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MONTAIGNE IN THE “GARDEN OF
EARTHLY DELIGHTS”

The Image of the Corps Morcelé in the Essays

Given the imagistic sources for the *corps morcelé* (the “body in bits and pieces” or the “fragmented body”), it is understandable that Lacan turned to painting, and to the artist Hieronymus Bosch, for a graphic depiction of the disintegrating ego. The tortured and disfigured bodies in the “Garden of Earthly Delights” vividly complement the reports of dream content by patients in analysis. The pre-linguistic locus of this archaic experience and its specifically figurative nature, not to mention the developmental push toward forms of psychic wholeness, makes the encounter with the *corps morcelé* an especially fugitive and elusive affair, for which examples are not only lacking but constitutionally inadequate. In the two important papers on the imaginary conditions wherein ego formation takes its cues from the overcoming of the infantile body, namely “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function” and “Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis,” Lacan turns to Bosch to aid him in illustrating this difficult theoretical notion.¹ That we lack words adequate to this experience is precisely Lacan’s point, and it justifies his stepping outside the psychoanalytic domain for the artistic, where words and language give place to affect and image. Yet, between the painted body and the visible body there is a continuity, not an identity, an approximation that can never trespass the former’s asymptotic limits. This raises the question, then, of whether the evocative significance of Bosch and painting has no cousin among the authors of literature. To paint a similar portrait of the image of the *corps morcelé* with words is difficult but surely not beyond the creative literary imagination. One would need to oppose the generalizing character of language, to draw down the word to the level of subjective experience; there would need to be a pervasive mood of anxiousness suitable to a subject undergoing the collapse of its ego formation; there should be an exclusive attention to the body and to the body’s sensory, affective life: one would need to write essays, and one would have to be Montaigne. In the *Essays*, Montaigne portrays his own “Garden of Earthly Delights,” a vision of a fragmented body as useful as those in Bosch for exploring Lacan’s realm of the imaginary.²

¹ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006). Hereafter *Écrits*.

² Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald Frame (Stanford:

Montaigne is not an unfounded choice to illustrate the forces and effects of subjectivity that find a home in the imaginary. In the paper on the structure of the imaginary, "Presentation on Psychical Causality," Lacan ranks Montaigne just below Freud in revealing the profound and irresolvable gaps and contradictions that make the imaginary identity of the ego unequal to the being of the subject which it represents (Écrits, 146). For Montaigne, as for Freud, the divisions within the ego or the *moi* illustrate the crucial phenomenon of miscognition (*méconnaissance*), insofar as they point up the real function of the ego, which is its illusory function. "This also happens to me: that I do not find myself in the place where I look; and I find myself more by chance encounter than by searching my judgment" (Essays, 27). Montaigne, it would seem, stands within the scene of his own primordial alienation, watching closely as the totalizing dream of the ego crumbles everywhere around him. This consideration puts Montaigne in a fairly elite constellation of psychoanalytic figures, even granting the obvious cultural, historical and theoretical differences. His position is further consolidated when, in Seminar XI, Lacan looks to Montaigne for the paradigmatic illustration the phenomenon of *aphanisis* ("fading").³ Lacan writes, "I would show you that Montaigne is truly the one who has centered himself, not around skepticism but around the living moment of the *aphanisis* of the subject" (Seminar XI, 223). To situate the author of the *Essays* in this psychoanalytic register of experience is to position Montaigne at the very disappearance of the subject into the signifier or the "field of the Other." The *Essays* can be read as a primer on the *aphanisis* of the human subject because Montaigne wields his doubt and uncertainty as moments for ego constitution and ego disintegration. In him is illustrated the core Lacanian critique of the subject as an autonomous and unified entity.

There are many levels on which *aphanisis* is displayed, but perhaps the most primal generator of this phenomenon, at least developmentally, is manifested in the move to overcome the division between the dissonant experience of the lived body and the "orthopedic" form of its totality" (Écrits, 78). Carried out at the level of the visual image, the movement "from insufficiency to anticipation" (Écrits, 78) is the key idea in mapping out the field of the imaginary. All of its forces are centered on the lure offered by the visual image to the subject. If the specular capture of the I by the image fails, or is pressured to do so by the analyst, the individual is thrown back on the body's anarchic subterranean existence, its "turbulent movements" (Écrits, 76) or what Lacan refers to more generally as humankind's specific "prematurity of birth" (Écrits, 78). Understandably, in the analytical situation the patient will muster every ego defense available to avoid such an attack on the formative unity of ego identity. Aggressiveness, for Lacan, is a key behavioral sign that the formal structure of the ego—the vital marriage of subject and image—is starting to lose its hold over

Stanford University Press, 1958). Hereafter Essays.

