Architectures of the Limit, Buildings of Desire: A Lacanian Approach to Cinematic Space

Sierra Komar

Department of Art History and Communication Studies

McGill University, Montréal

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Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between architecture and desire, drawing from film theory, architectural theory, and psychoanalytic theory to investigate how desire and sexuality materialize in the architectural spaces of cinema. In contrast to studies of architecture and sexuality that proceed from a Foucauldian understanding of sexuality as a discursive construction, this thesis engages the work of Jacques Lacan to argue that desire is identified with the internal limit of discourse: with the constitutive gap that lies at the heart of language, knowledge, and the subject. Centering this understanding of desire in its analysis of cinematic space, it suggests that architecture, in addition to being a technology that shapes discursive formations of sexuality, can also function as a formal tool through which the negativity of desire can be visualized and conceptualized. It proposes a way of reading architecture not for its reflection or substantiation of sexuality's presence, but for the perturbations, deformations, and distortions of symbolic reality that are the effects of desire's absence. Chapter 1 expands upon the differences between the Foucauldian and Lacanian conceptions of desire and sexuality through an analysis of Brutalist architecture, particularly as it appears in David Cronenberg's *Stereo* (1969). Placing the work of Foucault in dialogue with the critical writing that accompanied Brutalism's emergence, this chapter argues that while *Stereo*'s plot depicts an attempt to discover sexual truth, its Brutalist setting gestures towards the absence of sexuality, to the failure that greets all attempts to expose its true form. Chapter 2 focuses on the Red Road housing estate: the infamous collection of tower blocks that serve as the backdrop to Andrea Arnold's surveillance thriller *Red Road* (2006). This chapter reads the film's treatment of high-rise architecture through Lacan's concept of "the gaze" to consider how the structural negativity of desire comes to bear on questions of visual perception, identity, and power.

Résumé

Ce mémoire explore la relation entre architecture et désir, en puisant dans la théorie du cinéma, les sciences de l'architecture et la psychanalyse, pour étudier comment le désir et la sexualité se matérialisent dans les espaces architecturaux au cinéma. En opposition aux études sur l'architecture et la sexualité qui se basent sur une approche Foucaldienne, voyant la sexualité comme une construction discursive, ce mémoire renvoie au travail de Jacques Lacan, et soutient que le désir est déterminé par les limites intrinsèques à la parole: au sein des lacunes fondamentales qui résident au cœur du langage, de la connaissance, et du sujet. En centrant cette approche du désir sur une analyse de l'espace au cinéma, il suggère que l'architecture, en plus d'être une technologie qui participe à la formation discursive de la sexualité, peut aussi servir d'outil esthétique à travers lequel la négativité du désir peut être visualisée et conceptualisée. Elle propose une façon d'interpréter l'architecture, non pas dans la manière dont elle reflète ou matérialise la présence d'une sexualité, mais en posant le regard sur les déformations, perturbations, et distorsions d'une réalité symbolique résultant d'une absence de désir. Le Chapitre 1 porte sur les différences entre les conceptions Foucaldienne et Lacanienne de la sexualité et du désir, à travers une analyse de l'architecture Brutaliste, tout particulièrement telle qu'elle apparaît dans *Stereo* de David Cronenberg (1969). Mettant en lien le travail de Foucault avec le caractère critique des écrits au moment de l'émergence du Brutalisme, ce chapitre défend qu'en opposition à la recherche de la vérité sur la sexualité que le scénario de *Stereo* décrit, son esthétique Brutaliste ramène a l'absence de sexualité, avant d'en arriver à l'inéluctable échec de ceux qui tentent d'en découvrir la forme véritable. Le Chapitre 2 se concentre sur les Red Road Flats : le tristement célèbre ensemble de tours qui sert de toile de fond au thriller *Red Road* d'Andrea Arnold (2006), portant sur la vidéosurveillance. Ce chapitre analyse la représentation

des tours dans le film, à travers le concept Lacanien du Regard, pour montrer comment la négativité structurale du désir se manifeste jusque dans les questions de perception visuelle, d'identité et de pouvoir.

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Desire is separation itself become that which attracts:

an interval become sensible, an absence that turns back into presence.

—Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*

Architecture can be defined as something organized around emptiness.

—Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*

Introduction

Towards a Negative Architecture:

Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* and the Cinematic Space of Desire

How do you define the space of desire? What would such a space look like, feel like, what kind of experiences would it produce for the subject that gazes upon it, enters it, inhabits it? What qualities would characterize its architecture? Would it be baroque? Minimal? Sleek? Organic? Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Stalker* (1979)—the director's magisterial adaptation of Boris and Arkady Strugatsky's 1971 science-fiction novel *Roadside Picnic*—presents one possible answer to these questions. In the world of *Stalker*, desire is said to live in a house. More specifically, it is said to live in a room, one located far outside any city limits in a mysterious and heavily guarded territory known only as "The Zone." "The Room," as it is called in the film, purportedly has the power to fulfill the innermost desire of any who enter it, to reflect and materialize the most essential yearning of the subjects that cross its threshold. Sealed off from the rest of the world, it is a forbidden space, accessible only to those that can afford the help of a "stalker": a trained guide that specializes in leading interested parties to its entrance. It is one of these "stalkers" that the film follows as he guides two men on their perilous journey to satisfaction, and the viewer, like these clients, spends much of the film in a state of anticipation, anxiously awaiting their arrival at desire's doorstep.

Like *Stalker,* this thesis is also concerned with the architecture of desire. Attempting to map its contours in the cinematic realm, I draw from film theory, architectural theory, and psychoanalytic theory to explore how desire and sexuality are "concretized" in the architectural spaces of cinema. Yet, I open with Tarkovsky's mythical Room not simply because of the

explicitness with which it associates desire and architecture, nor do I wish to propose that it offers a definitive aesthetic paradigm for how desire manifests in built space. This would, in any case, be difficult if not impossible, for although we are shown the exterior of the rather unimpressive farmhouse within which the Room is apparently located, its interior is never revealed. Rather, I position Tarkovsky's film as a guiding paradigm for my exploration for the way in which the spatial dynamics that circulate around the Room manage to illustrate the specifically psychoanalytic understanding of desire that this thesis brings to its investigation of cinematic architecture. Often associated with the work of Jacques Lacan, this understanding of desire identifies it with neither presence nor substance, but with a constitutive absence at the heart of language, meaning, and the subject, one whose paradoxical (non)existence can be apprehended only through the declensions and deformations that it produces within symbolic reality.[1]

Although there exists a growing body of literature addressing the intersection of architecture and film, this work has not engaged significantly with questions of desire or sexuality. Conversely, work that has focused on the relationship between architecture and sexuality has largely been subtended by an understanding of both sexuality and built space informed by the work of Michel Foucault.[2] Framing sexuality as a discursive production and

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[1] For a broader exploration of the Lacanian themes in both *Stalker* and in the work of Tarkovsky in general, see Slavoj Žižek, "The Thing from Inner Space: on Tarkovsky," *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 4, no. 3 (1999): 221-231.

[2] While taking into account an unavoidable amount of overlap, this thesis uses the term "architecture and sexuality" to distinguish its inquiries—and the body of work with which it

architecture as a discursive technology, this work has, for the most part, looked to architecture as a mechanism of subject formation, as an apparatus that works to shape and solidify the mobile, symbolic constructions of sexuality and sexual identity. By exposing architecture's role in producing these constructions—or, alternatively, by showing how its productive power can be harnessed to produce sexuality otherwise—it has sought to denaturalize and de-essentialize sexuality, to reveal the fragility and artificiality of its seemingly stable boundaries. This thesis asks, however, what new possibilities might be opened up for the study of sexuality and architecture if sexuality was conceptualized not as fundamentally unstable, but as fundamentally empty. It asks, in other words, how a shift away from a Foucauldian understanding of sexuality

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engages—from an adjacent area of study taking place within cultural geography often referred to as "sexuality and space." In contrast to this geographical scholarship, which employs a more flexible definition of space not necessarily connected to any concrete structure, "sexuality and architecture" tends to focus on specific architectural objects. It also describes work that relies significantly on formal aesthetic analysis, a dimension which is often absent in the more geographical explorations of "sexuality and space." For key examples of geographical work on sexuality, see David Bell and Gill Valentine, eds., *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995) and Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter, eds., *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1997). For a more recent overview of this geographical work, see Phil Hubbard, "Geography and Sexuality: Why Space (Still) Matters," *Sexualities* 21, no. 8 (2018): 1295-1299.

to a psychoanalytic understanding of desire would manifest spatially, architecturally, and what it would mean to track or recognize this understanding of desire within built space.

In order to provide a basis for this interdisciplinary project, this introduction begins with a brief discussion of the relationship of architecture to the wider disciplines of critical theory, media studies, and film studies. I then provide an overview of the existing theoretical landscape surrounding sexuality and architecture, focusing particularly on those examples that mobilize a Foucauldian approach to both architecture and sexuality. Moving to the psychoanalytic realm, I then outline the alternative conception of desire that animates this thesis. Returning finally to *Stalker* and its Room of desire, I conclude with a demonstration of how this shift towards desire conceived psychoanalytically dramatically transforms how sexuality and its traces must be sought out in built space. For, as Tarkovsky's film—and this thesis—will show, desire is nothing if not a strange architecture.

I

In her 1995 book *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture and Mass Media,* architectural theorist Beatriz Colomina issues a provocative appeal regarding the relationship between architecture and representation. "The building," she writes, "should be understood in the same terms as drawings, photographs, writing, films, and advertisements; not only because these are the media in which more often we encounter it, but because the building is a mechanism of representation in its own right."[3] Highlighting the multiple levels of overlap between architecture and mass culture, she suggests not only that the various forms of mediated representation

[3] Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 34.

through which buildings circulate should be given the same sustained, theoretical consideration as their brick-and-mortar counterparts, but also that architecture—as much as the photographs, films, and drawings that portray it—is itself representational. The building, Colomina insists, not only organizes space, but also produces meaning, and if architectural scholarship is to respond adequately to the increasingly mediated landscape of contemporary architecture it must attend to, rather than deny, these complex representational operations. Moving beyond an outdated understanding of the architectural object as that which exists "in opposition to mass culture and to everyday life," architectural scholarship must pursue an expanded, intertextual approach to architecture that includes both the physical, material products of built space as well as the cultural productions that surround them.[4]

Twenty-five years later, the multi-textual, multidisciplinary terrain of contemporary architectural scholarship shows every sign of having heard her call. Freed from its purely concrete existence, architecture has become a frequent object of analysis in fields outside of official architectural discourse where it is readily analyzed in a variety of different forms, both visual and textual. Far from the sole purview of architects and engineers, it has become a topic of interest across the humanities.[5] The intersection of architecture and cinema, in particular, has

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[4] Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity,* 13.

[5] Over the past ten years, humanities scholarship on architecture has addressed topics as varied as the relationship between modern architecture and medical imaging technologies, between representations of the skyscraper and constructions of masculinity, and even between architecture and death. See Merrill Schleier, *Skyscraper Cinema: Architecture and Gender in American Film* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Beatriz Colomina, *X-Ray*

proved an especially popular area of study. Giuliana Bruno has read the history of film through an architectural lens, investigating how the physical structures of film houses have informed the philosophy and practice of cinema.[6] Edward Dimendberg and David Terrance Fortin have examined the presence of architecture within specific filmic genres, while Juhani Pallasmaa has focused on the connections between architecture and emotion in the films of Alfred Hitchcock, Stanley Kubrick, Michelangelo Antonioni, and Andrei Tarkovsky.[7] Two special issues of the journal *Architectural Design* have also been dedicated solely to the topic of architecture and film, while an ever-growing collection of books and anthologies continue to be produced on the connections between the city, as a distinct architectural and social formation, and the cinema.[8]

Architecture (Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2019); Stephen Cairns and Jane M. Jacobs, *Buildings Must Die: A Perverse View of Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017).

[6] Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002).

[7] See Edward Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); David Terrance Fortin, *Architecture and Science-Fiction Film: Philip K. Dick and the Spectacle of Home* (London: Routledge, 2016); Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Architecture of Image: Existential Space in Cinema* (Helsinki: Rakennustieto, 2007).

[8] See Maggie Toy, ed., *Architectural Design* 64 (1994), Bob Fear, ed., *Architectural Design* 70, no. 1 (2000). For work on film and the city, see Ben Highmore, *Cityscapes: Cultural Readings in the Material and Symbolic City* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Stephen Barber, *Projected Cities: Cinema and Urban Space* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002); and Nezar

Noticeably absent from this now-thriving area of inquiry are, however, any sustained engagements with questions of sex and sexuality. These questions have largely been relegated to their own separate, interdisciplinary offshoot of architectural theory: the study of architecture and sexuality. Work investigating the intersection of these two domains began to appear in the 1990s, a decade that marked a climax of sorts to what Anthony Vidler has referred to as the "extra-architectural" turn of architectural theory.[9] Beginning in the 1970s, this turn was characterized by the increased engagement of architectural discourse with thinkers and theories outside the traditional architectural canon, as well as with larger questions of power, meaning, and politics normally considered extraneous to the study of architecture. It was within this context that the first anthology to explicitly address the intersection between architecture and sexuality —Beatriz Colomina's *Sexuality and Space* (1992)—was published, a volume which inaugurated a field of inquiry that would explore architecture not just as an intertextual phenomenon, but a sexual one.

Based on a symposium held at the Princeton School of Architecture in 1990, *Sexuality and Space* brought together a diverse collection of essays addressing the relationship between gender, sexuality, and architecture, all broadly conceived. Before discussing its significance and content in more depth, however, I wish to focus on Colomina's brief introduction to the volume

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AlSayyad, *Cinematic Urbanism: A History of the Modern from Reel to Real* (London: Routledge, 2009).

[9] Anthony Vidler, "*Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* and *The Anaesthetics of Architecture* by Neil Leach (Review)," *Harvard Design Magazine* 11 (2000).

and, more specifically, on the particular way it imagines both architecture and sexuality. In her opening comments, Colomina writes:

> The concern of the symposium was not with space as yet another symptom of sexuality, repressed or otherwise. It is not a question of looking at how sexuality acts itself out in space, but rather to ask: How is the question of space already inscribed in the question of sexuality? This formulation required that we abandon the traditional thought of architecture as an object, a bounded entity addressed by an independent subject and experienced by a body. Instead, architecture must be thought of as a system of representation… Likewise, the body has to be understood as a political construct, a product of such systems of representation rather than the means by which we encounter them.[10]

Colomina's emphasis on architecture as a "system of representation" anticipates her later arguments regarding the need to expand the object of architectural scholarship. More important, however, is her description of what this "system of representation" does: Colomina suggests that architecture and its representational capacities do not merely house or reflect the sexual subject but *produce* this subject. Locating the sexual body within discourse rather than nature, she emphasizes its existence as a "political construct," a "product" of systems of representation which include architecture and built space.

Although no reference to Foucault appears in this introduction, Colomina's remarks bring to mind his famous argument in *The History of Sexuality* that sexuality is neither an organic set

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[10] Beatriz Colomina, "Introduction," in *Sexuality and Space*, ed. Beatriz Colomina (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992).

of behaviors nor an intrinsic dimension of human subjectivity but rather a social and historical construction specific to modernity. Contesting popular accounts of sexuality as an essential, timeless phenomenon, Foucault argued that discursive technologies that emerged around the seventeenth century produced sexuality as an object of knowledge and truth and, in turn, as a critical foundation for new identity categories. Moreover, Foucault's work did not only elaborate a theory of sexuality as produced, but also of architecture as *productive.* As he emphasized throughout his work, discursive formations—the diverse group of technologies and practices that produce meaning and constitute the objects of our knowledge and reality—are not limited to the realm of the written and spoken. Rather, they can be both linguistic and non-linguistic, material and immaterial, and, importantly, architectural. As Paul Hirst writes, "Foucault… refuses the obvious distinction between a brick and a word; both may be elements of a discourse."[11] This comes into play explicitly in the *History of Sexuality* when Foucault discusses the architecture of eighteenth-century secondary schools as part of the "proliferation of discourses" that worked to transform sexuality into an object of knowledge and regulation, even as it was seemingly being erased from the domain of official language.[12] He writes:

> Take the secondary schools of the eighteenth century, for example. On the whole, one can have the impression that sex was hardly spoken of at all in these institutions. But one only has to glance over the architectural layout, the rules of discipline, and their whole internal organization: the question of sex was a constant preoccupation. The builders

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[11] Paul Hirst, "Foucault and Architecture," *AA Files* 26 (1993): 52.

[12] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 18.

> considered it explicitly. The organizers took it permanently into account… The space for classes, the shape of the tables, the distribution of the dormitories (with or without partitions, with or without curtains), the rules for monitoring bedtime and sleep periods—all this referred, in the most prolix manner, to the sexuality of children.[13]

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault thus highlights the active role that architecture plays in the production of an epistemological landscape and the objects and concepts—like sexuality—that come to populate it. Foucault's challenge to the concept of architectural neutrality—to understandings of architecture as a purely passive, functional realm—is also articulated in his 1975 book, *Discipline and Punish*, where he examines the role architecture plays in the exercise of what he calls "disciplinary power": a type of governance that operates through the creation of discrete subjects and the classification and optimization of the individual body. This form of power is intimately related to architecture insofar as it relies on material configurations of space that produce individuated subjects upon which various techniques of surveillance, regulation, and supervision can converge. From the secondary school, to the military barracks, to the factory, and of course, the panoptical prison, disciplinary power, Foucault writes, can be seen as "the art of distribution"; it is a form of power that "proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space" and which operates according to principles of fragmentation and segmentation.[14]

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[13] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* 28.

