

CHAPTER 1

Actors, Agents, and Avatars

Sporadic and triumphant reports of its death to the contrary, the language of psychoanalysis has, at the end of the century whose birth coincided with its own, achieved the stature of a full-blown culture industry. The reasons for this are hardly mysterious. As a theory that purports to reveal the fundamental structure of the human psyche, psychoanalysis stakes a claim to a knowledge that is inherent to every human endeavor. Where its claims have been most powerfully felt, however, is in the realm of the analysis, explication, and criticism of literature, art, and cultural production in general. Early manifestations of psychoanalytic cultural and literary criticism were concerned with the analysis of the author's or artist's psychology via the text or work he or she produced, treating that text or work as if it were the speech of a patient in analysis. Another practice that began early on—which was evident, in fact, in Freud's own writings—but that, unlike the former tendency, has not fallen into disrepute, is the use of artistic or literary works to confirm, explicate, or demonstrate the validity of psychoanalytic models and theories.¹ Finally, a third general manifestation of the analytic attitude toward culture has become dominant in the last twenty years: the recourse to a psychoanalytic model of the human subject as a basis for demonstrating how texts—taken in the broadest possible sense—are able to affect human agency, and how power reproduces itself via this manipulation of agency.

The aim of this chapter is to show how both the contemporary tendencies in cultural criticism and the psychoanalytic model of agency they either explicitly or implicitly entail invite another, more fundamental level of analysis—an analysis of the subject's spatiality, its organization of the space it inhabits. What such an analysis shows is that this organization of space is, first, specifically theatrical and, furthermore, that its theatricality is a historical phenomenon, one whose contours are best delineated via a historical investigation of the material conditions of the medium from which it gets its name: the theater. By describing how theatricality is expressed in contemporary theoretical discourse, I hope to set the stage for this historical analysis in the chapters that follow, an analysis that will reveal the theatrical experience of space as it emerges against the background of its nemesis and sibling, presence. On the basis of this historical analysis, I will finally, in the last chapter, present these two terms as the pivotal

poles of a new analytic vocabulary, a tool for explaining what is unique about the modern world. This new vocabulary is not meant to replace that of psychoanalysis, nor is it dependent on psychoanalytic theory for its claims. Rather, what I intend to show in this chapter is how the discourse of subjectivity that currently abounds as an instrument for *theoretical* analysis is as beholden to theatrical spatiality as are the *historical* notions of subjectivity I analyze in the last chapter. Nevertheless, these theoretical instances of the subjectivity discourse do not share the weakness of those historical usages—namely that they confound disparate notions under one category—and hence my analysis does not, as it does in the latter case, constitute a criticism against these instances, but rather a dialogue with them.

AVATARS

Using a technology called Virtual Reality Markup Language (VRML), cyberspace enthusiasts may now construct more or less realistic representations of themselves to be their full-time representatives in the virtual community. These “avatars,” as they are referred to by the advocates of the Universal Avatar Project, a group dedicated to formulating one of the first manifestations of a social contract for this virtual world, are designed by their “masters” to play whatever role the master wishes them to play. But the understanding seems to be that their masters, for the most part, are not looking for mere passing toys, ephemeral masks to be changed at whim. Rather, if the group’s white paper is any indication, those who are seeking to set down the conventions of avatar interaction conceive of these entities quite seriously as second selves, entailing a certain “persistence of identity,” and perhaps deserving of the same respect owed to the masters in conventional, real-world interaction.²

In one scenario from the white paper in question,

Moses is at home in his VRML living space. His house was designed by a famous virtual architect, his avatar was created using the Avatars’R Us construction kit. He was able to easily purchase both products online, because his Universal Avatar had embedded financial transaction capabilities.

What is immediately striking about the language of the scenario is the tendency toward confusion between master and avatar. Which of these is Moses? He is said to be in his virtual living space, which would seem to indicate that the avatar is the referent, and yet his (Moses’s) avatar is also referred to as having been created with a kit, as having been purchased, etc., leading one to believe that Moses is the master. The confusion in this passage is not unique, and in fact the blurring is probably quite deliberate. One’s avatar *is* one’s self in interactive virtual reality. By means of it, one may lounge about one’s virtual house (with one’s in-

telligent, virtual pet), go shopping in a virtual mall, entertain virtual friends (who are the avatars of other real people), and go on virtual dates.

It is important to the authors that interactivity be experienced by an avatar much as a master might experience it in real life:

Moses shakes hands with Dan. To create compelling immersive virtual experiences, users and their avatars should be able to interact and have an impact on each other. They should be able to shake hands; one user should be able to tickle the other and see an automatic giggle; one user should be able to kick the other, and see the other begin to limp.

When a child plays a video game, he or she is often no more invested in his character than a chess player is in any individual piece on the board. The characters serve as means to the end of winning the game, but one could not be said to be overly identified with them. In contrast, the relation between an avatar and its master seems to be extraordinarily tight. Unlike the video game character, the avatar appears to carry a piece of the master with it in cyberspace; it reflects his or her individuality, his or her human uniqueness. Like any personal creation, a master feels protective of it, and feels emotional pain if it is criticized. But more than that, an avatar experiences *for* a master; it is that prosthesis through which the master feels his or her way through a world he or she cannot physically enter, and feels emotionally the presence of others, a presence entirely mediated through, and therefore entirely dependent upon, the identity of his or her avatar.

The Universal Avatar Project wishes to respect the sensitivity of this bond between avatars and their masters:

A intelligent virtual conversation ensues. Since the system allows for a variety of delay-mitigation strategies, a delay-mitigated virtual conversation between the three could be performed. When Nina talks, even though Dan and Moses won't hear the digitized voice for half a second and be able to respond for three seconds, both of their avatars can lean forward and provide visual back-channel encouragement for Nina's communication, to provide a seamless virtual conversation.

Why should it be important that this intelligent virtual conversation appear seamless? A failure to respond gesturally by an avatar could trigger an unpleasant association with a situation in real life, in which a misplaced gesture or a faux pas creates a misunderstanding, causing feelings to be hurt, or a pall of discomfort to fall over the group. If something similar happens in a virtual conversation, do the participants feel shame?

One last situation: Maclen and Kate have gone on a virtual date to a virtual amusement park. After a fun-filled day in which they fight the Borg in a Star

Trek immersive game, “Maclen runs his custom Java applet for a kissing animation, and Kate responds with stars spinning, fireworks and bells.” That’s how Kate responds, but how does *Kate* respond?

