a painting, stressing that, “Such images are indeed able to usurp reality because first of all a photograph is not only an image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real; it

is also a trace, something directly stenciled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask” (Sontag, 154).

It’s significant that the tracing “off the real” performed by photography accomplishes a function beyond documentation. It creates a new reality. “Photographs do more than redefine the stuff of ordinary experience (people, things, events, [...]) Reality as such is redefined—as an item for exhibition, as a record for scrutiny, as a target for surveillance. [...] providing possibilities of control that could not even be dreamed of under the earlier system of recording information: writing” (Sontag, 156).

While grounded in “the real” the concept of “the true” in photography requires a deeper interrogation of how realities—even those like the footprints or death masks Sontag speaks of—are presented. John Berger engages in this investigation. “Photographs, it is said, tell the truth. From this simplification, which reduces the truth to the instantaneous, it follows that what a photograph tells about a door or a volcano belongs to the same order of truth as what it tells about a man weeping or a woman’s body. If no theoretical distinction has been made between the photograph as scientific evidence and the photograph as a means of communication, this has been not so much an oversight as a proposal. The proposal was (and is) that when something is visible, it is a fact, and that facts contain the only truth” (Berger and Mohr, *Another Way of Telling*, Loc. 553-558).

Of course, the altering of photographic images is as old and common as photography itself, but as Berger notes, this is evidence of the perceived authenticity of the photographic image and the power of faked photographs to deceive derives precisely from the common belief that photographs tell the truth. Berger would say photographs always tell *a* truth rather than *the* truth and also contends that in the case of faked photographs there is really something different

from photography going on. In *Another Way of Telling*, Berger discusses how “photographs can be, and are, massively used to deceive and misinform” and comments parenthetically, “(...You can only make a photograph tell an explicit lie by elaborate tampering, collage, and re-photographing. You have in fact ceased to practise [sic] photography. Photography in itself has no language which can be turned.)” (Berger, Loc. 492-94). He notes, “The camera does not lie even when it is used to quote a lie. And so, this makes the lie appear more truthful” (Berger, Loc. 500-501).

This is why the commonplace authenticity of my *Carousel of Desire* photograph is relevant. In contextualizing this photograph it is necessary to briefly touch on the technical details of this image. While it was not digitally altered, it was digitally recorded and this electronic trace also archives its own history in a file referred to as Exchangeable Image File Format (EXIF) metadata. This is its claim at authenticity—like a DNA tag—that is increasingly being required as a verification security protocol major news agencies demand for responsible publication of freelance-sourced images. If digital electronic photography rather than chemical-based photography is, in itself, an alteration that somehow “fakes” the results or if using electronic imaging somehow creates an unreal result, this leads to an interesting discussion on the limits of reality from a technology of imaging perspective that would be the subject of a different paper.

In the context of *An Analysis of Reflections in the Carousel of Desire from a Lacanian Perspective*, what is most relevant is that *Carousel of Desire* is an accurate recording of the scene. The EXIF lists detailed authenticating data, but for the purposes of this paper only two items are most pertinent. The first is “Focal Length In 35mm Film: 46” and this is relevant because the human eye is basically a 50mm lens, so a focal length of 46 means that’s what the



average human would see if they were standing beside the photographer.

The camera only recorded the appearance of reality; there were no double exposures or post-production tricks. The shot was taken into a window to show both view and reflection and that's the file straight out of the camera. The EXIF makes the simple statement, "A directly photographed image."

2.2 A Brief Description of the Whole

First, the entire image may be regarded. The central element is the carousel. It is the most brightly lit, active, and attractive part of the photograph and the namesake motif around which all the other elements are organized. Under the carousel is an expanse of blue the carousel seems to float above. It is the blue of sky on a cloudless afternoon, but is actually water and the carousel is mounted on a concrete pad that sits atop piers a water-rollercoaster travels around beneath. Above the seating area on the carousel is the longitudinally patterned tent-like canopy, with alternating sections of blue and white that ascend toward the largest

humanoid detail in the photograph—a mannequin—and the interior of a women's clothing shop. On the right side of the image we see the trees and foliage of the park where the carousel operates and to the left are benches and the paved park grounds.

We may now "read" the discourse and rhetoric of this artifact on a feature-by-feature basis.

