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Clothing, Law and the Institution of the Subject's Internal Normativity

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Abstract: Gender Studies have shown that gender is a social construct. In the paper, I argue that gender as a social construct should not hide its “Real” dimension: social constructs participate in what Lacan calls the Real. In this perspective, gender is conceived as a symptom built by the subject to protect itself against castration. The subject is therefore tied to its gender as it is tied to its symptom – in the psychoanalytical sense. It builds the image of gender in order to be able to enter in a relationship with the Other. In other words, the imaginization of gender makes possible – paradoxically – for the subject to access the impossibility of a sexual relationship. Gender is therefore the result of the imaginization of castration. Whereas the psychoanalytical reading has often been interpreted – especially in Gender Studies – through a structuralist view, I argue that the psychoanalytical approach to the construction of gender does not contradict its social determination. However, one may stress that social determination according to psychoanalysis cannot but be introduced by the symptom, that is by the subject itself and through the fantasied construction of its relationship with the Other. I suggest to read this psychoanalytical interpretation of gender with the notion of the institution as developed by Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty's view of the institution is particularly relevant here for two reasons. First it overcomes the opposition between the subject and the social which are both instituted and instituting at the same time. Second, Lacan's theory of *sinthome* which reads the symptom in terms of sexual relationship implicitly refers to Merleau-Ponty's notion of the institution. I will show to what extent the Merleau-Pontian notion of the institution helps to conceive of the Real in gender understood as an intertwining of social and subjective construct. I claim that this view overcomes both a structuralist approach – which represses the historicity of the social – and a view which represses the function of gender in the subject's construction and its symptom.

Keywords: Clothes, Law, Cultural Normativity, Merleau-Ponty, Lacan, Castoriadis

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This essay develops the hypothesis that the way the subject relates to clothing and law originates in one and the same process: the *institution* of the subject's internal normativity, as will be defined in the essay referring to both Castoriadis and Merleau-Ponty.

First and foremost, this argumentation draws a parallel between the internalization of the necessity to wear clothes and the internalization of a sense of law.¹ Clothing characterizes the possibility of living together in society and implies to some extent the internalization of external principles such as social and cultural codes. It is not uncommon – to say the least – that people find their own general way of dressing more “normal” and “acceptable” than other ways pertaining to other cultural social groups or subgroups. Because clothing goes with social codes – most often unconscious as such – they go with a sense of normativity, which implies an internalization allowing the individual to appropriate the external codes. In this regard, clothing can be compared to law as social fact, which needs to be understood both as an internal principle and as an external principle imposed on the individual. The respect of law implies that the individual chooses to obey, which means that the external principle has to be internalized, at least to some extent. It so happens that the individual chooses or refuses to obey an interdiction.

The parallel drawn between clothing and law relies on the idea that both are social facts that can be considered – and are to some extent – external to the individual. Yet they rely on a process of internalization in the subject. This essay investigates how this internalization operates in order to explore the double meaning of the *fashionable subject*: how is the subject *fashioning* its own individual norms and to what extent is the subject *fashioned* by external norms?

In the first part of the essay, I discuss two examples that show the close relationship between law and clothing and bring the theme of the internalization of external social norms that I explore from a psychoanalytical perspective. In the second part, I develop how this internalization originates in the psychic construction of the *subject*,² arguing that both the genesis of law and that of clothing stem from the construction of the specular image of the ego, as

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¹ To investigate the parallel between law and clothing, see from a different perspective: Gary Watt “Law Suits: Clothing as the Image of Law,” in *Visualizing Law and Authority*, ed. Leif Dahlberg (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 27: “For the same social and cultural forces which compel us to dress, compel us also to make and obey laws.”

² In the essay, I will use the word “subject” in a psychoanalytical sense. This sense can be opposed to both the philosophical interpretations of the subject since Descartes and to a legal meaning of the subject as being subjected to the law. The psychoanalytical subject is not the conscious subject but it implies however a form of freedom regarding norms, rules and law.

investigated by Lacan. In the third part, I explore the meaning of the internalization of social rules as internalization of the gaze of the Other – in the Lacanian sense – configuring the relation between the individual and the social.