The question, put most generally, is: what do masters feel when avatars kiss, or are tickled, or are put down while engaging in intelligent conversation? What is at stake when we talk of rights, rules, and conventions for avatars? And finally, does it undermine the apparent immediacy of the body to discover that one could feel viscerally a slight to one’s avatar—a racial slur, for instance—that one could have a sexual experience on-line, or that one could feel the touch of another being through an avatar’s virtual skin?

The body of an avatar is produced through programming, which is in turn informed by cultural values and expectations, institutional regulations, the limits of certain languages, images and sensations, and all the desires involved in and invoked by all the above. The human body, on the other hand, is endowed with a real physicality that ostensibly transcends such influences. It can be opposed to the ideality of the avatar’s body, a body that can be shaped and even composed by desire. A human body, a real body, is what is given.

It is against the certainty of this distinction between the real and the virtual that Slavoj Žižek cautions in *The Indivisible Remainder*:

One must be careful, however, to avoid various traps that lurk here. The first among them is the notion that, prior to the computer generated virtualization of reality, we were dealing with direct, ‘real’ reality: the experience of virtual reality should, rather, make us sensitive to how the reality with which we were dealing *always-already* was virtualized. The most elementary procedure of symbolic identification, identification with an Ego Ideal, involves—as Lacan had already put it in the 1950s, apropos of his famous schema of the ‘inverted vase’—an identification with a ‘virtual image [*l’image virtuelle*]: the place in the big Other from which I see myself in the form in which I find myself likeable (the definition of Ego Ideal) is by definition virtual.³

If normal, physical, nonvirtual reality was somehow always-already virtualized, this could explain how a human body could feel the pain of an insult, or even that of a “physical” attack, to its avatar: harsh words in real life can hurt one physically; one does feel viscerally a racial slur, or the words “I don’t love you any more.” But if these words do not in fact impact the body in a material way, they must be affecting it through some mediated form, a sense of self that is both “virtual”—in this case, made of meaning, susceptible to language—and physical.⁴ This sense of self, or image of self, which has the capacity to represent the individual’s body in the world of meaning, is what Lacan and Freud called an “ideal ego,” that “virtual image” described by Žižek as depending for its construction on the identification with an “ego ideal.” I will come back to the nature of this relation in the third section of this chapter. For the moment, I

merely stipulate that there is such a thing as a virtual self that pre-exists its creation in cyberspace, or at least something like it. The next question, then, is: How is this virtual self, this human avatar, constructed? And by whom? I suggest that the current enthusiasm over the philosophical concept of *performativity*, particularly in the politically charged gender epistemology of Judith Butler, is provoked precisely by its insight into the construction of human avatars.

PERFORMATIVITY

The term performativity, in Judith Butler's articulation of it, describes a process by which a body is endowed with a certain form. Perhaps the most fundamental form the human body assumes is the distinction between male and female. Common sense dictates that a human body is either a male body or a female body (with the various other genetic possibilities, such as the numerous types of hermaphroditism that have been identified, usually discarded as anomalies). This distinction is taken to be fundamental, unalterable (notwithstanding the "perverse" use of medical technology to surgically alter the body), and in many senses determinant of what kind of human being one is, in that men and women may be said to be different in ways that are thought to be statistically verifiable (men are, on average, stronger than women, etc.). Butler's claim is that such thinking, recognizable in traditional as well as not-so-traditional thinkers, depends on a series of demonstrable errors. Even feminist thought has often left alone the ontological distinction of sex, seeking instead to problematize the culturally inflected, non-value-neutral categories of gender. According to this doxa, gender exists in the cultural realm, where it is subject to the vagaries of time and cultural difference; men's and women's bodies may have certain constant physical attributes that are always associated with them, but the roles men and women play, the skills and responsibilities expected of them, anything that enters into their social being, are all to be seen as aspects of gender, which is not essential to the human being but is constructed or imposed by society.

Rather than "deconstructing" the binary opposition of *gender* roles, revealing them to be mutually dependent, and disrupting the supposedly natural distinctions between the two, Butler's basic trope in *Gender Troubles* was to deconstruct the perhaps now more fundamental, and mostly unquestioned, binary of *gender and sex*. Humans, according to her argument, do not have immediate access to things in the world, but rather approach that world and everything in it via a host of filters, webs of meaning, cascades of images and expectations, none of which are innocent at any point in one's life. One's assigned sex is only *meaningful* as gleaned through this multiplicity of filters, and therefore, by the time one encounters "sex," or tries to say anything about it, that encounter is already the result of gender. Gender, in a logical if not chronological sense, *precedes* sex.

If gender can be said to precede sex, that is because, in fact, the language bearing the cultural categories of gender is never purely *constative*, a sort of language that merely describes an object or a situation; rather, that language is *performative*, in that it produces the reality it claims to describe (much as a priest's words "I hereby pronounce you man and wife" do not, as they would appear to grammatically, merely describe the priest's own act of pronouncing, but rather actually perform the work of creating a married couple out of two single individuals, to use one of Austin's famous examples). If the language of gender is performative, then it does not describe the neutral, physical reality of sexual difference; it produces it.⁵

Butler is clear, however, that the concept of performativity she is developing depends for its functioning on far more than the use of language. Humans *actively* become their sex by *enacting* gender:

In other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality.⁶

The gendered actions that are performed are performed within the social and cultural realm of meaning; they are intended to "express" a sense of "masculinity" or "femininity" to the real world, an expression by which the performer tries to prove he is a "real man" or she is a "real woman." But the "reality" of the sexual identity that the performer is trying to establish beyond a doubt is actually created by the innumerable performances of others who, like him or her, are trying to establish the same proof. If this is the case, then the gendered body, the real physical sex of the body, has no ontological status—or, to put it in stronger terms, the body, as a sexed thing, as a real support for the cultural veneer of gender roles, cannot be said properly to exist, because the object we call sex is "always already" presented or revealed by the categories of gender.

Apparently, even in some circles from which Butler might have expected more support, this claim did not go over too well. As she recounts in the preface to her next book, *Bodies that Matter*, after the publication of *Gender Trouble* she was continually beset by colleagues expressing concern over her failure to take into account the "materiality of the body."⁷ Here we are again confronted with the "commonsensical" opposition to the idea that selves can be, in some sense, virtual: that is all fine and well, goes the normal response, but what about the materiality of the body? Well, the body is material, and that material is still

there. To claim that gender performs sex and that therefore sex has no ontological status prior to gender, is definitely not the same as to say that there is no body, or that the body has no materiality. To conflate these two positions is already to assume the certainty that *Gender Trouble* was all about disrupting: the certainty that sexual difference was purely a question of ontological, pre-linguistic, physical materiality.