3. Master Signifiers:

3.1 The Goddess of Desire as a Sign of Woman

The *passive anaclitic form of Imaginary desire* is exemplified in "the phenomenon of fashion, which offers corporeal images that subjects can conform with in order to satisfy their desire to be attractive to others—that is, desired as objects of *jouissance* by others" (Mark Bracher, Lacan, *Discourse, and Social Change*, 40). The nucleating point that sparks here is that photographs may be (and that *Carousel of Desire* showcases) cultural artifacts that present controlling rhetoric, a rhetoric that cajoles and controls, that images define us, and that photographs are control mechanisms.

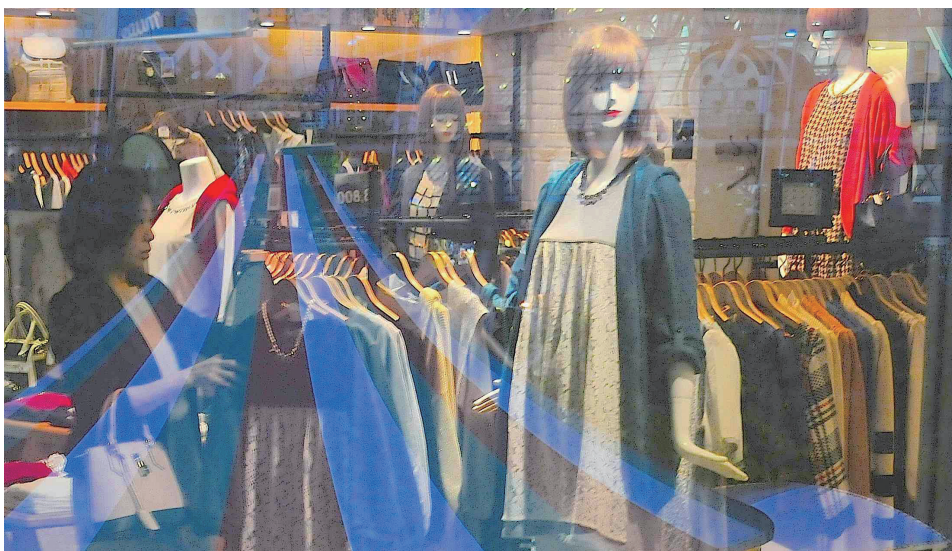


3.2 The Consumer of Goods as a Product of the Economy of Desire

In the top center third of the *Carousel of Desire*, manifested above the carousel like Venus emerging from and a caryatid supporting the structure of desire to be attractive to others, is the female form idealized as a mannequin. Its height matches the carousel's and the action in the complete image radiates out from the figure of the idealized woman and the diminutive figure of the living woman who is holding a dress exactly like the one the mannequin

is modeling. Bluish longitudinal bands of light—reflections of the canopy of the carousel below—visually draw the woman and mannequin together. The woman is, however, in an inferior position to the mannequin; smaller in size and almost entirely contained by the reflected bands of blue light. The mannequin, through the positioning of its hands, seems to be directing the light to envelop the woman.

In his discussion of interpellation through Master Signifiers, Bracher delineates Lacan's "registers



of subjectivity”—Symbolic, Imaginary, and Real. He specifies that, “In culture, these three registers manifest themselves respectively, in signifiers, images and fantasies. Of the three, it is the signifier that holds the key to desire. As Lacan puts it, ‘It is as a derivation of the signifying chain that the channel of desire flows’ (*Ecrits: A Selection* 259)” (Bracher 23).

Bracher notes “passive narcissistic desires of the Symbolic order” involve a feeling that “subjects are loved by the Symbolic Other because of the signifier they embody, as indicated, for example, in the belief that God loves ‘the meek,’ in the notion that Nature loves ‘the wise and pure’ (Coleridge, ‘Dejection’), and in the conviction that Society loves ‘a winner’” (23). Signifiers one embodies, with “such identity-bearing words”, are what Lacan calls master signifiers (23). In the above detail from *Carousel of Desire* we see the woman reaching for the clothing modeled by a symbolic other in the form of the idealization of the cultural notion of female. The woman in the photograph gazes from the dress in her hands toward the model representing the Symbolic Other. Of course, the woman is not consciously seeking the approval and love of the mannequin as a totem representing the Symbolic Other (“passive narcissistic desire ... to be the object of the Other’s love”). Yet, the woman regards both the mannequin and the dress it wears with an eye toward emulation (“active narcissistic desire”) if not adoration. “Subjects strive to fully actualize the qualities they have identified with, while their role as the effect of desire can be seen from the fact that identifications are always motivated—that is, they respond to a want-of-being” (Bracher 22). The woman is caught in a net, entangled in a web. The effect of this interplay of master and secondary signifiers—ones “bearing a metonymic and metaphoric relation to the operative signifier” (27)—that, by associating with and giving interpretive meaning to the master signifiers, leads to “active

