The Sixth Analyst: Theorizing (or Deconstructing) the Analysand Desire

If Benedict de Spinoza is to be believed, desire "is the essence of man" (*Ethics* 172)—a notion not entirely out of keeping with formulations in current society, a society that is undeniably saturated with "desire" and its permutations. What is less clear is what that "essence of man" actually is –what one means when he uses the term "desire" in colloquial discourse or in the layman's contemporary theory. Is desire, for instance, erotica? Love? Lust? Wanting? Is it instead a need or a demand? Does it even have its own particular—and unifying, unified—definition?

In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Jacques Lacan writes that desire cannot be defined, only circumscribed, and perhaps he is not wrong in this assertion. Rather than succinctly codifying desire, then, we drape it with terms like wish, libido, and love such that our formulations of these secondary terms both shade and illuminate desire (without actually formalizing its central designation). As such, the term desire, rather than being its own transcendental signifier, becomes instead the signifier of the intersection of trace theories, becomes as it is used in the contemporary moment the amalgamation of theories and terms propounded by philosophers of preceding ages. And, as such, the term desire can be deconstructed.

It is with desire as a signifier that I am primarily interested for the purposes of this theoretical exploration—in an examination of the trace theories and terms that comprise contemporary formulations of "desire," whatever they may be, and how such theories have been conflated to signify desire. In that, I do not mean to imply theories of origination or causation, or even to construct a chain of signification. Instead, I wish to explore the theoretical terms that resound in our contemporary construction of desire and how those terms have been appropriated into our current understanding.

That desire is a signifier comes in large part from Lacan, and it is with Lacan that I aim to begin my deconstruction—and in a sense psychoanalysis, for I intend to put desire on the couch—of the signifier/analysand desire. To do such, I borrow from two texts: "The Signification of the Phallus" (1958) and *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1964). In "The Signification of the Phallus," Lacan defines desire as "neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference resulting from the subtraction of the first from the second, the very phenomenon of splitting (*Spaltung*)" (81). Thus, "desire begins to take shape in the margin in which demand becomes separated from need" (Ibid); thus desire, in our contemporary paradigm wherein desire cannot be codified, only circumscribed, is neither demand nor need but the sort of gravitational center around which the two terms move in orbit. Desire is not need or demand, but the unraveling

of need and demand illuminates desire such that the two theories have become tied to desire in our modern articulation.

Interestingly enough, Lacan does not theorize need or demand and only in ancillary fashion theorizes desire. Instead of delineating what desire, what the margin between need and demand, actually is, he posits instead a third theoretical term that, unpacked, suggests at desire: the phallus. The phallus for Lacan is "the privileged signifier of that mark where the share of the logos is wedded to the advent of desire" (82), "the signifier of the desire of the Other" (84). In so doing, Lacan constellates need, demand, and the phallus around the nucleus of desire (and avoids making desire a solid and translucent term). In so doing, desire becomes for Lacan only a signifying trace in the phallus.

Just what, then, is the phallus? For in unraveling said term, we can cast an illuminating shadow on the theoretical apparatus, desire. Again, Lacan does not offer a concrete definition of "the phallus;" he merely relates truths *about* the phallus—constructs the phallus through signification of other terms and ideas. A useful place to begin, then, in concretizing the phallus is with its position in the unconscious—"the discourse of the Other" (*FA* 141)—and its necessary relation to lack. For Lacan, the phallus "can only play its role as veiled, that is, as in itself the sign of the latency with which everything signifiable is struck as soon as it is raised (*aufgehoben*) to the function of signifier./ The phallus is the signifier of this *Aufhebung* itself which it inaugurates (initiates) by its own disappearance" (82). In its disappearance, then, the phallus creates a lack around which desire is organized. Here Lacan separates desire from need in that need has a material object and desire is couched in the lack of object. Desire has no specific object; rather, it is the perpetual state of lacking the phallus, but wanting it, of attempting to gain or become the phallus and failing in the attempt. In the very moment it is raised to the function of signifier, the phallus creates a desire for itself—a desire that can never be satisfied (as the phallus has disappeared); it can only be deferred. To that end, then, Lacan's formulation adds another term to the orbit around desire: that of lack. Therefore, our present understanding of desire involves need, demand, and lack—absence a central formulation in the constellation we have constructed.

In all of this, the phallus and desire have a particular relationship to language. The phallus is a signifier in language, and desire relates innately to man's speech. Recall that desire is the split between need and demand. One is forced to wonder, then, what effect the acquisition of language has on the needs that foreground desire. For Lacan, all speech is demand as it presupposes the Other to whom it is addressed, whose very signifiers it takes over in its formulation (*Four Concepts*,

throughout). Desire is therefore a perpetual effect of symbolic articulation, innately tied to speech and discourse.