³ *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978). Hereafter Seminar XI.

subjectivity (Écrits, 84-5). If the collapse is complete, the spell of the "visual gestalt of his own body" (Écrits, 92) is broken and the ego shatters. The patient becomes one of the tortured souls in Bosch's "Garden of Earthly Delights," and the subject experiences at the level of the body the fracturing of identity. Images of the *corps morcelé* populate the distressed life of the patient, as he becomes the playfield for terrible visions of corporeal dislocation.⁴ "Most often," Lacan writes concerning the appearance of these body-images in the patient's dreams and fantasies, "the resemblance is to a jig-saw puzzle, with the separate parts of the body of a man or an animal in disorderly array."⁵

It hardly seems conceivable that Montaigne occupies a place in this traumatic universe. Montaigne is the paradigm Renaissance humanist. In the *Essays*, the sovereign individualism of the classical past flowers anew. The many Stoic counsels against the corrupting passions of the body originate from a philosophical retreat from lived experience, a sheltering of the mind or the soul against all affective states that would dislodge the self-mastery pursued by the sage. Against the accidents of life, "the wise man, after having well weighed and considered their qualities and measured and judged them for what they are, springs above them by a power of a vigorous courage. He disdains them and tramples them underfoot, having a strong and solid soul, against which the arrows of fortune, when they come to strike, must necessarily bounce off and be blunted, meeting a body on which they can make no impression" (*Essays*, 226). In borrowing the title of one of the essays from Cicero—"That to philosophize is to learn to die"—Montaigne is giving himself over to a thinking that seeks to remove from itself all mediating influences. Self-mastery weights the subject down with a meditation on death so as to deaden the existential cues offered by the world to the subject.

Nevertheless, no reading of the *Essays* can any longer abide by the simplistic arrangement of the three books of the *Essays* into supposed Stoic, Pyrrhonian and Epicurean phases, as if each book was an unadulterated position or school rather than the unfolding record of a life.⁶ The Stoicism adopted by Montaigne, inasmuch as it

⁴ As Lacan writes, "Among the latter images are some that represent the elective vectors of aggressive intentions, which they provide with an efficacy that might be called magical. These are the images of castration, emasculation, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, and bursting open of the body—in short, the imagos that I personally have grouped together under the heading 'imagos of the fragmented body,' a heading that certainly seems to be structural" (Écrits, 85).

⁵ Lacan, "Some Reflections on the Ego," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 34 (1953): 11-17 (13). Hereafter "Some Reflections."

⁶ There has been a long-standing debate over whether Montaigne evolved or developed through different stages (Stoic, Sceptic, Epicurean) corresponding to the different books of the *Essays*. Pierre Villey, whose edition of the *Essays*—complete with identified sources for quotations—is the modern version used by nearly all readers, advanced the "evolution" theory. Its basic thesis is that Montaigne identified with an early Stoic phase (first book), followed by a period during which he underwent a Sceptical crisis (second book), which was then followed

flowed into his thought as part of the Renaissance *Zeitgeist*, was also very much tied to a relation to the body that is singular in its history but general in its implications. The *Essays*, after all, as Montaigne writes in the opening letter to all future readers, is a book composed as a "private convenience" for friends and relatives, containing as it does "some features of my habits and temperament," in which the author is presented "entire and wholly naked" (*Essays*, 2). In other words, the *Essays*, and this is perhaps what so fixed the inestimable psychoanalytic value of Montaigne for Lacan, is a portrait whose compositional material is the author's relation to his own body. This combination of elements is the "psychic relationship *par excellence*": "the relation of the subject to his own body in terms of his identification with an *imago*" ("Some Reflections," 12). From the very outset, and thus adulterating considerably the portrait of Stoicism, the intimate bond between the body, its image, and the ego were on display for all to see. Normally stitched together in the distant past in the life of the individual, they have forced themselves on Montaigne with an insistence that can only be the outcome of a traumatic experience. Is there in the *Essays* an unraveling of the ego that leaves in its troubled wake the exposed chaos of the body? The answer to this question lies in the essay "Of idleness." Contained within its few short paragraphs is a logic of the imaginary that structures the entirety of Montaigne's effort at self-portraiture in the *Essays*.