narcissistic desire” in which one desires to become the Other. “That is, we gravitate (in active narcissistic desire) toward positions and identify with persons, characters and images linked with one or more of the master signifiers constituting our ego ideal” (27).

Seeing this perspective also invites engagement with the underlying narrative. In what I would consider a rejection of the sexist master signifiers and minor ones that importantly support the master signifiers, bell hooks correctly advises repudiation of debilitating associations. “Feminist ideology should not encourage (as sexism has done) women to believe they are powerless. It should clarify for women the powers they exercise daily and show them ways these powers can be used to resist sexist domination and exploitation” (hooks 95). Definitions of identity are not fixed; they are artificially imposed and then fixated on the maintenance of a particular style of privilege and domination. In the instant case of women as consumers, hooks comments that “profit from the sale of women’s fashion alone makes it one of the major industries in this economy. Endless purchases of small items can lead to enormous economic profit and power. As consumers, women have power, and if organized could use that power to improve women’s social status” (hooks 95).

3.3 Signs and Signifiers of Unattainable Desires within Grim Truths

On the distinction between signs and signifiers, Lacan says, “the domain of sexuality shows a natural functioning of signs [...] and, according to the definition of the sign, something intended for someone. The signifier, being something quite different, represents a subject for another signifier” (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 157).

In the upper left portion of the photograph are the most basic of signs in the form of actual paint-



on-wood signage. The rhetoric of these signs, in the economy of desire, may be unpacked. For clarity, the reflected image has been mirrored to allow us to read the English words. Since this shop is in Tokyo, these words would function as symbols of Western fashion and design. While various totem words have been “Japanized” because English is considered to be sophisticated and stylish, others retain their original meaning. Lacan states we are products of language and culture. In the above detail, both of these master signifiers (language and culture) may be considered.

Language from a meaning-making perspective—a semiotic role—performs a rhetorical function in the graphic

LIFE is short. So make your life be full of Happiness

that occupies the eye-level to shoulder space of the mannequin on the right. The way to be full of happiness is to fulfill your desires that, in this case, must be to buy the items on display in this shop. The grim reminder of one’s mortality is the rhetorical device used to persuade potential

purchasers to spend one signifier, money, to attain happiness. In this exchange, happiness is also a secondary signifier for an ideal desired condition.

From a Japanese cultural perspective, the common use of words denoting qualities like happiness, kindness, safety, or calmness is to ascribe the idealized condition rather than the transient state. For example, a compliment would take the form “you are kindness person” rather than “you are kind.” Lacan notes that the perfect condition of eternal kindness or happiness is a desire that will never be fulfilled. We don’t get what we say we want. We never get what we say we want. What we get is the want of wanting—desire. Lacan describes this as “a residue” that is the result of alienated needs that can’t be articulated by one’s demands (Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality*, 80). Further, Lacan takes issue with the current state of psychoanalysis that conflates the “reduction of desire to need” (80) when these two concepts must be regarded in opposition. Demand, in Lacan’s usage, is not related to what is granted or withheld. Rather, it is for the existence of an Other with the