Further querying the relationship between desire and speech, one turns again to "The Signification of the Phallus." Therein, Lacan writes that the effects of the phallus' presence "follow from the deviation of man's needs by the fact that he speaks, in the sense that as long as his needs are subjected to demand they return to him alienated" (80). Additionally, "what is thus alienated in needs constitutes an *Urverdrängung* (primal repression) because it cannot, by definition, be articulated in demand. But it reappears in a residue which then presents itself in man as desire (*das Begehren*)" (Ibid). Such a formulation sheds light on the "paradoxical, deviant, erratic, excentric, and even scandalous character by which desire is distinguished from need" (Ibid). What is interesting in the above formulation is that man's inability to articulate his needs in speech creates an alienation that presents itself as desire—that a lack, or inability, in discourse formulates the residue of desire (itself a term signifying discourse). So, too, does desire become repressed—assigned to the field of the Other and to the unconscious, that discourse of the Other.

In order to unpack the relationship between desire and language, it is useful to return for a moment to the notion that the phallus is the signifier of desire. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis,* Lacan writes that "a signifier is that which represents a subject. For whom? Not for another subject, but for another signifier" (198). He continues, "The subject is born in so far as the signifier emerges in the field of the Other. But, by this very fact, this subject—which was previously nothing if not a subject coming into being—solidifies into a signifier" (199). Thus the phallus, therefore, is that which represents the *subject* of desire *for* the signifier desire—which, in turn, is that which represents another subject and signifier imbedded within it. The subject (desire) is born when the signifier (the phallus) emerges within the field of the Other—as it does; the phallus is positioned entirely within that (unconscious) field. Then the former subject of desire itself solidifies into a signifier—in the field of the Other—such that the subject it signifies is therefore born, and becomes a signifier, and births a new subject.

What is material about that argument is that it suggests the viability of positioning desire as a term to be deconstructed—that desire contains within it subjects (that become signifiers when desire enters into the field of the Other, or the unconscious discourse therein). In such a way, need and demand, absence and lack—perhaps subjects within desire—become signifiers that reflect on our current construction of desire. In such a way, desire in our contemporary moment is conflated with terms like lust and love (through other theorists than Lacan) as they are trace elements embedded within the subject/signifier of desire. Lacan, therefore, seems to support in theory the construction of

desire with which we began our exploration—that desire is the intersection of trace theories of "desire" (*das Begehren, Wunsch*) (and is thus subject to psychoanalysis and deconstruction).

In like vein, Lacan himself seems to have difficulty in *Four Concepts of Psychoanalysis* articulating his own definition of desire. Rather, he formalizes *Freud's* desire and *Descartes'* desire, Piaget's desire and Plato's, Breuer's; he *circumscribes* desire by the traces of other theorists. Interestingly enough, those theorists do not properly use the term desire in their theorizing, but Lacan nonetheless conflates the terminology they do use with desire. That move is explained in the Translator's Note in *Four Concepts of Psychoanalysis:*

> DESIRE (*désir; Wunsch, Begierde, Lust*). The *Standard Edition* translates Freud's '*Wunsch*' as 'wish', which corresponds closely to the German word. Freud's French translators, however, have always used '*désir*,' rather than '*voeu*,' which corresponds to '*Wunsch*' and 'wish,' but which is less widely used in current French. The crucial distinction between '*Wunsch*' and 'wish,' on the one hand, and '*désir*' on the other, is that the German and English words are limited to individual, isolated acts of wishing, while the French has the much stronger implication of a continuous force. It is this implication that Lacan has elaborated and placed at the centre of his psycho-analytic theory, which is why I have rendered '*désir*' by 'desire.'

Of course, one might argue that the shift from '*Wunsch*' to desire is the translator's and not Lacan's; one needs to remember, however, that in his original text, Lacan uses *désir* in place of Freud's *Wunsch*, in place of *Begierde* and *das Begehren*, such that he, too, is guilty of appropriating other theories and terminologies under the heading of desire. Desire for Lacan, then, becomes the intersection of Freud's *Wunsch* and libido, of Spinoza's *conatus* and Plato's *eros*. (A reading which supports our formulation that desire in the modern moment is the signifier of trace theories.) In many ways, such a move makes sense given the metonymic nature of speech and Lacan's positioning of desire within speech and discourse. Lacan himself writes that "desire is situated in dependence on demand—which, by being articulated in signifiers, leaves a metonymic remainder that runs under it, an element that is not indeterminate, which is a condition both, absolute and unapprehensible, an element necessarily lacking, unsatisfied, impossible, misconstrued (*méconnu*), an element that is desire" (*FFC* 154). Thus in Lacan's desire we see metonymic remainders of *Wunsch,* for instance, and thereby Freud; thus in our contemporary use of the term desire we see metonymic remainders of Lacan, of Freud, of Schopenhauer, Spinoza and Plato. What is important to remember—particularly where traces of Freud are concerned in Lacan's text (and Freud is in truth the primary theorist on whom Lacan relies)—is that Lacan takes the traces of other theorists and renders them more symbolic. To put it more precisely, Lacan rereads Freud (and others) via de Saussure—a compelling

notion given not only our reading of Lacan but also our contemporary reading of desire as a signifier in which resounds traces of other terms.