The close connection between Montaigne and the *Essays* means that any judgment regarding an individual essay's interpretive significance should be laced with caution. Why privilege any one essay when they all bear the impress of a life? The *Essays* is, after all, a most unusual book: "a book consubstantial with its author, concerned with my own self, an integral part of my life" (*Essays*, 504). "I am myself the matter of my book," continues Montaigne in the same passage, an admission that would be an act of defenseless vanity if what follows was less candid, less inconsistent, and less steeped in the minutiae of subjectivity. His vanity is of a species that does not flatter but expose. He is not looking to draw the reader in so much as draw his inner life out.⁷ On this count, all the essays succeed, but among them "Of idleness" possesses a uniquely revelatory power. Its title refers to the expectation of what retirement promised Montaigne after he left public life behind for the simple pleasures of managing the affairs of his family estate. The implied temporary cessation of

by the mollifying attitude toward life expressed in Epicureanism (third book). Although still persuasive, the "evolutionary" theory has been questioned. For two of the more influential responses, see Donald Frame, *Montaigne's Discovery of Man: The Humanization of a Humanist* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955) and Floyd Gray, "The Unity of Montaigne in the *Essays*," *Modern Language Quarterly* 22 (1961): 79-86.

⁷ In his "Preface," William Hazlett makes this point eloquently, and with more than a touch of psychoanalytic relevance: "Of all egotists, Montaigne, if not the greatest, was the most fascinating, because, perhaps, he was the least affected and most truthful. What he did and what he had professed to do, was to dissect his mind, and show us, as best he could, how it was made, and what relation it bore to external objects." See *The Works of Michel de Montaigne*, ed. William C. Hazlett, trans. Charles Cotton, vol. 1 (New York: Edwin C. Hill, 1910) 55.

movement ("idling") was going to give way to a full stop. The cares of the world were no longer his. "Lately when I retired to my home, determined so far as possible to bother about nothing except spending the little life I have left in rest and seclusion, it seemed to me I could do my mind no greater favor than to let it entertain itself in full idleness and stay and settle in itself" (Essays, 21). Montaigne is here giving voice to at least two Stoic precepts, the one having to do with the wise sage's counsel of solitude, and the other fixing attention on the mind and the Stoic quest to achieve psychic tranquility or calmness (*apatheia*). An intimation of past difficulty with the latter leads Montaigne to believe that in the former he might more easily attain Stoic impassibility. From the essay, "Our feelings reach out beyond us," there is a glimpse of this former struggle, and of the lesson learned: "he who knows himself no longer takes extraneous business for his own; he loves and cultivates himself before anything else; he refuses superfluous occupations and useless thoughts and projects" (Essays, 9). The "extraneous business" of public service is an obstacle to full self-possession. All worldly affairs are foreign intrusions; although he is quite admired for his political skills, Montaigne comes to realize his being lies elsewhere. The decision to return to the family estate is motivated by an insight that turns against all exteriority. Supporting this insight is a belief in the fundamental unity and integrity of the mind, the domicile of true identity, and that by cleaving away the external shell of "superfluous occupations and useless thoughts and projects," the native and authentic self will re-surface intact. Returning to the context of thought in "Of idleness," Montaigne affirms the ego's seeming substantiality, coming into its own self-visibility in idleness—"which I hoped it might do more easily now, having become weightier and riper with time" (Essays, 21).

Montaigne's experience of idleness, however, is anything but psychic quietude. The narrative that began with the mind in seclusion terminates abruptly in a portrait of self-identity in complete and total dissolution. The anticipation leading Montaigne on in his attempted recovery of the unified self, the self that was lying below the surface of appearances, intact, ready to spring to life once the world faded from view, is proven misleading. For reasons that will become clear only later, when Montaigne deigns to set aside the mirror held up by the external, public world, he is left without any stabilizing reflection. Psychic unity and self-mastery are shown to be illusions. From idleness comes a scene where the subject-image-ego structure has collapsed. Instead of a mind in calm self-repose, Montaigne encounters a primal chaos: "on the contrary, like a runaway horse, it gives itself a hundred times more trouble than it took for others, and gives birth to so many chimeras and fantastic monsters, one after another, without order or purpose, that in order to contemplate their ineptitude and strangeness at my pleasure, I have begun to put them in writing, hoping in time to make my mind ashamed of itself" (Essays, 21). In a sort of meta-commentary that precedes but accompanies this self-description in the essay, Montaigne observes that a mind lacking a determinate shape or form is especially prey to this psychic affliction. Uncoupled from the form-giving, "orthopedic" properties of the *imago*, the self or ego becomes a plaything of the affective dynamism of the imaginary: "so it is

