

Eating the Book

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Art practise as an act of paradoxical creation sublimation ex nihilo

The Word Became Flesh

In the beginning was the word...

The word became flesh and lived for a while among us.

(St. John)

In this thesis I speculate freely on art practise and what is signified in an act of paradoxical creation sublimation ex nihilo. I speculate on art practise as an act, a limit contact with the real, an act with jouissance at its core, an ethical form of catharsis that is malediction acquiesced in as the realisation of desire. I speculate this to be the stake and true meaning of aesthetic inquiry.

These speculations on the paradoxical stakes of art as a practise of jouissance and an ethics of desire chiasmically intertwine Lacan's thought experiment in Seminar VII, with my thoughts developed in a particular key from the perspective of a practising artist and art teacher, not a theoretician. This thesis, the result of this intertwining, is not the work of a professional philosopher, theoretician, scholar or academic but of someone in search of a compass in the field of ethical guidance for the practise and teaching of art where the measure for judgement is radical desire not the Good/goods. This teaching and this thesis ask the following questions.

Is your desire attached to the neighbour as fellowman or to the neighbour within? What satisfactions and ends do your sublimation's seek? Are your sublimations, in your practise of art, attached to the topological "neighbourhood" of secondary rewards, of goods gained, or are your sublimations, in your practise of art, attached to the topological "neighbourhood" of radical desire motivated by no good and mediated by desire alone? Is your art practise an invitation to the revelation of your desire? Or do you aspire to happiness and a situation of individual comfort? Do you take art to be a guarantor of the bourgeois dream? Does your art practise change the "primitiveness" of your relationship to the Good? Do you keep on the side of the least-suffering principle - moderateness and temporateness - the good, that keeps you a safe distance from your jouissance? Do you take, in your sublimations the first half-serious step toward what dwells within the heart of you - jouissance?

Antigone:

"I know I please where I must please the most." (Sophocles. Antigone. L. 103)

"...the channel in which desire is located is not simply that of the modulation of the signifying chain, but that which flows beneath it as well, that is properly speaking, what we are as well as what we are not, our being and our non-being - that which is signified in an act passes from one signifier of the chain to another beneath all the significations." (Lacan. The paradoxes of ethics. p.321-322. July 6, 1960)

...the risks of sublimation attached to desire

My use of a psychoanalytic vocabulary is attached to two poles. The pole of exchange and the pole of a practise of jouissance and an ethics of desire. This is a non-universal ethics, guided by the polar star of the singular coordinate of desire. This coordinate is particular, concrete and pathological; it is the unwritten law from heaven, the law of desire. The advent of the absolute individual in all particularity, alterity and concrete pathology is attached to this singular law, that remains unwritten and therefore non-universalizable. The particularity of this coordinate is indexed to the unique signifying cut, that the human being miraculously happens to be the bearer of. The alterity of the subject appears as a pure and simple relationship of the human being to that which he/she happens to be the bearer of, that is, the bearer of the signifying cut, that confers the indomitable power of being what one **is**, in the face of everything that may oppose what **is**. An ethics of desire attached to the signifying cut, is attached to what is for that particular subject. This is an ethics of desire synchronically attached to the extreme limit, or *ex nihilo*. The crossing of this limit is the possibility for desire of what will transpire beyond the limit of, the Good/goods of good and evil when one has eaten the contaminated signifier of one's jouissance and realised it as fallen waste liberating desire.

To realise the consequences of the realisation of desire is to realise desire in the end and this is to allow death to trespass on life. This realisation of the consequences of the realisation of desire is to change one's relationship to jouissance. This is the forfeiting of one jouissance and an encounter with another supplementary jouissance beyond good and evil. This is the forfeiting of jouissance attached to the pole of use and gain. And an encounter with another supplementary feminine jouissance indexed to the extreme limit or *ex nihilo*.

