

## Stalking Oneself: The Fantasmatic Intersubjectivity of Google

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**Alois Sieben,**

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**Abstract:** This essay reads fictional and non-fictional accounts of digital stalking as signals of larger changes in intersubjectivity itself caused by Google. Most social media platforms trap users in imaginary relations, in which the other is encountered as a complete profile, but Google allows the searcher to locate an absence in the other in the form of a missing search result. As will be shown in an analysis of two contemporary novels whose first-person narrations center around Google-stalking, Caroline Kepnes's *You* (2014) and Olivia Sudjic's *Sympathy* (2017), Google's mode of intersubjectivity amounts to an endless tunnel with no light at its end, whose exploration only feeds the profits of digital capitalism. Through a comparison of real-life stalking and digital stalking, historical shifts in the subject's relation to the Other are captured.

## Alois SIEBEN

### Stalking Oneself: The Fantasmatic Intersubjectivity of Google

In Caroline Kepnes's horror-romance novel *You* (2014), Guinevere Beck catches narrator Joe Goldberg already knowing her favorite film, due to having studied her through Google: "so you're stalking me," [she says] without a trace of sadness" (90). Joe replies: "well, I wouldn't call it stalking... it's not like it's private or anything" (90). Laughing, Beck admits to having searched for him as well, so that she could "look at [his] pictures" (91). Stalking others online seems like banal behavior in this scene, but the rest of Kepnes's novel paints a darker picture of Beck and Joe's digital relation. In Daniel Trotter's study of "interpersonal surveillance" (46) through social media, he notes how innocuous viewing of another's digital profile often bleeds into "creeping" which itself is "seen as a milder version of stalking," lacking the "actively searching" (96) element. While most social media platforms permit creeping along the borders of privacy settings, Google provides the best platform for active searching of the stalking variety, since the content available is not controlled by the person being searched, lending them a certain passivity. It is through Google's digital relation that a troubled mode of intersubjectivity arises. As this essay argues through readings of Kepnes's novel and Olivia Sudjic's *Sympathy* (2018), digital stalking displaces intrapsychic conflict onto the mass of intersubjective relations made possible by Google, revealing how the internet more broadly is driven by a desire to be social with ourselves, rather than each other. In both novels, the digital stalker ultimately stalks themselves through the platform.

In *The Psychology of Stalking*, J. Reid Meloy cites the "force of fantasy" (1) as integral to understanding stalking, especially with the advent of the internet, where "fantasy can play an even more expansive role as the genesis of behavior in the stalker" with "targets becom[ing] easily available containers for his projections, and narcissistic linking fantasies" (11). Meloy verbalizes the general structure of the fantasy as: "If I can see her privately, perhaps I can come to know her intimately, to be with her in fantasy, and to perhaps be more like her. Then she may know me" (1). From a Lacanian perspective, the stalker's fantasy resembles a simplified form of intersubjectivity itself. In Lacanian terms, the subject encounters the other as a *semblable*, a visual relation by which likeness is imprinted on the other, luring the subject—who does not stalk, so much as follow—toward synthesis with this image, to be "more like" it. Yet, as the second stage of Meloy's structure shows—"then she may know me"—this other is not so much pursued as something in the subject themselves, fantasized through the other's gaze. Written in the year of Google's founding, Meloy's analysis concentrates on the first stage, in which stalking amounts to the pursuit of the other with "the goal to possess her" (20). By contrast, Google amplifies the second stage of the fantasy, involving not possession of the other, but one's own visibility to the other, or more precisely, the Other.