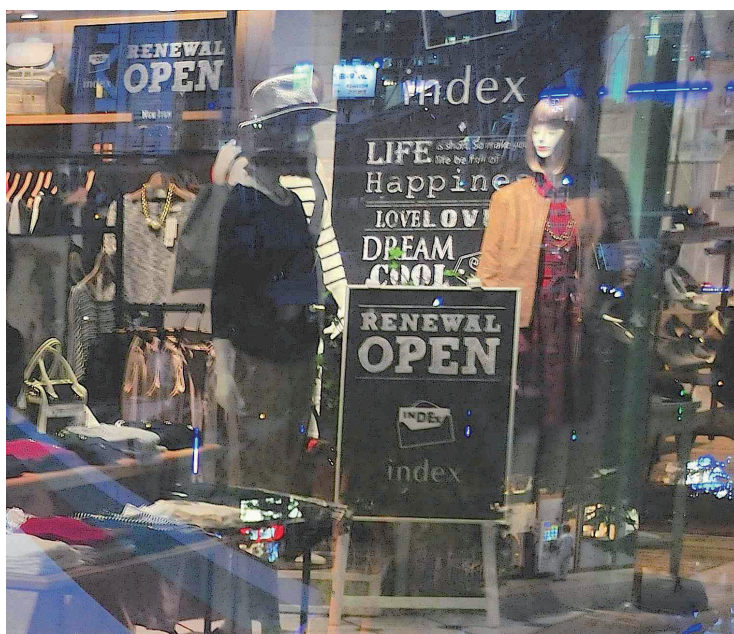
power to grant or withhold. “Demand constitutes this Other as already possessing the ‘privilege’ of satisfying needs, that is, the power to deprive them of the one thing by which they are satisfied” (80).

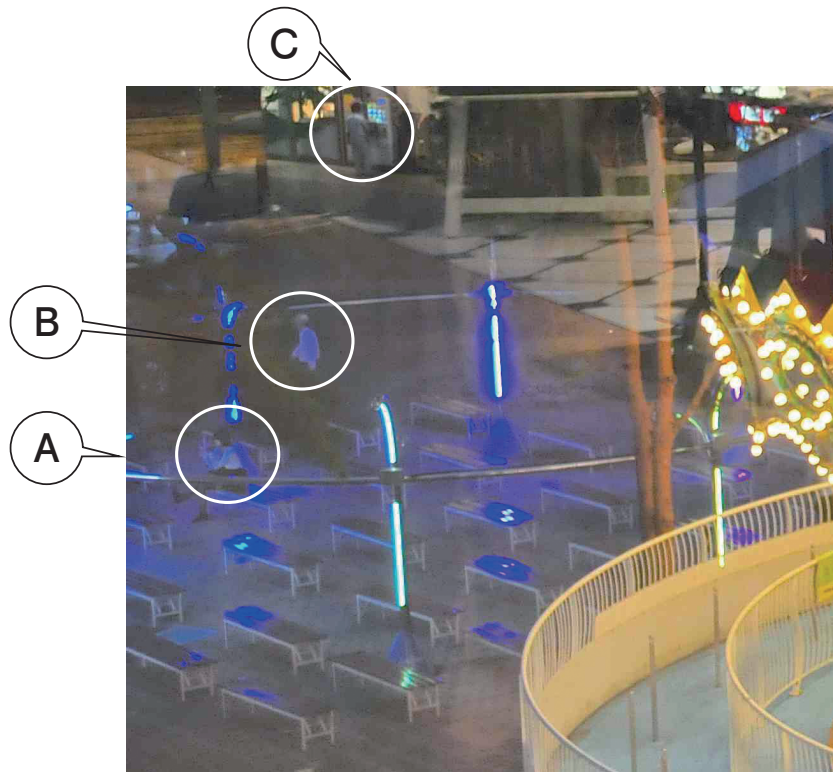
Culturally, the graphic in capital letters with the second “love” in bold typeface in “LOVELOVE” is a Japanized English phrase used to refer to couples in a physically romantic relationship. The phrase “they are not just friends, they are ‘lovelove’ together” conveys this *jouissance*. Most particularly, the power of what is hidden and in fact unattainable is demonstrated in the act of lovemaking. Each partner must appear to have what the other wants. Here it’s important to maintain the distinction between want and desire. In the example Lacan gives of a heterosexual couple, “an ‘appearing’ which gets substituted for the ‘having’ [intervenes] so as to protect it on one side and to mask its lack on the other” (84). The power dynamic in play, which we may refer to as the heterosexually-normative economy, is of the male wanting to present himself as if his phallus is rather than signifies the Other and the female wanting

to present herself as if her agreement to envelop his phallus will satisfy her desire for the Other. As Lacan states, “It is for what she is not that that she expects to be desired as well as loved. But she finds the signifier of her own desire in the body of the one to whom she addresses her demand for love” (84).

Other words, like DREAM and COOL, along with two that are hidden behind the mannequin—“sweet” (we see the “S” just behind the mannequin’s elbow) and “delicious”—evoke strongly positive associations. The English words, well known as iconic shapes and culturally meaningful phrases in modern-day Japan, are secondary signifiers that articulate desires and support the master signifier “woman” with attributes to be cultivated, like “sweet” and “lovelove.” Throughout the shop these words are repeated in other signs that act as decorations and display the positive signifiers one is urged to embody.