This thesis takes this extreme limit topologically to be the "neighbourhood" of the place-less place of the Thing: *das Ding*, the *Nebemensch*, the neighbour within, the heart of the self, the "evil" jouissance (the *destrudo* within). For Lacan the forbidden referent of jouissance can be evil. Evil exists for Lacan as the binary of good attached to the pole of Good/goods. This thesis takes the place of the Thing topologically to be co-extensive with: the lack in being, the lack of rapport in the sexual relation, the lack in the feminine, her lack of a complimentary term to the phallus, supplementary jouissance. This topology systematically represses certain differences, making different kinds of lacks coextensive. In this thesis the Thing is attached to wherever a lack or gap is to be found. This thesis distinguishes artists, thinkers and writers who are attached to the topological "neighbourhood" of the economy and service of goods from those attached to the topological "neighbourhood" of the lack (the Thing). It is important here to add a proviso, to prevent a misunderstanding about what is at stake here. What is at stake here is a question of not giving ground on desire.

What is at stake here is the acceptance of the law of one's desire. This acceptance of the law of desire may be closely related to accepting some misfortune, and acquiescing in malediction, but the misfortune is not the stake, desire is. The proviso here is that the misfortune is not the end, or the full content of the desire; in other words it is not the good gained (not the requirement to pay too much, to be punished for some hidden end). If misfortune or loss is involved on the path of desire it is not experienced as jouissance or punishment, it is merely the price paid, that is to say, it is the good one pays with on the path of desire. On the path of desire the only goods

worth having are the goods one pays with for access to desire. No more, no less. This applies to the misfortune related to accepting the singular unwritten law and malediction of desire. The misfortune involved is neither more nor less than the price one pays for access to desire.

What is at stake here is a refusal of the external authority of tradition and a refusal of the reduction of the subject, to an empty, formal point of negative self-relation. Art as a practise of jouissance and an ethics of desire is the acceptance of the problem of the “autonomous” subject encountering in itself something “more than itself; a strange body in the midst of its intimacy. The empty subject emplaced in the signifier, circulates around something that is “in itself more than itself”; the traumatic Thing. The subject is this “distance” toward the incandescent Thing; that cannot be approached too closely. The Thing is most “myself in myself” and is at “the heart of myself”. It is because of this Thing that the subject resists universalization.

It is because of this Thing that an ethics of desire, indexed to the Thing is a non-universal ethics. It is because of the Thing that the subject cannot be reduced to an empty place in the symbolic order. It is because of this topological “neighbourhood” of the neighbour-within that the subject can never be reduced to the topological “neighbourhood” of the neighbour as fellowman. It is also because of this neighbour within, that at a certain point, love for the neighbour as fellowman, necessarily turns into destructive hatred, in accordance with the Lacanian motto: ‘I love you, but there is in you something more than you,... which is why I mutilate you’. The Thing always remains as a remainder. The thesis explores what is at stake when that central emptiness, the form in which access to jouissance has presented itself to us, is approached.

...the signifying cut

Lacan’s fable of Adam and Eve makes the relation of desire to lack, the signifying cut, clear.

“Is nudity purely and simply a natural phenomenon? The whole of psychoanalytic thought is designed to prove it isn’t....there is a beyond of nudity that nudity hides. But we don’t need to engage in phenomenology; I prefer fables. The fable on this occasion concerns Adam and Eve, with the proviso that the dimension of the signifier also be present, the signifier as introduced by the father in the benevolent directions he gives: “Adam, you must give names to everything around you.” Here is Adam, then, and here is the famous hair of an Eve that we hope is worthy of the beauty that this first gesture evokes. Adam pulls out one of her hairs... Adam pulls out a hair from the woman who is given to him as his wife, who has been expected for the whole of eternity, and the next day she comes back with a mink coat over her shoulders... At the beginning everything is structured as a signifier, even if only a chain of hairs is involved. Textile is first of all a text.” (Lacan. The function of the good. p. 227. May 11, 1960)

Lacan’s fable centres on the word at the beginning that subjects Eve to a lack. Eve as a subject suffers the signifier in the psychic real. The word at the beginning murders the thing. Eve lacks and she desires because she lacks as a consequence of Adam’s naming. She eats the word that murders her Thing, she eats the wound and through this extreme metonymy of sublimation fabricates a text, creation ex nihilo. She returns with the coat of hairs fabricated ex nihilo as a chain of signifiers indexed to the lack. The chain of signifiers, the chain of hairs, the mink coat, the

textile which is a text she fabricates as an extreme metonymy of her desire, an extreme metonymy of her lack in being. This is the feminine masquerade, not as symptom but from a position within desire. The masquerade from a position within desire is the truth of subjectivity. Eve's gesture is the feminine masquerade raised to the dignity of the Thing. Art is fabricated out of lack and desire; as an act of creation sublimation ex nihilo.