[14] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 141. Architecture also appears as an object of analysis in Foucault's *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage Books, 1988). For more on the role of space and architecture in

Architecture as productive and sexuality as produced: these two aspects of Foucault's work resonate in Colomina's account of the sexual body as a body shaped *by* architecture rather than a pre-existing vehicle through which architecture is experienced. Similarly, the 1996 collection *Stud: Architectures of Masculinity* emphasizes architecture's ability to construct and discipline subjects as well as the fabricated nature of sexuality and sexual identity. In the introduction to *Stud*, Joel Sanders describes the anthology's project as an investigation of how "architecture, as a concrete material practice, works to institute sexual identities by delimiting and demarcating the interaction of humans in subject space… *Stud* interrogates how, through the precise organization and distribution of materials, objects, and bodies in space, physical structures assist in the fabrication of masculine identities."[15] As in the case of *Sexuality and Space,* Foucault is not explicitly cited in *Stud*'s introduction. Yet, his work is evoked not only by Sanders' description of sexual identity as a "fabrication" and of architecture as a mechanism of individualization that functions through the "precise organization and distribution of materials," but also by his discussion of how architectural visuality contributes to the establishment and maintenance of gendered power. "From panoptic prisons to pornographic theaters," Sanders argues, "numerous

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Foucault's work, see Jeremy W. Crampton and Stuart Elden, eds., *Space, Knowledge and Power: Foucault and Geography* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007); Russell West-Pavlov, *Space in Theory: Kristeva, Foucault, Deleuze* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009); Gordana Fontana-Giusti, *Foucault for Architects* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

[15] Joel Sanders, "Introduction," in *Stud: Architectures of Masculinity*, ed. Joel Sanders (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 12.

building types endow men with visual authority while relegating disempowered subjects—especially women—to the position of scopophilic objects."[16]

In early texts on the intersection of architecture and sexuality, we can thus register the presence of an implicitly Foucauldian influence: one which manifests as a focus on the productive and individualizing function of architecture and the symbolic, discursive character of sexuality and sexual identity. This focus also comes through clearly in a review of four of these early anthologies—including *Stud*—published in the journal *Signs*, where Victoria Rosner writes that "the volumes are more similar than disparate…Taken together, they represent a new wave of feminist debate in architecture, one that sees architecture as itself productive of gender identity and that analyzes built environments to discern how they convey implicit or explicit proscriptions on both gender and sexuality."[17] A more explicitly articulated Foucauldian

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[16] Sanders, "Introduction," 22.

[17] Victoria Rosner, "*Architecture and Feminism* by Debra Coleman, Elizabeth Danze, Carol Henderson; *Desiring Practices: Architecture, Gender, and the Interdisciplinary* by Duncan McCorquodale, Katerina Rüedi, Sarah Wigglesworth; *The Sex of Architecture* by Diana Agrest, Patricia Conway, Leslie Kanes Weisman; *Stud: Architectures of Masculinity* by Joel Sanders (Review)," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 25, no. 3 (2000): 981. Alongside *Stud,* Rosner also discusses Debra Coleman, Elizabeth Danze, and Carol Henderson, eds., *Architecture and Feminism* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), Katerina Rüedi, Sarah Wigglesworth, and Duncan McCorquodale, eds., *Desiring Practices: Architecture, Gender and the Interdisciplinary* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 1996), and Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner, and Iain Borden, eds., *Gender Space Architecture: An Interdisciplinary*

approach can be seen in more recent work examining the intersection of architecture and sexuality. In "Architecture as a Practice of Biopolitical Disobedience," for instance, Paul B. Preciado argues that the relationship between architecture and sexuality has been one of disciplinary and biopolitical regulation, one in which architecture has overwhelmingly functioned as a "normalizing, genderizing, and racializing force."[18] Highlighting the ways in which architecture has historically functioned to constitute and consolidate sexual identity and sexual difference, Preciado makes explicit the connection between Foucault's work and the understanding of architecture as productive. Foucault, he writes, "invites us to move from an anamorphic model of interpreting the relationship between the body and architecture, to a biopolitical model where architecture is understood as a political artifact to construct and produce the body rather than a mimetic system of representation."[19]

Transposing the concept of disciplinary architecture into the conditions of postmodern capitalism, Preciado suggests that the role played by architecture in the disciplinary production

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Introduction (London: Routledge, 2000). It is important to note, however, that although both *Sexuality and Space* and *Stud* are articulated in Foucauldian terms by their editors, Foucault's work does not come to figure significantly in any of the contributing essays included in these volumes. His influence in this early work remained largely indirect, with most of the contributors choosing to engage frameworks such as deconstruction and psychoanalytic theory, particularly as interpreted by feminist film theorists such as Laura Mulvey.

[18] Paul B. Preciado, "Architecture as a Practice of Biopolitical Disobedience," *Log* 25 (2012): 121.

[19] Preciado, "Architecture as a Practice of Biopolitical Disobedience," 124.

of sexuality has shifted significantly since the end of the Second World War. He coins the term "pharmacopornographic" to describe a new range of disciplinary and biopolitical architectures that regulate sexuality from *inside* rather than outside the body. In contrast to architectures which "controlled the body externally, like an ortho-architectural apparatus," the architectures of the pharmacopornographic regime (examples of which range from the birth control pill and its distinctive round packaging to "globally extended porn media technologies") are absorptive, flexible, and liquid; their goal is to "not only become part of the body but dissolve in it."[20] Exposing these new mutations of disciplinary architecture, Preciado hopes to dispel the illusion of innateness they create around sexual subjectivity and "undo the spatialization of knowledge and power techniques that have contributed to the performative construction of political subjectivities."[21]

Preciado's reference to "the performative construction of political subjectivities" also speaks to the ways in which Foucauldian accounts of "the spatialization of knowledge and power" have been expanded through an engagement with theories of performativity, particularly as developed in the work of Judith Butler. Indeed, though Butler herself does not emphasize the role architecture plays in processes of subject formation, her account of gender and sexual identity as a sedimentation of norms, modes of behavior, and bodily comportments has provided a useful framework for scholarship on the productive force of architecture, and especially for work that aims to demonstrate how built space can facilitate performances of gender and

[20] Preciado, "Architecture as a Practice of Biopolitical Disobedience," 128.

[21] Ibid., 134.

sexuality outside the rigid, heterosexist norms enforced by traditional architectural forms.[22] For instance, in "Sex and the Single Building," Annmarie Adams adopts the lens of Butlerian performativity to analyze an iconic work of California modernist architecture—Harwell Hamilton Harris's Weston Havens house. Isolating particular material features of the building such as its inclusion of three, nearly identical master bedrooms (in lieu of the conventional design hierarchy that centers the heterosexual couple), Adams illustrates how the house itself interrupts the traditional spatial privileging of heteronormative domesticity and allows for other, "queerer" performances of subjectivity and sociality. She also draws attention to the controlled dynamics of privacy and publicity that the design of the house exhibits, showing how it simultaneously facilitates a level of discretion through its interior organization while conforming to more traditional modern-architectural tropes of transparency. "The house," she argues, "managed to operate within a specific type of architectural visibility, even as it masked, screened, and protected the identity and activities of the inhabitants."[23]

In *Behind Straight Curtains: Towards a Queer Feminist Theory of Architecture,* Katarina Bonnevier undertakes a similar analysis of architect Eileen Gray's *E.1027,* a modernist villa in the South of France designed and built between 1926 and 1929. Proceeding from the assertion that "subject positions are partly constructed through building activities," Bonnevier highlights

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[22] See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

[23] Annmarie Adams, "Sex and the Single Building: The Weston Havens House, 1941-2001," *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum* 17, no. 1 (2010): 94.

Gray's attention to surface and texture and suggests that *E.1027* disrupts traditional divisions between structure and ornament, as well as the gendered hierarchy implied by this binary. The building, she argues, is "a queer architecture of surfaces where a division between interior decoration and building is impossible."[24] She also draws attention to Gray's ability to create spaces of privacy and intimacy, as manifested by the "layers of interiors" within *E.1027,* as well as the challenges her architecture presented to the conventional public/private divide. Bonnevier writes: "E.1027 can be understood as a performative challenge to the heterosexual matrix. It is clearly recognizable as a house to live in; simultaneously, it does not conform to the nuclear family. You live in another fashion here; the building is sexually charged and ambiguous."[25]

The performativity-based approach adopted by Adams and Bonnevier has usefully augmented the focus on the disciplinary effects of architecture by demonstrating how built space also makes room for non-normative sexual practices and enables the production of new, if not subversive, forms of sexual subjectivity. For the purposes of this thesis, however, what is important to note is that a particular Foucauldian legacy persists from the earlier anthologies edited by Colomina and Sanders to more recent explorations of architectural performativity. Taken together, these analyses represent an attempt to disrupt understandings of sexuality as a natural, self-evident category of identity, an understanding which, according to Foucault, is bound up with both the widespread regulation and management of the sexual and its exploitation by structures of power. Evoking the conclusion to the first volume of *The History of Sexuality,*

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[24] Katarina Bonnevier, *Behind Straight Curtains: Towards a Queer Feminist Theory of Architecture* (Stockholm: Axl Books, 2007), 16, 47.

[25] Bonnevier, *Behind Straight Curtains,* 80.

which sees Foucault begin to place the word "sex" within quotation marks, these analyses attempt to *destabilize* and *denaturalize* sexuality, to dissociate it from concepts of truth and inherency by exposing its discursive scaffolding and by foregrounding the ways it can be produced otherwise.

It is here that we arrive at the crux of the intervention this thesis seeks to make in the study of architecture and sexuality. Without denying the progress made by this Foucauldian approach, it proposes an alternative way of conceptualizing the relationship between sexuality and built space, one which holds the potential to denaturalize sexuality *to an even more significant degree.* This approach involves a re-thinking of sexuality not just beyond the confines of the natural, but also beyond the confines of the discursive, as well as a re-imagination of architecture as a formal tool rather than a productive technology. At this point, however, one might ask: how else can we possibly understand sexuality, if not as a discursive construction? A similar question has been raised by Joan Copjec, who has inquired if "the alternatives offered [by poststructuralism]—sex is substance/sex is signification—(are) the only ones available? And if not, what else might sex be?"[26] Turning, as Copjec also does, to the work of Jacques Lacan, I will outline one possible response to this question.

II

If Foucault is a thinker of the institution—a philosopher of the prisons, clinics, hospitals, and asylums that shape the subject—then Lacan is a thinker of the labyrinth: the maze in which the subject is lost. Elliptical and complex, his work is notoriously hard to schematize, and many

[26] Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan against the Historicists* (London: Verso, 2015), 202.

of his most crucial concepts shift and transform throughout his work, coming to mean different things over each successive phase of his career as a clinician and academic. His concept of desire proves a particularly difficult topography to navigate. A phenomenon described in terms of splitting, separations, and margins, of interstices and gaps, it's strange spatiality pervades the entire structure of Lacan's work from beginning to end, making any origins more or less arbitrary. To begin, however, we might start with Lacan's most famous assertion regarding desire, that one's "desire is the desire of the Other."[27]

This important claim locates desire in a place of fundamental exteriority: desire does not emerge from inside us, as an innate individual or psychological phenomenon, but rather comes to us from the outside, from a place which is not our own. This is not to say, however, that desire merely involves intersubjectivity: that it is directed at people, for example, or that it necessarily involves projections and internalizations of what we think is acceptable or appropriate or worth desiring. For Lacan, the realm of the Other is, more importantly, the realm of language, that realm of radical alterity we must enter to become subjects, but which precedes us, alienates us, and operates largely outside our control, despite our perceptions of it as a tool which submits to our conscious intentions. As Lacan writes, "I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object."[28]

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[27] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI. The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1998), 235.

[28] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 86.

Desire, then, is not our own but of the Other: it is the desire of both other people and of language. Yet, by positioning desire in the linguistic dimension Lacan is attempting to say something different than the poststructuralist notion that desire is a social construct, that it is an external or symbolic creation imposed on the subject from external forces of power and discourse. For Lacan, desire is not a positive construction of language, but rather is produced by the very failure of language: *it is a result of the internal limit of discourse which allows language to function as we know it.* Desire emerges from the place where language fails, as it inevitably does, to capture the entirety of experience and being. This is illustrated in the distinction between need, demand, and desire that Lacan outlines in *Seminar V*, and his claim that "desire is produced in the margin which exists between the demand for the satisfaction of need and the demand for love."[29] As Elizabeth Grosz defines it, need is "the experiential counterpart to nature. Need comes as close to instincts as is possible in human existence… [it] requires real, tangible objects for its satisfaction."[30] Need is the instinctual space occupied by the subject for only a brief time before their entrance into language, one in which they are unable to articulate the objects that they seek, but are still able to be satisfied when these objects are provided because their "desire" for them relates to concrete aspects of life and survival.

Yet, as Grosz also points out, our access to this space and to need is short-lived: the subject soon becomes able to articulate their wants, a linguistic variable which "deflects,

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[29] Jacques Lacan, *Formations of the Unconscious: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book V*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (Malden: Polity Press, 2017), 4.

[30] Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 59.

changes, transposes" need into demand.[31] This shift significantly complicates a subject's experience, and although the ability to state what, exactly, one wants at any given moment should theoretically provide more control for the subject and lead to more satisfaction, it ends up having the opposite effect. Because demands are articulated through language, they are inevitably attached to the realm of the Other. Demand thus raises the possibility for the subject to attempt to modulate the presence and absence of this other, as well as gain access to the objects that are the purported aim of their demand. Contained within the demand are thus two requests: one which, rather straightforwardly, seeks to obtain particular objects necessary for survival, and one which seeks something amorphous, something intangible in relation to the other. As Grosz explains:

> Demand always has two objects… The thing demanded—food, attention, a 'cure' from the analyst, the undying love of another—are all relatively insignificant, or rather, they function as excuses for access to the second object, the (m)other. The thing demanded is a rationalization for maintaining a certain relation to the other. Where need aims at an object which satisfied it, demand appeals to an other in such a way that even if the demanded object is given, there can be no satisfaction.[32]

Although it can specify—and obtain—particular objects, demand produces a longing for something in excess of these original needs, something which can never be fully articulated in the language of the demand. It is this excess, this element of the demand which is not, and can never, be stated or satisfied that Lacan identifies with desire: "neither the appetite for

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[31] Lacan, *Formations of the Unconscious: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book V*, 23.

[32] Grosz, *Jacques Lacan,* 61.

satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second."[33] Desire emerges from this gap between need and demand: it is that which is missing, unspoken, annihilated from the language of the demand and that which, because of this, is "always, constitutively contentless."[34] Not a product of the signifying structure, but the place where this structure fails, it is an impasse in—rather than a product of—discourse.

It is here that we can begin to grasp the difference between a Foucauldian understanding of sexuality and a psychoanalytic conception of desire, as well as the potential that the latter holds for the project of denaturalizing and destabilizing sexuality. To approach sexuality through a framework of desire is not in any way advocate for a return to essentialist categories of gender or sexuality, but rather to place sexuality definitively outside of both nature and culture, to emphasize the way in which it "involves persons only contingently."[35] It is to attribute to sexuality a more fundamental negativity than the poststructuralist position, one which emphasizes not the various shifting masks of signification that come to veil it, but the fundamental void at its core. As Joan Copjec has argued in the context of her critique of Foucauldian historicism, as well as the way in which Foucault has been taken up by theorists like Butler:

> [The psychoanalytic argument] constitutes a more radical desubstantialization of sex, a greater subversion of its conception of substance, than the one attempted by the Butler

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[33] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 692.

[34] Copjec, *Read My Desire,* 36.

[35] Tim Dean, *Beyond Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 18.

> position. For sex is here not an incomplete entity but a totally empty one—it is one to which no predicate can be attached. By linking sex to the process of signification, Butler makes our sexuality something that communicates itself to others… When, on the contrary, sex is disjoined from the signifier, it becomes that which does not communicate itself, that which marks the subject as unknowable.[36]

Centering this psychoanalytically informed understanding of sexuality as "totally empty" in its analysis of cinematic architecture, this thesis stakes out a different route in response to Foucault's powerful call to denaturalize and defamiliarize sexuality. Although it shares the desire to disrupt the process by which sexuality is established as a privileged site of truth, humanity, and knowledge, it attempts this disruption not through an emphasis on sexuality's discursive instability, but by an emphasis on its discursive negativity and its antinomic relation to the signifying chain. To Copjec's query regarding the "sex as substance/ sex as signification" binary, it is thus necessary to add one other question: if sex is, indeed, something else, namely, if it is nothing, then how would this play out in the architectural realm? Or, to echo the question that opens this thesis: How do you define the space of desire?