In the two novels, the stalker raises their pursued other to the dignity of the Other, by losing an aspect of the other with the help of the search engine. As Dany Nobus states, "the big Other is nothing but the dimension of... others that remains unknown to the speaker... the recognized, yet never fully ascertained aspect" (qtd. in Hook 23). Google provides the investigatory tools by which this negative dimension can both be posited in the other—a missing search result—as well as pursued. In the space of the gap in the other, the subject has room to fantasize about a gaze from the Other that might possibly recognize them. As Slavoj Žižek clarifies, the "radically intersubjective character of fantasy" amounts to the process by which "at its most fundamental, fantasy tells me what I am to my others" (*The Plague* 8-9). Žižek notes how intersubjectivity is only accomplished through "the focusing of attention on the enigma of the impenetrable Other's desire ('*Che vuoi?*')" (8), by which the subject posits an "*agalma*, secret treasure" within themselves, or "*objet petit a*, as the object of fantasy... that 'something in me more than myself on account of which I perceive myself' as 'worthy of the Other's desire'" (9). The subject splits themselves so that what Žižek calls "the Other's desire itself... serves as the mediator between the 'barred' subject \$ and the lost object that the subject 'is'" (10). In other words, the Lacanian subject stalks a lost part of themselves through the Other's desire. The true desire of the stalker is to be stalked themselves by the Other.

To explore the results of Google's intersubjectivity, this essay turns to the two contemporary novels whose plots revolve around digital stalking. As the intersubjective relation regresses to the intrapsychic conflict, the parts of themselves that users lose through the search engine return to them in monstrous forms, demonstrating the intractable non-relation underlying accessible digital relations.

### Searching for the Woman in *You*

"I found her" (2), Joe Goldberg narrates as MFA candidate Guinevere Beck walks into the New York bookstore which he manages, and into the frame of his fantasy. As the pair chat about how the internet

is ruining society, Joe proclaims that "eye contact is what keeps us civilized" (4), then immediately googles Beck after they part. Aided by Google, Joe converts Beck from a flawed woman that he finds to a "good, pure" (87) Woman for whom he searches. This search is doomed in the sense that Joan Copjec writes "if the woman does not exist," as Lacan formulates, "this is because she cannot be refound" (221). Beck only exists as a negative limit to Joe's search; he does not search the internet to see Beck as present in the search results, but rather as absent. In Lacan's explanation of the "ambiguity" of the "scopic drive," he contends that what the subject fantasizes about is "the object as absence" in a visual field, adding that "what the voyeur is looking for" with the "objects of his search" is "merely a shadow, a shadow behind the curtain" (*Seminar XI* 182). Beck's digital presence becomes the curtain, or what André Nusselder calls the "veil... on which the absence can 'paint' itself, where the subject can project and imagine the 'impossible' object of desire" (64). Found through Joe's search, Beck's Twitter profile @theunrealbeck both conceals and produces the real Beck.

Through the portal of Beck's singular name, Google delivers Joe a stack of results. Beck is a writer with a "deluded sense of privacy," and thus has "revealing bios at various online journals" (15), as well as public profiles on social media. For Joe, the once maligned internet now appears "designed with love in mind" in "giv[ing] me so much of you, Beck" (11). Beck's physical presence fixates Joe, but he is even more fixated by her digital presence. Search allows Joe to both approach his object of desire, as well as keep this object at a safe distance from himself, mediating his anxiety when in proximity to Beck: "I'm shaking and I'd pop an Ativan but they're downstairs" (1). As Nusselder explains, anxiety "is the too close approximation of the non-representable object" caused by "the impossible object of desire [being] not sufficiently kept at a distance by the fantasy-screen" (56). This non-representability is better encountered through Google, as the gaps and absences in Beck's digital presence. Upon first searching for Beck, Joe immediately questions the results which he finds because he does not see himself in them. Beck has recently tweeted, and she did not mention their conversation, prompting Joe's reaction: "Was I nothing to you?... But then I started to explore you and you don't write about what really matters. You wouldn't share me with your *followers*. Your online life is a variety show, so if anything, the fact that you didn't put me in your stand-up act means that you covet me" (13). Behind the screen, Beck waits for him in his fantasy, "searching for that hot guy in the bookstore" (17) on her laptop. His search is for the search of the Other, to be its desired result.