1 Law of clothing and society

The strong links between clothing, personal intimacy and society are striking. Individuals have different relationships to dressing and undressing, clothing and nudity. These individual roots of the relationship to clothing also depend on the society or community to which one belongs. This becomes particularly visible through intercultural experiences. For instance the use of a French or Italian public swimming pool by a person from a Nordic country and vice-versa will challenge both their perception of when the naked body should be hidden. In the dressing room in a Nordic public swimming pool, one is expected to shower naked in an open non-individual shower space. In a French or Italian swimming pool, however, there is no such rule because being naked even in the lady's room – for a woman – or in the man's room – for a man – is not generally accepted. You will therefore typically find private cabins to change as well as shower spaces offering privacy. In fact, those who shower naked in the open shower space – when there is one – might very well be frowned upon. In both cases the public swimming pool configures a space which institutes a nudity politics that is both explicit – rules written on the walls – and implied by the design of the space itself – providing private cabins or not. In the background there is of course the cultural differences which influence what is accepted or not in both cases: the rules governing nudity are in keeping with the cultural background. But the cultural rules are also internalized by the individual. In fact, most often these rules are considered “normal” and seem invisible. Only someone who has internalized other rules will in fact notice that they are *rules*. The individual who moves from one cultural system to another might find it more or less difficult to adapt because these rules concern very intimate matters. This example reveals the strong connection between the rules of intimacy internalized by the individual subject and the rules of clothing that can be imposed on everyone in society, through various rules and laws regulating public places.

The laws regulating clothing sometimes raise very strong passions. This was the case with the French law prohibiting wearing *niqab* in public spaces, which was promulgated in 2010. The discussions of the law raised passionate debates in society despite the fact that not many women actually wear a *niqab*

in France.³ Some of those who defended the law argued that forbidding the *niqab* was a way of defending women, which were considered as forced to hide their body and face behind a cloth in order to fit the requirements of male domination. Thus a law against *niqab* was supposed to support the equality between men and women in the French Muslim community,⁴ and many political actors seem to present feminism as an important tool of integration into French society.⁵

One can note however that Feminist associations were strongly divided on this question. Whereas some of them – the most well-known and advertised in mass media being the association “Ni putes, ni soumises”⁶ – defended the law prohibiting *niqab*, others argued that the feminist stand was in fact a shallow veil to hide the racism that pertained to it.⁷ The latter argued that women should not be told by anyone what they should wear and that the law would have as effect that these women would stay at home, preventing them *de facto* from being able to integrate into French society.

The importance of this law in the French political debate has to be understood within a particular political context and related to the French interpretation of laicity. But one can also make the hypothesis that its importance for French political actors and citizens – despite the small number of women wearing *niqab* – reveals the intertwining between the laws that regulate clothing in society and the internalized and implicit rules and norms in the individual. Within society some dressing codes are well accepted, others are somehow tolerated and some are sometimes frowned upon or even contested. This law shows that citizens are not only concerned by what they can or cannot wear but also by what they accept other citizens wearing; that is, what they accept or not to *look at*. A Muslim woman wearing a veil or a *niqab* can have

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3 Before discussing the law, the Parliament had evaluated the number of women wearing *niqab* in France to be around 1900.

4 When the European Court of Human Rights confirmed the French Law, a previous Minister tweeted “Merci à la @CEDH d’avoir validé notre loi sur le voile et ainsi affirmé l’égalité indissociable du pacte républicain entre hommes et femmes.”

5 The instrumentalisation of feminism in political speeches on immigration has been studied for instance in: Pierre Tévanian, *La République du mépris. Les métamorphoses du racisme dans la France des années Sarkozy* (Paris: La découverte, 2007).

6 “Neither whores, nor slaves.”

7 On the relation between migration politics and the role of feminist association, one can read: Sandrine Durand, “Politique migratoire et instrumentalisation de la question du genre en contexte post-colonial. Le cas des ‘mariages forcés’,” *REVUE Asylon(s), Institutionnalisation de la xénophobie en France* 4 (2008), accessed July 27, 2014, <http://www.reseau-terra.eu/article737.html>.

difficulty to be respected in an occidental country because of her clothing,⁸ but an occidental woman will encounter similar difficulties in a Muslim country if she wears for instance a décolletage or a short skirt. One could say that laws and rules regarding how people⁹ should dress in a society have to be supported by individual conceptions that are both formed by and participating to the social discourse in which they originate. These individual conceptions stem from a process of internalization. The internal sense of law and the internal sense of clothing both proceed from the internalization of social rules. The question raised is therefore that of the encounter between the individual and the social rules that are primarily encountered as external: how does the individual internal life come to make certain external codes, rules and laws his own – or not?