III

When we left Tarkovsky's film, two men had engaged the help of a "stalker" to guide them to the mythical Room: that supernatural space lying deep in the forbidden Zone that was purported to fulfill the innermost desires of any who enter it. Prepared for a perilous journey, they are surprised to find themselves in close proximity to the very space they seek almost immediately after arriving at the Zone. Standing in a field of tall lush grass, only a short distance

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[36] Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 207.

away from where the men have been dropped off, is the run-down farmhouse that supposedly contains the Room. Their journey, it seems, will be a swift one.

Things become more complicated, however, when they are told by the Stalker that it is impossible to approach the Room directly, but only by the most circuitous of means. Claiming that "there are no direct routes," the Stalker insists on guiding the group's movement by indiscriminately tossing a piece of metal attached to a long bandage as if to see what direction the wind—or chance—would lead them. With the Room only paces away, the three men are thus forced to trace a tedious, nonsensical path through the surrounding train, prompting the frustrated Writer to finally seek an explanation for the Stalker's oblique navigational process. "Is it fatal to go straight ahead?" he asks. "I told you. It's dangerous," the Stalker replies. Unsatisfied, the Writer persists. "Is the detour less dangerous?" "It's not," the Stalker replies matter-of-factly, "but nobody goes straight."

Although this indirect route significantly lengthens the time frame of their journey, the three men do eventually reach the doorstep of desire. At the entrance to the Room, however, chaos ensues. Paralyzed in the anteroom, both the Writer and the Professor begin to spiritually and psychically unravel. Neither wishes to be the first to enter, and their hesitance provokes the Stalker's revelation that he himself is prohibited from entering the Room and, therefore, has never seen nor experienced its purported power. The Room, it seems, could only exist in discourse, as a mirage of the spoken which itself does not exist. As the men conclude, however, the opposite could also be true, a possibility which turns out to be even more alarming than the possibility that the Room is a sham. Discussing how the Room responds not to any stated demand but to one's deepest unconscious desire, that of which one has neither knowledge nor control, the men begin to fear its powers and speculate on its potential for destruction. As the

Writer exclaims in his final fit of hysterics, “That, what is in accordance with your nature, your essence, is what comes true here! That essence that you have no idea about, but it sits in you and rules you all your life! I do not want to spill all the trash that has accumulated inside me on anybody’s head.”

The final scene of this stunning climax shows the three men from the position of a subject within the very space they will not enter, beyond the very boundary they refuse to cross. Even from this position, nothing is revealed about the Room’s architecture, interior, or content, save for a dark, stone floor covered in a shallow pool of water. As if communicating the space’s readiness to reflect the men’s most profound wishes, the pool is as still and clear as a mirror, reflecting perfectly the huddled silhouettes of the three men marooned on the Room’s threshold. As the viewer contemplates this reflection, however, it suddenly begins to rain. Signalling the closure of the world in which the men’s innermost essence is revealed, in which the truth of their being is brilliantly reflected, the water’s surface becomes unreadable, un-signifying, transforming from transparent to definitively opaque. Deadlocked and delirious, none of the men end up entering the Room.

A charged void in the center of *Stalker’s* filmic space, one which cannot be approached directly but only blindly, randomly, by the strange pull of a drive that exists outside individual agency and intention, what Tarkovsky’s room of desire demonstrates so powerfully is that the space of desire cannot be defined by any positive attributes: desire is not a space, but a non-space, not a structure, but a vacuum or force recognizable only through its structural effects, through its deformation of the familiar arrangements of knowledge, language, perception and identity. As Alenka Zupančič has explained: “The point is that beyond all sexual content and practices the sexual is not a pure form, but refers instead to the *absence of this form* as that which

curves and defines the space of the sexual. In other words, this is an 'absence' or a negativity that has important consequences for the field structured around it."[37] It is these consequences, these effects that this thesis seeks in the filmic spaces that it examines, spaces which range from the University of Toronto Scarborough's Andrews Building—the monumental Brutalist masterpiece that appears in David Cronenberg's 1969 film *Stereo*—to Glasgow's infamous Red Road estate, the housing complex which serves as the backdrop for Andrea Arnold's 2006 surveillance thriller *Red Road.* Although neither of these films articulates a connection between architecture and desire as explicitly as the Room in *Stalker,* each uses architecture cinematically to signal the limit point of the various systems of knowledge and subjectivity that are functioning in the filmic world.

With the exception of Tarkovsky's otherworldly Room, however, the architectures with which this thesis engages are all functional, operational buildings, buildings that are associated not just with particular histories, but with particular purposes. Indelibly linked to the quotidian routines of teaching, working, and living that they were designed to facilitate, they possess an inescapably utilitarian dimension, an observation which brings us to the particular methodological affordances that are afforded by an exploration of cinematic architecture as opposed to architecture proper.

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[37] Alenka Zupančič, *What IS Sex?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2017), 22.

As one of the so-called "purposeful" arts, architecture has a longstanding association with the concepts of usefulness, practicality, and function.[38] Indeed, it is the seeming inseparability of architecture from function that leads to Immanuel Kant's famous exclusion of architecture from the list of artistic forms capable of producing an experience of pure or "free" beauty, which he defines as a state of pure form and sensation unhampered by any conceptual limitations. Because a building's design will always, to some extent, reflect its intended purpose, Kant argues that architecture can only achieve a state of "adherent beauty," one which, secondary in nature, remains mired in extra-aesthetic concerns.[39] An updated version of this logic appears in Le Corbusier's famous dictum that "a house is a machine for living in," a claim which, in addition to its fetishization of technological progress, also collapses a type of building (house) to the type of activity it is meant to facilitate (living).[40]

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[38] For a discussion and critique of the distinction between the "purpose-free" and the "purposeful" arts, see Theodor Adorno, "Functionalism Today," in *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, ed. Neil Leach (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), 5-18.

[39] As Kant writes in *Critique of Judgment,* "the beauty… of a building (such as a church, palace, armory, or summer-house) does presuppose the concept of the purpose that determines what the thing is [meant] to be, and hence a concept of its perfection, and so it is merely adherent beauty." Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 230.

[40] Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells (New York: Dover, 1986), 4.

Architecture, then, has proved famously difficult to separate from questions of practicality and function. It is for this reason that this thesis turns to cinematic representations of architecture: not just because, as Colomina argues, modern architecture cannot be understood without reference to the larger cultural landscape of mediated representation within which it is situated, but because cinema provides a space in which architecture can be encountered beyond a hermeneutics of functionality and purpose. This is a crucial step in enacting a shift from an architecture of sexuality to an architecture of desire, as ideals of function and utility conceal precisely the symbolic distortions, inadequacies, and illogicalities that constitute the traces by which we must recognize desire. The mediation of the cinematic apparatus also imparts a level of flexibility to architectural space, allowing it to appear in perverse, unnatural, and decidedly non-Euclidean ways. This flexibility is crucial given that the very negativity of desire—the resistance it shows to discursive and representational regimes—makes it hard to predict the exact ways in which it will erupt spatially. As Victor Burgin writes in his essay "Geometry and Abjection": "Why should we suppose that the condensations and displacements of desire show any more regard for Euclidean geometry than they do for Aristotelian logic?"[41]

Finally, as film theorist Kaja Silverman has argued, the cinematic apparatus also possesses a particular ability to foreground the dimensions of lack and absence around which representation (and subjectivity) take shape. As she writes in *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema:*

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[41] Victor Burgin, "Geometry and Abjection," in *Psychoanalysis and Cultural Theory: Thresholds*, ed. James Donald (New York: St Martin's Press, 1991), 17.

> Film theory has been haunted since its inception by the specter of a loss or absence at the center of cinematic production, a loss which both threatens and secures the viewing subject. When Jean-Louis Comolli suggests that "the whole edifice of cinematic representation… finds itself affected [by] a fundamental lack," he speaks for Munsterberg and Bazin as well as Metz, Oudart, Dayan, and Mulvey.[42]

Although Silverman is mainly concerned with the ways in which cinema has disavowed and displaced this structuring absence, mainly through projecting it onto the female subject and body, she nonetheless suggests that cinema possesses a singular power to evoke and re-stage the process of symbolic castration, to foreground the losses of the signifying chain. Far from being incidental, the use of cinema in this thesis thus provides a way not only to estrange architecture from its functional, practical existence but also to draw out the cracks and vicissitudes of the symbolic world. As this thesis will show, both these affordances prove vital in the search for a phenomenon which is as opposed to sense as it is to substance.

The subsequent chapters of this thesis proceed as follows. Chapter 1 undertakes a more detailed elaboration of the psychoanalytic conception of sexuality, as well as some of Michel Foucault's specific critiques of psychoanalysis, through an analysis of the Brutalist architecture that appears in David Cronenberg's first feature-length film, *Stereo* (1969). Set against the dramatic, concrete backdrop of the University of Toronto Scarborough, the film follows a series of experiments on telepathy that promises to liberate the true sexuality of its participants. While the film's plot depicts an attempt to discover sexual truth, however, its architecture gestures

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[42] Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 3.

towards a vision of sexuality centered around *the absence of sexuality as such.* Placing the work of Michel Foucault in dialogue with the critical writing that accompanied Brutalism's emergence in the mid-20th century, the chapter suggests that Brutalist architecture and modern sexuality – as theorized by Foucault—show a similar investment in the pursuit of truth. It goes on to argue, however, that Brutalism's attempt to access a genuine and authentic architecture failed, resulting in an architectural style experienced as blank, opaque, and impenetrable. Connecting these qualities to psychoanalytic theories of sexuality's ontological negativity, Chapter 1 concludes that *Stereo's* link between Brutalism and sexual truth signals the nonexistence of this truth, the failure that greets all attempts to know—and expose—sexuality.

Chapter 2 moves away from these more recognizable manifestations of desire to a consideration of how its structural effects come to bear on questions of visual perception as well as the relationships between vision, identity, and power. It examines director Andrea Arnold's 2006 surveillance thriller *Red Road*, a film that follows a female CCTV operator that begins to stalk a mysterious man living in Glasgow's Red Road housing estate. Due to its depiction of a female surveyor, the film has been interpreted as a feminist subversion of a male centered legacy in surveillance studies – often traced to Foucault's account of the Panopticon– in which men are exclusively given the power of the gaze. Returning to Foucault's account of panopticism in *Discipline and Punish,* however, this chapter suggests that to center a distinctly female mode of seeing as the basis of a critique of surveillance is to merely reinforce the disciplinary project that subtends the exercise of visual power. Reading *Red Road's* high-rise architecture through Lacan's concept of the gaze, it attempts to extract a more powerful critique of panopticism, one which highlights the limits of disciplinary power rather than reproducing its logic.

In *Against Architecture,* Denis Hollier's exploration of spatial and architectural themes in the work of Georges Bataille, Hollier writes:

> Architectural devices, according to Foucault, produce subjects; they individualize personal identities. But why would they not work in reverse, leading against the grain to some space before the constitution of the subject, before the institutionalization of subjectivity? An architecture that, instead of localizing madness, would open up a space anterior to the division between madness and reason; rather than performing the subject, it would perform spacing: a space from before the subject, from before meaning; the asubjective, asemantic space of an unedifying architecture.[43]

It is in this spirit that this thesis proceeds on its search for other zones, other rooms, in other forms and other films, seeking architectures that act as an obstacle to rather than a technology of the production of knowledge and subjectivity. Turning away from the threshold of Tarkovsky's "Room," it sets off in pursuit of that most intimate, yet alien, of architectures: the space at the heart of the subject, the negative architecture of desire.

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[43] Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture the Writings of Georges Bataille*, trans. Betsy Wing (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), IX.

Chapter 1

Sex, Lies, and Architecture:

Brutalism and the Search for Sexual Truth in David Cronenberg's *Stereo*

Sensuality has been known to overcome even the most rational of buildings.

—Bernard Tschumi, *Advertisements for Architecture*

"Now that we have some insight into the concept of experiential space, we may consider interaction among the experiential space continua of a highly unique group of individuals." Thus begins the notoriously cryptic series of voiceovers that narrate David Cronenberg's first, feature-length film *Stereo* (1969), spoken by an anonymous, masculine voice identified only as "Narrator" in the film's script. The first of six voices that will speak over the course of the film, his tone, like the rest of the six speakers, is utterly monotonous, emotionless, and mechanical. *Stereo* is known for this soporific voiceover, for it comprises the entirety of the film's soundtrack and constitutes its only source of audio. As these opening lines obliquely suggest, *Stereo* is also known for its emphasis on space, setting, and architecture. Shot against the austere, concrete backdrop of the Andrews Building at Toronto's Scarborough College (see fig. 1)–an iconic example of Canadian Brutalist architecture– the film casts Brutalism in an uncredited main role, showcasing its monumental form and stark aesthetic with frequent, wide-angle camerawork and a monochromatic color scheme.

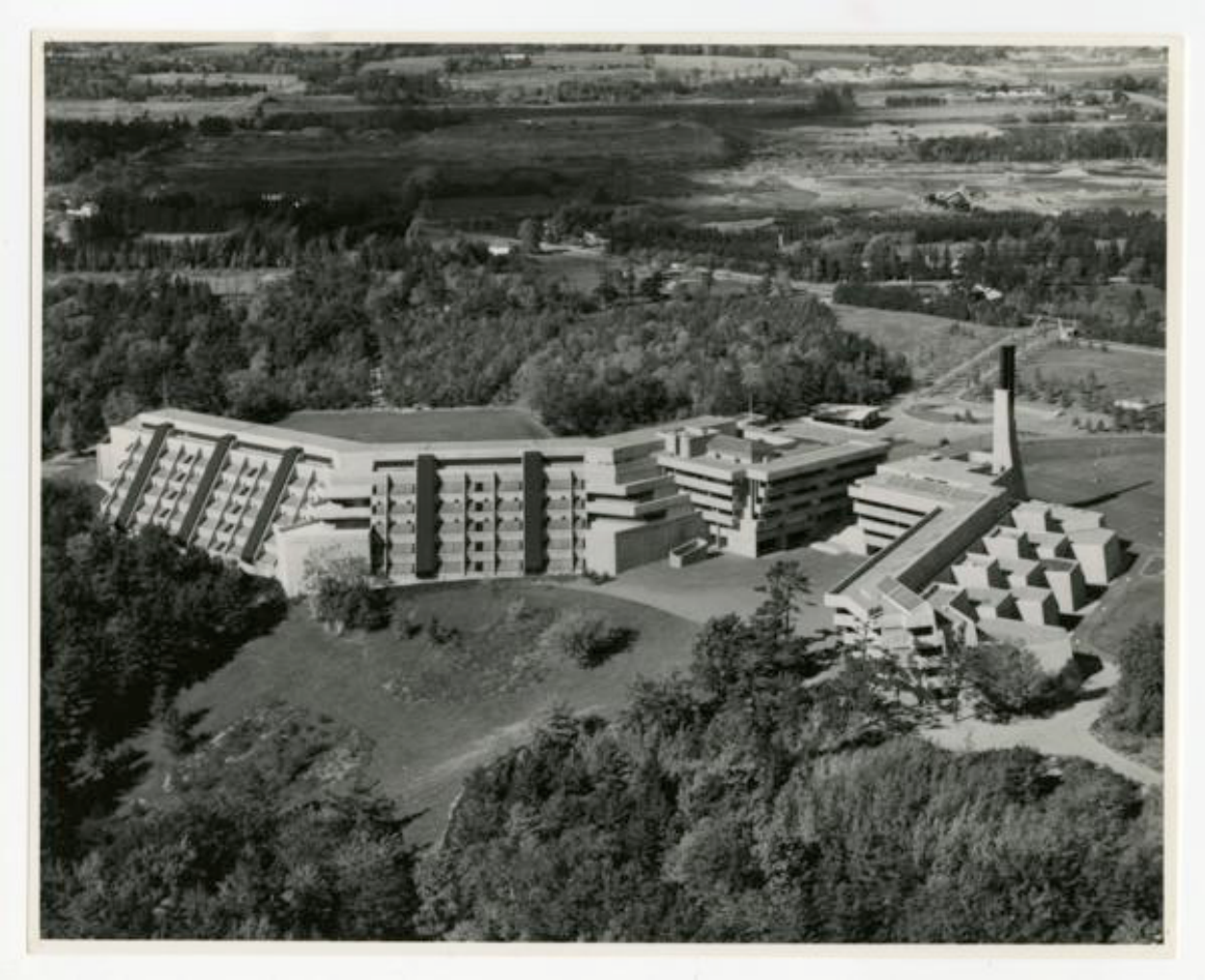

Fig. 1 Aerial shot of the Humanities, Science and Recreation Wings. Photo courtesy of the University of Toronto Scarborough Library, UTSC Archives Legacy Collection, Photographs.

Now known as the Science and Humanities Wings of the University of Toronto Scarborough, this striking megastructure serves as an altogether more unconventional facility in Cronenberg's debut: the satirically named "Canadian Academy for Erotic Inquiry," a research institution conducting a series of experiments on telepathic communication. Unsurprisingly given the Academy's name, their investigations are also acutely interested in sexuality. From the voiceover narrative, we learn that the telepathic experience is also a sexual one: it induces an "expanded form of bisexuality" in its subjects, an unrestricted "omnisexuality" hypothesized to be sexuality's true state. Harnessing telepathy's ability to liberate this authentic "omnisexuality," the Academy hopes to free the world from restrictive, heterosexual kinship structures and usher in a new era of communal, utopian living. However, as acts of suicide and self-harm begin to erupt amongst the participants, a shadow of violence is cast over the Academy, telepathy, and sexuality itself.