Bodies that Matter, then, set about to deconstruct another binarism, that between the materiality of bodies and the ideality of cultural norms and values. From the fact that the human body is a material entity it does not follow that its materiality cannot be subject to powers assumed to be ideal, or in some sense nonmaterial, such as discursive power. Butler had shown that sexual difference was subject to the performative power of gender categories, but now her critics were suggesting that there was something in the materiality of the body itself that could perhaps resist this performativity. So she responded with the notion of materialization, claiming, in effect, that if one wanted to argue that the material body had some say in sex, that was fine, but in so doing one would also have to admit that even that materiality itself was not unaffected by the performative power of gender.

The idea is that, in order for human bodies to be received as just that—human—they must, in a material way, conform to certain, often unspoken, social expectations that govern their appearance, their behavior, and the appearance and behavior of the other bodies they desire. These social expectations, or “regulatory ideals,” are “materialized” insofar as bodies conform to or adopt them. “Thus, ‘sex’ is a regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices.”⁸ These regulated practices are not to be understood as occupying a superstructure outside of the absolute confines of the body, but as actually altering the body, acting materially to determine its surfaces and its being: “In this sense, what constitutes the fixity of the body, its contours, its movements, will be fully material, but materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power’s most productive effect.”⁹ This power, in the form of regulatory practices, does not just perform one’s sex as a category of knowledge, having to do with what one understands as one’s sex, but further, and more profoundly, it performs (aspects of) the very materiality of the body as that body strives desperately to *materialize* (become existent, occupy space) before its fellows, to take a place among the living, the desirable, the human.

It should be clear from this that Butler’s performativity cannot be thought of as a singular performance, even if her earlier work put a lot of stock in the subversive potential of certain *theatrical* acts (by which she means enactments prone to hyperbole¹⁰) or parodies, such as, most pertinently, the performance of drag. Drag is potentially subversive for Butler because, “in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its

contingency.”¹¹ While it is often these singular acts that Butler’s readers have interpreted as being the most powerful, or politically interesting, instantiations of performativity, this is precisely where one runs the risk of misunderstanding the crux of her contribution. Performativity, as a mode of imposition of bodily forms—or, as I have termed it, the process of construction of a human avatar—does not, for the most part, describe an agency-rich method of creating one’s self and body to one’s own specifications. Rather, performativity is a description of how bodies and selves are controlled and compelled to conform to social standards:

Performativity is thus not a singular “act,” for it is always a reiteration of a norm or a set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition. Moreover, this act is not primarily theatrical; indeed, its apparent theatricality is produced to the extent that its historicity remains dissimulated (and, conversely, its theatricality gains a certain inevitability given the impossibility of a full disclosure of its historicity).¹²

If “normal” performativity appears theatrical, played out in a hyperbolic way, it is so only to the extent that we, the observers, are unaware of the history of performances that this performance repeats. And it is from this repetition of a history of performances that performativity derives its power to shape and fix bodies and selves. Each time the body in question repeats its performance, it simultaneously reiterates and reinscribes the norms dictating that performance. But what is it that compels the individual to enact those norms, and to perform and hence materialize its body in conformity with those norms?

At times Butler refers to the potential of punishment for those who fail to comply,¹³ but mostly her argument rests on the claim that regulatory practices materialize bodies, such that bodies come to exist, to be recognized as human, within the horizons of a certain set of practices. Resistance, if not futile, is always circumscribed by these regulatory practices, and must ground itself from within their confines; hence the importance of such destabilizing techniques as drag. Power is defined not as the imposition of one subject’s will upon that of another, but as what enables the will to arise and defines its horizons of possibility: “If power is not reduced to volition, however, and the classical liberal and existential model of freedom is refused, then power-relations can be understood, as I think they ought to be, as constraining and constituting the very possibilities of volition.”¹⁴ It is this statement which most clearly differentiates Butler’s Foucauldian from her psychoanalytic tendencies: for a Foucauldian, power precedes will; for a Freudian or a Lacanian, will, or desire, can be coöpted by power, but never entirely produced.¹⁵ It is by understanding how the individual’s desires are brought into play within social interaction that we can best explain how it is that (and to

what extent) our virtual selves are constructed, imposed upon us, and to what extent we may be free to define and create them ourselves.

For Butler, the particular power of performativity lies in its rehearsal or reiteration of a set of norms, or previously performed contexts. Interestingly enough, this take on performativity is derived not from the work of John Austin, who coined the term in his 1962 book, *How to Do Things with Words*, but rather from a critique and appropriation of Austin's work by Jacques Derrida. Derrida did not intend by his critique to invent a new concept of performativity, but rather to say something in general about language, namely, that it depends for its comprehensibility on what he calls iterability. He bases his claim on a series of exclusions Austin makes from his inquiry into what makes a performative utterance *felicitous*; that is, what makes it perform. I hope to be forgiven if I quote here my candidate for the most overquoted passage in contemporary philosophy, that same passage which, in Derrida's estimable hands, sparked one of the most virulent anglo-continental philosophical debates to date:

a performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy. This applies in a similar manner to any and every utterance—a sea change in special circumstances. Language in such circumstances is in special ways—intelligibly—used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use—ways which fall under the *etiolations* of language. All of this we are *excluding* from consideration.¹⁶

Derrida's critical appropriation of this passage is familiar enough: namely, that in excluding these parasitic etiolations (weakenings of natural vigor) of language that are those uses considered not-serious, Austin is in fact trying to exclude from his inquiry the very instantiations in language of what is essential to its functioning. These etiolations of language—the actor's speech, the poet's verse—model the essence of language for Derrida because they demonstrate its property of iterability, or citationality. "Could a performative utterance succeed if its formulation did not repeat a 'coded' or iterable utterance, in other words if the expressions I use to open a meeting, launch a ship or a marriage were not identifiable as *conforming* to an iterable model, and therefore if they were not identifiable in some way as 'citation'?"¹⁷ Language is always parasitic, always not-serious, because it depends on the citation of previous uses and contexts for its comprehensibility. Therefore, it appears that Butler's performativity is a hybrid of the classic definition—a usage of language that produces what it purports to describe or express—and of a separate but related concept, iterability. In Butler's reading, however, the performativity of a social construct like gender is empowered by its quality of citationality, that very quality whose presence in a linguistic situation was reason enough for Austin

to exclude it (wrongly, according to Derrida) from consideration, because a performative utterance in that situation (one in which it was not taken seriously) could never work.