To that end—that in Lacan we see traces of other theories—in *Four Concepts,* Lacan's use of desire as the subject of the phallus' signification seems to drop out of the text in favor of privileging metonymic traces of (primarily) Freud and in a significant sense Plato. Key to this is the echo in Lacan of Freud's elision of desire and sexuality. Lacan writes "certainly all the intervals of desire come into play in the sexual relation" (*FFC* 192). Desire is "a locus of junction between the field of demand, in which the syncopes of the unconscious are made present, and sexual reality. All this depends on a line that [Lacan] will call a line of desire, linked to demand, and by which the effects of sexuality are made present in experience" (156). For Lacan, then, Freud's "libido is the effective presence, as such, of desire. It is what now remains to indicate desire—which is not substance, but which is there at the level of the primary process, and which governs the very mode of our approach" (153). As such, sexuality, libido and desire may become related in a chain of signification—desire becomes the signifier of sexual reality and libido. In such a formulation, sexual relations and libido also circumscribe our modern construction of desire—via Lacan, via Freud, via the trace we find within the term desire itself.

Though Lacan has much more to say on the subject of desire—in particular through the theories of Freud and Plato—the concept of libido may be a constructive point from which we move into Freud's use of desire. In our present theoretical moment, we the people seem to agree that desire has something to do with psychoanalysis and as such with Freud. What is interesting about such an agreement is that Freud himself never properly theorizes the term "desire." Of course, it appears in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) and in "Fragment of an Analysis of Hysteria (Dora)" (1905)—it is referenced off-the-cuff in essays, but *desire* itself is never really theorized (merely circumscribed). Instead, Freud posits such terms as "wunsch;" or "libido;" "love-object" and "lust," and most notably "love." And in the same sense that desire and need are conflated through Lacan to our present theorizing of desire, then, so too does Freud's wish, his libido, love and lust become part of our contemporary paradigm.

In searching for a text through which one analyses Freud's theory of desire, one is tempted to go immediately to *The Interpretation of Dreams.* Therein, Freud writes that the dream is a manifestation of desire (and uses the term desire in relation to dreams) (*Basic Writings* 205). For Freud, "the dream represents a current state of affairs, such as [he] might wish to exist; *the content of the dream is thus the fulfillment of a wish; its motive is a wish*" (Ibid.). Therein, desire and wish, or wish fulfillment, become aligned, desire becomes related to motive—and, as Freud actually

references the term desire in relation to the dream, one is tempted to begin there in our analysis. That said, Freud is more concerned in *The Interpretation of Dreams* with the specific factual material of each dream rather than theorizing the *desire* on which the dream is generally predicated, so we turn again to other texts. In "Dora," Freud writes that desire is that which is repressed and that "hysterical symptoms are the expression of [the patient's] most secret repressed desires" (3). As what Dora represses, according to Freud, is her love for her father and her love for Herr K (transferred, of course, to Freud himself), we can align "love" with "desire." In so doing, however, we run into the same problem we encountered with *The Interpretation of Dreams*—that love (and hence desire) is not what Freud properly theorizes. (Rather, he theorizes hysterical symptoms as they relate to repression.) Instead, we turn to a text wherein Freud *does* theorize love—and through it desire: "A Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men (Contributions to the Psychology of Love)" (1910). What is problematic about such a move is that "love" and "desire" are not perfectly synonymous (just as "wish" and "desire" are not synonymous). What a move might nonetheless serve to explain, however, is how love (and wish, sexual longing, love-object <as the recipient> and other terms Freud theorizes) have entered the constellation of terms circumscribing our modern use of "desire."

In "A Special Type of Choice of Object," Freud positions desire in relation to an infantile fixation on the mother—a fixation that revolves around the libido and sexual gratification. Freud writes that the information a boy receives at the onset of puberty—that of sexual activity and sexual longing—awakens in him the memory-traces of his infantile Oedipal relation with his mother, that "he begins to desire his mother herself in the same sense with which he has recently become acquainted" (that of sexual longing) (171). Freud relates these desires to impulse—it is an impulse to know the mother sexually that the boy acquires at the onset of puberty (Ibid). Thus, for Freud, desire and sex are linked—desire becomes a manifestation of the sexual impulse and, as the mother becomes the boy's choice of love-object, love, too, is linked to desire. One can further illuminate the connection between sexual impulse and desire if one reads "A Special Type of Choice" through Freud's use of desire in "Dora." Desire, in "Dora," is that which is repressed—as the boy necessarily represses his sexual impulse for his mother, sexual impulse and desire become as a matter of consequence linked. Later in "Object," Freud actually uses the term desire to describe the "driving force" of the boy's lust for his mother—such that, again, drive and lust are moved into the modern constellation of desire, as is fixation as the boy fixates on his mother as the object of his lust.