Faced with *Stereo's* violent conclusion, the viewer cannot help but wonder: what, exactly, is the nature of this "true" sexuality? The film, however, offers no easy answers. Its visuals are ambiguous and experimental, presenting the viewer with a variety of disparate scenes that have no clear causal relation. The characters almost never speak to each other, and when they do, we cannot hear it, for *Stereo* was shot without synchronized sound and contains no audible dialogue. The film's voiceover narrative, its last remaining beacon of meaning, casts an undeniably faint light; not only does its excessive use of scientific jargon straddle the line between sense and nonsense, often veering into the latter, but it also appears completely disconnected from the film's visuals. In its resolutely anti-narrative form, *Stereo* clearly refuses to tell a straightforward tale of sexuality. But if sexuality is not a story, then what is it? The

answer, this chapter suggests, can be found in the concrete walls of the Andrews Building, the film's inanimate but unmistakable star.

Brutalism, it turns out, is no stranger to the pursuit of truth and authenticity; it emerged out of the attempt to free architecture from its superficial camouflage and reveal a pure, underlying essence of buildings and their materials. Yet in stripping away excess ornamentation, hybrid materials, and all other perceived obstacles to this essence, Brutalism generates a sense of profound opacity rather than transparency. In the words of the legal team of the Third Church of Christ, Scientist, whose successful lawsuit against the city of Washington, D.C won the right to demolish and renovate a landmark-status Brutalist church, the style is perceived as "unfriendly and uncommunicative," blank and impenetrable rather than authentic.[44]

Housing the Academy's experiments in an edifice of this impenetrability, *Stereo* suggests that the search for sexuality's true form is also doomed to fail, that there is something about the sexual that frustrates attempts to unmask it for what it is. More precisely, it hints at something *lacking* in the sexual that consistently thwarts this will to knowledge. In what follows, I argue that *Stereo's* relentless emphasis on Brutalist architecture gestures towards an understanding of sexuality *centered around the absence of sexuality as such*, one that insists *there is no truth of sexuality.* This understanding of sexuality locates it at the very limit of our discursive reality: as the name for the place of this reality's lapse, sexuality is not a thing or entity that can be known, but the negativity internal to the very structure of language and knowledge. Impenetrable,

[44] Brian T. Kaylor, "Building Free Speech: A Case of First Amendment Rights versus Church Architecture," *Free Speech Yearbook* 45, no. 1 (2011): 51.

incommunicable, and fundamentally insoluble within the realm of Symbolic meaning: this is *Stereo's* vision of sexuality.

I

Stereo begins with a shot of a man arriving at the grounds of the Andrews Building by helicopter. As we watch him attempt to enter the building, coming across locked door after locked door, the first droning narrator explains that eight subjects have undergone brain surgery to invest them with telepathic abilities as part of a series of experiments. Some participants, we learn, have even undergone an additional surgery to eliminate the speech centres of their brains in the hopes that this will further amplify their telepathic capabilities.

As various narrators expand on the research methods used by the Academy, we begin to learn about the multiple entanglements between sexuality and telepathy. In a complete reversal of scientific objectivity, we are informed that the experiment requires the establishment of a sexual relationship between researcher and subject. As one narrator puts it, "The nature of erotic research requires that the sexual-emotional involvement of the researcher with each subject be taken to its farthest possible extreme. It is only in this way that the researcher, in whose consciousness the total mosaic of his particular research project exists, can divine in each of his subjects a color, a texture, and a shape, and so assign to that subject his proper place in the research mosaic."

In addition to its "methodological" relevance, sexuality is a central part of the telepathic experience itself. Telepathy does not just allow for communication between minds without the use of the known senses, but induces in its participants a polymorphous, genderless, non-reproductive, "omnisexuality." Telepathy and sexuality are thus collapsed in *Stereo,* and it becomes clear that sexuality is an equal, if not the prime object of the Academy's experimental

inquiries. According to the film's voiceover, this telepathically induced "omnisexuality" is not a new development but constitutes the true state of human sexuality. As one narrator states: "both heterosexuality and homosexuality are equally what might be termed 'perversions' relative to the potential human sexual field. In this context, the true norm is an expanded form of bisexuality, which we term 'omnisexuality.'" Telepathy and its omnisexual disposition are described enthusiastically as benevolent, communal, and innovative, a perfect basis upon which to build a new society. "The communal telepathic experience," drones the voiceover, "translated into the larger social-national context, would presumably carry with it its intrinsic qualities of willing reciprocal dependency and mutual experiential creativity." The ultimate aim of the Academy's experimentation? To someday replace "the obsolescent family unit" with sexually liberated, telepathic communes.

Despite these utopian promises, unseen violence plagues the telepathic experience and its omnisexual disposition. Early on in the film, one narrator describes how the telepathic connection can lead to an unfortunate side-effect known as "frustrated telepathic dependency," a form of mental or psychic addiction that causes extreme discomfort and distress in those affected. The narrator relates how one experimental subject, during a previous stage of the experiment not depicted by the film, was driven by a case of this "frustrated dependency" to drill a hole into his own skull with a hand drill. "The wound," describes the narrator dispassionately, "a hole about one half an inch in diameter, completely penetrated the subject's skull and seemed to afford him the relief of imagined cranial pressures, temporary euphoria, and electrochemical dissociation which he sought." A later narrator describes another unsettling reaction to the experiment in which a female participant, experiencing the telepathic connection as profoundly intrusive, developed a split-personality disorder in a deliberate attempt to fend off telepathic

contact. Perhaps the most shocking anecdote offered by the narrative comes close to the end of the film, where the speaker once again alludes to a previous phase of experimentation. After describing another subject driven to self-harm with a drill, the narrator makes an offhand reference to two participants that committed suicide. As in the case of the other violent reactions, both these episodes remain offscreen.

Any description that presents *Stereo* as a coherent, plot-driven film, however, fails to capture the experience of viewing it. Described by one critic as proving that it is "possible to be boring and interesting at the same time," *Stereo* expressly turns away from conventional narrative frameworks and forms of cinematic meaning.[45] As Stacy Abbott writes, "meaning is not conveyed through cause and effect [in *Stereo*] but rather through the juxtaposition of images, voiceover, and sound effects, in the tradition of the avant-garde or art film, demanding that the audience work out [the] film's various meanings for themselves."[46] The visuals are meandering and varied, showing men and women playing games, taking drugs, having occasional erotic encounters, and partaking in a variety of other activities ranging from the mundane to the bizarre, all without a clear sense of narrative progression. "People walk through the grounds, cavort in classrooms and corridors, explore storerooms of chemicals in bottles, eat candy bars or have tea, touch each other affectionately or quizzically, and sometimes appear to just be killing time in

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[45] Kim Newman, *Nightmare Movies: Horror on Screen Since the 1960s* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 158.

[46] Stacy Abbott, "*Stereo/Crimes of the Future* (Review)," *Science Fiction Film and Television* 1, no. 1 (2008): 148.

completely random ways."[47] Rather than clarifying this seemingly random assortment of visuals, the voiceover adds yet another layer of confusion and complexity to the film. Delivered in a continuous, machinic stream of language, it resembles the senseless output of a typewriter gone awry and constantly flickers in and out of coherence. When it is intelligible, its content often directly opposes the onscreen action; as one 1968 review put it, "As the narrator drones on… alternately strange and static scenes are presented which only occasionally bear any relation to the words being spoken."[48]

Then, of course, there is the film's architecture. Poised atop a ravine overlooking Scarborough's Highland Creek like a stiff, concrete serpent, the Andrews Building "is all concrete; the eggcrate is concrete, the walls are concrete, the balustrades are concrete, even the wall sconces are concrete… just ordinary poured-in-place concrete, replete with air cavities, flaws, and pour marks."[49] This "béton brut," raw or bare concrete, is the hallmark of Brutalism, the architectural style that shows such a forceful presence in Cronenberg's debut film. Abbott writes that "[*Stereo* is] as much about the space the characters inhabit as the characters

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[47] William Beard, *The Artist as Monster: The Cinema of David Cronenberg* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 4.

[48] Variety Staff, "Stereo," *Variety*, December 31, 1968, accessed June 25, 2020, https://variety.com/1968/film/reviews/stereo-1200421845/.

[49] Witold Rybczynski, "A Tale of Two Colleges," *Architect Magazine*, July 15, 2015, accessed June 25, 2020, https://www.architectmagazine.com/design/a-tale-of-two-colleges_o.

themselves,"[50] and Cronenberg himself has emphasized the importance of Brutalism in the film, claiming that he "structured the film around the architecture."[51]

Indeed, frequent, wide-angle shots of the building's exterior mean that the architecture often dwarfs the characters themselves (see fig. 2), emerging as the clear focal point especially in outdoor scenes. Concrete still commandeers the frame during interior scenes, often taking up three-fourths of the screen itself and rendering characters insignificant figures in a sea of grey. Even the few scenes that take place in the forest surrounding the Andrews Building seem to radiate an ambient Brutalism, as the film's monochromatic color scheme imbues even the most natural environments with the aura of concrete. Despite its clear significance, the possible connections between Brutalism and the themes of sexuality that *Stereo* addresses have yet to be explored. In what follows I will argue that Brutalism holds the key to unlocking *Stereo's* vision of sexuality, and, more specifically, its vision of the relationship between sexuality and knowledge.

In common readings of the film, this relationship is usually read through a lens of corruption or contamination. As William Beard writes, *"Stereo* is the first of the long, long line of Cronenberg films in which experiments go wrong,

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[50] Abbott, "*Stereo/Crimes of the Future* (Review)," 149.

[51] Allan Tong, "'These Movies Work Better If You're Really Stoned:' David Cronenberg on Architecture and His Early Work," *Filmmaker Magazine*, January 24, 2014, accessed June 25, 2020, https://filmmakermagazine.com/84009-cronenberg-on-architecture-and-horror-in-toronto.

Fig. 2. Still from *Stereo.*

in which their prosocial 'scientific' purposes are compromised by the irresponsible and often sexually tainted or power-hungry drives of their controllers."[52] Within this framework, knowledge is that which becomes corrupted by sexuality's chaotic and anti-social nature, and the violence that materializes around telepathy and sexuality is traced back to the repressed sexuality of the researcher which goes on to infect the participants. This chapter will argue, however, that this reading fundamentally misunderstands *Stereo's* vision of sexuality *insofar as it substantiates it as something that can be known at all. Stereo,* I will argue, articulates a much stranger vision of sexuality, yet the path to approaching it lies in perhaps the most familiar work ever written on the topic of sexuality and knowledge: Volume I of Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality.*

II

The hyper-scientific language of *Stereo's* voiceover narrative, the sheer size of the Academy's facilities, and the multiple references to the larger, socio-political goals associated with their experimentation clearly suggest that the Academy possesses some sort of institutional power. Their emancipatory project, however, is radically different from the way power is assumed to act on sexuality. Rather than working to constrain or restrict the sexual behavior of the participants, the Academy's experiments encourage them to expand and explore, to discover, liberate and live their sexual truth.

Yet, as Foucault insists in his seminal *History of Sexuality*, the logic of sexual emancipation is itself a mechanism of control. It is not by repressing the disruptive truth of sexuality that power acts on the sexual, he argues, but through the insistence that sexuality is *a site of hidden truth that must be liberated.* He connects this fusion of sexuality with truth and

[52] Beard, *The Artist as Monster,* 5.

repression to the proliferation of techniques designed to excavate sexuality from its apparently concealed position, techniques which extend the reach of power into ever more intimate realms of human activity. When people are convinced of the union between sexuality and truth as well as sexuality's repression, Foucault argues, they enthusiastically embrace a variety of procedures designed to unearth, identify, and "liberate" sexuality. Yet, as sexual behaviors and practices are increasingly drawn into the discursive realm, power is provided with a multiplicity of new "surface[s] of intervention" upon which to act.[53] "At issue is not a movement bent on pushing rude sex back into some obscure and inaccessible region," he writes, "but on the contrary, a process that spreads it over the surface of things and bodies, arouses it, draws it out and bids it speak, implants it in reality and enjoins it to tell the truth."[54]

It is in the context of this argument that Foucault's critique of psychoanalysis is formed, as he considers it first and foremost one of the techniques of discursive power that act on and through sexuality. Not only does the psychoanalyst state that sexuality is repressed and must be effortfully and repeatedly brought into discourse, but also that it is potentially everywhere, a diffusion of the sexual that Foucault associates with an accompanying diffusion and expansion of power. Bracketing Foucault's indictment of psychoanalysis, I wish to focus on his claim that an integral part of modern sexuality's identity—and exploitation—is its entanglement with the pursuit of truth, as it is here that the first connections between sexuality and Brutalism lie.

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[53] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 48.

[54] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 72.

Brutalism has more in common with sexuality than merely housing the Academy's fictional experimentation. The critical writing surrounding its emergence in the mid 20th century associates the architectural style with a strikingly similar pursuit of truth to that which, according to Foucault, has become attached to modern sexuality. Most commonly associated with architectural critic Reyner Banham and his 1955 treatise, "The New Brutalism," this theoretical movement attempted to define Brutalist architecture not just by certain aesthetic characteristics, like unfinished materials and the exposure of structural elements, but also ethical ones like transparency, authenticity, and honesty.

Origin stories concerning the term "Brutalism" proliferate, but two, in particular, are most commonly cited as the moment the name was first born. It is often traced back to two different architect's descriptions of two different buildings: one in Sweden, and one in Soho. Swedish architect Hans Asplund apparently used the term "nybrutalism" around 1950 to describe a small, unassuming brick house in Uppsala with visible beams on its front and back windows.[55] In 1953, architects Peter and Alison Smithson, whose work would eventually come to properly inaugurate Brutalism as a style, used "Brutalism" to describe a proposed design for a house in New York that would have its "structure exposed entirely, without internal finishes wherever practicable."[56] These competing tales have one striking consensus: they show the term's emergence not as a descriptor for violence, aggression, or brutality, but rawness, bareness, and

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[55] Sarah Briggs-Ramsey, "Concrete's Many Fair-Faces," *Room One Thousand*, no. 3 (2015): 274.

[56] Alison Smithson and Peter Smithson, "House in Soho, London," *October* 136 (2011): 11.

exposure. This sense is clear even in the most seemingly arbitrary of these origin stories, for example, the one that claims the term Brutalism emerged from the combined names of the Smithsons (Peter Smithson's nickname, Brutus, plus Alison). In regard to this neologism, Greek-French architect and friend of the Smithsons Georges Candilis insists that it was meant to be "taken in the sense of directness, truthfulness …"[57]

It is this sense of Brutalism as referring to a certain rawness or exposure in architecture that was extended by Banham in his 1955 manifesto, although it is frequently lost or eschewed in favour of one of the work's more provocative, yet ultimately marginal, comments concerning Brutalism's "bloody-mindedness." Emphasizing the French etymology of the word and connecting it to both Le Corbusier's use of "béton brut," raw or bare concrete, and Jean Dubuffet's "art brut," or raw art, Banham imagines Brutalism first and foremost as an architecture of honesty and authenticity, not brutality.

"Whatever has been said about honest use of materials," Banham writes, "most modern buildings appear to be made of whitewash or patent glazing, even when they are made of concrete or steel."[58] This scathing critique of architecture's dishonesty appears amidst Banham's discussion of the Smithsons' Hunstanton School in Norfolk, England, a building Banham considers to be the first manifestation of the Brutalist architectural style. Unlike "most modern buildings," the Hunstanton School does not attempt to camouflage its unglamorous but constituent materials, like the concrete and brick that make up most of its structure, nor does it conceal its functional elements like framing, plumbing, and electrical. An edifice of unfinished

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[57] Anthony Vidler, "Another Brick in the Wall," *October* 136 (2011): 108.

[58] Reyner Banham, "The New Brutalism," *October* 136 (2011): 22.

steel, glass, brick, and concrete with visible pipes and frames, Banham considers Hunstanton to be "unique among modern buildings in being made of what it appears to be."[59]

Using the Hunstanton School as his prototype, Banham goes on to advance the definition of a New Brutalist building, a definition consisting of three characteristics: "1, Memorability as an Image; 2, Clear exhibition of Structure; and 3, Valuation of Materials 'as found.'"[60] The second and third criteria are somewhat self-evident. To demonstrate a "clear exhibition of structure," a Brutalist construction must expose the structural elements, such as beams, pipes, and frames, normally hidden or camouflaged within finished architectural products. "Valuation of materials 'as found'" refers to Brutalism's commitment to using various building materials, whether brick, concrete, or wood, only in their "true," unprocessed state, allowing their authentic physical form and properties to shine through. The language of Brutalism's first and most important tenet, "memorability as an image," is more counterintuitive, as it in no way refers to originality or uniqueness. Rather, Banham uses the term to articulate the perfect correspondence between form and function that is his vision for Brutalism. "Memorability as an image" requires the external, aesthetic form of a Brutalist building to unambiguously translate the building's function to the viewer. As Banham explains, "Basically, [memorability as an image] requires that the building should be an immediately apprehensible visual entity, and that the form grasped by the eye should be confirmed by the experience of the building in use. Further, that this form should be entirely proper to the functions and materials of the building, in their entirety."[61] In

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[59] Banham, "The New Brutalism," 22.