It is the very movement of the search itself which keeps this missing result alive. Joe's digital stalking progresses to urban stalking when Google provides Beck's address. Showing what mode of stalking is dominant, the urban stalking aims only at furthering Joe's digital stalking. After breaking into her apartment, Joe breaks into Beck's laptop, attempting to verify her desire, though he only encounters more absence: "I know how to search a hard drive and I know I'm not in there... one possible theory: you write about me in the notepad on your phone" (21). Disavowing his satisfaction with the search itself, Joe gorges on results, stating: "I'm so full of you, your calendar of caloric intake and hookups and menstrual moments, your self-portraits you don't publish, your recipes and exercises. You will know me soon too, I promise" (53). These sentences mimic exactly the structure of the stalking fantasy advanced by Meloy. Through the gap in Beck's search results, Joe can envision himself as a loved object. In this light, Bonni Rambatan and Jacob Johanssen miss the point when they argue (about the TV show adaptation of *You*) that it is "the specular image that [Joe] loves, his control over this image that he is obsessed with" (115). It is what is missing from the specular image—himself—that Joe loves, and it is his lack of control over his digital desire that excites him.

Crucially, Joe's stalking of Beck is more passive than active, more controlled than controlling. Throughout *You*, Joe denigrates Beck's excessive search results as evidence that she is an "attention whore" (13) or an "exhibitionist" (16), thereby repressing his status as voyeur. With Beck appearing passively on display online, Joe reasons that she wants him to look at her, which he is more than happy to oblige. He reads Beck's digital front as feminine marketing, seeking to attract his masculine attention, thus legitimizing his scopophilia. His looking helps to feed the "hungry public part of [her] that wants to be noticed and observed" (172), an interpretation that resonates with his view of her genitalia, "the soft, hungry magnet that heaves between [her] legs" (394). Yet Joe's misogyny is a projection of his own masochistic submission to the search results. The hungry magnet imagined as belonging to Beck is his own object-cause of desire, or *objet petit a*.

Todd McGowan's critique of Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze helps explain Joe's submission to Beck. As McGowan writes, Mulvey locates the gaze "in the spectator" (*The Real* 5), in the form of "the determining male gaze project[ing] its phantasy onto the female figure" who in women's "traditional exhibitionist role" solicits this gaze "for strong visual and erotic impact" (Mulvey qtd. in *The Real Gaze* 8). By contrast, McGowan follows Lacan in locating the gaze on the side of the object being looked at. The gaze emanates from "what is lacking, is non-specular, is not graspable in the image" (Lacan qtd. in

McGowan, *The Real* 8), through which the subject initially becomes involved in the image. The gaze figures an impossible object—the *objet petit a*—through which the subject desires, signaling what is “in the Other more than the Other” (10), as McGowan paraphrases Lacan, or what is in the image more than the image. The subject’s look does not seek to master the Other, but rather submit to the Other’s mystery so that it can continue desiring. As McGowan explains, “desire has this masochistic quality because its goal is not finding its object but perpetuating itself” (9), and so what appears as the desire for mastery is the subject “trying to find another, less traumatic way of relating to its object” (11). Along these lines, Joe’s search for Beck represents a passive engagement rather than an active engagement, with Google luring him through Beck’s results in an induced state of desire. The platform helps him to avoid finding his object (the answer to the question of whether Beck desires him), which would be traumatic, as a later scene in *You* illustrates. Joe represses this masochistic element of his desire through BDSM fantasies of mastering Beck.