From a psychoanalytical perspective this question raises a paradox since the individual primarily follows principles that are to some extent incompatible with the social. What defines the individual from a Freudian standpoint is the specific development of drives, both being shaped by and shaping the subject's personal history and interaction with others. Far from being mechanical or even natural, the infant's drives develop primarily in relation to the caregiver who handles its body and provides its needs. The drives are not to be mastered or controlled by the subject. But the subject, even as an infant, is already an actor in the relationship to the caregiver. These drives support the subject's desire. For instance, developing a strong oral or anal drive will therefore strongly influence – but not determine – the subject's objects of desire. The drives develop through social interactions and are in fact social in this particular sense but they pursue an aim that is ultimately incompatible with not only other individual drives but also with society as such. The drives trigger the subject's attempt at satisfying

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⁸ Here let's quote a caricature view presented in a French satirical and supposedly humorous monthly journal called *Siné*, on June, 5, 2013. *Siné*, founder of the journal, comments on women wearing *niqab*: “Je n'arrive pas à les considérer comme des femmes normales avec qui je pourrais deviser, plaisanter et encore moins flirter.” One translation could be: “I cannot consider them as normal women with whom I could chat or make jokes and even less flirt.” The whole article – which is not only insulting to women wearing *niqab* but also to women in general, accessed July 27, 2014, <http://www.sinemensuel.com/zone-de-sine/mini-zone-du-5-juin-2013/>.

⁹ I set aside here the question of the difference of treatments of men and women regarding these kinds of issues. Silvia Naef, Professor of Arabic and Muslim cultures at the University of Geneva, argues for instance that the Western obsession to un-veil Muslim women hides the desire to possess them. Cf her interview: Matthieu Mégevand, “Pourquoi le voile pose-t-il problème?,” in *Le Monde des Religions* (April 14, 2011), accessed July 27, 2014, http://www.lemondedesreligions.fr/actualite/pourquoi-le-voile-pose-t-il-probleme-14-04-2011-1447_118.php.

them, encountering primarily society as an obstacle. One can note for instance that the discourse of society implies a certain taming of individual drives. This appears perhaps the more clearly in the sphere of sexual practices: different societies chose to approve or disapprove of certain sexual practices that are displaying sexual drives that the social represses – both in the psychoanalytical sense and in the strong sense of the English word. This finds embodiments in law: some countries prohibit homosexuality, some exclude homosexual marriages, etc. This type of social repression of the individual drives will to some extent be incorporated by the individual. One cannot ignore for instance the difficulty of being homosexual in a Western country: the individual incorporates to some extent the social discourse on homosexuality and heterosexuality which construct the latter as a norm – want it or not. But from a broader perspective, all individuals meet in the society normativities that they are forced to deal with and that most often end up inhibiting their drives. As a matter of fact this accounts for an important part of human suffering.¹⁰ Beyond specific examples, this means that repression in the individual is partly shaped by a certain internalization of (the) social discourse(s). Repression should not be understood as a purely individual process, on the contrary it builds on and incorporates the social, precisely because the social is primarily encountered as an obstacle to the individual drives.

These limitations that the individual encounters through culture (*Kultur*) should not be understood as something that are necessarily always bad in themselves.¹¹ Not only are the drives in themselves necessarily selfish and blindly pursuing the individual satisfaction against any other interest, but also pursuing the satisfaction of the drives is to lead to the destruction of both the

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10 Freud indicates that neurotics suffer from the sexual renunciation imposed by culture to the individual. “Psychoanalytic work has shown us that it is precisely these frustrations of sexual life which people known as neurotics cannot tolerate. The neurotic creates substitutive satisfactions for himself in his symptoms, and these either cause him suffering in themselves or become sources of suffering for him by raising difficulties in his relations with his environment and the society he belongs to.” In Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930) (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1961), 108. On the relation between individual symptoms and collective discourses in Freud, one can read: Paul-Laurent Assoun, *Freud et les Sciences Sociales* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1993).