[60] Ibid., 28.

[61] Ibid., 25.

other words, it does not suffice for a Brutalist building to simply leave a selection of disparate, structural elements unconcealed, it must make the *meaning* of these elements legible to the viewer. The Brutalist building is imagined as the perfect architectural signifier, that which transmits meaning without any loss, confusion, or ambiguity.

By stripping away color, ornamentation, finishing, and all other external elements, Brutalism attempts to access a true and authentic architecture. The understanding of truth at work in Brutalism's logic is therefore strikingly similar to that which Foucault argues has been united with modern sexuality. "It seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, 'demands' only to surface; that if it fails to do so, this is because a constraint holds it in place, the violence of a power weighs it down, and it can finally be articulated only at the price of a kind of liberation."[62] In both cases, truth is linked to processes of uncovering and exposure and is conceptualized as that which must be continuously and vigorously freed from that which conceals it. Yet, a question emerges from Foucault's account of sexuality's relationship to truth and power. If, as he claims, discourses of truth have attached themselves to sexuality "not…by reason of some natural property inherent in sex itself," then what has allowed these discourses to take such a profound hold and exert such an enduring influence?[63] One answer to this question can be found in the psychoanalytic tradition that Foucault so adamantly rejects. As psychoanalytic theorists like Alenka Zupančič and Joan Copjec have argued, Foucault's dismissal of psychoanalysis as just another component of the expansive "machinery of power"[64]

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[62] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 60.

[63] Ibid., 70.

[64] Ibid., 44.

that has been erected around sexuality relies on some fundamental mischaracterizations of the psychoanalytic position on sexuality.[65] In what follows, I will briefly outline this position before returning to Foucault's criticisms.

III

"The telepathic experience," concludes the narrator of *Stereo's* final voiceover, "[is] likely to be an overwhelming and extremely exhausting one, verging on pain and hallucination." Given the intimate correspondence between telepathy and sexuality in the film, this description of telepathy's violent and disturbing effects also paints an intensely negative picture of sexuality. Yet *Stereo's* vision of sexuality, and that of the Freudo-Lacanian tradition, is better captured by a less familiar definition of the negative: that which refers not to various undesirable characteristics, but to lack or absence, *to the state of missing something.* To understand this second sense of the negative and how it relates to sexuality, we must turn to the very formation of our Symbolic reality.

For Lacan, the Symbolic order is not a separate realm of representation, but our entire experiential world. For something to exist it must be represented or signified in this order, woven into the fabric of symbols, meaning, and language that constitutes our reality. "In Lacan's terminology, existence is a product of language: language brings things into existence (makes them part of human reality), things which had no existence prior to being ciphered, symbolized,

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[65] See Joan Copjec, "The Sexual Compact," in *Sex and Nothing: Bridges from Psychoanalysis to Philosophy*, ed. Alejandro Cerda Rueda (London: Routledge, 2018), 107-138 and Alenka Zupančič, "Biopolitics, Sexuality and the Unconscious," *Paragraph* 39, no. 1 (2016), 49-64.

or put into words."[66] The very existence of this Symbolic world, however, depends on its own imperfection: a gap within the system of signifiers that allows them to shift and relate to each other, that allows for the metaphor, displacement, and mobility that that defines language. As Lacan himself puts it, "Discourse begins from the fact that there is a gap here.... But, after all, nothing prevents us from saying that it is because discourse begins that the gap is produced. It is a matter of complete indifference toward the result. What is certain is that discourse is implied in the gap."[67] This gap or lack can be sensed in a certain contingency and illogicality present within discursive reality; because signifiers can move and relate, they can also do so mechanically, outside of human intention and rationale. Though the gap can be sensed, however, it is impossible to absent because it inaugurates and enables our very systems of knowledge and communication. Impossible to fill up or complete, it persists as an eternal but invisible (il)logic at the heart of our systems of meaning.

It is this gap, that both emerges with language and brings forth its emergence, that is the place of sexuality in the psychoanalytic tradition. Because it does not correspond to any signifier but rather to the constituent gap of signification, sexuality is therefore defined by an ontological negativity. In other words, it does not exist as the rest of our world exists as a positive entity within Symbolic reality. "Sex is not some realm or substance to be talked about," explains

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[66] Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 25.

[67] Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre XVIII. D'un Discours Qui Ne Serait Pas Du Semblant* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), 107.

Zupančič, "it is in the first place the inherent contradiction of speech."[68] As the name for the fissure of the discursive realm, sexuality can never be known: located in exactly the place where meaning is missing, it is a negative force within knowledge and language that, like a black hole, can only be perceived by how it has already deformed the world around it.

Returning to Foucault, we can see how his characterization of psychoanalysis fundamentally misconstrues its position on sexuality. Although psychoanalysis does claim that sexuality is repressed, this repression is not one which can be dissolved or broken through; rather, sexuality is that which is constitutively repressed, that which is fundamentally incompatible with conscious knowledge. Sexuality is "not something that first is, and is then repressed," but that which "only registers in reality in the form of repression."[69] Any approach that would encourage subjects to disclose or express their sexuality in the interest of liberating it from its repressed state could therefore not be further from the psychoanalytic view, as it adamantly maintains that *there is nothing to be liberated.* Furthermore, if psychoanalysis extends the definition of the sexual outside the canon of explicitly sexual acts or behaviors, it does not do so through simply adding to a list of places where sexuality can be monitored and searched for. Rather, it explodes the definition of the sexual altogether: if sexuality can be everywhere in psychoanalysis, this is only because it is fundamentally nowhere and nothing, as it is not something but "the something which is not there."[70]

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[68] Agon Hamza and Frank Ruda, "Interview with Alenka Zupančič: Philosophy or Psychoanalysis? Yes, Please!," *Crisis and Critique* 6, no. 1 (April 2019): 44.

[69] Alenka Zupančič, *What IS Sex?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2017), 11.

[70] Zupančič, *What IS Sex*, 17.

It is precisely because of this ontological negativity that sexuality is such a heightened site of anxiety and discursive management. As Zupančič writes, "Sexuality is regulated in all kinds of ways not because of its debauchery but insofar as it implies (and 'transmits') the knowledge of this ontological negativity."[71] In other words, the constant but shifting array of norms, regulations, and interdictions around sexuality take hold precisely because they promise to conceal or absent sexuality's unsettling negativity. One could adjust Foucault's claim to say that it is *because* there are no "natural propert[ies] inherent in sex itself" that it is the object of such widespread regulation.

"A rigorous language as it arises from sexuality will not reveal the secret of man's natural being, nor will it express the serenity of anthropological truths, but rather, it will say that he exists without God… the language of sexuality has lifted us into the night where God is absent, and where all of our actions are addressed to this absence."[72] Though it could have just as easily emerged from the pen of Lacan or Zupančič, this quotation in fact comes from Foucault, from his 1963 essay "Preface to Transgression" written in homage to the work of Georges Bataille. Although he does not situate it specifically in a psychoanalytic lineage, this description of sexuality as outside of nature, language, and the human, is a more accurate portrayal of the psychoanalytic conception of sexuality than the one he will later attribute to psychoanalysis in *The History of Sexuality.* It is this understanding of sexuality that *Stereo's* Brutalist setting

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[71] Zupančič, *What IS Sex*, 17.

[72] Michel Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 30.

gestures towards. As even the most casual observer of Brutalist architecture can attest, Brutalism's pursuit of truth and authenticity resulted in a spectacular failure. Despite Banham's utopian dream, the style does not generate a sense of honesty or transparency but one of blankness, alienation, and an impenetrability so profound it caused a congregation of the Third Church of Christ, Scientist in Washington, D.C. to resort to legal action.

IV

Third Church of Christ, Scientist, Washington, D.C. v. District of Columbia Historic Preservation Review Board was a lawsuit filed in 2008 concerning an octagonal, concrete building just blocks from the White House. The building was a Brutalist church designed by architect Araldo Cossutta and completed in 1971 that the congregation was determined to raze and replace (see fig. 3). The city's preservationists, however, were determined to protect the church as a notable work of architecture, and their efforts culminated in the building achieving landmark status in 2007. In response to this designation, which prevented the church from destroying, renovating, or altering the building in any way, the Church filed suit the following year, alleging that being forced to occupy the Brutalist building was a violation of two federal religious freedom statutes as well as the free exercise clause of the First Amendment.

Fig. 3. *Third Church of Christ, Scientist, Washington, DC, USA,* Photograph by Nicolas Grospierre, 2012.

The logic of their lawsuit is anchored firmly in the realm of communication and language; it is based on the principle that architecture speaks, and that particular architectural styles articulate specific meanings to a building's observers and occupants.

The building's Brutalist design, the lawsuit alleged, communicated a message that was fundamentally at odds with the Church's vision and mission. "Not only did the building's design prevent the Church from communicating the messages it wished to present about itself, but it was forcing the Church to present an image that contradicted the members' religious beliefs."[73] What was the message, so problematic for the Church, that the Brutalist aesthetic conveyed to the public? Nothing at all. As the lawsuit argued:

> Th[e] abstract nature of brutalism makes the style unfriendly and uncommunicative, instead of being integrating and protective, as its proponents intended. For example, the location of the entrance of a brutalist structure is rarely obvious to the visitor. brutalism also is criticized as disregarding the social, historic, and architectural environment of its surroundings, making the introduction of such structures in existing developed areas appear starkly out of place and alien. The Church's present building suffers from all of these problems.[74]

The picture of Brutalism painted by the Church and its supporters, a picture which also resonated with the U.S. District Court, who ruled in favor of the Church in 2014, is of an architectural style that is profoundly blank, opaque, and "uncommunicative." The Church's impression of the Brutalist aesthetic is less that it articulates a distasteful message, and more that

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[73] Kaylor, "Building Free Speech," 51.

[74] Ibid.

it articulates nothing at all; the style's deliberate rejection of historical ornamentation and other architectural signifiers, though intended to impart a pure and unambiguous meaning and functionality to the viewer, ends up conveying an *absence of meaning*. If architecture speaks, then Brutalism remains silent.

In fact, the contradictions to Banham's ethical vision for Brutalism extend down to the level of its most prized material: exceeding the simple fact of concrete's literal opacity, there is something particularly elusive about its very being. Although Brutalism is defined by its "valuation of materials 'as found,'" charged with the task of exhibiting them only in their truest forms, its most definitive material is both slippery and shapeless, impossible to associate with any stable, natural state. Fundamentally amorphous, concrete takes shape only in reaction to the negative space around it, and its physical characteristics can vary wildly depending on how it is mixed, formed, and cast. Although one can speak of an "unfinished" or "natural" concrete, this "natural" concrete is actually that which leaves visible the human imperfections, textures and details imprinted by the casting process. In reality, there is no "natural" concrete; according to Ford Bostwick, "concrete has no inherent formal qualities. It takes on the form of whatever vessel it is poured into and adopts the surface treatment of its mould… [It] has no formal language and depends completely on the formal logic of the materials of its formwork."[75]

Brutalism's pursuit of truth, clarity, and authenticity is plagued by opacity and formlessness, resulting in vacant, a-symbolic space that appears withdrawn from the realm of language and communication. Yet it is ultimately this failure that makes it a productive figure

[75] Ford Bostwick, "Shapes of Gray: Concepts in Concrete," *Architecture Senior Theses* 162 (2013): 6.

through which to think sexuality. Linking Brutalism to the search for sexual truth, *Stereo* gestures towards the nonexistence of this truth, to the failure that greets all attempts to expose sexuality's radical negativity. Just as concrete has no true form, but is that which is shaped by the negative space of a mould or cast, what we think we know as sexuality—sexual pleasures, sexual practices, and sexual objects—is also that which is formed in reaction to negative space, to the void or absence of sexuality as such. It is important to note, however, that neither a legal background nor a knowledge of architectural history is necessary for understanding Brutalism's function within *Stereo.* Its impenetrable and a-symbolic qualities are underscored in the film itself by the characters' interactions with the architecture around them. From the film's opening shots, it becomes clear that the relation between the Andrews Building and the participants is one of profound alienation and confusion.

The first interaction that the viewer sees between a character in the film and the Andrews Building also happens to be one of *Stereo's* most striking visual sequences. After the first participant is dropped off by helicopter, a series of languorous, wide-angle shots show him dwarfed by the size and monumentality of the Andrews Building, which he begins to approach. He proceeds to have noticeable difficulty entering the building. Looking around confusedly, he tries a first set of doors. From the other side of the door's glass, he is shown visibly straining, trying to get a glimpse within the building. The shot then moves quickly through two different shots, each showing him through the glass but from progressively further positions that show the building's vacant interior, each successive shot revealing more and more emptiness (see fig. 4).

Fig. 4. Stills from *Stereo.*

This flurry of shots is striking in contrast to the slow pace that characterizes the rest of Cronenberg's camera work in *Stereo*, and is one of only three rapid, montage-like sequences in the film. The participant moves away from the first set of doors, trying another to no avail. He proceeds to wander around the outside of the building but is constantly shown from inside the building, a point of view that emphasizes its empty interior. After a while, he gives up, walking away into the surrounding forest. Although he subsequently gains access to the building and is pictured inside it, we do not see him enter, and our first impression of the Brutalist edifice is of an impenetrable, inaccessible void.

While the outside of the Andrews Building is blank and impenetrable, the inside is impossibly labyrinthine. Confusion and disorientation reign in the building's interior as its maze-like quality is emphasized by frequent shots of repetitive spatial elements, features of the building or its decoration that iterate in seemingly endless ways and make it impossible for the viewer to establish any sense of the building's layout. Characters peer down Escher-like staircases and wander through winding rows of identical lockers, constantly moving through spaces whose dimensions are impossible to sketch, whose beginnings and ends are impossible to locate. Like sexuality then, the Andrews Building is also a space of Symbolic breakdown, both aesthetically and functionally. Not only is it void of ornamentation, decoration, and other architectural signifiers, it also constantly acts as a barrier between the participants of the experiment, preventing rather than facilitating their communication. The building's windows, in particular, function in this divisive way; despite being the architectural feature most representative of transparency and clarity, in *Stereo* they operate as a force of alienation.

Characters constantly appear to be separated—and silenced—by glass. In one scene, for example, a male participant walking the grounds looks up to see a female participant pressed up

against the Andrews Building's glass façade as if frozen in an arrested communication. In another, a female and male participant stand together in a concrete alcove whose window looks down onto a hallway. As two of the other participants walk by, the man leaves to join the newcomers, and the female participant proceeds to gaze despondently at their exchange with her hand pressed to the window as if separated from them by more than a thin layer of glass (see fig. 5). Like oil within in water, Symbolic communication seems to be insoluble in the space created by Brutalist architecture.

Surrounding the Academy's search within the blank, concrete walls of the Andrews Building, *Stereo* "reveals" sexuality's resistance to all attempts to expose it, its identity as that which has none. With this vision of sexuality in mind, other features of the film begin to fall into place. The disquieting surgery undergone by some participants to eliminate their capacity for speech, for example, is another articulation of the irreconcilability between sexuality and language. As the narrator states, "Two of the eight subjects consented to having portions of their larynx removed, making it physically impossible for them to speak. In addition, large portions of the speech-centers of the brains of these subjects were obliterated, so that the psychological faculty of speech itself would be impaired." The researchers believe that removing the speech faculties will amplify the telepathic experience, suggesting that sexuality, too, can only emerge in the place where language and speech collapse.

Similarly, *Stereo's* famously convoluted voiceover can be understood in a new light when read in the context of sexuality's ontological negativity. As this chapter has already noted, there is a significant disjunction between the film's voiceover narration and the visuals that appear onscreen.

Fig. 5. Still from *Stereo.*

Although this disparity is often dismissed as the result of a technical limitation (Cronenberg wrote and recorded *Stereo's* voiceovers after filming was already completed), it can also be contextualized within *Stereo's* depiction of sexuality.[76] A particularly striking example of this conflict between visuals and voiceover appears near the end of the film. As a narrator describes the most disturbing violent episode that has occurred during the experimentation, an episode in which "two of the five subjects committed suicide in their residences at the Institute, [while] another pierced his skull with an electric drill," the film's visuals depict what appears to be the opposite event, showing three of the participants in the throes of a euphoric erotic encounter.

Should we identify sexuality with the amorous visuals, or the tale of violence overlaid on top of them? Is sexuality what we see on the screen, or is it what we hear in the voiceover? *Stereo's* answer is, in fact, neither: sexuality is instead identified with this very space between voiceover and visuals. The gap between voiceover and visuals mirrors that which lies at the center of the Symbolic order—the gap which is the place of sexuality as such. In a 1981 interview with *Cinefantastique* magazine, Cronenberg referred to *Stereo* as a "dead end," acknowledging its contribution to his artistic growth but reflecting positively on his subsequent decision to move towards less experimental, more narratively-focused cinema.[77] Although his choice of words is meant to evoke the film's incompatibility with commercial audiences, it is also an inadvertently apt descriptor of what meets all attempts to discover sexuality's meaning, form, or identity. Like the researchers and participants in *Stereo,* we are consigned to forever circle its perimeter, its formless and impenetrable center.