In a scene exemplifying the masochism of Joe’s search, he drives to Little Compton to spy on Beck’s vacation with her friend Peach. He finds “Peach’s family’s address online through a combination of an old article in *Architectural Digest* and Google Maps” (257). The ease of Joe’s digital navigation meets the perils of physical navigation, as a snowstorm and wandering deer conspire to drive his Buick off the road. Disregarding his mangled body, he is happy that his “phone is intact” (264), as it is his true source of mobility. Opening Google Maps, he finds that the accident site is “234 feet due west of Peach Salinger’s home,” a surprising proximity that inspires Joe’s reaction: “we really are destined, Beck” (264). Yet the proximity signaled by Google Maps conceals a difficult distance. Joe hobbles toward his destination through the snowstorm in “a zombie sidestep,” tracking his excruciatingly slow progress with his phone: “I’ve gone only *ten fucking feet?*” (265). Google drags Joe toward a shifting destination, with his body suffering its magnetic pull. Here, the visual field of the internet exceeds that of the cinema in facilitating the masochistic desire of the viewer, compelling Joe to pursue the luring image out into the world to the near destruction of his body. At last, Joe checks his phone and “the blue dot is on top of the red dot” (265). This overlap still conveys a separation, rendered palpable when Joe can only gaze in through the window of Peach’s place at the “scene” inside, despite his “uncontrollable urge to jump through the window and enter [Beck]” (267). Rather than enabling mastery of Beck, Google only operates to continually displace her to another scene, allowing Joe to desire masochistically, through submission to the red dot.

Joe experiences the paradox by which McGowan writes that “the more we seek the *objet petit a* through the act of exposure” in digital environments, “the further it retreats from us” (*The End* 79). Similarly, Byung-Chul Han notes how the internet’s “heroic project of transparency—wanting to tear down veils, bring everything to light, and drive away darkness” only “leads to violence” (44). This violence arrives in *You* when the Other’s non-recognition of the subject can no longer be searched away from. After kidnapping Beck and imprisoning her in a glass cage in his bookstore’s basement, he asks her in despair: “what do you want now?” The correct answer: me!” (408). Yet, Beck can only tell him that she wants to be an actress. An unsatisfying answer crowds into the empty space that Joe carved into Beck through googling. Emptying her out again, Joe proceeds to “squeeze [her] neck to make the wrong answers go away. They fester in [her] bulging eyes [and] must be choked through the bubbles of saliva that ooze from the corners of [her] gnarled mouth” (409). In Joe’s words, she has become “a monster, deathly, *solipsistic* to the bone... because *all you want is You*” (410). Joe is only speaking to his own desire, through Beck. It is only in being lifeless that Beck can fulfil her imposed role, lying “so still and all the good in [her] is in [her], beneath those eyelids, latent” (410). If the Other’s gaze cannot see Joe, it is better that the Other’s eyes be closed.

Prior to her murder, Beck points the way to the exit from the fantasmatic intersubjectivity constructed by both Joe and Google. While searching her email, Joe finds that she writes “true and beautiful” emails addressed to her ex-boyfriend Benji but “they all get stored in drafts” (68). Writing of “the enigma of the [woman’s love] letter which is written but not posted,” Žižek contends that these letters are not addressed to an actual partner, but rather their “true addressee is the gap of absence itself... which provides *jouissance*, since *jouissance* is contained in the act of writing itself, and since its true addressee is thus the writer herself” (*Less* 751). This alternative form of *jouissance* is defined by its object not existing on the other side of the screen, where the object of masculine *jouissance* must reside. As Žižek expounds, the woman’s “ultimate partner is not the other human being, her object of desire (the man), but the gap itself, that distance from her partner in which the *jouissance féminine* is located” (753). Beck’s unsent emails do not search for an addressee located behind the screen, but rather sit idle in the space of the screen or gap itself, an idleness that is more active in its pursuit of a self-relation than the passivity ingrained into Joe by Google.