with minds. Unless you keep them busy with some definite subject that will bridle and control them, they throw themselves in disorder hither and yon in the vague field of imagination. [. . .]. And there is no mad or idle fancy that they do not bring forth in this agitation" (Essays, 21). Without simplifying the descriptive richness in these passages, in essence Montaigne is relating his own descent into the phenomenon of anxiety lying at the origins of ego development. The lure of the image that was supposed to captivate the subject and provide a secure point of identification, wherein the ego would emerge out of the psychic dissonance between identity and lived experience, has lost its totalizing promise. The normally unbidden and developmentally masked alienation of the ego in the illusory unity of the *imago* has become traumatically visible. What is one to make of this profusion of disordered images against which Montaigne is helpless?

To begin with, there is no mistaking the uncanny resemblance between the images and visions described here and those encountered by Lacan and others in clinical practice. The effort at controlling the mind by giving it a "definite subject" to fixate on could be taken to mean a busying of the mind that amounts to nothing more than a technique of distraction. This, however, does not square with "disorder" and the "ineptitude and strangeness" into which the mind is thrown if lacking an object on which the subject can be fixed. More than a mere diversionary tactic, Montaigne is touching upon precisely the psychoanalytic point that Lacan made in the "Mirror Stage" article. The subject is turned over to the formative control offered by the objectifying effect produced through an identification with and assumption of an external form (*Gestalt*). "It suffices to understand the mirror stage," Lacan writes, "in this context as an *identification*, in the full sense analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image—an image that is seemingly predestined to have an effect at this phase, as witnessed by the use in analytic theory of antiquity's term, 'imago'" (Écrits, 76). The mind is lacking in itself the structuring principle needed in order to support the subject as it traverses the chasm created by the "specific prematurity" of the human individual. What it needs is something to fix it in place, to give it a determinate shape or contour. Lacking this formative structure or "formal fixation" (Écrits, 90), the psyche is subjected to the turbulent, "unbridled" domain of lived experience. The individual may go through many such ideal unities or *imagos*, but to undergo the fracturing of the ego's ideal unity is to fall into the distress of finding oneself without the primordial constitution that maps out for the subject an *Umwelt*. There is a failure "to the structures of systematic misrecognition and objectification that characterize ego formation" (Écrits, 94). The "vital dehiscence constitutive of man" (Écrits, 94) opens up beneath Montaigne's feet. The description he provides in the essay "Of idleness" obeys the same logic of the imaginary as portrayed by Lacan. This is an important point: both the essay, "Of idleness," and the dreams and fantasies of patients suffering ego disintegration manifest the fundamental notion of the *corps morcelé*. The images of "chimeras and fantastic monsters, one after another, without order or purpose," are these not drawn from the same pool of terrifying creatures as that of the flying fish

whose inflated, transparent body stalked the dreams of one of Lacan's analysands? (Écrits 86) To admit that they are situates the opening moments of the *Essays* in a psychoanalytically suggestive light. More is needed, however, in order to see the essay "Of idleness" as the very dimension of the imaginary from which Montaigne never leaves. Let us look more closely at how Montaigne responds to his sudden immersion in the lived experience of his own subjectivity.

"I have begun to put them in writing, hoping in time to make my mind ashamed of itself" (Essays, 21). Against the carnival of disordered images, Montaigne puts quill to paper so as to give them some semblance of reality. They are like nothing he has ever encountered before; in them he does not recognize himself. In their "ineptitude and strangeness," the images are truly monstrous, that is, they offer neither formative integrity nor formative recognition. They are very much like "jig-saw puzzles," to borrow the expression from Lacan. To describe them as "chimeras" is to join Bosch in his "Garden of Earthly Delights," where half-human, half-animal creatures populate the foreign terrain. The functional unity of the human body is lost in these precipitates of ego deformation. They are the products of an unraveling of the structural effects of identification, which is for Montaigne a glimpse into the truth, lost afterwards to much of the Western philosophical tradition, that the being of the subject is not reducible to the being of consciousness. It is a truth, however, that is shocking and alien, and that offends the dignity of the individual and the authority of reason. Such an unruly and disobedient awareness must be domesticated, or at the very least brought into an order of familiarity. "I have begun to put them in writing," remarks Montaigne, an act that begins with "Of idleness" and which constitutes the very project of the *Essays*. Thinking he could tame and bridle the roaming affectivity so disturbing to the driving and regulating forces of identification, Montaigne himself becomes a literary version of Bosch: his essays are themselves "fancies," the imaginary's flotsam and jetsam washed up on the shores of language.