What is interesting about Freud—in this particular essay and in others—is that Freud is concerned with the object of desire. One significant way in which Lacan differs from Freud is in that Lacan's desire has no object, but is a lack, and Freud's desire is innately tied to its object and is a

presence. Neuroses, for instance, in Freud are the product of repressed desire, and desire is repressed when it chooses as its object something or someone that is outside the bounds of social convention. (For instance, it is not acceptable in contemporary society to long sexually for one's mother, or for a physical object—that becomes the fixation of Freud's fetish. Consequently, one must repress that sexual longing and it is converted into desire. In that paradigm, culture and society become the necessary lens through which sexual longing and desire become synonymous.) In an interesting way, then, desire for Freud becomes mitigated by cultural constructions in a way that Lacan's desire does not. Furthermore, Freud positions the relationship between subject and love-object as integral in desire. In "A Special Type of Object," for instance, Freud relates that a man most desires in his female love-object the *need* she has for him (168). In Lacan, desire was related to need insofar as demand was separated from need; in Freud, desire relates to need in that desire is heightened and in some cases predicated upon the need of the love-object (perhaps even of the other). In such a vein, for Lacan, desire is the desire of the Other and the Other's desire; for Freud, desire is *for* the other, sharpened by the need—and if one connects the dots in Freud's texts one can also connect desire to need in a synonymous sense—that the other has for the subject. Additionally, in Freud, the choice of love-object is directly related to the mother—she who forms and fashions the infant's initial desire. All love-objects for Freud descend from the prototype of the mother (in the case of a boy; the father in the case of a girl) such that the desire the infant feels is replicated on his future choice of love-object.

Consequently, through Freud, desire becomes a term that is subject not to deconstruction (as it is for Lacan), but to psychoanalysis. As we theorize desire in Freud and through Freud, desire becomes in a sense a sort of analysand (through its connection to the fleshed love-object and the fleshed subject that possesses the presence, desire) onto which is projected the analyst's desire (as that analyst reads the analysand "desire" and as the analyst constructs a paradigm he wishes desire to be—a common argument in the refutation of Freud) and which transfers its own complex relationship with its trace terms (wunsch, love, longing, etc.) onto the analyst. In the move from signifier (and its connection to deconstruction) to analysand (and its connection to psychoanalysis) desire attains in our contemporary theoretical moment a positionality, or in another sense coloration, of the flesh and the body. (For desire as analysand must have a body as analysands have bodies—and it is through the position of desire-as-analysand that the body and desire become inextricably linked in contemporary theorization.) Reading desire in the modern moment through both Freud and Lacan, then, the term resounds interestingly both of language and of the flesh.

So, then, where Freud relates to our contemporary construction of desire is that he introduces the necessary component of the flesh (or object) and that the terms he employs in his analysis—sex, sexual impulse, love, wish (*wunsch*), fetish, fixation, etc.—are removed into the orbiting terms we analyze when circumscribing desire in the present. So it is that sex and sexual longing become in our current moment synonymous with desire and that desire becomes inextricably connected to the flesh and to an object; so that desire (after Freud and Lacan) signifies absence, need, demand, sex and sexual longing, love, impulse, fetishization, fixation, lust, drive, and wish—both through the body and through language.

Be that as it may, it is reductive to argue that sex and sexuality entered our contemporary discourse only through Freud. In *The World as Will and Representation* (Vol I. 1819, Vol. II 1844), Arthur Schopenhauer also theorizes desire in terms of sex and sexual love—primarily through his terms "will" and "will-to-life" (sometimes "will for life"). *The World as Will and Representation* is written in two volumes, and it is with the second volume—specifically Chapter LXIV, "The Metaphysics of Sexual Love," with which we are concerned. That said, we must first look to Vol. I. to make the connection between the term Schopenhauer uses—will—and the term desire.

In Vol. I, book four, *The World as Will Second Consideration: With the achievement of self-cognizance, affirmation and denial of the will for life,* Schopenhauer writes of the "will, i.e. desire" (455, 462). What is interesting about will (and thus desire) for Schopenhauer as he theorizes it in Vol. I is that it is positivistic—it is a presence, rather than an absence as for Lacan, it has an object and also a vector trajectory. In a sense, Schopenhauer thus seems similar to Freud. Where the two diverge, however, is that desire—as a presence, with its object—for Schopenhauer's Vol. I is housed completely within the conscious and can be moderated by reason. (While I will discuss Vol. II momentarily, I should note that Schopenhauer's depiction of desire differs markedly in his two volumes, a truth that possibly relates to the 25 years that lapsed between writing them. In Vol. I, for instance, desire is conscious; in Vol. II, however, desire is not.) Be that as it may, for both Schopenhauer and Freud, desire has a cultural component—but for Schopenhauer, that cultural component does not produce desire, as it does for Freud, but regulates desire's sometimes unruly nature.

Furthermore, "will" in Volume I is "desire" and may also be read as an inclination (167), one that can and must be tempered by reason. Such it is for Schopenhauer that institutions like religion and similar moral forces operate on desire to keep man in check and the soul in its proper orientation toward the afterlife and toward its fellow souls on earth. Here desire operates differently than it does for Freud—for Freud, desire *is* (unconsciously) repressed and, when repressed, must be brought to

the surface again through analysis; for Schopenhauer's Vol. I, will is *not* repressed but must be consciously regulated in order to keep mankind on its proper spiritual and humanistic path. What is key to the constructions of desire in Vol. I is that reason comes into play as does the deliberate, and conscious, denial of desires. We can read such formulations of desire and its constraints in our contemporary theorization of desire—it is in the modern instant a force to moderate, to keep in check, through the operation of morality and the mind.