Since our “identity is determined to a large degree by what happens to those signifiers that represent us—our master signifiers—particularly





the alliances they form with and the wars they wage on other signifiers” (Bracher 25), we want them repeated often (26) and “Since the Symbolic Other extends beyond individual authority figures and is ultimately coextensive with the Symbolic order itself, the signifiers one desires to embody in order to achieve recognition by the Other are, in the final analysis, those signifiers given pride of place by a system of language as such” (27).

Returning the detail of signage to its reflected orientation in the actual photograph, we see a small human form in the lower left corner (look all the way down the centerline of the hatless mannequin).

The detail of this section, looking further down and through the window reveals three humans—two standing and one seated—in the lower left.

3.4 Three Humans in the Lower Left

In this detail we see a woman **A** seated on a

bench on the left center part. She is gazing into her mobile telephone, a tiny machine. The man **B** above and to the right of the woman is walking away from the carousel, which is the largest machine in *Carousel of Desire*. The man **C** we could see in the signage detail above is interacting with a human-sized machine. It seems to be a vending machine. These are peripheral isolated individuals in the photograph, yet they spark one reverie—the notion of machine reality as a control mechanism that mediates the economy of desire. While space does not permit a more complete exploration of this theme, one extract from Donna Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and socialist-feminism in the late twentieth century* will be adduced to support the case that our relationship to technology as a signifier of modernity (as machine reality) is a control mechanism that mediates the economy of desire. Haraway observes, “...the



boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion [and that] intense pleasure in skill, machine skill, ceases to be a sin, but an aspect of embodiment. The machine is not an *it* to be animated, worshipped, and dominated. The machine is *us*, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment” (Haraway, 315).

We then move to the right side of the photograph.

3.5 On the Verge of the Natural World: Foliage at the Lower Right

The deep green foliage beside the staircase leading up to the carousel in the lower right may plausibly be interpreted as the realm of the unconscious. It is a fractal image—the most difficult to appreciate visually because it organizes itself with an organic logic that is resistant to interpretation by electronic and mechanical (digital camera) means—that marks the entrance to the carousel. It is a vestige of nature; untamed, romantic, poetic, and passionate. Looking again at the full image of *Carousel of Desire*, we see this deep green foliage

frames the entire right side of the image and accounts for twenty percent of the visual surface. It verges and yet is distinct from the built world of the rest of the photograph. At this point I will imagine the natural green area as female and the structured built area as male, with the male area showing “femaleness” as a set of structures women are urged to conform to.

Luce Irigaray, in “The Question of the Other”, asserts there must be an “otherness” for women outside the ambit of equality with men because “the lack of special rights for women does not allow them [women] to move from a state of nature to a civilized state” (Irigaray, 14) and Irigaray presents this case noting concrete examples such as how exploitation of women must be resolved by efforts “resolved within difference rather than by abolishing it” (10), with discussion of long-held male-based biases of Western philosophy (12), and with romantic, poetic passion (17). This intentionally echoes the above distinction between the deep green foliage verge as the untamed,



romantic, and passionate feminine portion of the *Carousel of Desire* photograph in contrast to the mechanical built world of the eighty percent that may be conceptualized as the masculine (which includes the masculine impression of the feminine) portion of the image.

If we don't travel far enough down into the landscape of Irigaray's schema, we may not appreciate that the "intellectual scenery" that contains such wonders as a new feminine language that would allow women to express themselves if it could be spoken corresponds to dialect being spoken (philosophically speaking) by Jacques Lacan. We would find Irigaray's new feminine language strikingly similar to the third stage in Lacan's philosophy of three orders—Symbolic, Imaginary, Real—the last of which has very specific counterintuitive and non-common-sense meaning in Lacan's universe. For Lacan, *the Real* is that which is outside language and that resists symbolization absolutely.

We come to a wall. This wall directs us up the staircase. The staircase channels and regulates the flow of our steps—provides a structure for our movement—up toward the carousel.