### The Search Result is Coming from Inside the User

Within the search results of Japanese writer Mizuko Himura, Alice Hare is "sure there is something very deep, lying far beneath the surface, which, if disturbed, maybe even provoked, might finally come up for air" (6). By the end of Sudjic's *Sympathy*, the object of Alice's search surfaces, though in an unexpected form. Prior to this revelation, Alice stalks Mizuko on Google, with results ranging from her social media to news stories to her faculty page at NYU. She also lays "a million traps" for her, so that:

whenever she does or says anything, or anyone else does or says anything in connection with her, across whichever ocean, the name reaches me in a Google alert. Each time I reel in the net, experience rapture for about one second, and am then overcome by acute nausea. I will read without breathing, scanning to see if any of her words are about me, or secretly addressed to me, and feel a creeping mortification when nothing stands out and she slips back into the water. (6)

In stalking Mizuko, Alice's desire to possess her—for their bodies to be "snapped into alignment" (4)—runs secondary to her desire to be possessed by her. Alice desires her "way of seeing the world" (85), grasped through Mizuko's style of digital curation, as an external gaze that can be directed upon Alice herself: "I was a plain thing she [could] transfigure into something more interesting by looking at me" (85-6). Alice does not have to imagine this gaze from the Other, but rather can inhabit it, having "spent so much time looking at things through Mizuko's eyes, from her exact height or posture" (246). Nevertheless, the Other cannot be so easily externalized as Alice's fantasy suggests.

Instead, the Other and the subject are interlinked to the point that boundaries of internality and externality are unstable, signaled by the extimate structure of *objet petit a*. Lacan explains *objet petit a* through reference to the topology of the Möbius strip, in which the internal and the external sides lie on the same surface. Their coinciding cannot be grasped at the specular level by the subject, which Lacan compares to an "insect that wanders along the surface of the Möbius strip form[ing] a representation of the fact that it is a surface" with "another face that he hasn't explored" (*Seminar X* 136). As Lacan elaborates, "there isn't one," a non-existence that engenders the *objet petit a*, this "little missing piece" (136) of the Other that forever eludes the subject. With Google as her instrument, Alice displaces this missing piece into Mizuko. Her aggressive searching for Mizuko emerges from a contradiction between her object of desire's extreme online specularity, and the non-specularity of *objet petit a*. Mizuko is a feast for Alice's eyes, enhanced by taking the drug Provigil, which heightens "visual stimulus" (332), leading to long sessions of "dissect[ing] the pictorial equivalent of [Mizuko's] DNA" (76). Yet, *objet petit a* cannot be visually consumed, emanating instead from non-specular elements in a visual representation.

At one point, Alice employs the omnipotent lens of Google Earth to pan over New York, stalking Mizuko's digital presence. Gradually, she moves "down and down until [she] landed on the blades of grass and the goose dung and the dew" (400-1) of a park, a pixelated mess contrasting the previous definition of the aerial shot. Her visual movement here replicates the opening shot to David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* in which the camera drifts from an idyllic neighborhood scene observed from a distance to a close-up of the insect-ridden soil. Žižek writes that this shot displays the "contrast between reality, observed from a safe distance, and the absolute proximity of the real" ("The Lamella" 206). The way Žižek describes Lynch's camera being lured from the "establishing shot of reality" to "the disgusting substance of enjoyment, the crawling and twinkling of indestructible life" (206), can be applied here as well: Alice's zooming is driven toward finding what lies behind the digital screen, through the points of indeterminacy in the image.

In a similar scene, Alice googles images of Mizuko's apartment, and having copied them with a "screenshot," she "zoomed in as far as [she] could go before it pixelated" (256). Again, she converts a representation into indeterminacy, and the object of desire (the visual form of Mizuko) into the object-cause of desire (a formless blob). Alice ultimately identifies with this blob of pixels that can be reformulated back into a coherent image, by zooming back out. Regarding pixels, N. Katherine Hayles illuminates the overlap between the organic and the digital through the pixel's creation story, with "biology provid[ing] [John von Neumann] with clues to build computers, and computers provid[ing] clues for theoretical biology" until eventually "the massive and resistant materiality of the self-reproducing automaton" of the cell became replicated "as pixels on computer screens" (240). Alice's conversion of images of Mizuko (an external representation) into pixels (pointing to an interior dimension of the subject) illustrates the structure of fantasy, in which the subject's interiority, the massive and resistant materiality of the drives, is explored through external representations.