In this paradigm, Schopenhauer distinguishes between love and desire. He writes, "all true and pure love is compassion, and all love that is not compassion is selfish desire. Selfish desire is eros, and compassion is agape. The two are frequently confused" (444). Desire, then, is an *element* of love (or a trace within love)—where desire for Freud was synonymous with love. So, too, is desire aligned negatively via the term "selfish" to eros—a term whose theoretical origins in Plato suggest a wish to possess that is achieved principally through sexual relations. Desire, then, for Schopenhauer is not love and is not compassion—and it is interesting to note in our present theorization of desire that terms like "compassion" play no part—desire is instead love that is selfish and self-centered. In the body and mind of man, at least, desire focuses on the self, rather than on the other—it is not, as for Lacan, the Other's desire; it belongs instead to the sole province of he who desires. Additionally, Schopenhauer argues that selfish desire comprises the largest portion, even of friendship—the satisfaction we receive "at the presence of friends whose individuality agrees with our own" and our desire to be in the presence of those friends supersedes the compassion we feel "in sincere participation in their welfare and woe and in the unselfinterested sacrifices that one brings" (444).

Schopenhauer, of course, did not originate the notion that desire must be regulated by reason, that it leads a man down a precariously slippery moral path, but we nonetheless see traces of Schopenhauer in our modern formulation. What Schopenhauer does do that is perhaps unique, however, is align will and desire with concerns (462) such that desire necessarily assumes the foreground in our thoughts and in our existence. Such it is with little surprise that desire has saturated the modern moment, that desire takes supremacy in our thinking and in the cogs of our cultural machine.

Additionally, will for Schopenhauer in Vol. I is what connects man to the world—specifically to the force of Nature (462). For the purposes of our geneology, however, it is not with Vol. I that we are principally concerned but with Vol II, connected to the notion of will in the earlier volume that relates to Nature. (Specifically, desire in Vol. II is properly *Nature's* desire, and not man's, Nature's desire to perpetuate the species.)

In the chapter of Vol. II entitled "The Metaphysics of Sexual Love," Schopenhauer defines an element of the will to life—used differently in the second volume than in the first—as it relates to sexual love and sexuality. If will and desire are synonymous, as they are in Schopenhauer, the will to life can be read as the desire to life and as such is conflated into our modern paradigm of desire. The will to life, as (*Nature's*—for desire here is Nature's and not man's) desire to life, becomes then not a search for bodies—as for Freud—a wish for personal fulfillment through possession—as for Schopenhauer in Vol. I—but becomes instead a life-instinct (that is the flip of Freud's death-instinct, so innately tied to desire). In "The Metaphysics of Sexual Love," desire is connected to sex, through will, only in that sex is the means through which the species is preserved. The overarching desire is that for the preservation of the species—the will for life—through reproduction and as such through sex. Thus desire at its apex is removed in "The Metaphysics of Sexual Love" from man altogether—Nature and Nature only has real desires that operate on the world. Furthermore, the desire (read sexual attraction) that man feels for a body, or *thinks* he feels for a body—as in Schopenhauer's Vol. I example of Petrarch and Daphne (lust), and in the Vol. II formulation that man is attracted to the opposite sex for the sole purpose of reproduction—only serves to mask the overarching desire of the natural world to perpetuate the species. Real desire in Volume II belongs only to Nature; man is fooled into thinking that desire, or his own sexual attraction, is couched within the human form. Instead, according to Schopenhauer, desire is not of the flesh but of the world—the *will* of the world is desire as manifested in the will-to-life.

Schopenhauer's Vol. II. assertions differ markedly from his stance in Vol. I. Where desire in Vol. I was conscious—as in the desire to spend time with friends because their presence makes one feel good—desire in Vol. II is completely unconscious (or not-conscious in the pre-Freud era), obscured in and by Nature and the natural world. Desire for Schopenhauer (in Vol. II) is the sexual impulse, generated by Nature beyond the consciousness of man, and is innately tied to biology. In this sense, Schopenhauer and Freud can be read in agreement—for both men, desire can be un- or not-conscious and is linked directly to the sexual impulse and to biology. Where Freud differs from Schopenhauer, however, is that Freud took what was instinct and imposed by Nature in Schopenhauer and removed it to the realm of the unconscious and personal. Likewise, the biological ties between the texts are similar as the materiality of sexual intercourse is key for both theorists. Nonetheless, where desire is imposed by Nature (though subliminally) for Schopenhauer, Freud lifts that desire and makes it a personal desire rooted in the personal unconscious—that can be repressed, certainly—but that always originates in the self. Furthermore, desire for Freud *is* repressed—is unacceptable and therefore denied—whereas desire for Schopenhauer is not repressed at all, but

rather hidden. (Repression and hiding differ in that in repression, man squelches and thus forgets repugnant desires, and in hiding, Nature obscures highly valuable and positive desires so that man will be more likely to reproduce.) The real desire, in Schopenhauer, is Nature's desire for the preservation of the species through reproduction; that desire masks itself in the sexual attraction man feels for members of, for Schopenhauer, the opposite sex.