...beauty of Antigone

"I have no love for a friend who loves in words alone." (Sophocles. Antigone, p. 87. L. 612)

This thesis takes as a paradigm beautiful Antigone - as hero, who accepts and acts on her desire - in a reconsideration of ethics in the field of art. A reconsideration of the relation between action and the desire that inhabits it. It is a reconsideration of ethics in the field of art from the point of view of Lacan's chosen standard, the Last Judgement. This standard gives force to the question I pose in the field of art, to the artist, "Are you doing what is in you to do?" Lacan has recourse to tragedy in an attempt to explain his chosen standard - a mental experiment - because ethics implies the dimension expressed in the tragic sense of life, in which one can take one's bearings in the sphere of values for life and art. Tragedy does not leave one in ignorance as to where the pole of desire is, and does not leave one in ignorance as to the fact that access to desire necessitates crossing all fear and pity, desire stopping before nothing, not even the good of the other. It is with this line of orientation that I think through the question of following desire through to its end in the field of art. Art practise as a sublimation whose topology can be linked to *utilitas* or to the pole of desire.

I examine what is at stake in radical desire, as a desire linked to a register of morality that takes its direction from that which is to be found on the level of *das Ding*; it is the register that makes the subject hesitate when on the point of bearing false witness against *das Ding*; the place of desire: whether it be perverse or sublimated. I explore how this is another register of morality to that of Kant's categorical imperative or Aristotle's Supreme Good, or the ethical register of Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarianism, and a different dialectic than that of Hegel's Idealist one, which posits absolute knowledge as its end.

"The question of the Sovereign Good is one that man has asked himself since time immemorial, but the analyst knows that it is a question that is closed. Not only doesn't he have that Sovereign Good that is asked of him, but he also knows there isn't any. To have carried an analysis through to its end is no more nor less than to have encountered that limit in which the problematic of desire is raised." (Lacan. The demand for happiness and the promise of analysis. p. 300. June 22, 1960)

"...given that jouissance implies precisely the acceptance of death - and there's no need of sublimation... it is enough for jouissance to be a form of evil, for the whole thing to change its character completely, and for the meaning of the moral law itself to be completely changed. Anyone can see that if the moral law is, in effect, capable of playing some role here, it is precisely as a support for the jouissance involved; it is so that the sin becomes what Saint Paul calls inordinately sinful. That's what Kant on this occasion simply ignores." (Lacan. Love of one's neighbour. p. 189. March 20, 1960)

This raises Lacan's first proposition for an ethics of desire; "The only thing one can be guilty of is giving ground relative to one's desire." I claim this proposition as the first in a series that provide an essential guide for the practise of art as a practise of jouissance and an ethics of desire.

This brings us to a certain limit and the apocalyptic possibility of its "transgression", in relation to the meaning of desire. This limit - the field which opens relative to desire - is the unspeakable field of radical desire, the field of absolute destruction beyond putrefaction. This is a place beyond the place of restraint constituted by the economy of goods and the Good. This is also the problematic unfathomable spot that is Freud's site of the impassable site of the Thing. The topological place of the death drive as Archimedean fulcrum, the place an artist can assume, a place of absolute ignorance, in order to stand outside the historical chain, false metaphors and conventions and begin again from degree zero. Art practise as an ethical catharsis destroys and repudiates the goods of good and evil, liberating desire beyond this limit through the sublimation that is an extreme metonymy.

The last barriers on the path of desire are the parallel functions of the beautiful and a sense of shame. The formulation Lacan gives for the aesthetic phenomenon of the beautiful is the image that emerges on the path in between marking the site of the subject's relation to death. This is an image that forms the last veil that Lacan calls the unbearable splendour of vibrating beauty. The image of the beautiful is the beyond the good principle that helps us adjust to desire, it does not take us in like the good that must not be touched. The image of the beautiful can be the incarnation of sublime waste that buds and sprouts in the direction of the good at the limit. Or the beautiful can incarnate, temporally, decomposition in the direction at the limit of desire conjoined to death.