11 For instance, Freud notes that culture results in Justice and Law: “This replacement of the power of the individual by the power of the community constitutes the decisive step of civilization. The essence of it lies in the fact that the members of the community restrict themselves in their possibilities of satisfaction, whereas the individual knew no such restrictions. The first requisite of civilization, therefore, is that of justice – that is, the assurance that law once made will not be broken in favour of an individual. This implies nothing as to the ethical value of such a law.” Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 95.

individual and society through the death drive.¹² There is no total satisfaction of the drive, according to Freud, which makes this quest impossible in itself and only leads to the liberation of a raging death drive.¹³ Because the experience of obstacles to the satisfaction of the drive arouses the death drive, it is also in the interest of the individual to tame his own drives, which at best occurs through the process of sublimation.¹⁴

In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud opposes drives and civilization (*Kultur*): the latter cannot but rely on the “modifications” of the first.¹⁵ Freud’s concept of *Kultur*, translated by civilization or culture, implies an idea of progress.¹⁶ The encounter of the individual subject with the social results in

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12 This is the meaning of the death drive in *Civilization and its Discontents*. In this text from 1930, Freud notes: “The fateful question for the human species seems to me to be whether and to what extent their cultural development will succeed in mastering the disturbance of their communal life by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction.” Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 145.

13 Freud here hesitates: is it culture that imposes a renunciation or is this renunciation inherent to the function of the drives? “Sometimes one seems to perceive that it is not only the pressure of civilization but something in the nature of the function itself which denies us full satisfaction and urges us along other paths. This may be wrong; it is hard to decide.” Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 105. One can note here a decisive step from Freud to Lacan: for the latter, it is even clearer that, the drives are to miss their full satisfaction. In this sense, the renunciation is imposed by the nature of the drives but the *modalities* of renunciation belong to a specific social context.

14 Sublimation has to be distinguished from the process of repression: in repression, the drive is only retained and concealed whereas sublimation enables a form of drive discharge, for instance through art.

15 Freud defines *Kultur* as a process relying on modifications of drive predispositions in humans. He indicates that these modifications can be displacements or sublimation of the drive through cultural achievements. “[...] we cannot fail to be struck by the similarity between the process of civilization and the libidinal development of the individual. Other instincts [besides anal erotism] are induced to displace the conditions for their satisfaction, to lead them into other paths. In most cases this process coincides with that of the *sublimation* (of instinctual aims) with which we are familiar, but it can be differentiated from it. Sublimation of instinct is an especially conspicuous feature of cultural development; it is what makes it possible for higher psychical activities, scientific, artistic or ideological, to play such an important part in civilized life.” Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 97. But he adds “[...] finally, and this seems the most important of all, it is impossible to overlook the extent to which civilization is built up upon a renunciation of instinct, how much it presupposes precisely the non-satisfaction (by suppression, repression or some other means?) of powerful instincts.” Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 97.

16 Freud defines the word *Kultur* as such: “We will content ourselves with saying once more that the word ‘civilization’ [*Kultur*] describes the whole sum of the achievements and the regulations which distinguish our lives from those of our animal ancestors and which serve two purposes – namely to protect men against nature and to adjust their mutual relations.” Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 89.

the possibility of *cultural progress*. This process does not only rely on repression but also on sublimation.¹⁷ Becoming civilized implies to some extent becoming able to live together with others inside a society and will require the subject to either repress or find strategies to moderate its own individual drives. The subject can find ways to emancipate from its drives through sublimation, for instance through art, music, etc.. The drives must, at the very least, be transformed in the sublimation process because the subject's individual drives are not accepted by society in their original and totally untamed form. But the drives cannot be fully sublimated, implying that the individual cannot fully shape his drives to match the social. There remains a hiatus between the individual and the social, which is why *civilization goes along with repression*.