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[76] Beard, *The Artist as Monster,* 3.

[77] Abbott, "*Stereo/Crimes of the Future* (Review)," 151.

Chapter 2

High-Rise Visions: Surveillance, Architecture, and the Gaze in Andrea Arnold's *Red Road*

And if thou gaze long into an abyss, the abyss will also gaze into thee.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

The gaze is not necessarily the face of our fellow being, it could just as easily be the window behind which we assume he is lying in wait for us.

—Jacques Lacan, *Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953-1954*

In the opening scene of Andrea Arnold's *Red Road* (2006) a camera pans across a dark room interspersed with blurry squares of light. The squares shift amorphously, hovering just out of focus, the camera's slow movement working only to amplify their ambiguity. As if to mimic the act of ocular straining, the camera begins to close in on a single square, yet this attempt to sharpen the image merely produces an even more shapeless nebula of light and color. For a brief moment, the blur takes over. It is not until a distinctly technological glitch ripples across the image that we realize we may be looking at a screen. The subsequent shot, now both zoomed-out and in focus, confirms this speculation, revealing the mysterious squares to be the flickering screens of a CCTV grid, each displaying a different city view. Although clear-sightedness prevails, the viewer is left with a lingering sense of vision's indeterminacy, its inexactitude. They are left, in other words, with an image of failed vision, one that, this chapter argues, is central to *Red Road*'s treatment of surveillance, subjectivity, and desire.

Red Road tells the story of the woman behind the grid: a CCTV operator named Jackie charged with monitoring the streets of Glasgow for a private security company named "City Eye." Bathed in the light of her screens, Jackie spends her days surfing between various camera feeds, benevolently looking in on her favorite strangers and reporting suspicious activity to the police. One day, however, she recognizes someone. During a routine check on the infamous Red Road housing estate, Jackie sees a man whom, we can assume from her disturbed and anxious reaction, she clearly knows. As she begins to stalk the man through her cameras and engage him in an increasingly intimate series of real-life interactions in and around the estate, the viewer struggles to piece together the man's identity and his precise relationship to Jackie.

In its explicit engagement with CCTV technology, *Red Road* joins a long line of films that take surveillance as their primary theme. Yet, there is something that distinguishes it from Alfred Hitchcock's 1954 masterpiece *Rear Window*, Michelangelo Antonioni's widely acclaimed *Blow-Up* (1966), and even more recent contributions to the surveillance genre such as Michael Haneke's *Caché* (2005). In a move that film theorist Jessica Lake describes as "exceptional in the context of surveillance cinema," *Red Road* depicts a woman as the source of the surveillant gaze: positioning Jackie as the watcher, rather than the watched, the stalker, rather than the stalked, it disrupts a long history of cinematic surveillance narratives that portray "nearly all surveyors… [as] white, middle-class men."[78]

Crucially, however, the film has also been interpreted as a challenge to one of the most iconic architectural metaphors of the twentieth century, one that has haunted the study of vision

[78] Jessica Lake, "*Red Road* (2006) and Emerging Narratives of 'Sub-Veillance'," *Continuum* 24, no. 2 (2010): 231.

and power since the early 1980s: the Panopticon. Often associated with Michel Foucault's book *Discipline and Punish*, the Panopticon was an 18th-century penitentiary design developed by philosopher and jurist Jeremy Bentham, one whose structure aimed to produce an experience of continuous yet unverifiable surveillance for those imprisoned within it. Consisting of a central guard tower encircled by individual cells, its layout was such that, although the guards in the tower would have a clear view of each of the surrounding cells, the prisoners could not see into the tower, leaving them ignorant as to exactly when—and if—they were being surveilled.

Becoming, over the years, the most widely used metaphor for surveillance, the Panopticon has recently been taken to task by critics who claim that the anonymous, disembodied gaze at its center is one that is implicitly masculine.[79] It is to these critics in particular that *Red Road* speaks, and the film's depiction of a uniquely female form of surveillance has been praised as a corrective to both this male-centered, Foucauldian legacy as well as to the exclusionary history of both the surveillance genre and cinema in general. This chapter suggests, however, that this prevailing focus on the gender of *Red Road*'s protagonist leaves the film's most valuable insights about vision in the dark. Returning to Foucault's original account of panopticism in *Discipline and Punish*, I argue that to center a distinctly female mode of seeing as the basis of a critique of surveillance is to merely reinforce the disciplinary project that subtends the exercise of visual power. To shed light on *Red Road*'s true critique of

[79] Maša Galič, Tjerk Timan, and Bert-Jaap Koops, "Bentham, Deleuze and Beyond: An Overview of Surveillance Theories from the Panopticon to Participation," *Philosophy & Technology* 30, no. 1 (2016): 10.

surveillance, I suggest, one must look beyond the film's representation of the female subject and, in fact, beyond the realm of the subject altogether.

Surprisingly for a film named after an infamous housing estate, analyses of *Red Road* have not focused extensively on the film's architecture. Built between 1964 and 1968, Red Road was a housing complex located in Glasgow, Scotland, consisting of eight, multi-story tower blocks between twenty-eight and thirty-one storeys high. The tallest residential building in Europe at the time of its construction, it stared down from the Glasgow skyline for decades before being destroyed in a series of high-profile demolitions between 2012 and 2015, yet another testament to the failures of post-war mass housing. In Arnold's eponymous film, however, the estate is called on to represent a failure of a different order: the failure of perceptual autonomy and subjective closure that Lacan calls "the gaze."

In what follows, I read *Red Road'*s high-rise architecture through Lacan's concept of the gaze in order to extract a different critique of panopticism, one which highlights the limits of disciplinary power rather than reproducing its logic. Often manifesting as a glitch or disruption in visual perception, as well as in the uncanny sense that something inanimate possesses a gaze of its own, the Lacanian gaze describes an intrusion of desire into the scopic field, a phenomenon directed at the subject from the object world that reveals the subject of vision as perpetually incomplete. Constantly exceeding Jackie's CCTV screens, yet all the while drawing her closer in a false promise of completion and closure, the Red Road towers exemplify this gaze, whose unspeakable light radiates not from the eyes of any subject, but the lacuna of the missing object.

I

Jackie's disruptive, on-screen encounter with the nameless man sends her into a spiral of anxious reactions, each of which amplifies the mystery surrounding their relationship and the

danger that seems to surround him. After frantically smoking a cigarette ('I thought you'd quit', remarks one of her coworkers) Jackie leaves the City Eye control room in a state of disarray, returning home only to fall into a troubled sleep. Waking in the middle of the night, she rises to rummage through her laundry room, unearthing a bag of newspaper clippings from under a pile of discarded boxes and cleaning supplies. As Jackie sifts through the mess of papers, she finally pauses on one in particular: the front page of a newspaper emblazoned with the man's face and a damning headline that reads: "BLACKIE HILL MAN GETS 10 YEARS." The man Jackie recognized from her screen, we gather, is potentially a criminal.

The following day, cameras fixed on the Red Road high-rises, Jackie calls up a colleague to verify that the buildings house ex-convicts. Though the viewer does not hear his answer, all suspicions are confirmed when, upon returning home that evening, Jackie tracks down a clear view of the man's face, on the grounds of Red Road, from a VHS tape of pre-recorded surveillance footage from past days. As his face is frozen, paused, on the television screen, an answering machine message plays over the image: "Jackie," the voice says, "it's Stuart Kincaid. I looked into things for you. There's not much else to add, I'm afraid. He got early release for good behavior. Like I said, very sorry. It happens."

The "he" in question, we learn, is a man named Clyde Henderson. Continuing to stalk him using the City Eye surveillance cameras, Jackie begins to supplement her view with in-person journeys to the Red Road estate, coming ever-closer to breaking her anonymity and engaging with Clyde in real life. After managing to slip, unnoticed, into a party in Clyde's flat, we realize that whatever his relationship to Jackie, he does not recognize her. The two dance together at the party, begin a quasi-romantic relationship that culminates in full-on sexual contact days later. Though their encounter appears to be completely consensual, Jackie leaves Red Road

in a performative hysteria, using the CCTV footage of her running from the estate—as well as a series of self-inflicted wounds—to charge Clyde with sexual assault. The next day, however, she revokes her charges, and in her final interaction with Clyde, we finally learn that he was the reckless driver responsible for the death of her husband and young daughter.

In the world of *Red Road*, it is thus Jackie who occupies the position of scopic control. It is she who is invested with the symbolic authority to observe; it is she whose profession allows her to use (and abuse) an expansive network of surveillance technology according to her personal motivations. Not only does Jackie's reliable access to a sophisticated visual apparatus provide her with the ability to track Clyde's whereabouts and manipulate the terms of their interactions, but also to observe many of his most intimate moments in what amounts to a level of psychological—as well as tactical—dominance. Spared the ethical complexity of his reciprocal look, she watches Clyde struggle to find employment, have sex in abandoned parking lots, and visit tensely with his estranged daughter, all the while remaining anonymous and detached, concealed by her position behind the cameras.

As Jessica Lake points out in her 2010 article "*Red Road* (2006) and Emerging Narratives of 'Sub-Veillance'," *Red Road*'s depiction of female visual agency is far from the norm in the context of surveillance cinema, a genre which has, for the most part, extended the power of the agentic look only as far as the masculine subject. Despite over a century of films dealing with questions of surveillance, Lake argues, "the dynamics of represented surveillance situations are nearly always 'traditional' in that the watchers are white men."[80] Indeed, from *Rear Window*'s

[80] Lake, "*Red Road* (2006) and Emerging Narratives of 'Sub-Veillance'," 235. Thomas Levin has traced the origins of the surveillance genre all the way back to the birth of cinema

Jeff Stewart to *Blow-Up*'s David Bailey; from Harry Caul in *The Conversation* to Captain Gerd Weisler in *The Lives of Others*, the "Peeping Toms" that populate the canonical films of surveillance cinema are, as this colloquialism itself suggests, overwhelmingly male. Gazing out at their diagetic landscapes—and often at the women that inhabit them—this endless string of masculine detectives, policemen, and photographers testifies, for Lake, to the "cosy conceptual coupling of male voyeurism and surveillance" that plagues the history of the surveillance genre, a coupling she sees as disrupted by *Red Road*'s portrayal of a female voyeur.[81]

Of course, one could argue that this alliance between masculinity and visual power is not restricted to the particular genre of surveillance film, but is rather definitive of cinema itself, at least in its more mainstream forms. This is the famous argument advanced by Laura Mulvey's 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," which links Hollywood cinema to the satisfaction of the male gaze. Mainstream cinema, Muley argues, overwhelmingly privileges masculine, heterosexual vision in one of two ways: by presenting the female form in a way that can be directly objectified by the male spectator, or by providing the spectator with a masculine proxy through which they can indirectly possess, control, and objectify the female characters in the diegetic space of the screen. Identifying the active, agentic look with masculinity and

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itself, pointing out how one of the first films ever made—the Lumière Brothers' *Workers Leaving the Factory*—can itself be considered an instance of workplace surveillance. See Thomas Levin, "Rhetoric of the Temporal Index: Surveillant Narration and the Cinema of 'Real Time'," in *CTRL [Space]: Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother*, ed. Thomas Levin, Ursula Frohne, and Peter Weibel (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 58.

[81] Lake, "*Red Road* (2006) and Emerging Narratives of 'Sub-Veillance'," 235.

passive, "to-be-looked-at-ness" with femininity, Mulvey suggests that Hollywood cinema is a male-centered visual regime, one which reinforces an understanding of "woman as image, man as bearer of the look."[82]

With this context in mind, it follows that the critical reception of *Red Road* has placed a marked emphasis on the gender of the film's protagonist, and particularly on her role as an active surveyor. Catherine Zimmer's recent book *Surveillance Cinema*, for example, argues that *Red Road* "revers[es] the more expected gender roles" and "highlight[s] the dynamics between gender and surveillance,"[83] while a 2007 Boston Globe review entitled "In gritty '*Red Road*' she's the watcher and he's being watched" reduces the film entirety down to its portrayal of a "she" who watches.[84] Similarly, Lake describes the film in terms of its "inversion of the gendered gaze," suggesting that "in its reversal of the traditional dynamics of looking… [*Red Road*] reconceives surveillance in terms of voyaging and opposes the static, distanced, watching inherent in the white man's panopticon."[85]

The Panopticon: a visual apparatus that, although architectural rather than cinematic, has also been critiqued for its relationship to masculine visual dominance. Although Bentham's

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[82] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings,* eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 837.

[83] Catherine Zimmer, *Surveillance Cinema* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 70.

[84] Ty Burr, "In Gritty '*Red Road*' She's the Watcher and He's Being Watched," *Boston Globe*, May 5, 2007.

[85] Lake, "*Red Road* (2006) and Emerging Narratives of 'Sub-Veillance'," 239.

proposal was never realized, the Panopticon has become an inescapable point of reference in surveillance studies thanks to Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, which introduced the term "panopticism" to refer to a mode of "visible yet unverifiable" surveillance that causes subjects to regulate their own behavior in the absence of external force.[86] A crucial component of Foucault's larger elaboration of disciplinary power, it has also been the subject of numerous critiques concerning its implicitly masculine understanding of vision, as well as its failure to capture the gendered dynamics of surveillance.

Sarah Pemberton, for example, writes that "Foucault pays no attention to the sex, gender, or sexuality of prisoners,"[87] while Lake, in her article on *Red Road*, argues that "the panoptic paradigm renders bodies and social identities irrelevant to the practice of surveillance."[88] On a similar note, Torin Monahan links the Panopticon to an "enlightenment rationality of masculine control at a distance," including it under a category of surveillance systems which are "highly masculinized, at least on a theoretical level, because they depend on disembodied representations of the world and an evacuation of social relations and contexts."[89] What these feminist critiques of Foucault suggest, in other words, is that the unmarked nature of the Panopticon's central

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[86] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 201.

[87] Sarah Pemberton, "Enforcing Gender: The Constitution of Sex and Gender in Prison Regimes," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 39, no. 1 (2013): 151.

[88] Lake, "*Red Road* (2006) and Emerging Narratives of 'Sub-Veillance'," 232.

[89] Torin Monahan, "Dreams of Control at a Distance: Gender, Surveillance, and Social Control," *Cultural Studies/Critical Methodologies* 9, no. 2 (2008): 291.

observer obscures how particular (male) subjects are more likely to occupy this position while others are barred from it, more likely to be placed under observation themselves. Moreover, they argue that the professed neutrality of the panoptic model severs vision from identity only to tacitly perpetuate a masculine ideal of visual perception, one that understands it as necessarily remote, abstract, and disembodied.

It is this line of critique that informs Lake's reading of *Red Road* and its focus on Jackie's gender as the film's most noteworthy—and politically relevant—feature. Interpreting the film as a challenge to the exclusionary history of cinema and the surveillance genre, as well as a rejection of the distanced, masculinized paradigm of panoptic vision, she argues that it "challenges the alignment of surveillance with male voyeurism and suggests the existence of a distinctively female voyeur/voyager, who works to collapse distance rather than maintain it and to traverse space and screens." Positioning *Red Road* as part of an effort to multiply and proliferate the gaze, to extend its power across a variety of genders, identities, and subjectivities, she writes:

> Surveillance has long been the institutionalized practice of the white man, passing his voyeuristic gaze over others. Now 'sub-veillance' narratives are emerging, such as those deployed by *Red Road*, that invite scrutiny of established theories regarding practices of surveillance and suggest that rather than equating to centralized objective and official looking it can become a deeply intimate practice of interaction, spatial habitation and movement. Where surveillance controls through optic distance, sub-veillance collapses

boundaries and allows us to traverse through screens in new intimate and embodied ways.[90]

Lake's analysis of *Red Road* effectively draws attention to the complexity of contemporary surveillance practices, as well as to some of the limitations that inhere within conventional surveillance narratives. And yet, her description of a "distinctively female voyeur/voyager, who works to collapse distance rather than maintain it," as well as her appeal to a variety of other "sub-veillant" gazes, each of which is associated with a different, embodied subject position, contain the implicit suggestion that these alternative forms of visual subjectivity hold the potential to disrupt the exercise of visual power. Associated with intimacy, tactility, and proximity rather than objectivity, distance, and control, the female gaze that Lake describes is positioned as the antithesis of panoptic power, implying that to feminize the gaze—to wrest it from the confines of the "anonymous" central guard—is to also elude or undermine the panoptic operation. And yet, there is a fundamental flaw in the logic that would seek to replace the Panopticon's masculine gaze with a feminine one or, for that matter, with any number of unique, individual gazes. Driving the Panopticon's system of visual control is a more insidious regime of disciplinary power, one whose constitutive dynamics of subjectification and individualization are not just unchanged but reinforced by the appeal to the gaze's femininity and multiplicity.