Lacan's formulation of the beautiful is closer to Kant's category of the sublime rather than the ideal and reigning canons of beauty. As Lacan says truth is not pretty. I explore the beauty effect as a blindness effect. A blindness effect that conceals the shameful parts of the "truth" of desire behind the unbearable brilliance of beauty. The blinding effect of beauty emerges at the frontier revealing the site of man's relationship to his own death in a blinding flash.

Access to desire necessitates crossing all fear and all pity. Antigone shows us that the hero trembles before nothing especially not before the good of the other. One pays a price for taking the path of desire and one learns the value of prudence from Antigone's fate. If one's accounts with one's desire are not in order one knows why: perhaps one could not have done any better. But this is something different from the suffering the saint eats - as the realisation of sublime desire that is not at all her own desire - for the good of the other. Lacan makes clear the stuff of religion, is the stuffing, of those who feast themselves, on the jouissances that are sacrificed by others; this stuffing is a recuperation of sublime desire as a good. Religious works are very different from an ethical form of catharsis that is not at all pacificatory or moral in the ordinary sense of the word; catharsis that recuperates no good.

This thesis clarifies the difference between the price paid for desire - understood here as an expenditure without a guarantee of return - and the goods of suffering and pain which are recuperated as a return and as a support for neurosis in masochism, martyrdom and saintliness. For example, in the religious operation the

good which is sacrificed for desire is recuperated as sublime desire. Sublimation as an ethical form of catharsis purifies desire at the cost of the good and this good is not recuperated. The economy of masochism, Lacan shows, ends up looking like the economy of goods, with masochists fighting over the goods of masochistic pain.

Likewise, in this exploration of an artist on the path of radical desire, I will make clear that it is not a question of an identification with the “artist” as an identity; but a recognition of the socially and historically constructed practise of art as a poetic function of sublimation that is an extreme metonymy within a social consensus. The artistic act is an act that unworks identifications; an act that involves the repudiation of certain ideals; an act that entails the destruction of false goods.

...crossing the limit

Going to the end of desire through art practise, as an act, is not a bed of roses or a comfy pillow. To go to the end of desire, an ethical form of catharsis, one will have to overcome: fear and pity, overcome the exercise of guilt “which is a reflection of hatred for the creator”, and overcome jealousy (that keeps the good that must not be touched intact). For the one who goes to the end of desire all of this - that keeps him/her on this side of the limit of Good/goods – “is meaningless nonsense”. To cross the limit with this “meaningless nonsense” intact, is to cross the limit without understanding a thing; which amounts to crossing the limit in a derisory fashion: like poor old King Lear. What is at stake in Lacan’s reconsideration of ethics is the question of resolving the problem of the present relationship of each individual to his/her desire in the short period of time between birth and death.

“Antigone reveals to us the line of sight that defines desire”. (Lacan. The splendor of Antigone. p. 247. May 25, 1960)

For Lacan, desire throughout this historical period has been anaesthetised by moralists, domesticated by educators and betrayed by academies; and has taken refuge in “the blindest of passions”, the passion to know about desire. This is a paradoxical topology. The mobius band is an embodiment of this topology. A topology that links the register of the symbolic to the source of the drive. A topology that links knowledge to unsublimated jouissance; the universal to the particular. A topology that links the empty subject to the “*extimite*”¹. To know about desire beyond the goods of good and evil is to know about and be released from the core of jouissance at the heart of the self. Access to this unsublimated jouissance, which is the “more than itself” in the self, is physically unbearable, and constitutes the limits of the space Sade explores in a sublimated form in his texts. What is at stake for Lacan, is the satisfaction of the drive, through sublimation, as an extreme metonymy that changes the drive. In other words, access to unsublimated jouissance, through the mysterious operation of sublimation, returns it to the void from which it emerged. This is the crossing of the limit of the second death that releases suffering

...drive

“...the function of desire must remain in a fundamental relationship to death.” (Lacan. The moral goal of psychoanalysis. p. 303. June 29. 1960)

¹ Cf J.-A. Miller's unpublished seminar of that name.