Derrida's reading, while in some ways quite productive, was most likely (as has been pointed out by Searle and his sympathizers ad infinitum during the course of the subsequent debate mentioned above) not a "correct" interpretation, in that it (deliberately) reads Austin's statement at a different level than it was probably intended. There is, for example, another way to understand the "peculiar way" in which these utterances become "hollow or void." Derrida's critique aims at the heart of language understood as the transmission of some autonomously *intended* message; if meaning is radically dependent on the citation of previous usage, the transmission of this pure intention appears undermined, since one must always be saying something other than what one means, and since one's listener will most always be referring to different contexts and different usages in order to make sense of one's utterance. The actor's lines, however, are also in a peculiar way hollow or void of intentional content if one removes oneself from the frame established by the stage; for certainly, Austin would admit, the actor's words would not be hollow or void to the other *character* to whom they are addressed. They would, on the contrary, be overflowing with meaning, a meaning that makes sense within the context fixed by the limits of the theatrical frame. The actor's words are only hollow and void, lacking in seriousness, if one posits that they have an ulterior purpose beyond the transmission of a certain intended meaning to that character's interlocutor. They are words and actions, that is, presented to the ears and eyes of an audience, an audience that cannot be said properly to exist within the world of the stage. And not only is the actor's *speech* undermined by this "being-for-another," the actor's *being*, or more accurately the being of his or her character, is one that exists for another, an Other, again, of whom he or she can have no knowledge.

Just as Derrida used his reading to question Austin's move to exclude such a context as an etiolation of language and to argue that such usage is, in fact, an essential aspect of spoken communication, so I would claim that this second peculiar way in which language is staged is no less essential to normal usage and, in fact, that this *theatricality* is constitutive of a particular historical form of interpersonal relations and of self-consciousness itself.

To repeat: if the actor's speech, action, and presentation of self are in some way not serious, and hence not worthy of being included in an analysis of real language, of how language works in an everyday situation, it is not merely because these words and actions are those of another; more pertinently, they are not serious because they are not directed at the character with whom his or her character is interacting, at least not exclusively. The actor's presentation of his or her character is dedicated to a gaze that is, from the perspective of the characters, disembodied. For my claim to be true—namely, that what is true of the

stage is true of everyday speech and action—then speech and action in everyday life, like that on the stage, are also dedicated to, or played out for the benefit of, a disembodied gaze. When a person speaks, acts, becomes the person he or she is becoming in everyday life, he or she is guided in his or her speech and actions, in his or her gestures and clothes, in his or her likes and dislikes, by the desires he or she attributes to this gaze, a desire he or she wishes to embody. This gaze, then, and the desire it engenders, is the mechanism by which performativity in its extra-semiotic sense functions to produce, to materialize certain bodies, and, as Butler insists, to reject or make abject certain others.

To say that an individual becomes or adopts certain modes of speech and action and, eventually, even forms of being, is not the same as to say that the individual chooses these forms because they suit him or her, as in the naive idea of performativity discussed before. On the contrary, the gaze captures the individual's desire, motivates him or her to play those roles and become those selves that are most pleasing to it. The individual, in turn, learns how to play different parts at different times—learns to manipulate his or her performance within the confines of desirability as delimited by the gaze. Often he or she fails to meet its expectations, developing feelings of inadequacy, depression, worthlessness; in other cases, he or she manages to escape from its tyranny. But most of us, most of the time, become who we become under the auspices of the gaze, negotiating its demands, failing at times, succeeding at others. But almost always we are acting, playing our lives out before an audience we cannot see.

Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in their excellent introduction to a volume of articles dealing with the cross-pollinations existing between performance studies and the philosophical notion of performativity, draw attention to the essentially public nature of performative language, implying that it depends for its efficacy on an audience of sorts. What they emphasize, however, is the effect of this relation on the audience itself, in its role as witness to a performative statement:

Austin's rather bland invocation of "the proper context" (in which a person's saying something is to count as doing something) has opened, under pressure of recent theory, onto a populous and contested scene in which the role of silent or implied witnesses, for example, or the quality and structuration of the bonds that unite auditors or link them to speakers, bears as much explanatory weight as do the particular speech acts of supposed individual speech agents.¹⁸

The idea here is that the power of the performative context runs both ways. Not only does the presence of an audience of "implied or silent witnesses" function to activate the performative function, the audience itself is imperceptibly changed. Having participated in one more repetition of a particular ritual, they engage in a subtle but ever deeper reinscription of that practice into the domain

of the normal, the rational, and the natural.¹⁹ While I accept fully the implications of this notion of reciprocal interactivity between performers and witnesses, what this notion fails to address is the extent to which the role of the gaze in the formation of the individual's avatar, bodily ego, or virtual self, functions irrespective of the actual presence of others at a performance. The gaze has become a central aspect of the psyche, and it continues to watch us even when we are completely alone.

THEATRICALITY

Given the long tradition in the West of comparing life to theater, to say that humans behave as if they were acting on a stage might not seem particularly surprising.²⁰ In the twentieth century, this intuition has, for example, been canonized in the sociological methodology of Erving Goffman's 1956 book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. For Goffman, when an individual enters the presence of others, he or she immediately sets about reading the situation in terms of what roles are being played and what sort of role will be expected of him or her, as well as gauging the possibilities he or she has of controlling the set of conventions that will be accepted by the group, such that it might include conventions amenable to his or her own spectrum of self presentation. Consequently, "when an individual projects a definition of the situation and thereby makes an implicit or explicit claim to be a person of a particular kind, he automatically exerts a moral demand upon the others, obliging them to value and treat him in the manner that persons of his kind have a right to expect."²¹ The implication in terms of the agency of social actors is that their roles are, up to a certain point, consciously or deliberately assumed, because they take the form of a demand—more or less compelling, depending on the personality of the performers—to be acknowledged as truly being the person they present.²²

Goffman identifies a different demand, one he calls a "moral standard," in the extent to which "the cultural values of an establishment will determine in detail how the participants are to feel about many matters and at the same time establish a framework of appearances that must be maintained, whether or not there is feeling behind the appearances."²³ The potential lack of feeling behind the performances is an instance of what he refers to as the "amoral" character of the attitude of individuals as performers—in contrast to the "moral" standards guiding the frame of appearances to be maintained—who generally

are concerned not with the moral issues of realizing these standards, but with the amoral issue of engineering a convincing impression that these standards are being realized. . . . To use a different imagery, the very obligation and profitability of appearing always in a steady moral light, of being a socialized

character, forces us to be the sort of person who is practiced in the ways of the stage.²⁴

Therefore, while Goffman describes the actors in terms that, at first glance, grant them a great deal of agency, he also recognizes an element of compulsion in the assumption of their roles, a compulsion that is not to be confused with a moral obligation to respect community standards, but rather is one that seems in contrast empty and self contained: the compulsion to maintain the illusion of the performance at all costs.