If so, one can assume that clothing which is a creation of civilization (*Kultur*) also goes along with repression. Although one will not find a thematisation of clothing in Freud's work, the function of clothing as concealment has drawn his attention. One primary aim of the piece of clothes is indeed to conceal the body and primarily to conceal the genitals. Clothing organizes, Freud says: "The progressive concealment of the body which goes along with civilization."¹⁸ The function of concealing the body gives to clothing a particular role in the development of civilization (*Kultur*). Our rules and conventions regarding clothing can be understood both as the internalization of a modality of repression and as a certain approach to repression in society. Indeed one can speak about collective repression or social repression in the sense that individuals living together in a same society will tend to share the same answers to the hiatus between the individual drives and the demands of society. This hiatus constitutes a fundamental question not only for the individual but in turn for society: how can society deal with the individual drives? In the *Imaginary Institution of Society* (1975), Castoriadis explains that the way one society answers to its "fundamental questions" constitutes its imaginary.¹⁹ In this sense, the implicit collective norms that a society builds to make

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¹⁷ This process presupposes the process of sublimation which has to be distinguished from the process of repression: in repression, the drive is only retained and concealed whereas sublimation enables a form of drive discharge, for instance through art.

¹⁸ Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953), 7, 156–157.

¹⁹ "Toute société jusqu'ici a essayé de donner une réponse à quelques questions fondamentales: qui sommes-nous, comme collectivité? que sommes-nous, les uns pour les autres? où et dans quoi sommes-nous? que voulons-nous, que désirons-nous, qu'est-ce qui nous manque? La société doit définir son 'identité'; son articulation; le monde, ses rapports à lui et aux objets qu'il contient; ses besoins et ses désirs. Sans la 'réponse' à ces 'questions', sans ces 'définitions', il n'y a pas de monde humain, pas de société et pas de culture – car tout resterait chaos indifférencié. Le rôle des significations imaginaires est de fournir une

possible the co-existence of the individuals' drives can be understood as belonging to the imaginary institution of society, as defined by Castoriadis.²⁰ The meaning of the institution is historical: the institution accounts for the historical genetic processes shaping a society. Castoriadis' understanding of the institution has been very much influenced by Merleau-Ponty. The institution in Merleau-Ponty is also instituted through this process of answering questions: the historical movement from one institution to another can be understood precisely as a shift in the answering.²¹ Exploring the historical implications of the institution, Merleau-Ponty insisted on its two-sided historicity, relying on both a passive and an active meaning: the institution is both *instituted* and *instituting*,²² thereby defining a complex net of circular causalities. In this sense, the imaginary modalities of repression in one society can be understood as both instituted by and instituting society. In other words, they are fully part of the institution of society. Therefore one can interpret the rules of clothing in a society as stemming from the imaginary modalities of repression that pertain to the institution of society, by which it answers to the hiatus between the demands of the collective and those of the individuals. What is most interesting in Castoriadis' reinterpretation of the notion of institution is that, by bringing together the institution with the notion of the imaginary, in particular through "the radical imaginary,"²³ Castoriadis insists on the irrationality and the unconscious of the genetic processes participating to the institution of society. Society does not answer to questions that have been explicitly formulated or articulated in any way. Rather it answers to questions that are implicit

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réponse à ces questions, réponse que, de toute évidence, ni la 'réalité' ni la 'rationalité' ne peuvent fournir [...]." Cornelius Castoriadis, *L'Institution imaginaire de la société* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), 221.

20 Exploring the meaning of puberty as institution, Merleau-Ponty notes: "Elle reprend toujours une institution préalable, qui a posé une question, i. e. qui était son anticipation – et qui a échoué. Elle réactive ce problème et elle en réunit enfin les données dans [une] totalité centrée autrement. Institué [veut dire] segment d'une histoire." Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L'institution/La passivité, Notes de cours au Collège de France (1954–1955)* (Tours: Belin, 2003), 58.

21 It has been mostly explored and elaborated in Merleau-Ponty, *L'institution/La passivité, Notes de cours au Collège de France (1954–1955)*.

22 For instance: "Donc [il y a] sujet institué et instituant, mais inséparablement [...]." Merleau-Ponty, *L'institution/La Passivité, Notes de cours au Collège de France (1954–1955)*, 35.

23 "L'histoire est impossible et inconcevable en dehors de l'imagination productive ou créatrice, de ce que nous avons appelé l'imaginaire radical tel qu'il se manifeste à la fois et indissolublement dans le faire historique, et dans la constitution, avant toute rationalité explicite, d'un univers de significations." Castoriadis, *L'Institution Imaginaire de la Société*, 220.

and – one could say – unconscious, through its own activity as a society, in its “doing.”²⁴ In this sense, the repression of drives can be understood as part of what shapes the imaginary dimension of the institution of society: the social modalities of repression are answers “in doing” to the fundamental question of the hiatus between the social and the individual.