Lacan's formulation of sublimation, gives us a topology attached to the source of the drive that can be changed because drive activity is attached to the death drive: it can become a will to creation degree zero. This change of drive through sublimation is the extreme metonymy of eating the book. In this sense, a subject can come to know their desire, after the fact, by way of what insists in the signifiers they fabricate. They locate the *extimité* in the signifiers they fabricate through sublimation, indexed to the Thing; indexed to that which suffers the signifying cut, in the psychic real of the subject. An artist in this sense, can be attached to that which is most their own, in the real.

"In the definition of sublimation as satisfaction without repression, whether implicitly or explicitly, there is a passage from not-knowing to knowing." (Lacan. The demand for happiness and the promise of analysis. p. 293. June 22, 1960)

A passion to know about desire is a blind passion to know about the mysterious laws that come to us from heaven, "the same unwritten laws as Antigone's". For Lacan, the laws of heaven in question are the laws of desire. Lacan hopes desire will be revealed to us by those who have paid the price with their blood and written with their labours, to locate the mysterious laws of desire in the signifiers they fabricate, desire that is changed in the process of the act of paradoxical creation sublimation *ex nihilo*. To locate the laws of desire in the signifiers through sublimation involves, in Lacan's formulation, not only a change of aim of the drive, but a change of object as well; without repression. The circle that is closed in the satisfaction of the drive, in the sexual act, closed in a circle from body to body, is closed in sublimation in a circle, but from body to the body-of-the-text. The drive changes its aim, and object, from body to body-of-the-text and thus from body to the social body. The drive allows the change of object, because the drive is already deeply marked by the articulation of the signifier. Lacan gives us an image of what he means by sublimation. He gives it to us by means of the most radical of verbs, in the development of the phases of the drive, the verb "to eat". At the level of the drive there is "eating". What is to be "eaten" is secondary. There is eating - the eating of what? For Lacan sublimation is the eating of the signifier itself. The eating of the support of creation. The support of creation is the signifier, *ex nihilo*, at the beginning. To eat the support of creation, is to eat the signifier *ex nihilo*. For Lacan, sublimation is the eating of the signifier itself, as well as the eating of the *ex nihilo* from which the signifier comes. It is also the eating of the objects of the drive and of desire that we invest emptiness with. The source of the hunger is the source of the drive. The drive to eat, to satisfy the source of the drive, can be satisfied by eating the drift of the drive, in its remembering, historicising and signifying function. The change of object is the properly metonymic relation between one signifier and another that we call desire. This is not a new object or a previous object, but the change of object in itself. This is something that confronts what Freud told us is not susceptible to substitution and displacement, namely, hunger, with something that isn't really made to be eaten - the signifier. This is the shift from demand to the realisation of desire through sublimation as an extreme metonymy that changes the drive, liberating desire.

...eating the book

Lacan ends his reconsideration of an ethics of desire with the most extreme of metonymies, he ends it with a writer's idea. The writer is Saint John of the