Goffman identifies at least one mechanism of this compulsion in what we might call a fear of being shamed. When a group establishes the implicit conventions of a social performance—the register the actors are meant to assume, the gestures they are permitted to make, the subjects that are acceptable for discussion—a great deal of energy is invested into maintaining a smooth and natural flow to the performance. This flow is directly dependent on the investment of each of the individuals involved in her own self-definition, which has become an integral part of the group. As Goffman says,

[g]iven the fact that the individual effectively projects a definition of the situation when he enters the presence of others, we can assume that events may occur within the interaction which contradict, discredit, or otherwise throw doubt upon this projection. When these disruptive events occur, the interaction itself may come to a confused and embarrassed halt.²⁵

A misplaced word or gesture, a glance narrowly directed but apprehended by the wrong player—any such gaffe or faux pas can bring down the opprobrium of the group on the guilty party, while the group suffers palpably from the rift caused in the fabric of its social fiction. For, in effect, the performance is all about the establishment of this fiction as a truth, the truth of the group's natural bond, its mutual and transparent comprehension.

As closely as this model fits to the idea of theatricality I am advancing, Goffman does endeavor to place distance between the terms of his analysis and a performance on an actual stage. The principal difference he stresses is, perhaps surprisingly, the lack of an audience in real life. That is to say, an audience constitutes a “third party to the interaction—one that is essential and yet, if the stage performance were real, one that would not be there. In real life, the three parties are compressed into two; the part one individual plays is tailored to the parts played by the others present, and yet these others also constitute the audience.”²⁶ Certainly this caveat has a great deal of truth to it, and yet I have continued to insist on the presence of an audience when none is, in actual fact, present.

This aspect of being-looked-at—that it is a form of experience independent of the actual presence of others in one's vicinity—is also central for Jean-

Paul Sartre in his discussion of the problem concerning the existence of others in *Being and Nothingness*. The main concern of this book is the insurmountable chasm separating the “in-itself” [*en-soi*] of inert, objective existence, and the “for-itself” [*pour-soi*] of self-consciousness. In the course of an inquiry concerning the existence of others, Sartre raises the possibility of another mode of being as a point of mediation between these two extremes, a mode he calls “being-for-others.” In this mode of being, the subject’s realization of the ever-present possibility of other consciousnesses in the world makes it aware that, while existing for itself, as a being in its own world, and as the central being at that, it must also exist-for-others, as an object in another’s organization of the world. The other, therefore, has access to some aspect of the subject’s own being to which the subject does not, since the subject cannot know itself purely as an object, and since it has no access to the other’s experience of the world and, specifically, to the other’s perception of the subject. The presence of the other as subject is experienced as a gaze, or a feeling of being-looked-at, but in his account Sartre makes it clear that while the gaze is only made manifest in other individuals; it is the force of the Other as such. As he puts it, “In a word, what is certain is that I am looked-at; what is only probable is that the look is bound to this or that intra-mundane presence. Moreover there is nothing here to surprise us since as we have seen, it is never eyes which look at us; it is the Other-as-subject.”²⁷ The fact of inhabiting a world we assume to be inhabited by other subjects, others who perceive objects and organize the space of their perception around themselves, makes us constantly aware of the possibility that we are being watched, an awareness that is all the more acute when we cannot perceive any evidence of an observer (an idea that was central to Jeremy Bentham’s plans for the perfect prison, as Foucault has discussed in *Discipline and Punish*).

More than merely destabilizing what could otherwise be a solipsistic world view, however, this experience of the gaze is seen by Sartre (just as being-for-others was seen by Hegel before him) as a necessary and constitutive element in the emergence of self-consciousness.

The problem of the Other should not be posited in terms of the cogito; on the contrary, the existence of the Other renders the cogito possible as the abstract moment when the self is apprehended as an object. Thus the “moment” which Hegel calls being for the Other is a necessary stage of the development of self-consciousness; the road of interiority passes through the Other.²⁸

In other words, self-consciousness, that mode of being in which one apprehends oneself as an object, as a *res cogitans*, is not a state to which a being who is alone in the world can aspire. Rather, the being must experience the possibility that it is apprehended in the world of objects as experienced by others in

order for it to be able to be conscious *of* its self as opposed to being merely a point of consciousness, apprehending the world but not itself in the world.²⁹ A problem arises, however, since the existence of the Other in my world, while making possible my own apprehension of myself in self-consciousness, also opens up the existence of a world, and in particular an organization of space, alien to the world I perceive, but which nevertheless is the same world as the one I perceive (if I am not to lapse into solipsism) and, to make matters worse, a world in which I am included.

When I encounter another (person) in my universe of objects, it is not only as an object but as “an element of disintegration in that universe,” a disintegration of my space, a space defined by my grouping of the objects in my universe. When an other appears in that space, “there is a regrouping in which I take part but which escapes me, a regrouping of all the objects which people my universe.”³⁰ The Other, that is, the existence of others in general, is therefore not merely experienced as “the absence of a consciousness in relation to the body which I see” but as “the absence of the world which I perceive, an absence discovered at the very heart of my perception of the world.”³¹ The gaze, then, not only intervenes in a formative way in my relation to my self, in my self-consciousness, it actively disengages me from the space I inhabit as *my* space, an ordering of things *for* me; it forces upon this space an intermediary role, an abstractness foreign to things that exist only for me. I and the objects around me, including other people with whom I interact, are always interacting in a space that exceeds us and precedes us, in that its organizational unity derives from the Other’s gaze.