It follows that the repression of drives will take various forms, depending on the society and its imaginary. And hence the different parts of the body that should be covered by clothes, depending on the specificity of the place – swimming pool, open public place, and so on – will change in different societies as well as in different historical periods. However, it should be emphasized that the internalization of repression is an individual process, which relies on the most intimate relation a subject can have to its body. In other words, repression is always ultimately an individual process, but this individual process can only find its possible expressions in the imaginary institution of society. Hence a foreigner migrating to a Nordic country might have difficulty with the local social rules all life long, in the same way as the woman wearing a *niqab* might have great difficulty to abandon it from one day to another just because of a new law. The law which people obey in such cases is not the law of the state – which is external – but their internal law, the one by which *they* are related to society according to *their* psychic life, which is the one that configures their repression.

2 The function of concealing in the structure of desire and its relation to law

The question that psychoanalysis raises is precisely that of the internal law that a subject constitutes for itself through repression. The internal law is

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²⁴ “Les questions ne sont même pas posées préalablement aux réponses. La société se constitue en faisant émerger une réponse de fait à ces questions dans sa vie, dans son activité.” Castoriadis, *L’institution imaginaire de la société*, 221. One can add that this interpretation is not necessarily contradictory with Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of the institution, though his relations with psychoanalysis have been more complex. In Merleau-Ponty, the institution is not visible or explicit as such, rather, it participates to a “field,” that has a plurality of dimensions, that can never fully be known as such. See for instance: Merleau-Ponty, *L’institution/La passivité, Notes de cours au Collège de France (1954–1955)*, 58. About the relation between Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of the flesh and psychoanalysis, see: Guy-Félix Duportail, *Les Institutions du Monde de la Vie, Merleau-Ponty et Lacan* (Grenoble: Million, 2008); Isabelle Letellier, “Le Réel et la non-altérité de l’Autre. Lacan avec Merleau-Ponty”, *Chiasmi International* 17 (2015), 133–145.

internalized by the subject through a process of internalization. But it is nevertheless most often ignored by the subject itself, like rules or laws can become invisible to one who is used to them and never had to question them for what they are. I will now examine how the individual structuring of desire configures both modalities of body-concealment and law – as internal principle – and show how they are both intimately intertwined. In Lacan's view, the internalization of the sense of law is intertwined with the structuring of desire: "the norm of desire and law are one and the same thing."²⁵ This simply means that the subject's internal law is the one that unconsciously circumscribes and limits its desire. From a psychoanalytical standpoint, the law – in the sense of the possibility of law as principle – is internalized by the subject through the structuring of desire.

Developing the process of specular identification through his optic schema, Lacan shows that the norm of desire participates in the structuring of the body as body image. The body image implies a division between visible and invisible that creates a certain fantasy of something concealed. Lacan elaborates his optic schema to account for the constitution of the body image that the infant perceives as a whole: it is first with the mirror stage – between six and eighteen months – that the infant becomes aware of its body as a unified whole.²⁶ Lacan is trying to explain the psychic process which makes possible for the subject to relate to its own body image. In the optic schema in *On Anxiety*, Lacan theorizes specifically how the object *a* is produced through the specular process.²⁷ As will appear in the argument, the object *a* is key to our question because it is precisely what embodies the body-concealing politics and what constitutes the norm of desire. It constitutes thereby the law, since as mentioned, in Lacan's view, the norm of desire and the law – understood as the internal condition of law – are "one and the same thing." Before we enter the core of the argument, let us recall first the general definition that Lacan gives of the object *a*: it is the object which causes desire because paradoxically it limits desire. In other words, the object *a* in fact designates castration, that is the impossibility of total satisfaction. The name "object *a*" symbolizes the first object of satisfaction that the subject is bound to seek for. But it is also an object that can never be reached, despite the infinite series of metonymization – objects *b*, *c*, *d*, *e*, *f*, *g*, etc. – through which the subject tries to find the object *a*.