Apocalypse. We read in the Apocalypse and in Lacan this powerful image “eat the book”. The book itself acquires the value of an incorporation, acquires the value of the incorporation of the signifier itself. The extreme metonymy of eating the book acquires the value of an incorporation of the signifier, that in this instance, Lacan says, becomes God, the object of the incorporation itself. But as Lacan says, you have to pay for this incorporation of the signifier, in which the signifier becomes “me” and “me” is incarnated in the signifier. You have to pay with something; pay with a pound of flesh, called *jouissance*. *Jouissance* is the good one pays with for the operation of sublimation, as the realisation of desire. Art as a paradoxical act of creation sublimation *ex nihilo* – “costs”. The measure of the “cost” is relative to whether or not the sublimation is an act attached to the real. Antigone was consumed in the real as a consequence of her act. Eating the book as an act of creation sublimation *ex nihilo* is an extreme metonymy that incorporates the source of the drive, in the real, at the limit of mediation locating it as emptiness in the signifiers as the realization of desire, mediating and realising desire. Antigone could only mediate her desire in death through being consumed in the real. Eating the book, an extreme metonymy of desire mediates the helplessness and disarray of a limit contact with the function of desire in its conjunction with death by locating the beyond of the signified in the signifiers (of art). This extreme metonymy of Lacan’s is creationist; it implies ‘joy before death’; it is a ‘gay science’. An act attached to the real is an act through which desire is realised. For desire to be realised, it is always a question of desire realised in the end; which means the trespassing of death on life. Death trespasses on life in the act. In this sense, the “cost” of desire realised in the act, is the trespassing of death on life. The act, as the realisation of desire, is the crossing of the limit between two deaths; the crossing of the limit of the second death. Lacan locates the end of our sufferings there. The act is the entry into the zone between two deaths. The act is the initiation into the field of the Thing, an initiation into the triumph of being-for-death. This is an act indexed to expenditure without guarantee of return. This act is not indexed to accumulation or mastery. Antigone’s act in the real, and art practise as an act of creation sublimation attached to the extreme limit of the Thing in the real, are topologically co-extensive. Co-extensive with all that bears on this act in the topology of an ethics of desire, as Lacan formulates it.

“But in order for this operation to take place - and it takes place everyday – I definitely have to pay a price. Freud weighs this difference in a corner of Civilization and Its Discontents. Sublimate as much as you like; you have to pay for it with something. And this something is called *jouissance*. I have to pay for that mystical operation with a pound of flesh. That’s the object, the good, that one pays for the satisfaction of one’s desire.” (Lacan. The paradoxes of ethics. p. 322. July 6, 1960)

“Thus, there is the vulgar tissue of absolute knowledge and the mortal opening of an eye. A text and a vision. **The servility of meaning and the awakening to death.** A minor writing and a major illumination. From one to the other, totally other, a certain text. Which in silence traces the structure of the eye, sketches the opening, ventures to contrive “absolute rending”, absolutely rends its own tissue once more becomes “solid” and servile in once more having been read.” (J. Derrida. Writing and Difference. From Restricted to General Economy. p. 276-277) [emboldening is my addition]

If one has to do things for the good, even more in the name of the good of the other, one is faced in practice with the question; for the good of whom? Doing things in the name of the good of the other, Lacan argues, is far from protecting us from guilt,

neurosis and from all kinds of inner catastrophe. If Lacan teaches us anything it is that the only thing one can be guilty of is giving ground relative to one's desire.

"...desire is nothing other than that which supports an unconscious theme, the very articulation of that which roots us in a particular destiny, and that destiny demands insistently that the debt be paid, and desire keeps coming back, keeps returning, and situates us once again in a given track, the track of something that is specifically our business." (Lacan. The paradoxes of ethics. p. 319. July 6, 1960)

For Lacan the path of the hero is traced in the ordinary man, and it is as ordinary man that one follows desire to the end. The hero guides and supports him/herself correctly in relation to desire in the midst of all the passions. For Lacan it is not a question of how you start out in life, but rather what will transpire in the end, when you have come to know what you are and what you are not and done what is in you to do. This understanding grants no other happy satisfaction than sublimation. If sublimation is the only happy satisfaction of the drive, and sublimation in the Lacanian formulation is an act in the real that is attached to the place of the drives; and if the drive allows the change of object, without repression, then the different phases of the drive and the "impossible objects" of the drive, must not be censored, in our encounter with aesthetic texts in the field of art. In Lacan's formulation of sublimation the emptiness of the Thing is determinative, and different forms of sublimation, art, religion and science are brought together with the different mechanisms of hysteria, obsessional neurosis and paranoia attached to recovery of the goods (jouissance) of neurosis. The ends and satisfactions sought when sublimation is attached to the pole of goods are secondary rewards at the level of Good/goods, including the forms of jouissance that support neurosis.

Lacan's profounder formulation of sublimation attached to the pole of radical desire, given in the most extreme of metonymies of eating the book, is an invitation to the field of the Thing. Lacan's formulation of sublimation attached to the pole of radical desire as an ethical form of catharsis is the realisation of desire. Releasing this source of the drive in the signifiers of art through the extreme metonymy of eating the book, desire is liberated beyond good and evil.