3.6 The central image of the carousel

Mirrors are mounted around the carousel's core. I will reference these mirrors a number of times. First, the mirrors allow riders to recognize themselves on their favorite animal mannequin (and for mommy or daddy to say "that's you on the horsey!" to their delighted offspring). Bracher notes the urge to have an identity in which one recognizes oneself and is recognized by others results in "the establishment of a cluster of master signifiers as the ego ideal, which originates in the child's attempt to be desired and loved—that is, recognized (passive narcissistic desire)—by the Other" (24). For the child it is the parent who represents the Other. Bracher continues that master signifiers provide feelings of coherence and continuity essential to identity and "are, as Lacan puts it, what makes a discourse readable (XVII 218)" (24). The discourse of the carousel, with animals represented as toys to be safely ridden for enjoyment, communicates a sense of coherence and continuity. On a carousel the rider moves and the surrounding world remains the same. As a trigger to Hélène Cixous' thoughts in *Laugh of the Medusa*, we see Medusa heads as decorations between oval mirrors on the carousel's

frieze. On the inner wall of the carousel there are only mirrors. On the subject of constantly changing appearances that challenge notions of coherence and continuity, Cixous says, “One can no more speak of ‘woman’ than of ‘man’ (207) without being trapped within an ideological theater where the proliferation of representations, images, reflections, myths, identifications, transform, deform, constantly change everyone’s Imaginary and invalidate in advance any conceptualization” (208).

Cixous’ mention of Lacan’s Imaginary, as the register of subjectivity in which images invoke desire, further supports the need to break out of the ‘ideological theater’ and also leads to her concluding that “nothing compels us to deposit our lives in these lack-banks; to think the subject is constituted as the last stage in a drama of bruising rehearsals; to endlessly bail out the father’s religion” (210). The term “lack-banks” evokes associations with Lacan’s third register of subjectivity, *the Real*. What is *Real* is the lack stored in these banks. Considering the double tier of mirrors on the carousel—one girding the inner barrel and another between Medusa heads on the upper frieze—as an attempt to reflect the real world around, the metaphor of the mirror may do double service for references to both Cixous and Lacan.

For Cixous, like her metaphor of white ink writing on white paper, the absence that marks *the Real* inscribes it as an absence by providing a ground on which the figure of its absence can be expected and the condition of its never arriving is confirmed. That is, the images in the mirror *mirror* reality and are not real “through the looking glass” locations we may ever visit. Lacan couches this in reference to the act of making a photograph and plays with the idea of a photograph (or its precursor, a camera) being better understood as a mirror.

In “Sexuality in the Defiles of the Signifier” Lacan speaks of the way in which “the nodal point by which the pulsation of the unconscious is linked to

sexual reality must be revealed. This nodal point is called desire” (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 154). Desire always has a hidden component. Lacan describes the “topology of the subject (of certainty/uncertainty in the network of signifiers in relation to sexuality and sexual identity) according to a sign that I [Lacan] once called the interior 8” (155). Lacan continues, “you have only to turn the obturator [basically, opening] I referred to earlier [the enclosed circle of the 8 when viewed three-dimensionally from above, in which sexuality always contains the inner core of desire] into a camera shutter, except that it would be a mirror. It is in this little mirror, which shuts out what is on the other side, that the subject sees emerge the game by means of which he may—according to the illusion of what is obtained in the experiment of the inverted bunch of flowers, that is to say, a real image — accommodate his own image around what appears, the *petit a*” (159). Here I would understand the small “other” as one’s ego projection; in other words, as one’s sexual identity as constituted by a desire that is closed off from itself.

In setting out to “distinguish between *the Real* as the organic substrate of subjectivity constituted by our body, where drives are grounded, and the *Real* as the (psycho)logical effect of the subject’s accession to the Symbolic order, the irreducible lack that is the heart of subjectivity and to which fantasy responds” (40), Bracher quotes Slavoj Žižek. Žižek writes that while the kernel of *the Real* may be *jouissance* as enjoyment, there is also the nuance of too much enjoyment, as in what is left over when one has experienced a surplus of enjoyment and is beset with lassitude, which Žižek describes as a void whereby “*the Real* is in itself a hole, a gap, an opening in the middle of the symbolic order—it is the lack around which the symbolic order is structured. (169-70)” (41). Consideration of this lack following surplus invites the question of what

residual impression *Carousel of Desire* leaves us with.