Traces of Schopenhauer, of course, are found in our modern reading of desire—not only in that desire must be regulated by reason but in that we view desire as both conscious and unconscious. It is, after Schopenhauer, both imbedded within the nature of man and beyond the nature of man. Man can no more control the capricious whims of Nature than he can his own desire—desire, then, is simultaneously something that must be regulated and *cannot* be regulated. Such resounds tellingly (and interestingly) in our modern paradigm and the tension involved where responsibility and desire meet or intersect. The question—for Schopenhauer as for modern society—is whether man can and must restrain his desires through the force of reason or whether desire cannot be regulated as Nature's power to instill it far supersedes our own powers to contain it (and as such whether man should even attempt to regulate his desires). Perhaps in that distinction one moves too far from what desire *is* to what one does *with* desire; nonetheless, Schopenhauer's treatment of desire appears as a trace in the modern moment—both in the composition and character of desire and in how man responds (or should respond) to that desire. Furthermore, Schopenhauer's two theories of desire relate to the distinction we have drawn between deconstruction and analysis—where desire is a function of language and discourse it can be mediated by reason (and thus deconstructed); where desire is a function of nature and the body it must submit to psychoanalysis.

Unfortunately, in the interest of time and space the final two theorists that I should like to position in our geneology—and whose traces I would like to illumine in our modern theory of desire—must be included as annotations rather than explicated in prose. They are as follows, with an apology for the necessarily reductive argument:

Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics* (1677)**:** Spinoza brings together several of the terms with which we are already familiar. He writes:

> "The [endeavor of a thing to preserve its being], when it is related to the mind alone, is called 'will,' but when it is related to the mind and body simultaneously, it is called 'appetite.' Appetite, therefore, is nothing other than the very essence of man, from the nature of which there necessarily follow those things that contribute to his preservation, and so man is determined to do these things. Further, there is no difference between appetite and desire, except that desire is usually related to men in so far as they are conscious of their appetite, and so it can be defined as follows: 'Desire is appetite together with a consciousness of the appetite.' So it is established from all this that we do not endeavor, will, seek after, or desire something because we judge it to be good, but on the contrary we judge something to be good because we endeavor, will, seek after or desire it" (172).

(Of note, the term Spinoza uses in his original Latin text is *cupiditas*, which becomes desire when translated into English. *Cupiditas* is the root of the English word "cupidity," which in archaic formulation means a strong desire or ardent longing and in contemporary usage relates to an inordinate desire for wealth—cupidity stresses the intensity of the desire, strongly suggesting covetousness where wealth is concerned.[1] I mention such as issues of translation necessarily foreground any connection between foreign-language texts and a discussion of desire as it is theorized in English.) For Spinoza, then, desire relates to the preservation of the self—it is the "essence of man" directed toward his preservation together with a conscious recognition of that will to preserve. (Put differently, desire is human striving (appetite) together with the consciousness of striving.) Additionally, desire is an implicit part of all emotion as emotion is tied specifically to self-preservation (*Ethics,* Part Three: On the Origin and Nature of the Emotions). Spinoza argues that desire can and should be modulated by reason, in a sense relating to Schopenhauer. Where Spinoza and Schopenhauer differ, however, is that appetite is an unconscious (read 'not-conscious' in the pre-Freud era) phenomenon and desire, as it relates to appetite, is a conscious understanding of an unconsciously rooted term or function. To that end, Spinoza seems to suggest for our modern reading that we cannot help what we desire—as its roots in appetite is unconscious—but that we must moderate our desire through reason. Moreover, Spinoza brings the term "appetite" to the constellating theories circumscribing desire as it is presently formulated and introduces the notion that desire is the foundation of all emotions—benevolence, greed, love, hate, etc. Finally, desire relates to both good and evil—we strive toward desire in the good, but desire can lead us to evil (a notion not entirely out of keeping with modern constructions of the term).