"Of him who ate the book and the mystery within it, one can, in effect, ask the question: "Is he good, is he bad?" The important thing is not knowing whether man is good or bad in the beginning; the important thing is what will transpire once the book has been eaten." (Lacan. The paradoxes of ethics. p. 325. July 6, 1960) [emboldening is my addition]

What will transpire when the good and bad cause has been released and realised in the eating of the book, will depend on what one wills as creation sublimation ex nihilo. Where will the problem of desire lie in the future? Perhaps those who have most recently eaten the book will reveal it to us. Art practise can be an act that can change everything in the chain of what an artist is and is not. Art practise can be an act that can attach - through a limit contact with the real - to the particular truth of a subject revitalising the life of the subject and the signifiers of art. Art practise can be an act where the stake lies in a return to the meaning of an act through the desire that inhabits the act.

"And it is because we know better than those who went before how to recognise the nature of desire, which is at the heart of this experience, that a reconsideration of

ethics is possible, that a form of ethical judgement is possible, of a kind that gives this question the force of the Last Judgement: Have you acted in conformity with the desire that is in you?" (Lacan. The paradoxes of ethics. p. 314. July 6, 1960)

Lacan's reconsideration of ethics chooses as the standard and measure for judgement the relationship between action and the desire that inhabits it. An art practise that is an ethics of desire is a practise that is in conformity with the desire in the artist. The ethics of art practise has nothing to do with speculation about prescriptions for, or the regulation of, the service of goods.

"...lets say that an ethics essentially consists in a judgement of our action, with the proviso that it is only significant if the action implied by it also contains within it, or is supposed to contain, a judgement, even if it is only implicit. The presence of judgement on both sides is essential to the structure. If there is an ethics of psychoanalysis - the question is an open one - it is to the extent that analysis in some way or other, no matter how minimally, offers something that is presented as a measure of our action." (Lacan. The paradoxes of ethics. p. 311. July 6, 1960).

The stake in art is that desire is the measure and true meaning of aesthetic inquiry. Giving ground on desire, which is the true measure for judgement in art, is psychological suicide for art, art practise, the artist and for the practise of the teaching of art. To give ground on desire as the true measure in the judgement of the practise of art would be a systematic and fundamental misunderstanding of everything this thesis argues for. This giving ground on desire would be a reduction of art practise to nothing more than to form a branch of the service of goods. In other words a branch of the service of powers. This would be the putting to sleep of desire.

"...domesticated by educators betrayed by academies..." (Lacan. The paradoxes of ethics. p.324. July 6, 1960)

Art practise attached to desire is attached to the particular co-ordinate of what insists after the fact, of what is and is true for the particular subject. Art practise attached to this co-ordinate locates the particular in the historically specific signifiers of art, through the poetic function of sublimation within a social consensus. Art practise that is a limit contact with the real is a practise in which the artist finds their own way against the grain of goods, the universal and utility laws of the selfsame. This finding of a particular voice through the practise of art is the dignity and true meaning of aesthetic inquiry. Art practise as a practise of jouissance and an ethics of desire goes as far as the dignified malediction the artist acquiesces in and is taken to be the realisation of the artist's wish.

Art practise as an ethics of desire involves a leap into the unknown in the light of uncertainty and a lack of response from the guarantor who is found to be wanting.

"A notion as precise and articulate as grace is irreplaceable where the psychology of the act is concerned, and we don't find anything equivalent in classic academic psychology. Not only doctrines, but also the history of choices, that is, of heresies that have been attested to in this sphere, and the succession of emotional outbursts that have motivated a certain number of directions taken in the concrete ethics of generations, all belong to our sphere of inquiry..." (Lacan. The death of god. p. 171. March 16, 1960)

Art as an act of paradoxical creation sublimation ex nihilo is a practise attached to the irreducible lesion of pain at the limits of mediation. Art practise as an act of creation (extreme metonymy) brings us the beyond of mediation located at the heart of mediation. Art practise as such an act is a leap from the known to the unknown, in the shadow of uncertainty. An ethics of desire in the Lacanian formulation is the ground that releases the state of grace required for such an act in this time when the guarantor is found to be wanting.