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²⁵ Jacques Lacan, *L'Angoisse*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: PUF, 2004), 232 ["[...] la norme du désir et la loi sont une seule et même chose."].

²⁶ In Freudian terms, the body image here corresponds to the secondary narcissism.

²⁷ Lacan, *L'Angoisse*, 49–53.

The object *a* participates for this reason both in the constitution of the subject's internal law as and in that of the norm of desire. Lacan's optic schema shows that the object *a* emerges from the imaginary process²⁸ through which an illusionary body image is produced. This illusionary body image is in fact what Lacan paradoxically calls the "real image"²⁹ because this image appears to the subject *as real*, although it is only a retrospective illusion – in other words, a fantasy – that never can be seen as such. The "real image" remains invisible. The production of the object *a* is precisely situated by Lacan in the "real image." The illusion of the "real image" requires the object *a* to be complete. Just like the "real image," the object *a* is an illusion participating in the fantasy. The subject can only reach the object *a* "through some detours or artifice,"³⁰ Lacan says, that is through the production of the fantasy of the subject's "real image."³¹

The object *a* appears as key to clothing because it is what configures the concealment in the illusionary "real image." How does this concealment of the object *a* configure the object of desire for the subject? By definition, the object, which arouses desire only *appears* to the subject as what is withdrawn from its sight and thus as what is *concealed*. This concealing is in fact part of the subject's fantasy since the object *a* does not really exist: the object of desire that Lacan calls object *a* and which organizes sexuality only appears to the subject as being concealed and never to be seen. The illusionary "real image" and the object *a* which emerges from it "support the function of desire," Lacan says.³² In other words, the object *a* is what

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28 The notion of the imaginary in Lacan is generally distinguished from that of the imaginary in Castoriadis. However an understanding of the imaginary in Lacan that does not oppose the imaginary and the symbolic, seems to be less easily contradicting Castoriadis' efforts to understand how the imaginary shapes the symbolic. This understanding can be found in the late thought of Lacan, when the imaginary, the symbolic and the real are articulated together in the borromean knots. In my view the symbolic cannot and should not be isolated from the imaginary. This reading opens for a more fully integration of the imaginary in Castoriadis and in Lacan. This paper obviously sketches such a direction. See Isabelle Letellier, "Du signifiant à l'inconscient comme béance. Lacan contre le structuralisme vers Merleau-Ponty," *Revue roumaine de philosophie* 1 (2016) forthcoming.

29 In *L'Angoisse*, Lacan defines the "real image" as "image du corps fonctionnant dans le matériel du sujet proprement imaginaire, c'est-à-dire libidinalisée." Lacan, *L'Angoisse*, 50.

30 Lacan, *L'Angoisse*, 52.

31 One can add that the use of the vase to stand for the body image on both sides of the schema is meant to embody the drive circuitry: the drive circuitry goes around the orifices (anal, oral,...) and this trajectory is endless, producing the impossibility of its total satisfaction. The object *a* can be understood as the object of that impossible satisfaction of the drive. The vase stands for the hole of the drive.

32 Lacan, *L'Angoisse*, 52.

keeps desire awake because it is inaccessible, like the concealment of the body keeps sexuality awake. Just like repression will not suppress the repressed, concealing will certainly not annihilate the concealed. The repressed elements keep coming back in the guise of the “return of the repressed,” its most famous form being the Freudian slip. If concealing the body through clothing aims at *covering*, and thus *repressing*, the subject's sexuality – that is from a Freudian viewpoint its drives – this does certainly not annihilate the covered sexuality it aims at covering. On the contrary, the genital concealment obeys a paradoxical vicissitude: far from separating the subject from genital sexuality, it arouses it, as Freud stresses: “The progressive concealment of the body” indeed “keeps sexual curiosity awake.”³³ To maintain sexual curiosity it is necessary that the body is concealed to a certain extent. Nudity is appealing only because it is – or ought to be – concealed. Would everybody be naked, nudity would become non sexual and thus stop arousing sexual curiosity. Therefore, as repression paradoxically constitutes the sexuality it is supposed to repress, the concealment of the naked body paradoxically constitutes it as sexual.