This Other, whose gaze organizes the space I inhabit, does not exist within this space; it is necessarily excluded in order for that space to attain its own, apparently objective, coherence. To the extent the Other is shown to exist, this can only take place at the expense of “reality” itself, just as the recognition of the audience as real (and not just another character written into the play) must perforce disrupt the fantasy world of the play being enacted for its pleasure. Like the audience is for a character on a stage, the Other is, for Sartre,

the being toward whom I do not turn my attention. He is the one who looks at me and at whom I am not yet looking, the one who delivers me to myself as unrevealed but without revealing himself, the one who is present to me as directing at me but never as the object of my direction; he is the concrete pole (though out of reach) of my flight, of the alienation of my possibilities, and of the flow of the world toward another world which is the same world and yet lacks all communication with it. But he can not be distinct from this same alienation and flow; he is the meaning and direction of them; he haunts the flow not as a real or categorical element but as a presence which is fixed and made part of the world if I attempt to “make-it-present” and which is never more present, more urgent than when I am not aware of it.³²

The last few words are the most telling: the Other is the meaning and direction of my alienation as a character, and of the flow of the story I am living out; he is neither real nor categorical, yet he haunts the flow of my existence; and while I can fix him and make him a part of the world (as God, an icon to be worshipped, a leader), his presence is most powerfully invoked precisely when I am not aware of it. The point of emphasizing this homology between the Other and the audience's meaning for a character on the stage is not merely to find another way of explaining a complex philosophical concept, but rather to claim for this relation a very real, very historical connection, a connection that becomes clear in Lacan's rearticulation of the gaze in psychoanalytic terms.

It is important that Sartre's analysis of the phenomenon of being-for-others is predominantly scopic, having to do with the "gaze" of the Other (in general) as manifested in the eyes of others. Lacan, teaching his seminar during the same time period that Sartre is working on *Being and Nothingness*, develops a schema of subjectivity in which a similar notion of the gaze plays a central role, and it is in his teaching that the most deliberate connection is made between the gaze and the object or cause of desire.

Lacan's schema involves the appropriation of several Freudian concepts concerning the relation of the human self to the social, particularly those of the *ideal ego* and the *ego-ideal*. Central to Freudian thought is the notion that the ego, that sense of self we refer to when we say I, is not a primordial, simple, immanent point of experience of the word, but rather is to be understood as an object, if one of the first and most privileged objects.³³ At the beginning of its existence, as it begins to distinguish its body from its environment and from the body of its mother, the child invests (cathects) the sensory "image" of its body with libidinal energy, it enjoys its own body, revels in it. Upon entering the world of meaning and suffering the first prohibitions that come from interaction with other subjects and their desires, the infant develops an ego-ideal, whose function is to serve as a model of identification for the infant, in accordance with the desires and expectations of the others with whom it must live.³⁴ This ego-ideal is, as we have already seen with Žižek, defined by Lacan in optical language as that perspective from which subject sees itself as lovable. The ideal ego is then produced as a third moment, an image mediated by the ego-ideal, representing for the infant the possibility (unattainable except in extreme cases of megalomania) of an enjoyment-in-self of the kind it now imagines it once had.³⁵

It is certainly commonplace to notice the affinity between this model of selfhood and a theatrical stage; indeed, this and the fact that Freud often derives central tenets from great works of drama in the western tradition has led some commentators to criticize Freud's theories as generalizing from not only a historically and culturally specific series of observations, but from a specific form of cultural expression as well.³⁶ My claim does not contradict this tack,

but rather locates in this specificity the great strength of Freud's contribution. Freud's model of the self issues from a moment of crisis of a certain historical mode of subjectivity, one whose principal element is precisely its *theatricality*. Lacan's radicalization of Freud's thought does nothing if it does not make even more explicit the theatrical nature of the Freudian subject.

The core of Lacan's theory is the dictum that the subject is split, and that this split is what constitutes the subject in the most radical sense. The subject is the site of the split between being and meaning, between seeing and being looked at, between the act of enunciation and the statement uttered, etc. The founding metaphor of this split is the difference between actor and character. Just as the actor becomes a character for the gaze of a certain audience, an audience that cannot be said to exist from the perspective of the character itself, so does the subject become an ego, a self, for an audience that cannot be said to exist at the level of the articulation of that self. The subject builds its ego under the auspices of the Other's gaze, in that very space that Sartre described as alienated from the subject, and that Lacan calls, in fact, the "space of the Other" and has been referred to as "the other stage" (*l'autre scène*), but that we might name as well "the space of the stage":

You will then see that it is in the Other that the subject is constituted as ideal, that he has to regulate the completion of what comes as ego, or ideal ego—which is not the ego-ideal—that is to say, to constitute himself in his imaginary reality. This schema makes clear . . . that where the subject sees himself, namely, where the real, inverted image of his own body that is given in the schema of the ego is forged, it is not from there that he looks at himself.

But, certainly, it is in the space of the Other that he sees himself and the point from which he looks at himself is also in that space. Now, this is also the point from which he speaks, since in so far as he speaks, it is in the locus of the Other that he begins to constitute that truthful lie by which is initiated that which participates in desire at the level of the unconscious.³⁷

The schema to which Lacan refers is the famous, and famously obscure, "diagram of the inverted vase" familiar to most from its inclusion in Seminar XI. This diagram, which appears on one page of the eleventh seminar and even there is barely explained, was the subject of some one hundred pages of analysis in the seminar of ten years earlier, Seminar I, on *Freud's Papers on Technique*.³⁸

The point of the diagram and this lengthy, detailed, and exceedingly clear exposition was to develop a way of thinking about the ego as a scopic phenomenon, an elaboration of Lacan's famous mirror-stage theory developed in the late 1940s. In the diagram, Lacan reproduces a parlor trick cum experiment in optics in which an observer can be made to see a vase with some flowers in a mirror where such an object, at least so arranged, does not in fact exist. What exists, on the side of the observer's body, is something else: a box, with the back

side open, and a vase suspended upside down inside it. On top of the box, rightside up, are the flowers, but without a vase. Behind the box, about where the observer should be standing, there is a concave mirror. In front of the vase, and in the observer's line of sight, a flat mirror. If the observer is correctly positioned within the cone of light emanating from the concave mirror and converging on his or her visual cortex, he or she will see, reflected in the flat mirror, a virtual vase containing an equally virtual bouquet. The scenario is Lacan's metaphor for the constitution of the ideal ego. This image (the vase) attains its coherence in a virtual world, what Lacan calls the space of the Other. It is where the Other sees us, and where we see ourselves as seen by the Other. It is, as Žižek notes in the passage with which I began this chapter, a virtual space.