3.7 The Entire Image as an Entity that Defines Us

Begging the question in this section's heading, the entire image is an entity that defines us because it reflects a world that identifies us as we identify ourselves in it. Those last eight words—identifies us as we identify ourselves in it—is how Lacan's camera-as-mirror metaphor operates and reprises the idea of a photograph (or its precursor, a camera) being better understood as a mirroring device in a Lacanian sense that photographs are signifying images.

Returning to the “teaser copy” that precedes the title to this paper, *Images Watch Us*, we may also add that images speak to us and photographs seek to define us. We are what the photograph says and it says, “do this” and “be this” and “want this” and “buy this” and you may be able to “be that,” so “do this” in an endless circle, in a carousel of desire in which wanting is the coinage in the economy and goods are the tokens in the game and the understanding is (to quote a popular Japanese marketing slogan) that nothing is better than the “next next.” It's an economy in which I paraphrase Lao Tsu in saying that wanting is the symptom and having is the disease.* It's a situation in which feeling you can have anything you want makes you want everything; in which having everything makes you disappointed in everything. Or, put another way, that when you can have (or have) everything you are satisfied with nothing. You have everything except satisfaction. Desire keeps the carousel turning, but seeing we are on the carousel is the first task to finding a way off of it. Indeed, the phrase “did you get off?” has come to be synonymous with one partner seeking confirmation of another's attainment of the fleeting ecstasy of *jouissance*.

4. Conclusion

As outlined at the start, the goal of this paper was not to explain the entirety of Lacan's philosophy, system, and his reformulation of Freud in terms of gender and identity as artificial emanations of language and culture. That project would require study many years in duration that might only be summarized in delineating the contours of Lacan's registers of Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real with insights from scholars who have spent careers—collectively, centuries—offering their trenchant interpretations.

Rather, this *Analysis of Reflections in the Carousel of Desire from a Lacanian Perspective* aimed to offer plausible entry points into the functioning of the economy of desire by examining one photograph and referencing selected concepts from Lacan and other writers who have provided cogent interpretation of his work.

As Bracher concludes “The value of this taxonomy of desire ... lies not in its capacity to serve as a totalizing system ... [but] ... rather in its demonstration of the multifariousness of and complexity of desire and in its function as a kind of checklist prompting us to search a given text or discourse for interpellative forces that might not be immediately evident” (52) and he asserts that the identification of these forces “is a primary means for promoting social change” (52).

This paper, in examining one image from the real world from a Lacanian perspective, presents *Reflections in the Carousel of Desire* as a synecdoche and suggests that all photographs must be interrogated rather than internalized. As they seek to define us, we must dialogically undertake to deconstruct and analyze them. Interpellation, in its philosophical usage—as the process by which cultural beliefs are simply assumed rather than questioned—must be interpenetrated and Dr. Lacan has provided us with the instruments to perform

this operation. This paper has attempted to give us some experience in using them.

This paper was written in the main by Lawrence Karn, with the very kind assistance and support of Takahiko Hattori.

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Notes

- * An excerpt from reading 46 of *The Way of Life According to Lao Tzu* comments that “Owning is the entanglement, Wanting is the bewilderment”

Directly related to how images act as signifiers, two BBC News items are of interest in terms of the importance of photographic images and language (*Menstruation adverts deemed too racy for NYC's metro*) and in terms of how the dominant signifiers (lighter skin as being ‘refreshed’ in *Kenya's #BleachedBeauty speaks out*) define self-image.

Menstruation adverts deemed too racy for NYC's metro

24 October 2015

“Adverts for Thinx, a brand of pants designed to absorb menstrual blood, have been deemed too racy for the New York City subway.

The problem? Outfront Media, the company that advises the subway system on advertising, took issue with the suggestive nature of their imagery and the use of the word ‘period.’

Are the ads more offensive than other images that have appeared on the subway, or is this a case of sexism? A debate has been raging online.

Video by Olivia Lace-Evans”

<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-34611876>

#BBCTrending: Kenya's #BleachedBeauty speaks out
16 June 2014 Last updated at 10:10 BST

“The Kenyan socialite Vera Sidika has defended her decision to lighten her skin in an interview with BBC Trending.

As we reported on this blog, Sidika was criticised on social media for spending as much as \$170,000 on skin lightening. People shared their opinions online using the hashtag #BleachedBeauty.

Sidika, often dubbed ‘Kenya's Kim Kardashian’, told BBC Trending she has no regrets and blames society for encouraging skin lightening.”

<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-27833833>

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