The link between the Panopticon and the plague may not initially seem apparent. Yet, it is precisely through this connection that Foucault introduces his concept of panopticism, which begins with a story of a plague-stricken town. For Foucault, the Panopticon exemplifies a particular form of power he terms "disciplinary power," one which, as outlined briefly in the

[90] Lake, "*Red Road* (2006) and Emerging Narratives of 'Sub-Veillance'," 239.

introduction to this thesis, operates through the production of the subject in ever-increasing particularity. Disciplinary power, he argues, has its origins in the outbreaks of contagious disease that appeared around the 17th century, which brought with them both a fear of illness and a concurrent need to establish and keep track of citizens' identities, to make citizens aware of and forced to disclose their relation to this illness. He thus links the arrival of the plague to the development of a complex apparatus of control dedicated to establishing, monitoring, and reinforcing the boundaries between subjects, to assigning each individual "his 'true' name, his 'true' place, his 'true' body, his 'true' disease."[91] This apparatus was a disciplinary one, one whose political economy of subjectification would come to define the exercise of modern power.

Uniquely concerned with the creation and consolidation of identity, disciplinary power is "an expression of power that is associated with what [Foucault] calls, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* the 'assignment' of subjective positions, whereby individuals are allotted roles in the social world, positions that provide different possibilities for the exercise of power."[92] In order for it to operate, it thus depends on various techniques of subjectification and individualization, one of which is the type of visual surveillance afforded by the architecture of the Panopticon. Like the disciplinary architectures of the school, the military barracks, and the hospital, however, the Panopticon is less an apparatus of vision than it is an apparatus of *subject production.* Like a "naturalist," it works to draw out, analyze, and classify difference, and its spatial arrangement

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[91] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* 198.

[92] Ellen K Feder, "Power/Knowledge," in *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts*, ed. Dianna Taylor (London; New York: Routledge, 2011), 59.

seeks to create the conditions for the individual qualities of each prisoner to appear clearly and crisply to the central guard and to also be internalized by the subjects themselves.

The Panopticon is thus a dream not just of visual perfection, but of the perfection of discourse, and of the ability of discourse to categorize—and produce knowledge about—the subject. As Jacques-Alain Miller writes, "all Benthamic buildings are materialized classifications" in which "discourse and reality are reversible, without remainder."[93] If the entirety of the subject can be captured by identity, then no part of the subject can escape the exercise of disciplinary power, and it is this "remainder-less" categorization that the spatial and visual configuration of the Panopticon attempts to ensure. Vision in the Panopticon is thus not an inherent tool of objectification and control that must be wrested from the central guard and distributed evenly amongst different types of subjects. Rather, vision controls through its ability to submit bodies and identities through the classificatory operation of the disciplinary project, an operation which the emphasis on a specifically feminine form of vision not only fails to disrupt but inadvertently reinforces.

Put otherwise, the logic that opposes an embodied, female gaze to the Panopticon's visual regime becomes untenable upon closer consideration of the aims and objectives of disciplinary power. Although the putatively invisible observer of the Panopticon's central tower may indeed obscure the way in which the positions of surveyor and surveyed are circumscribed by factors such as gender, it is not a case of disciplinary power functioning through this elision, but rather through the production and maintenance of these categories themselves and their subsequent

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[93] Jacques-Alain Miller, "Jeremy Bentham's Panoptic Device," trans. Richard Miller, *October* 41 (1984): 16.

internalization and re-articulation by subjects. The true goal of panoptic surveillance—and the disciplinary political economy it works to maintain—is for subjects to individuate themselves, to cohere their bodies and souls into a legible, differentiated surface that power can subsequently optimize and exploit.

With this in mind, the appeal to a distinctly female form of gaze—which itself presupposes an articulable, coherent female subject that would be the source of such a gaze—merely ends up reproducing the same internalization and re-articulation of singularity through which disciplinary power is exercised. This would hold for any of the multiple, subversive gazes that one could propose as a corrective to the universalizing, masculine gaze of disciplinary surveillance, *for to simply insist on a different type of subject as the source of the gaze is to reproduce the logic of subjectification that subtends the exercise of disciplinary power.* As Foucault writes, this power is one that "categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects."[94] Or, as Joan Copjec has articulated, in shorter but similar terms: "Differences do not threaten panoptic power; they feed it."[95]

The female gaze thus proves to be less of a disruption to the panoptic regime than it is a re-inscription of the disciplinary project. And yet, to suggest that *Red Road* is not a story of the female gaze is not to suggest that it is a story of surveillance as usual. There is another gaze that

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[94] Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in *Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley (The New Press, 2001), 331.

[95] Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire* (Cambridge, London: The MIT Press, 1995), 18.

pierces the visual field of *Red Road,* one which, if pursued, can illuminate another possible critique of panoptic power and its regime of discipline. Unlike the female gaze, this gaze does not emerge from Jackie and her position behind the cameras, but rather from the Red Road estate itself.

II

One of the most recurrent images in all of *Red Road* is that of Jackie's CCTV grid. Appearing in no less than eight separate scenes, it receives more screen time than the walls of Jackie's own home, its rigid arrangement of grainy, moving windows becoming a surprisingly comforting constant throughout the film's many suspenseful moments. It is a testament to the centrality of this image that, when faced with the windowed façade of the Red Road estate, one cannot help but be struck by its grid-like appearance (see fig. 6). Vast, repetitive, and geometrical, the exterior of Red Road is the architectural doppelganger of Jackie's CCTV grid, and their resemblance produces an uncanny effect: the viewer is encouraged to consider the estate as a visual apparatus in and of itself.The striking formal parallels between Red Road's grid of windows and Jackie's grid of CCTV screens raises the specter of reciprocal vision, the disturbing possibility that the towers, as well as being the object of Jackie's gaze from the control room, are somehow looking back.

Though Arnold's rendition gives it a particularly paranoid spin, the image of the "seeing" building—of the building as a visual device— is not unique to the world of *Red Road.* Rather, it is a motif that pervades modernist imaginations of the high-rise all the way back to a 1933 drawing by Le Corbusier that depicts a disturbingly skeletal structure, stripped of all detail and decorative elements and yet topped with a massive eye that stares out from the building's top apartment (see fig. 7).

Fig. 6. Stills from *Red Road.*

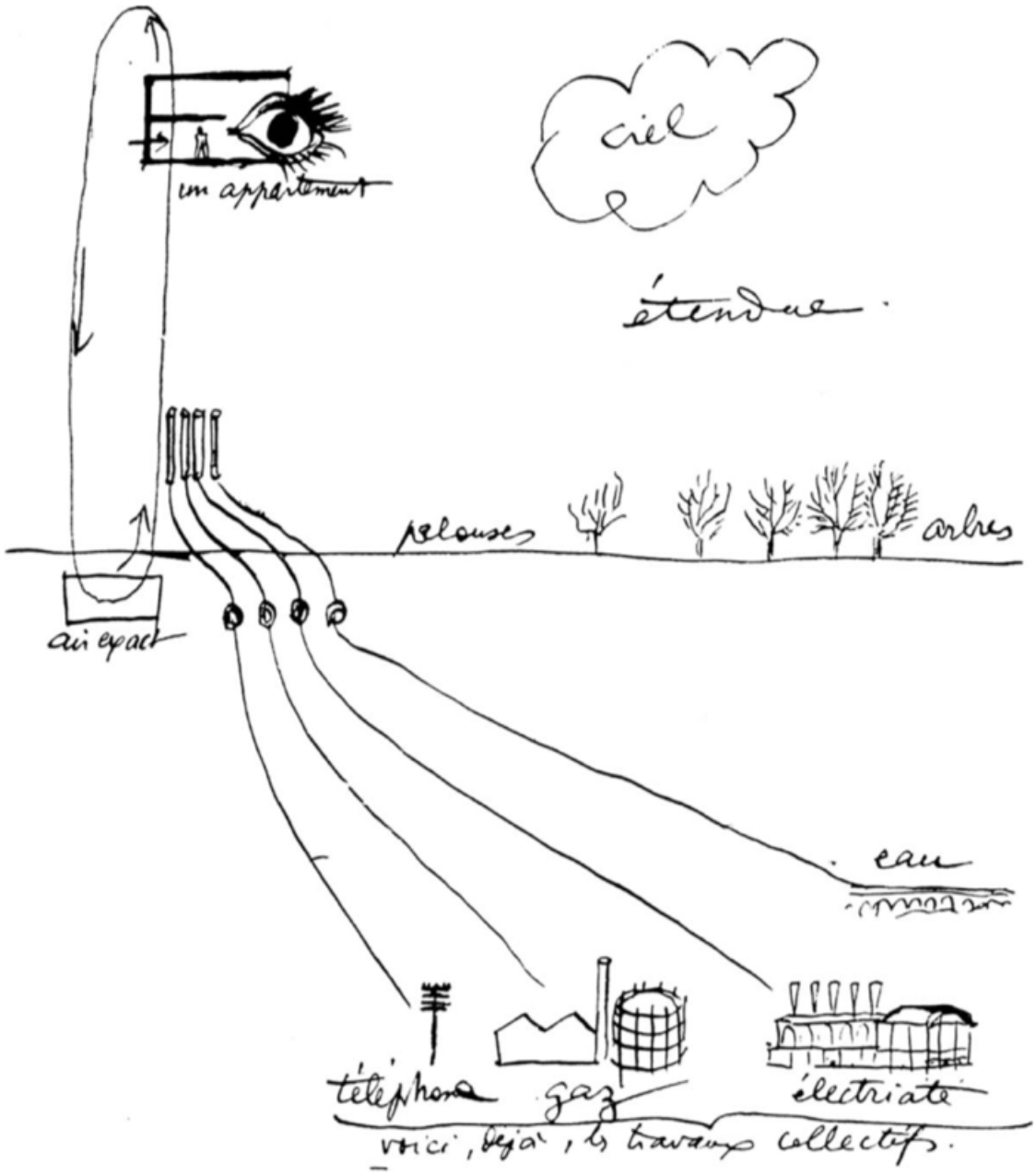

Fig 7. Le Corbusier's "Seeing" Building. In Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 21.

An inadvertent caricature of modern architecture's investment in vision, the sketch establishes the high-rise as that which should augment or enhance the visual ability of its occupants. As Beatriz Colomina argues, it exemplifies a shift, inaugurated by Le Corbusier's horizontal window, from the architectural logic of the "inward gaze," which constructed buildings to protect the interior from the exterior, to that of the outward gaze, which used architecture as a means to provide "a gaze of dominion over the exterior world."[96] In Le Corbusier's modernism—the ethos that informed post-war mass housing developments like the Red Road estate—the building itself becomes a technology of vision, a "system for taking pictures" where the window becomes the camera lens.[97]

The curious, inanimate agency that seems to emanate from the Red Road towers thus speaks to the wider investments in vision and visuality that defined the modernist architectural tradition, as well as to the persistent, haunting presence of these investments in those buildings that have come to embody the failure of the modernist project. Yet, it also recalls a particular anecdote that appears in Jacques Lacan's eleventh seminar, one which also involves the uncanny phenomenon of the object world looking back. In a section of *Seminar XI* entitled "Of the Gaze as Object Petit a,"[98] Lacan tells his audience of a day in his youth spent accompanying a group of local fishermen out to sea. During his afternoon on the water, one of the men points out a

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[96] Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001), 306.

[97] Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity,* 311.

[98] Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 370.

shimmering sardine can floating near their fishing boat, using it as an opportunity to make a joke. "You see that can?" the fisherman says, "Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!"[99] As the men laugh, Lacan finds himself anxious and unsettled, unable to join in on their fun. This is because, he tells his audience, "it was looking at me, all the same. It was looking at me at the level of the point of light, the point at which everything that looks at me is situated."[100]

This oft-cited and cryptic anecdote appears as part of Lacan's discussion of "the gaze," an equally cryptic phenomenon that has little in common with conventional understandings of vision and visual perception. Unlike Mulvey's account of the male gaze and Foucault's account of the panoptic gaze, the Lacanian gaze is not an instrument of mastery and objectification, nor a technology that assists in the disciplinary consolidation of subjectivity. In fact, it is not a property of any particular embodied subject, but rather something that the subject encounters in the object realm, as Lacan's story of the sardine can makes explicit. To understand how cans and buildings look back, however, we must first understand the relationship between vision and language, as well as the relation of both vision and language to the missing object of desire.

For Lacan, vision is constitutively deformed by language. Just as reality can only be experienced through the mediation of the signifier, Lacan suggests, so must light pass through pre-existing channels of meaning to become visual perception as we know it. As Norman Bryson explains:

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[99] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis,* ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 95.

[100] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts,* 95.

> When I learn to speak, I am inserted into systems of discourse that were there before I was and will remain after I am gone. Similarly when I learn to see socially, that is, when I begin to articulate my retinal experience with the codes of recognition that come to me from my social milieu(s), I am inserted into systems of visual discourse that saw the world before I did, and will go on seeing after I see no longer.[101]

Far from existing in some pre- or extra-discursive realm, visual perception is thus inseparable from language. "When I look," Bryson reiterates, "what I see is not simply light but intelligible form."[102] And yet, to partake in the signifier's promise of meaning is also to be stained by its loss. Something gets left behind by the process of signification: the signifier can never fully capture the extent of the meaning it aims to represent, and this non-correspondence between signifier and signified produces a remainder that haunts the subject in the form of a missing object, a lack or gap at the center of language and subjectivity that the subject longs to fill. That something, whose loss occasions the very emergence of the individual—"[that] something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself, has separated itself off as organ"—is what Lacan calls the *objet petit a:* the shifting collection of objects, people, or experiences that seem to promise the wholeness that has eluded us since we came into language and thus into being.[103]

Given its reliance on the signifying chain, vision is not immune from this loss nor from the missing object of desire that it produces. Rather, it is plagued by its own specifically visual

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[101] Norman Bryson, "The Gaze in the Expanded Field," in *Vision and Visuality*, ed. Hal Foster (Bay Press, 1988), 92.

[102] Bryson, "The Gaze in the Expanded Field," 91.

[103] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts,* 103.

manifestation of the *objet petit a*: the phenomenon that Lacan calls the gaze, or "the *objet a* in the field of the visible."[104] A perceptual token of the incompleteness of the subject, the gaze makes its presence known as an uncanny, animate agency that seems to radiate from the object world, as well as through the disturbances and interruptions it produces within the visual field. The first of these two, seemingly opposing manifestations is related to the autonomy of the signifying chain itself. Just as language has, so to speak, a life of its own due to the way in which the signifying chain both precedes the speaking subject and can function without it, so too does the network of meaning through which vision takes shape. The gaze thus materializes as the sensation of this inanimate vitality, as the momentary apprehension of the "mobile tesserae of signification" that unceasingly—yet invisibly—informs our vision, despite our fantasies of perceptual agency.[105]

And yet, because the *object petit a* is that which is missing or absent from the Symbolic, its eruption into the visual domain can also take the form of a defect or glitch in visual perception—as the breakdown of the visual. As Copjec writes, "This point at which something appears to be invisible, this point at which something appears to be missing from representation, some meaning left unrevealed, is the point of the Lacanian gaze."[106] It is this second incarnation of the gaze—the gaze as an experience of perceptual breakdown— that is expressed by the series of visual distortions and failures that emerge over the course of Jackie's surveillance of the Red Road estate. Taking shape to the viewer through a series of tangled alleyways, the claustrophobic

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[104] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts,* 105.

[105] Bryson, "The Gaze in the Expanded Field," 92.

[106] Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 34.

interiors of elevators, and bunker-like parking garages, Red Road and its surrounding infrastructure are cast as spaces that erode or elude the visual capabilities of others, and particularly those of the film's protagonist.[107]

From the moment Jackie sets her cameras on its intimidating, steel-frame structure, the Red Road estate refuses to be captured by her view. A scene taking place shortly after she first recognizes Clyde, for example, shows Jackie slowly panning a surveillance camera across a wide and desolate landscape until it faces the Red Road towers. The building, however, eclipses the frame: cut off at the top and bottom, it seems to extend infinitely in each direction in a never-ending stream of windows that exhausts both Jackie and her camera's capacity for vision. A similar failure meets most of Jackie's attempts to surveil the estate throughout the film. One night, while watching a woman loitering at the entrance to one of Red Road's parking garages,

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[107] Arnold's cinematic treatment of Red Road also plays off of existing stereotypes concerning the "anti-visuality" of housing estates, stereotypes which rose to prominence alongside the work of architect and city planner Oscar Newman in the early 1970s. Newman's widely-criticized theory of "defensible space" famously linked the high crime rates of public housing estates in New York to the lack of visibility and natural surveillance offered by their architecture, representing housing estates—and particularly high-rise housing estates—as places where vision goes to die. His account singles out several, specific components of the architectural environment (elevators, lobbies, and parking garages) as being particularly resistant to the surveillant eye, and it precisely these areas that Arnold highlights in her representation of Red Road. See Oscar Newman, *Defensible Space: Crime Prevention through Urban Design* (New York: Collier Books, 1978).