But it is not only a space where we are seen and where we see ourselves as seen, it is also the space in which and from which we speak, since, as Lacan says, "it is in the locus of the Other that [the subject] begins to constitute that truthful lie by which is initiated that which participates in desire at the level of the unconscious." The truthful lie is the utterance that the analysand speaks to the analyst, somewhere off behind him or her, an utterance that has the structure of a liar's paradox, an *I am lying*. How is it that a subject can, in fact, utter the words *I am lying*, without balking at the paradox that emerges from a too intensely logical analysis? Well, think of an actor saying the lines. The same logic that allows us to separate the I of the character from the I of the actor releases us from the obligatory absurdity of such a phrase. The same logic, according to Lacan, lies at the heart of the Cartesian subject, that form of subjectivity, as he says again and again, that forms the basis of Freud's discovery. The *I* of the statement *I think* seeks in vain to establish, to permanently fix the *I* of its enunciation, the *I* of its being; one of the ways it tries to convince itself that this being has been attained is through the fantasy it plays out in the space of the other.³⁹

It is also truthful, this statement, this lie, in that it is in this very act of enunciation that the actor reveals the fundamental discrepancies between the *I* of the statement that is the *I* of the story being told to the audience, and the *I* of the enunciation, the *I* whom the character's I is trying to establish as its own, as the certainty of its own truth. This level of truth, the truth that the character wishes to establish (just like the performer in Goffman's social situations) exists at the level of the actions and words that are exchanged on the stage of the Other, scripted actions and scripted words. This script is another word for what psychoanalysis calls fantasy, the mechanism with which a subject structures its reality in such a way as to cover over the incommensurability between the ego-ideal and the ideal ego, between the models it learns to identify with and the imaginary self it tries to construct. This fantasy is what the subject plays out for the benefit of the gaze of the Other, a gaze that holds the promise of the subject's true being, if only the subject could have access to it.

The tensions that develop between the various scriptings, between the ideals adopted and the possibilities of enacting those ideals, are the core of the problems clinical psychoanalysis seeks to treat. However, how it goes about treating them is more complicated. The analytic situation is intended to bring about a state known as transference, in preparation for the intervention, or interpretation, of the analyst. Lacan calls the transference the moment of closure of the unconscious, an unconscious that should not be thought of as a thing, or a place, but rather as an event: any of the slips, gaffes (mistakes in staging) that reveal the tensions underlying the subject's presentation of self. The transference is an enactment, Lacan says, of the reality of the unconscious, of its ephemeral eventness, of its pulsation. It is a repetition, which could also be understood in the French sense of a rehearsal, of that fundamental fantasy that makes the subject's performance believable to itself, that covers up the distance between the speaker and the words spoken, the body and the image it strives to represent. The gaze of the Other becomes the object and origin of the subject's desire when it is posited as that unattainable perspective from which the ultimate truth of my fantasy, of my performance, will be verified, and in that sense it fills in, shuts down the apertures, the disruptive events of the unconscious. The transference is only an enactment of the truth of the unconscious insofar as it is an enactment of its opposite, an enactment or repetition of that fantasy connecting what I am for others with what I am for myself, what Sartre refers to as bad faith and Žižek as the function of ideology. From the character's viewpoint, however, the analysis is the wrong moment to go into this mode, because just as the character/analysand gets into the telling of its story for the benefit of the disembodied gaze, that gaze suddenly becomes embodied; the analyst speaks, or coughs, or makes some apparently significant sound that disrupts the flow of the fantasy scenario and makes the analysand (suddenly stripped of her character) aware of the analyst's *presence*.

In his seminar (I) of 1953–54, Lacan describes this experience in the following terms:⁴⁰

In extracting it from my experience, I told you just now that at the most sensitive and, it seems to me, significant point of the phenomenon (the transference), the subject experiences it as an abrupt perception of something which isn't very easy to define—presence.

It isn't a feeling we have all the time. To be sure, we are influenced by all sorts of presences, and our world only possesses its consistency, its density, its lived stability, because, in some way, we take account of these presences, but we do not realize them as such. You really can sense that it is a feeling which I'd say we are always trying to efface from life. It wouldn't be easy to live if, at every moment, we had the feeling of presence, with all the mystery that that implies. It is a mystery from which we distance ourselves, and to which we are, in a word, inured.⁴¹

In his later teachings and writing, Lacan will connect (if perhaps only implicitly) this element from his own analytic experience with a concept from Freud's teaching, that of *Trieb*, which Lacan translates not as instinct, but as *pulsion*, or drive. In this later work, drive is always opposed to desire, always on the side of the body and the real, as opposed to that of meaning, the Law, language, the Other.⁴² The end of analysis is at this time described as a traversal or piercing of the fantasy through to the realm of pure drive.

I am not going to suggest at this point any explicit definition of what the experience of pure drive may in fact be (it is definitely not some sort of pre-cultural, animal engagement with the physical world, uncorrupted by contact with meaning). Rather, I am interested in the notion of drive or the experience of presence as it is articulated in opposition to the theatrical schema I have described as the normative, modern mode of being, a mode of being with which psychoanalysis tries to contend by endeavoring to repair its inconsistencies (in pre-Lacanian practice), or by shooting the whole thing to hell (to put it in terms appropriate to the violence of Lacanian practice). In this sense, drive and presence are related analogically, in that the experience of drive is to the experience of desire as the spatiality I call presence is related to that of theatricality. While the latter terms are mediations that incorporate and build on the former terms, this does not imply that the former terms refer to *immediate* realities, but rather to prior forms of mediation. Nevertheless, drive and presence retain a performative power for the realms of desire and theatricality, in that their relative atavism *vis à vis* these later forms of mediation tends to disrupt the experience of normalcy the later forms support: just as drive is positioned at the dis-rupture of desire in the analytic relation, presence is concealed everywhere in theatrical spatiality, and retains therein some of the mystical, religious, and magical power that was the norm of the world organized according to its mandates. To the same extent, the normal workings of both desire and theatricality depend on their incorporation of drive and presence: with desire we seek the directness of a contact with the world that we believe we have lost with the primary repression of our drives; in theatricality we search endlessly for the little pieces of the real that constitute our only experience of presence.