The image of the *corps morcelé* is the central motif in the portrait of the self offered by Montaigne. That the images are fragmentary, lacking determinate shape or form, is clearly indicated by the preceding analysis. The fact that the images are modeled upon and take existence from a disturbance to Montaigne's body-image, that it is in fact his own embattled body-image which serves as the very material for writing, this is the psychoanalytic *tour de force* represented by the *Essays*. "Of idleness" is neither an isolated statement of intention, nor is it a solitary depiction of the body's formative insecurity. Everywhere one turns, Montaigne is fixing his inquisitive eye on the field of the imaginary. One of the best examples comes from the essay "Of friendship." Anthony Wilden, the English translator of Lacan's *Discours de Rome*, in a rare and still brilliant instance of a Lacanian reading of the *Essays* in terms of the relation between Montaigne and La Boétie, finds in their friendship a crucial analytic insight.⁸ For Wilden, the *Essays* represent an individual's search for the illusionary

⁸ Anthony Wilden, "Par Divers Moyens On Arrive A Pareille Fin: A Reading of Montaigne," *Modern Language Notes* 83.4 (1968): 577-97.

point of overcoming the *dehiscence* that marks all human relations. "[T]he *Essays*," writes Wilden, "are a particularly interesting example of an interpersonal relationship dependent upon the constitution of a lost id" (Wilden, 581). There is a void at the heart of the *Essays*, an "absent image" of the friend La Boétie (Wilden, 591). Captured in the ideal image offered by La Boétie, his untimely death preceding the *Essays* sets in motion the experience of radical alienation and the resultant quest for lost unity that drives Montaigne without cease. Wilden's thesis is significant in that it captures the intersubjective horizons outside of which the *Essays* cannot be read. Moreover, he is one of the only commentators to pick up on the properly imaginary context for understanding the movements of self that make the *Essays* such a unique document of lived subjectivity.⁹

What he does not develop, however, is the profound bodily meditation that takes place for Montaigne as a result of the fracturing of his ideal image, his "proto-self" (Wilden, 588). The imaginary is not just the place where the *corps morcelé* lodges its unsettling force, it is, in its essence, a dimension of the body itself. Lacan's masterstroke was to de-center the subject and thus doom the traditional philosophy of consciousness; Montaigne perhaps exceeds even Lacan in bringing out the nature of the operative forces pushing the subject out of focus. The various essays are so many captured fragments from a glimpse into what, on an existential level, it would mean to try to inhabit the imaginary realm, to expose the self to the winds of the passions. Picking up again the thread of the essay "Of friendship," witness, for example, the profound implication of the following passage. Drawing on an analogy with painting to orient his efforts, the deformed body-image, void of all structural unity, is on full display: "As I was considering the way a painter I employ went about his work, I had a mind to imitate him. He chooses the best spot, the middle of each wall, to put a picture labored over with all his skill, and the empty space all around it he fills with grotesques, which are fantastic paintings whose only charm lies in their variety and strangeness. And what are these things of mine, in truth, but *grotesques and monstrous bodies, pieced together of divers members*, without definite shape, having no order, no sequence, or proportion other than accidental" (*Essays*, 135, my italics). Here again is the description given in "Of idleness," where the essays, being Montaigne's attempt to study the images of corporeal dislocation, would themselves be formless and disordered. The painting metaphor solidifies the intent and the meaning: to move within the imaginary realm one needs to remain at the sensory level, close to the lived experience of the body; the contents of the portrait, lacking solidity and determinacy, will be pieces of the body-image that have been snatched from the fleeting life they lead. Without any support from an *imago* that would give Montaigne's ego a sense of being totalized in a stable unity, any and every *essai* of the self reveals a truth, partial and uncertain as it may be.

⁹ "It is the contradictions of the *Essays* between assertions of personal solidity and stability (plenitude) and Montaigne's discovery of his own vacillations (flux) which reveal the existential status of imagination and absence in the constitution of human desire" (Wilden 595).