After "stag[ing] a collision" (246) with Mizuko in real life, the two gradually begin to become physically entangled, helped along by Alice's research into Mizuko. As Alice explains, their early conversations resemble a "Möbius band" in which Alice asks "questions with answers that [she] already knew" (204). Their physical relation pales in comparison to their digital relation. Lying in Mizuko's bed with her "body on fire," Alice describes feeling she had "gone from lover (intimate, easy in her company, despite her never knowing [she] was there) to stranger" (8). Mizuko's body, not as the "imperceptible" pores of her selfies, but as "toe-nails, gums, and vertebrae" (9), causes Alice to feel overly "close" (8) to her. Like Joe and Beck, the sexual non-relationship between two bodies underlies the fantasmatic intersubjectivity of Google. Hardness emanates from Mizuko's sleeping body, in that Alice cannot "stretch out [her] hand through her body, push it out the other side, or turn her over in [her] palm" (8). Kissing Mizuko, Alice expresses the desire "to go through" (263) Mizuko, to pass to the other side of her. Instead, their physical intimacy feels "like staring into a mirror, never actually touching the other body even though you pressed yourself against it" (262). Gone is the gap—the missing search result—in Mizuko's digital representation within which Alice's fantasy could formulate.

The narcissistic truth of Alice's cathexis onto Mizuko is apparently revealed when "look[ing] down into the dark screen" of her phone for a message from Mizuko, she sees her "own face reflected back at her" (371). Yet, *Sympathy* does not simply represent the narcissistic play of images amid the "mirrored walls" (400) of the internet. Rather, the novel represents how an intimate, bodily part of the subject is both dispersed and pursued through Google. As Stijn Vanheule writes, the *objet petit a* signals some "organic aspect of the body [that] is not entirely enveloped by the mirror image" (7). While the mirror phase involves the subject's imaginary resolution of an internal confusion with a stable, external image of themselves or another, the *objet petit a* transcends the division of internal and the external. According to Lorenzo Chiesa, it is a "real object... cut from the subject of desire... precisely what is missing from [them]" even though it is still "an object which is "in a close relationship to... the subject" (130-1). Through the proximity of Mizuko's search results, Google dominates Alice's pursuit of the *objet petit a*. Initially, Alice conceives of Google as the "reassuring, impersonal, objective... arbiter of truth," and notes that she has "no reason to mistrust the medium" (21). However, she gradually begins to suspect "some sinister controller behind it all" (87) whose desire she is "enslaved by as much as Mizuko" (335); her desire is the desire of Google. As much as she searches, she is searched for in turn: "I'd searched [Mizuko's] name enough times... that anything to do with her would seek me out without my soliciting it" (404), through algorithmic suggestion. She pursues the object, and the object pursues her, through the opened portal of Google.

Ultimately, the real *objet petit a* cannot be fully externalized, for it is internal as well. Žižek describes it as a "parasitical object [that] incessantly changes its form" due to its "anamorphic status" (*The Sublime* 86). The description recalls "the strange looping path" (5) captured by an X-ray of the parasite that Mizuko's brain becomes infected with during her relations with Alice: "a ribbon" measuring "two centimetres" and first spotted by doctors as "a strange ringlike thing" (357). Initially, Alice approaches Mizuko's parasite through the screen of Google, "search[ing] self-infected parasite" (345) due to her suspicion of the lengths Mizuko will go for a good story. Eventually, Alice identifies with the parasite, "imagin[ing] burrowing into [Mizuko], eating my way all the way up into her brain" (356). Through its affliction of encephalitis, the parasite causes memory loss in Mizuko, deleting all the time she and Alice spent together. The real of their relationship, represented by the parasite, annihilates their imaginary entanglement.