Plato, *The Symposium* (date uncertain, though after 385 B.C.): In *The Symposium*, Plato theorizes desire in several ways, though the theories earlier in the text serve only as straw men to his ultimate theory—that of Diotima's ascent. In *The Symposium*, Plato uses *eros,* not desire—which resounds of Schopenhauer, in that eros for Schopenhauer is selfish desire. *Eros* can nonetheless be linked to desire through *erasthai* and *erotikos—erasthai* referring to the part of love that constitutes a passionate, intense desire for something (often theorized as sexual desire) and *erotikos* aligning with the contemporary word "erotic." Early in *The Symposium*, Plato posits a theory of desire via the theorist-speaker Aristophanes wherein two people used to be one body and that desire is the yearning of those people to reunite in flesh (through sexual activity; the act of sex is the operation of desire, the attempt to reunite two bodies into one). Aristophanes' myth merits mention here as it relates to contemporary desire—the myth of two halves of a separated whole, the desire for those two halves to reconnect (through sex, and, later, through love). What is interesting about Plato, however, is that he ultimately rejects the myth of Aristophanes in favor of Diotima's Ascent—that desire is to produce in the presence of the beautiful or the good. And, one should note, to possess the beautiful in the good—we see the "onions" (as Socrates says to Alcibiades), the nuggets of good in others and so seek to possess them (through a sexual relationship with that person). Desire for Plato begins with the flesh of one body (in Diotima's Ascent, a theory of desire that Plato privileges as the true meaning of desire), moves to a desire for many bodies, then beyond the body into the realm of ideas and ultimately to philosophy. Philosophy for Plato is the pinnacle of desire—the means through which one ultimately produces in the presence of the Beautiful. Interestingly, Plato comes back in Lacan—who discusses the figure of Alcibiades, "whose desire is visible enough" (*FFC* 255). Alcibiades sees in Socrates (the philosopher) the ultimate good and desires to possess it; but Socrates, having attained his philosophical level, is no longer interested in bodies. Thus, in the relationship between Alcibiades and Socrates, we see base desire—the desire for the good in one man, attained through the flesh (Alcibiades' desire)—and true desire—the mere desire to produce in the presence of the beautiful (Socrates' desire). Plato's theory of desire resounds as trace in our modern formulation in that Plato is the first of Western philosophers to theorize desire—all others spring in a sense from Plato. (So he is a trace in all philosophers). More compellingly, desire for Plato is for something one does not have—the beautiful *outside* the self rather than inside the self. What's interesting about Plato is that

[1] Source: Merriam-Webster Unabridged (Online).

modern culture remembers his theory of desire as that of Aristophanes—the myth of one body sliced in two—over what Plato actually privileges as desire. Thus it is the desire that Plato *rejects* that forms the basis of contemporary desire, which arguably signifies a flaw in desire as it is currently formulated.

Having examined the theories and theorists in question, we must then return to our original theory of desire—that it is a signifier in which we find traces of previous theorists. We have previously argued how these earlier terms and theories exist as traces in our modern formulation—it is now left for us to reiterate. As we cannot define desire, only circumscribe it, our theorizing of Lacan, Freud, Schopenhauer, Spinoza and Plato have draped about the term "desire" such secondary theories and terms as lack, demand, need, sexual instinct, libido, wish, preservation of species, preservation of self, appetite, will, the beautiful etc. And indeed, when we think "desire" colloquially in the present, shades of all of the above (and more) spring to mind. As Lacan says in *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, "these are not easy terms to handle and it is not made any easier by the fact that they already have meanings" (244). Perhaps, as Lacan writes of other theoretical terms, it is the "intuitive use of these terms, on the basis of the feeling that one has of understanding them, and of understanding them in an isolated way as revealing their dimension in the common understanding" that is

> the source of all misapprehensions and confusions. It is the common fate of anything to do with discourse. In common discourse, he who speaks, at least in his native language, expresses himself with much ease, with such evident familiarity, that it is to the most common user of a language, to the uneducated man, that one has recourse if one wishes to know the correct usage of the term (244).

As desire is a signifier—and as such a part of discourse—it necessarily, though unfortunately follows that it will surround itself with terms that misapprehend and confuse, that circle desire but do not in fact encapsulate it. Therefore it is necessary to deconstruct desire—and to psychoanalyze it, for after Freud the body is written on desire and desire on the body, such that desire itself is analysand—to determine what "desire" actually means in any given critical moment, a task we have attempted to do herein.

Analytic Example[i]**:** While I have attempted to describe a contemporary theory of desire, theory is only as useful as its application. To that end, I turn to an example that I will unpack in terms of desire—for our purposes an advertisement. The choice of the medium was not arbitrary; rather, an advertisement was selected because of how intensely our current society is saturated with desire, because of how desire relates (through its trace elements) to the economy of every day life and living. The ads in question (see attached) were paired together on opposite pages in a magazine such that the ads appeared side-by-side (and thus perhaps as one single ad) as they do on the attached sheet. Of interest to note is that while searching for the ad on the internet, all but one version of the

ad I found showed only the right side of the ad—that of the woman with her face covered, the object (if only in a sense) of the man's desire. Though beyond the scope of this paper, that choice nonetheless resounded tellingly not only of desire but of desire in our contemporary society.