With the self of consciousness displaced by the subject of the imaginary, the body weighs heavily on the images that make it into writing. From the essay "Of practice," Montaigne describes this captivation of the subject by the lived body: "I expose myself entire: my portrait is a cadaver on which the veins, the muscles, and the tendons appear at a glance, each part in its place. One part of what I am was produced by a cough, another by a pallor or a palpitation of the heart—in any case dubiously. It is not my deeds that I write down; it is myself, it is my essence" (Essays, 274). Lacking the formative permanence and integrity of a specular image, each reflection "at a glance" carries with it a trace of that which has been refused the structuring effects of a visual form. There is no body-image synthesis because the ego has lost its ideal locus of objectification. Where there is no identifying form, there is no "alienating destination," no "mental permanence" (Écrits, 76), and the "I" encounters not a rigid world of statues but a world given over to Heraclitean flux and unrest. "The world," Montaigne observes, "is but a perennial movement. All things in it are in constant motion—the earth, the rocks of the Caucasus, the pyramids of Egypt—both with the common motion and with their own. Stability itself is nothing but a more languid motion" (Essays, 610). Such a paradoxical overturning of the structure of human life and knowledge is possible only on the basis of the bodying forth of the subject. Writing essays is for Montaigne to raise a watchtower in the imaginary order itself.¹⁰ He becomes a recording machine for the monstrous images whose animating force is the body. In a sense, for Montaigne waking life is a dream only a body could have. "In order to train my *fancy* even to dream with some order and purpose, and in order to keep it from losing its way and roving with the wind, there is nothing like *embodying* and registering all the little thoughts that come to it. I listen to my *reveries* because I have to record them" (Essays, 504, my italics). Not even the slightest "imaginings" are corrected (Essays, 574), as they are all testimony to the existential mutability of the embodied subject.

To maintain the subject within the interior orbit of the *corps morcelé* is to move at the level of the image. Without any structuring form to capture the subject and draw it away from the body's turbulence, the individual lives in intimate proximity to the

¹⁰ In focusing Montaigne's psychoanalytic value on his proximity to the imaginary order, I realize that however similar the *Essays* might seem to Bosch's "Garden of Earthly Delights," there is still this fundamental and irreducible difference: to capture his corporeal visions, he turned to the word, to language. This raises the very significant question of the status of the unconscious with Montaigne. For Lacan, the Freudian unconscious presupposes the Cartesian subject, divided and split as it is between thought and being. From the perspective of Descartes, Montaigne makes a fatal alliance with being. Whereas Descartes enforces the division of the subject into *cogito* and *sum*, pinning the being of the subject in the act of thinking, Montaigne observes no comparable split. Indeed, Montaigne aggravates the very assumption of such a *cogito* unfettered from the substance of embodied subjectivity. Thus, the necessary precondition of the subject of the unconscious, namely the alienation of the subject as it is forced to choose between being and meaning or thought, is absent in the *Essays*. What complicates this otherwise sound picture? Not only does Montaigne not stop speaking, displaying a striking and subversive awareness of the divergence, in Lacanian terms, between

affective register, wherein all paths to the visible world are labyrinthine struggles that take place "against a background of organic disturbances and discord" ("Some Reflections," 15). For Montaigne, the play of "reveries" across the field of the subject constitutes a radical involvement with the lived body. At this level, that is, at the level of the imaginary, the body mirrors little back to the subject that looks anything like the human form. If there is a madness in the *Essays*, it belongs to the same species of madness "by which a man thinks he is a man," a psychoanalytic truth which is also the most profound illusion (*Écrits*, 153). Like one of the tortured residents of the "Garden of Earthly Delights," Montaigne sees everywhere around him a world populated by images of the body as if seen through a prism. If by fortune and by practice he is to remain in the realm of the imaginary, a gaze doubled-back on itself and returned to its primal sources in the corporeal fact, as the subject caught up in the image of the *corps morcelé*, is it any surprise that in describing the style of his writings he chooses to call them, this literary cousin of Bosch, "essays in flesh and bone" (*Essays*, 640)?

the subject of the statement and the subject of the enunciation, but like Freud, he never for once makes the mistake of believing that conscious intention is adequate to the full expression of signification. See further, Lorenzo Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness: A Philosophical Reading of Lacan* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2007) 38. Between Montaigne and Descartes there emerges the possibility of psychoanalysis sketched in the outlines of the unconscious. This strange period in the history of thought yet remains to be written, obscured as it is and has been by the reading of the *Essays* that situates its skepticism, retroactively, within the project of Cartesian certainty and the self-founding of the subject in consciousness. Yet, if skepticism shares with psychoanalysis a certain taste for the negative, it remains simultaneously and paradoxically true that both Montaigne and Descartes make Freud's epochal discovery possible. I want to thank a reviewer's comments for signaling the need to address this problematic.