In the end, Alice and Mizuko only truly relate through mutual parasitic infection, the only form of intersubjectivity possible. Alice is lured by Mizuko to a drug-fueled orgy where she is potentially sexually assaulted. Feeling ill, Alice suspects herself of being infected with a "tapeworm" (294) and coming down with "a sympathetic form of encephalitis" (336) to Mizuko's. Yet, her parasite is singular, existing not in her brain, but in her womb. It signals the result of her relationship with Mizuko; after its appearance, Mizuko ghosts Alice. Despite being "the size of an egg" (304) when Alice visits Planned Parenthood (and therefore requiring a surgical abortion), it is as non-specular as Mizuko's parasite. Given "a scan of [her] womb, captioned with the time and date... on smooth photo paper," Alice relates that she "couldn't see anything, though [she] searched and searched" (304). Even when the parasite emerges in a flood of blood as if by its own volition, exiting "a matter of hours" before Alice was to have it surgically "suctioned out" (327), it is non-specular:

I turned to face the toilet bowl and knelt down to look at what was inside. The blood was clotted and dark at the bottom but sending up red billows like a flare that was turning all the water pink and opaque so that it became rapidly more difficult to see what was in there... I searched for images of miscarriage online—kneeling by the toilet, gripping the ceramic with my free hand in order to try to stop my shaking—and then used the

toothbrush holder to scoop out the pink water and transfer it carefully into the sink with the plug down. I worked meticulously and calmly, using my hands as a sieve, until I found what I was looking for. (325)

Afterwards, she describes what she has found, the search result at the bottom of the toilet bowl, as "the tiny, fleshy part of me [she] had saved... the rich red sashimi [she] had salvaged" which "as [she] held it, it appeared to move, then to shrink and curl up at the edges like one of those fortune fish" (326-7). She "looked for bones [but] couldn't see anything remotely human, and yet [she] felt a kind of kinship [she] had never felt before" (327). Cradling its form, "it became increasingly leathery and indestructible-looking" (327). Alice seals it in an envelope to dispose of it, yet cannot bring herself to, keeping it in this sealed envelope addressed to no one, like Beck's love letters. Compared to the intersubjective space of Google in which Alice attempts to lose the *objet petit a*, the non-relational aspect of the *objet petit a* comes to the forefront in this scene.

What Alice finds bears a strong resemblance to Lacan's myth of the lamella, described by Richard Boothby as "a part of oneself that has become alien" (64). The lamella emerges from Lacan's challenge to Aristophanes' theory of love, in which Lacan articulates "the search by the subject" as not being oriented toward "the sexual complement, but [rather] the part of [themselves], lost forever" (*Seminar XI* 205). Lacan elaborates on this part through the lamella myth, a "false organ" (196) representing "indestructible life" (198), the enigmatic kin-object to the human subject that is the drive. Where Alice sought to find the precious *agalma*, there is the horrifying lamella. Boothby defines the lamella as a by-product of the subject's encounter with the Other, a leftover which "is nevertheless active and seeking" (64). While searching on Google feels like an active affair for the subject, the user is ultimately shackled to the lamella's search; the result searches for users rather than the other way around. As Žižek explains, the lamella figures "an Otherness prior to intersubjectivity" to which the subject is bound in an "impossible' relationship" (*Tarrying* 180). It is this impossibility that opens the possibility of digital intersubjectivity.

### **Conclusion: There Is No Ethical Intersubjectivity under Psychoanalysis**

A more recent, non-fiction example of digital stalking, Becca Rothfield's 2021 essay "My Year of Stalking Rachel," illuminates historical shifts in stalking behavior, as well as implications for intersubjectivity more broadly. Rothfield recounts aggressively Googling her ex-boyfriend's new girlfriend Rachel, "scroll[ing] through all twenty pages of search results," uncovering music playlists, social media comments, college graduation photos, secret family pancake recipes, 5km running times, etc. While Rothfield's behavior might appear excessive, it typical of the social media era, in which "the point of all our posting and all our talking is only to mask our stalking," with all of Rothfield's friends having "Rachels of their own." Rothfield is not so much interested in Rachel as in figuring out her ex-boyfriend's desire for Rachel, viewing all the search results "through the lens of his interest in her, which was palpable as a residue." While Joe and Alice picture themselves as the object of the Other's desire, Rothfield's fantasy involves another as object of the Other's desire. In Freudian terms, Joe and Alice are being googled by their father, while Rothfield's father is googling someone else. Ultimately, both involve the fantasmatic rendering of the Other's desire, through the act of search.