As far as the particulars of the ad are concerned, both the left picture and the right feature a white-sheeted bed wherein (the same) couple are engaged in what appears to be sexual intercourse. Thus, in its plot, does the ad (as I posit it is one ad comprised of two parts) relate to desire, as Freud introduced sexual intercourse and the materiality of sex to our theoretical paradigm. (One doubts Schopenhauer's assertions to the same apply; desire in these pages seem to be a product of the participants' will—as is evidenced by the expression on the woman's face and the positioning of the magazine in each photograph.) In the photo to the left, the man lies supine with a magazine covering his face, the pages of the magazine featuring a red BMW. The woman, forgiving the terminology, rides above him, her face tipped to the sky and her eyes closed in what appears to be a fit of rapture. Conversely, in the ad on the right, the woman lies supine and the man lies above her (in a suggestion of the missionary position). The same magazine covers the woman's face, though instead of closing his eyes, the man gazes intently at the BMW featured in the magazine. In the same photo, the camera gets a view of a curtained window, whereas no window appears in th photo to the left. Atmosphere, therefore, is more clearly defined in the picture wherein the woman's face is covered; the activity of the bodies is foregrounded in the picture wherein the man's face is covered. For Lacan, and for others, the domain of vision is integrated into the field of desire such that what the "reader" sees—and what the subjects in the ads see—is of utmost importance. Within the ads themselves, the man sees the BMW—his desire for the BMW is suggested by its position over the woman's face; the BMW is the object of his desire, though his body is being pleasured by her body. To that end, the BMW and sexual gratification are linked; the BMW is linked to desire through the gaze and the body—and, one presumes, the imagination as the text implies the man fantasizes about the BMW while having sex with the woman. Similarly, sex and the BMW are linked through the color of the car in the ad—red—a color that connotes sex, fun, and power.

Fantasy is featured in greater detail in the photo on the left, wherein the woman is not even looking at the photograph but is nonetheless in the throes of rapture; it is as if she fantasizes about the BMW in the magazine even as she has intercourse with the man. What is interesting to note is the expression of utter ecstasy on her face and the lack thereof in the man's on the opposing page. Such appeals to the desire of a female reader—she will attain such physical (and fantastical) pleasure through the acquisition of a BMW—and a male reader—as desire for sexual gratification in one's female partner is also featured in the ad. In the photo to the left, the sex—and the desire via sex—is

foregrounded, compellingly enough, whereas in the photo on the right, the vehicle—and the desire via the BMW—comes to the fore. Thus desire has several levels in the ads—there is desire within the ad itself (that of the woman for the BMW, and that of the man for the BMW; that of the woman for sexual gratification; by implication (though manifested in a less powerful form) the pleasure of the man through sexual gratification); the desire of each man and woman for both the physical body of his or her partner, the intercourse in which they engage and the pleasure thereof, and for the car—that produces desire and physical gratification. The ads also create a structuring of desire between ad and reader—desire for a female reader to experience the pleasure of the woman in the ad on the left, desire for a male reader to experience the pleasure *resulting* from a woman who acts as the woman on the left, the desire of a male to have a partner as gratified as the woman on the left; the desire of a man for the BMW in the photo on the right that is implicitly and explicitly aligned with sexual gratification and pleasure. So, too, do the ads foreground a lack—and thus create desire—in the mind of the reader. The reader lacks the BMW, and so the kind of sex the actors are experiencing; the reader lacks the kind of sex the actors are experiencing and so hopes to attain it through the acquisition of a BMW. What is particularly interesting about these ads is that they are paired—and that they attempt to equate the level of pleasure of male and female readers. (It is an equal opportunity ad, in theory, even if on further examination one could posit that it targets women as the woman's pleasure seems more evident in the ad itself.)

In creating a feeling of desire in the mind of the reader for the BMW, the advertisement plays up on several characteristics of our modern formulation of desire. One is that desire is innately linked to fantasy—typified in the case of the woman on the left. Another is that desire is linked to sex and sexuality, evidenced in the positioning of the bodies on the page. A third is that desire is linked to status—though not specifically referenced in our theorists, self-preservation (and selfish desire via Spinoza) can relate to the appeal for a higher status that the ad invokes. The ads also capitalize on the notion of the gaze—which appears in Freud and Lacan—that intervenes here to establish the subject (or the reader) "sustaining himself in a function of desire" (*FFC* 84-85).

Perhaps most compellingly, the ad serves as a pictoral signifier that can be deconstructed into its trace elements, much as desire as we have constructed it is a textual signifier that may also be deconstructed. In both, we find traces of Lacan and Freud, Spinoza and Schopenhauer, even Plato—through the rejected myth of Aristophanes and also the production in the presence of the beautiful. (For sexual intercourse is such a production, and it is being produced in the presence of the BMW—where the ad is concerned, the beautiful, such that purchasing the BMW would acquire for the reader Plato's ultimate goal: the possession of the beautiful.) Additionally, we find in the ad that we

experience a lack, as mentioned before, and also a desire for a love-object: the car, the body of the other, the body of the self (as imagined through one of the figures on the bed), the sexual pleasure and gratification that the union of the bodies seems to produce, etc. We find a desire as manifest through self-preservation, for ads of this kind suggest that self-preservation requires the elements featured in the ad—here the bodies, the sex, the BMW, the fantasy. Ultimately, we find that our theory of desire as we have formulated it—as a signifier that becomes the amalgamation of theories and terms propounded by philosophers of preceding ages (rather than as its own beginning and end)—seems to work in application. That desire can be deconstructed and psychoanalyzed; that a reading of our contemporary moment, of our current society—so saturated in desire—requires deconstruction and psychoanalysis to properly pick apart and understand its constituent parts and thus its whole.

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[i] **The Ad:**

The above is a BMW ad, release location unknown.