The implication of the last quote from Lacan's early writing is that in our existence as characters on the stage of the Other, in addition to being attracted to the promise of presence, there is a sense in which we are also constantly trying to efface it from life, and in which it presents to us a mystery to which we are, to a greater or lesser extent, inured. When the analyst helps to produce a situation in which the theatricality of the analysand's being is disrupted, this other form of being, this other mode of experience, is attested to, whether as something that helped cause the rupture, or as the state that temporarily results from it. One contention of this book is that this other mode of being, called by Lacan the experience of presence, exists in opposition to the theatrical mode

of being still dominant in the West. Most of the ways in which individuals interact with one another and with the institutions forming the basic structures of our societies are dependent on this theatricality, from our systems of political representation and social control to our experiences of aesthetic enjoyment to our interpersonal relations. My other contention, however, is that this has not always been (nor is it everywhere) the case. The theatricality of being is a historical mode of being, and like all things historical, it had a beginning and it may have an end.

One of the great innovations of Lacan's work was to recognize the historical nature of the subjectivity he was describing (which is not to engage in the usual universalist/historicist debate, since to say that something is historical is not to deny that one or any aspect of it may also be universally, or generally, valid). In fact, it is surprising how often this fact is overlooked by both intellectual allies (seeking in Lacan's work a weapon in the battle against historicism) and foes (trying to scuttle Lacanian thought as yet another example of the unexamined imposition of western ideas on Other times and Other people). In her book *The Threshold of the Visible World*, for example, we have the case of an ostensible disciple of Lacan, Kaja Silverman, claiming that Lacan fails to historicize his concept of the gaze, and making that claim by way of a reading of his most historically conscious text, Seminar XI, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*.

In her book, Silverman advances a perfectly acceptable argument about the historically specific nature of Lacan's description of the gaze in terms of the history of the camera, pointing out that Lacan's own language in his discussion of optics is steeped in the imagery of photography. She adds, however, despite some clues to the contrary—for instance, his emphasis on the etymology of “photo-graphed,” to be drawn with light—that he fails utterly to place the concept in its proper historical context:

He associates the gaze not with values specific to the last century and a half, but rather with illumination and ‘the presence of others as such’ (91, 84). Within the context of *Four Fundamental Concepts*, the gaze would thus seem to be as old as sociality itself. Even in his deployment of the photographic metaphor, Lacan resists historical periodization.⁴³

Perhaps most surprising in this passage is Silverman's expectation that Lacan, in describing a phenomenon from his clinical experience, *should* make an effort to historicize it, and that further he should choose to historicize it in the method and period that she has chosen to focus on. Indeed, exceeding the terms of a purely academic squabble, Silverman goes on to claim that this oversight actually renders “untenable” his “elaboration of the field of vision.”⁴⁴ As a cultural historian working in a different period than she is, I find her choice of

the mid-nineteenth century as the appropriate starting point for the period of the gaze somewhat puzzling. However illuminating it might be to link Lacan's description of this phenomenon with the discovery and popularization of the camera, it is a logical fallacy to thereby draw the conclusion that the entire theory is invalid (and consequently ready to be replaced by one's own).

Furthermore, the claim that Lacan fails to historicize his model is patently false; he merely fails to place it within the same historical parameters that Silverman describes (which might suggest that he is not describing the same thing). Lacan speaks about the "privilege of the gaze in the function of desire," and says that we can apprehend it

by pouring ourselves, as it were, along the veins through which the domain of vision has been integrated into the field of desire.

It is not for nothing that it was at the very period when the Cartesian meditation inaugurated in all its purity the function of the subject that the dimension of optics that I shall distinguish here by calling 'geometral' or 'flat' (as opposed to perspective) optics was developed.⁴⁵

This privilege of the gaze in the field of desire, then, far from being "as old as sociality itself," appeared at a very specific moment in *intellectual* history for Lacan. The Cartesian subject, the form of subjectivity on which Freud's innovations are based and for which they are valid, was inaugurated at the same time as the development in science and painting of "geometral" optics. This period—which spans the century previous to that of Descartes—saw the development of techniques of pictorial representation that Lacan adduces as evidence of a new and different form of subject, a subject who is concerned with, even entranced by, the relation of itself to the world it sees represented on a canvas: "For us, the geometral dimension enables us to glimpse how the subject who concerns us is caught, manipulated, captured, in the field of vision."⁴⁶ In this passage and others, he explicitly associates the gaze with a kind of representation that precedes the invention of the camera and even of the camera obscura, a form of representation that suggests to the looker, even as she looks, that she is being looked at.

It should be clear, then, that the subject of psychoanalysis is for Lacan a historically specific subject, one described in the intellectual tradition by Descartes and manifested in cultural history by the development of new methods of visual representation. Understanding this historically specific formation is important to psychoanalysis because it aids the psychoanalyst's primary purpose: to understand, and hence to be better able to intervene in, the organization of individual subjective experience in the here and now. As I argue in chapter 4, however, the vocabulary of subjectivity, while useful in the highly focused discipline of psychoanalysis, suffers from a debilitating vagueness when

an attempt is made to appropriate it for the explanation of wide-ranging historical and cultural change. If Lacan was attuned to traces in cultural and intellectual history of the development of a new kind of subjective formation, a formation of particular relevance to the practice he was developing in the wake of Freud, this does not necessarily imply that the vocabulary used to describe this formation is adequate or appropriate to describe changes—even changes occurring at approximately the same time—in philosophy, political organization, and aesthetic practice. Rather, the change in the coordinates of a psychoanalytic subjectivity are indicative of a change of another kind, a change I have described as phenomenological.

This chapter has been concerned with describing a model of self—indebted to psychoanalysis and practically ubiquitous in contemporary critical discourses—a self that is simultaneously virtual and corporeal: virtual in that it exists in a virtual space completely separate from the space occupied by the human body; and corporeal because the images and representations portrayed in this virtual space are so tightly wired to the feelings, desires, and motivations that emanate from and affect the human body. The analysis of human ego and of how this ego functions socially, aesthetically, politically, and philosophically is, therefore, ultimately dependent on the analysis of the virtual space it inhabits. The remainder of this book is dedicated to describing the historical emergence of this space, the space of theatricality, from the perspective of a particular cultural formation—the modern theater. However, in order to understand the space of theatricality, it is necessary to begin with a description of the space from which it emerged and against which it can be understood: the space typical of medieval practices of spectacle, the space of presence. This is the task of the next chapter.