Jackie's cameras happen upon an altogether more disturbing scene: another woman running through the labyrinthine alleys that surround the garage, seemingly being chased by a shadowy man. Afraid for the woman's safety, Jackie quickly picks up the phone to report the incident to the police, only to stop, moments later, when she realizes that the scence she is witnessing is amorous rather than aggressive. As the man and woman embrace in a desolate, graffiti-covered lot, it becomes clear that Red Road is a space of confusion rather than clarity, a sense which is only amplified as the man turns around and reveals his face. This is the moment when Jackie first sees Clyde, coming to the disturbing realization that it is him she has been obliviously watching for much of the night.

A later scene shows Jackie splitting her attention between the various screens on her grid, one of which shows Clyde on the grounds of Red Road. Preoccupied with her observations of Clyde and the estate, she fails to register an altercation taking place on one of her other cameras, switching focus only to realize that a teenage girl has already been stabbed. After frantically alerting the authorities of the violent episode, Jackie zooms in on the injured girl, her face visibly distraught at her failure to notice and prevent the accident. Although the girl's body is almost entirely occluded by the shadow of a concerned bystander, the CCTV cameras manage to capture her small hands, stained with blood, giving a new and unintended meaning to Lacan's assertion that the *objet petit a* haunts the subject in "the form of a bloody scrap,"[108] as well as his remark that "the function of the stain is… identified with that of the gaze."[109]

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[108] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink, Héloïse Fink, and Russell Grigg (New York: Norton & Company, 2006), 630.

[109] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts,* 74.

What each of these scenes illustrates is how the mere presence of Red Road within Jackie's field of vision has the effect of warping her perceptual abilities, and particularly her ability to serve as a detached and all-seeing set of disciplinary eyes. They reveal how her mysterious investment in Clyde and the housing estate clouds her judgement and objectivity, causing her to misjudge and misrecognize the scenes playing out on her grid of CCTV screens. They reveal, in other words, the way in which her visual perception is distorted by desire, the way in which she is not just an agentic, observing subject, but a subject who is herself caught within the field of the gaze. As Todd McGowan argues in *The Real Gaze: Film Theory After Lacan:*

> [the gaze] is not the look of the subject at the object, but the gap within the subject's seemingly omnipotent look. This gap within our look marks the point at which our desire manifests itself in what we see… The gaze… disrupt[s] the spectator's ability to remain… 'all-perceiving' and 'absent as perceived.'[110]

Simultaneously the point at which vision fails and "the point at which the object looks back," it is this gaze—the Lacanian gaze— that reverberates across the landscape of Arnold's film. It is this gaze that manifests in the visual phenomena that surround the Red Road towers, in their strange inanimate agency and the visual disruption that they provoke; this gaze that propels the irrational currents of grief and desire that draw Jackie ever closer to Clyde and the estate. For, what drives Jackie's forays to Red Road other than the hopes that it—or one of its inhabitants—will provide some sort of closure or meaning to the loss she has experienced?

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[110] Todd McGowan, *The Real Gaze: Film Theory after Lacan* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 6.

Because its loss is constitutive of subjectivity, however, the *objet petit a* can never be definitively acquired or possessed. Correspondingly, the gaze that constitutes one of its manifestations can never deliver the confirmation that it promises: though it draws the subject in, intimating their fulfillment, the encounter with the gaze illuminates nothing but the absence at the heart of the subject, the groundlessness of all self-identity. "The site of a traumatic encounter with the Real, with the utter failure of the spectator's seemingly safe distance and assumed mastery,"[111] it leaves only desire and disorientation in its wake, and it is perhaps this aspect of the gaze that *Red Road* most compellingly of all.

III

After her first attempt to enter one of the towers is thwarted by the reception desk in the lobby, Jackie manages to slip unnoticed into the elevator with two other residents of the tower. She quickly notices, however, that her fellow riders are none other than Clyde's friends: a couple she has observed repeatedly from the City Eye control room that appears to be living with Clyde. Luckily, it turns out, Clyde is having a house party, and Jackie passes herself off as an invited guest. Standing quietly in the corner, she attempts to blend into the crowd, but Clyde quickly approaches her, perhaps feeling the intensity of her gaze. As he moves towards Jackie ominously, the viewer anxiously readies themselves for a confrontation, perhaps even a violent one. Upon reaching Jackie, however, Clyde embraces her in a slow dance, one suffused not just with anxiety, but palpable and reciprocal desire. The opposite of what Jackie expected to find

[111] Todd McGowan, "Looking for the Gaze: Lacanian Film Theory and Its Vicissitudes," *Cinema Journal* 42, no. 3 (2003): 29.

within the towers, it is this desire that seems to unsettle Jackie the most, and as their dance gets increasingly intimate, she makes an excuse and quickly leaves the building.

When she returns to the towers, bottle of whiskey in tow and looking for Clyde, he is not home. Her expectations for confrontation once again dashed, she sits tensely with Clyde's male roommate and his girlfriend, April, anxiously dodging questions about her relationship to Clyde and her reason for visiting. As Jackie drinks quietly, we suddenly see her eyes raise, drawn to the window of their living room. It is this moment when we realize where Jackie is. She has finally managed to access that point, behind Red Road's glass facade, from which she has felt the gaze, that point in the field of the Other she has invested with the power to confirm her, to validate her, to bring her closure. "That's some view," Jackie remarks as if seeking some sort of outside agreement, and when the roommate responds noncommittally, she gets up from her seated position to approach the view herself. "Some view you've got," she repeats, continuing towards the window, but the roommate merely offers another, equally nonplussed reply: "It's all right, isn't it?"

Jackie stops, finally at the window, camera positioned behind her so the viewer can share in her view. Yet, the glass that Jackie peers out of is streaked with dirt, covered in a thin film that obscures and distorts her view of the outside. The adjacent window is completely fogged up: entirely opaque, it is impossible to see out of. What can be seen out the window is merely another one of Red Road's towers rising from the pavement, its grid of windows directly facing Clyde's living room. It is as if the gaze, at the very moment that Jackie believes she has taken possession of it, immediately migrates across the way and re-materializes itself in the form of the

other tower. Slipping out of her grasp, it stares at her anew. As Lacan writes, "it is precisely in seeking the gaze… that you will see it disappear."[112]

Jackie leaves her view, sitting back down until Clyde's male roommate draws his girlfriend and Jackie back to the window. "You want to feel the wind?" he asks, proceeding to throw open the windowpanes and blast Jackie and April with a strong gust of air. Disoriented but exhilarated, the three characters stand at the window until, all of a sudden, the male roommate grabs April and begins to dangle her out the window as she struggles and screams. After being returned to the ground, April runs out of the living room, and the male roommate laughs apologetically. "April, I was having a laugh with you!" he insists, and when Jackie reprimands him for frightening her, she is unceremoniously ejected from Clyde's flat. Visibly shaken, Jackie leaves the apartment, and it is not until she is attempting to board the bus which will take her far from the estate that she realizes that Clyde's roommate has stolen her wallet. In a rather literal manifestation of the gaze's identity-destabilizing effects, Jackie leaves the Red Road grounds no longer in possession of any identification.

What the powerful scene of Jackie in Clyde's apartment makes clear is how the encounter with the gaze is not subjectively affirming, but subjectively annihilating. Though we, like Jackie, may attempt to connect it with specific people, places, or entities, which we subsequently invest with the power to resolve our incoherences, to suture the places where we have been severed, these associations merely provide temporary relief from the truth: the external gaze of the Other will not affirm the structure of our subjectivity or give a definitive shape to our formless desire.

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[112] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts,* 89.

Once confronted, it inevitably leaks out from its provisional container, taking with it any promise of confirming a given subject's being, desire, or identity. As Copjec writes:

> When you encounter the gaze of the Other, you meet not a seeing eye but a blind one. The gaze is not clear or penetrating, not filled with knowledge or recognition; it is clouded over and turned back on itself, absorbed in its own enjoyment. The horrible truth… is that the gaze does not see you. So, if you are looking for confirmation of the truth of your being or the clarity of your vision, you are on your own; the gaze of the other… will not validate you.[113]

It is by veiling the absence of this nonexistent Other that the Panopticon implicates the subject within the flows of knowledge and power constitutive of the disciplinary regime. Through particular configurations of space and visibility, it compels the subject to internalize and re-articulate an image of themselves that may or may not exist, to contort themselves in the shape of a singular, unique subjectivity which is then re-absorbed within power's grasp. As Copjec also notes, and as we have seen realized in the case of the female gaze, this system of power is a pessimistic one, one which appears to permit no outside and which is, therefore, "ultimately resistant to resistance."[114] And yet, what Lacan's account of the gaze presents us is not a theory of a visual subject who somehow exceeds or escapes the individualizing process of disciplinary power, but rather a theory *of how the limits inherent to discourse itself produce a negativity within this visual subject, one which corrodes its coherence from within.* What it emphasizes, in other words, is how desire persists in the subjective productions of the

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[113] Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 36.

[114] Ibid.

disciplinary project, to the effect that something in the subject will always tend towards its own undoing.

If Jackie does find closure in the film, it is only when she realizes that Clyde cannot give it to her. It emerges, in other words, from the revelation that there is no closure, subjective or otherwise: no singular person or piece of meaning that will release her from her tragedy or substantiate her formless grief. After withdrawing her charges against him and revealing her identity, Jackie meets Clyde on the grounds of Red Road, and the two discuss the fatal accident that killed her husband and daughter. The insight that Clyde shares, however, is that he has no insight: he was drunk, there was no logic, and he is deeply apologetic. The final shot of the film shows Jackie walking down the street. As she walks, the camera abruptly shifts from the sidewalk view to an aerial one, from high-quality film to the grainy and pixelated quality of the surveillance camera. It is the same type of view we have seen repeatedly throughout the film, yet this final surveillance footage differs from the others in one important way: it is no longer claimed by Jackie. Severed from its usual diegetic witness, there is something especially uncanny about this final, anonymous perspective. Evoking that "point at which everything that looks at me is situated," it leaves the viewer looking over their shoulder, acutely aware not just of the disciplinary gaze, but of the vicissitudes that plague the fields of vision and identity as their very condition.

Conclusion.

Perverse Topologies

How do you define the space of desire? This thesis, it would seem, has proposed multiple responses to this opening question. It has identified such a space at the threshold of a mythical room, one which, far from the outskirts of any city, can never be approached directly. It has located it within the blank, impenetrable walls of a Brutalist school and church, walls which exhaust the revelatory operations of science and knowledge. It has discovered it within a towering high-rise in Glasgow, Scotland, one whose uncanny, iterative facade—now existing only in the realm of film, memory, and photography—appears to possess a gaze of its own. And yet, what this investigation into architecture, cinema, and psychoanalytic philosophy has attempted to demonstrate is that the answer to the question that opens this thesis—the question of what particular features or qualities would characterize the space of desire—is more complex than circuitousness, opacity, or repetition. These qualities, it has suggested, are less definitive properties of desire and its space than they are intimations of something far stranger, far more unsettling: that the space of desire is empty.

Following the work of Jacques Lacan, this thesis has argued that desire itself is identified with a space: the constitutive gap of the signifying order where both meaning and knowledge are missing. It has attempted to re-imagine what has traditionally been conceived as the productive relationship between sexuality and built space, suggesting that, in addition to being a technology that shapes discursive formations of sexuality, architecture can also function as a formal tool through which desire's negativity can be visualized, registered, and conceptualized. It has proposed, in other words, a way of reading cinematic architecture, not for its reflection or

materialization of sexuality's presence, but for the perturbations and distortions of language, perception, and identity that are the effects of desire's absence.

More broadly, this project has also sought to revisit some of the historical debates between psychoanalysis and poststructuralism through an engagement with the work of Michel Foucault. And yet, the intention behind this pairing was not to fortify the opposition between their work, but rather to nuance this opposition itself: to show how the differences between their respective positions do not preclude their being placed in constructive dialogue. Chapter 1, for example, highlights the limits of the critique of psychoanalysis that appears in the first volume of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* in order to emphasize the shared interest, between Foucault and Lacan, in challenging conceptions of sexuality that portray it as a privileged locus of meaning. Chapter 2, on the other hand, undertakes a critique of a particular feminist critique of Foucault to suggest that the psychoanalytic perspective provides a more productive framework through which to imagine resistance to disciplinary power.

Why undertake such an exploration, through architecture, of a psychoanalytic perspective on desire? In *Beyond Sexuality,* Tim Dean's extended argument for the relevance of Lacan's work to the project of queer theory, Dean suggests that the most generative aspect of Lacan's thinking for a radical sexual politics is precisely its identification of sexuality and desire with this gap or caesura of language. For Dean, this understanding of desire has the effect of defamiliarizing and depersonalizing desire and sexuality, providing a vocabulary through which to think about both not merely as discursive or subjective effects, but as phenomena which exist in conflict with the productions of discourse and individual subjectivity. From a Lacanian perspective, sexuality ceases to become a possession or attribute of the individual, something which, in its different forms, differentiates different types of humans. Rather, it becomes, as

Zupančič has argued, that which disrupts and disorients the very concept of the human, that which "bring[s] into question all our representations of the entity called 'human being.'"[115]

It is for this reason, Dean argues, that Lacan's understanding of sexuality and desire possesses such an "innovative potential": by severing desire from both identity and the human, it disrupts the process by which sexuality is established as the cornerstone of humanity and subjectivity, and, more importantly, the processes of exclusion and regulation that this investment justifies.[116] In other words, Lacan's insistence on the "radical impersonality of desire" presents a successful challenge not only to the process by which particular sexual orientations are marginalized as dangerous perversions of human nature, but also to the ways in which sexualities are normalized, "included" within an enlarged category of normativity only to become subjected to increased discursive administration and management.[117]

Dean also points out, however, how the most radical feature of Lacan's conception of desire—its "de-essentializing, despecifying abstractness"— brings with it some significant representational difficulties.[118] If desire is that which exists at the limit of language, if it is that which lies not only outside the subject, but outside the human, how can this strangeness be communicated without being compromised? How can the structural negativity of desire be expressed through either images or words when both fundamentally rely on presence, on visibility, on the substantiation of meaning?

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[115] Alenka Zupančič, *What IS Sex?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2017), *7.*

[116] Tim Dean, *Beyond Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 2.

[117] Dean, *Beyond Sexuality,* 17.

[118] Ibid., 231.

Lacan himself wrestled with these questions, increasingly turning to the conceptual imaginary of mathematics and topology as one means of negotiating them.[119] Topology refers to a branch of mathematics concerned with spatial relations that remain unchanged within a given figure even as this figure is distended or transformed; encompassing forms like the Mobiüs Strip and the Klein Bottle, which effectively disturb the boundaries between inside and outside, it provided Lacan with a means to communicate seemingly impossible logical and spatial contradictions while simultaneously maintaining an underlying emphasis on structural organization. And yet, while he presented several specific, schematic formalizations related to desire and sexuality, these formalizations are notoriously difficult to engage with. Ironically, the success with which they defamiliarize sexuality and desire limits their heuristic value, for as Dean argues, "topological mappings cannot be pictured intuitively, only mathematically."[120]

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[119] Lacan's use of topology has inspired numerous elaborations and an equal number of critiques. For a wide-ranging overview of the role of topology in Lacan's work, see Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan and the Logic of Structure: Topology and Language in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 2015) and Dany Nobus, "Lacan's Science of the Subject: Between Linguistics and Topology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, ed. Jean-Michel Rabaté (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 50-68. For a widely cited critique of Lacan's use of topology and mathematics, see Alan D. Sokal and Jean Bricmont, *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals Abuse of Science* (New York: Picador, 1998).

[120] Dean, *Beyond Sexuality,* 55. The most well-known of these schemas is perhaps Lacan's "graph of desire" as it is laid out in his text "The Subversion of the Subject and the

This thesis proposes that architecture, and particularly cinematic architecture, can contribute something meaningful to this debate. Simultaneously inert and inhabited, abstract and intuitive, it constitutes an untapped resource for negotiating the discursive resistance of desire: a less exact, but more perverse rendition of Lacan's forays into topology. Although undoubtedly less rigorous than a formal topological mapping, to conceptualize desire through architecture is to preserve and communicate the structural aspects of desire while retaining a dimension of recognizability. It is to successfully re-orient one's attention towards what is radical about desire—its impersonality, its unnaturalness, its resistance to discursivity—while opening up a wealth of new wealth of visual and textual examples through which desire's negative pulsations can be explored. In its inanimacy, architecture has the potential to bring desire to life.

"Architecture can be defined as something organized around emptiness."[121] This striking description of architecture, which serves as one of the epigraphs to this thesis, surfaces as a peripheral remark in Lacan's Seminar VII, in an equally peripheral section of the text entitled "Marginal Comments." It is, as Lorens Holm has noted, the only explicit reference to architecture that appears in Lacan's work, one which, seemingly unimportant, is quickly transitioned into a larger discussion of painting and anamorphosis, and not returned to in any of

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Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious." See Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 671-702.

[121] Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1992), 135.

the sessions or seminars that follow.[122] And yet, as this thesis has shown, precisely through its engagement with architecture, the essence of his fleeting observation in Seminar VII—its eschewal of pure positivity and its insistence on absence as both central and structuring—does not truly vanish, but rather resonates throughout his elaborations of another subject, one whose position in his work was far from marginal: desire.

[122] Lorens Holm, "What Lacan Said Re: Architecture," *Critical Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (2000): 2.

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