For Rothfield, Rachel's results offer an enigma necessitating interpretation, with her "mild and milky" appearance anathema to her ex's "red-eyed and restless" yearning. From the mass of materials that Google hands over to Rothfield, she "piece[s] together," "decode[s]," and "interpret[s]," producing a conspiracy theory of desire through a nightly labor of "sweating and scrolling." Relevantly, McGowan states that "capitalism creates a singular focus on the desire of the Other in a way that no prior socioeconomic system has," orientating "subjects who dedicate themselves to the interpretation of this desire" (*Capitalism* 42). While McGowan understands this interpretation being carried out through "learning about the lives of Hollywood stars, or following the movements of famous sports figures" (42), social media turns all users into micro-celebrities, allowing for their movements in life to be tracked by followers, and opening them to investigations concerning their desire. What McGowan calls the "chain of interpretation [with] no endpoint" (43) through which desire intersubjectively emerges is concretized by Google, at whose nether regions a sublime object lurks: knowledge of the Other's desire. As Ed Finn notes, algorithms of platforms like Google "encode a particular kind of abstraction, the abstraction of the desire for an answer" (25), matching the impetus of fantasy, in seeking to provide an answer to the Other's desire.

In this way, the subject's intrapsychic conflict with the Other becomes transformed into an algorithmic labyrinth. The process is similar to Alenka Zupančič's description of how "power—and particularly modern forms of power—works by first appropriating a fundamental negativity of the symbolic order, its constitutive non-relation," meaning between the subject and the Other, "while



building it into a narrative of a higher Relation," thereby enacting a "privatization of the negative" (31). The perfect environment for this process involves not the creation of a narrative, but rather Google's database of relations between user and results, in which the search engine's deep address installs what Benjamin Bratton calls "a space of *relationality* between things" or between people as things "that exceeds the relations they might already possess as natural objects" (205). Moving through this database, subjects can write their own narratives, a process which relies on and contributes to the expanding infrastructure of digital capitalism, while avoiding the intractable non-relation.

The complicated status of the Other is revealed in Rothfield's story about digital stalking, as well as its inability to be visually handled through Google. Rothfield contends that what "distinguishes online stalking from its dangerous, 'IRL' analogue is that no online stalker wants to meet, much less seduce or harm or abduct, the object of her obsession" since "the online stalker aspires to remain invisible at all costs." This description of digital stalking appears as the opposite to Meloy's stalking fantasy, as if it were the inside-out version. Yet, read together, the two fantasies illustrate the complicated status of the subject in relation to the Other, caught between a desire for visibility and a desire for invisibility, which fuels all intersubjectivity. While Joe and Alice struggle to deal with their invisibility to the Other, Rothfield struggles to deal with her visibility to the Other. Rothfield recounts creating "fake Instagrams ('Finstas') in order to lurk undetected" but even then [she] felt exposed, like someone leaning too far out a window." Near the end, she begins to suspect that "Rachel was seeing me when I did not know I was an object of sight." Though at times she was "so still and so quiet" in her viewing of Rachel, that she might have "disappeared altogether," her essay closes mysteriously with the line that "maybe the Rachel I couldn't see could watch me even then." Through the aspect of others that the subject cannot see, the Other's gaze follows the subject, as if stalking their every movement. All our stalking is only meant to mask this truth. While Meloy's real-life stalkers aspire toward visibility, and reduce intrapsychic conflict to intersubjective relations, digital stalkers like Rothfield aspire toward invisibility, and reduce intersubjective relations to intrapsychic conflict. Joe and Alice's hybrid stalking (both digital and in real life) serves as a vanishing mediator by which to observe this transformation in intersubjectivity and the subject's relation to the Other caused by Google.

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