But in what sense does the object *a* configure the subject's body-concealing politics? To answer this question, one needs to understand the relation between the object *a* and castration as it appears through the specular image. Castration, that is what limits desire, is encountered at the place of the object *a* in the body-image that the subject actually sees in the mirror and which Lacan calls “virtual image”.³⁴ Whereas the “real image” is a retrospective, fantasy illusion purely constructed by the subject, the “virtual image” is the actual image the subject grasps in the mirror. What I see when I look at myself in the mirror can be very different from reality but also from the fantasy-image I have of myself. What I see in the mirror is neither how I look objectively nor how I wish I should look according to my fantasy “real-image.” For instance, it is very common to be disappointed by this actual image. There is a hiatus between the fantasy “real-image” and the “virtual image” and this is because castration only becomes visible in the “virtual image.”

Since there is no image of the object *a*, it can only be fantasied in the illusionary “real image” and never seen in the mirror. As a result where I expect

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33 Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 156–157.

34 Lacan opposes “virtual image” that is noted *i'(a)* in the optical schema to the “real image” that is noted *i(a)*. He indicates “Ce que l'homme a en face de lui n'est jamais que l'image virtuelle, *i'(a)*, de ce que je représentais dans mon schéma par *i(a)*.” Lacan, *L'Angoisse*, 52. This means that the image one sees in the mirror is the “virtual image” and this image of itself that is actually seen by the subject is built on the “real image” which is in lacanian terms the imaginary image that is, strictly speaking, the libidinalised body-image.

to see the object *a* in the mirror, I will only be able to see its absence through various imaginary figures of castration. Castration is encountered in my body-image as the absence of the object *a*. In that sense, one can consider the retrospective illusionary “real image” as a screen disguising the body to conceal its castration to the subject. Beyond the *screen* of the retrospective illusionary “real image,” only castration can be met in the mirror in the place where the object *a* is expected.

This shows us another possible meaning of concealment of clothing: hiding the body and in particular hiding the genitals can mean hiding the castration that I encounter through my image in the mirror, the “virtual image.” The most common dream that shows this is that of going out or going to work without one’s clothes on when it is associated with a strong feeling of shame.³⁵ This feeling of shame reveals that the absence of clothes here stands for the absence of *concealment* of the body, which in itself is an experience of castration in that it breaks the *screen* of my illusionary “real image.” From this standpoint clothing can be considered as what constitutes the screen of the illusionary “real image.” From a broader perspective, fashion can be viewed as an aesthetisation of the body-image used to hide one’s own castration, or the other’s castration.

From this viewpoint, one can understand that one’s perception of what part of the body should or should not be hidden depends on the imaginary constitution of the object *a* in the illusionary “real image.” What a non-Nordic user of a Nordic public swimming pool might fear is therefore to be deprived of the concealment through which s/he has constituted the screen of his/her illusionary “real image.” Showering naked means to let go of this screen and thereby the subject becomes vulnerable. It can result in a feeling of shame, as if one was displaying one’s castration. On the contrary, for the Nordic user, being naked will be in keeping with his/her body-concealment politics which has been constituted through its “real image.” Of course this does not mean that the Nordic subject does not have any castration, nor that s/he does not have a body-concealment of her/his own. For instance, one can note that, even in Nordic swimming pools, there are still separated women’s room and men’s room and that nobody goes to swim without a bathing suit. Simply the body concealment will respond to another social and cultural division between the visible and the

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³⁵ Of course, being naked does not have any universal meaning in a dream. The interpretation will depend on the affective content of the dream as well as on the specific associations of the subject.

invisible, what can be shown, what should be concealed and when. This social and cultural division is part of the *imaginary institution of society*, as developed in the first part of the essay.

The same analysis can be applied to the issue of wearing or not wearing a *niqab* in a public space. The social norms are encapsulated in the subject's specular constitution which means that they are part of what constitutes how the subject looks at itself. In that sense, the social norms become efficient in the subject when they are internalized through the subject's specular constitution. The norms governing how one covers/uncovers one's body are therefore both stemming from a social and cultural discourse and rooted in what is the most intimate. Therefore the specular constitution not only strongly anchors this body-concealment politics as an *internal law* within the individual. But it also blinds the social and cultural origin of this body-concealment politics, which tends to appear as "natural" and "normal" within a same group. One can imagine that when a Muslim woman refuses to take off her *niqab* in France, she may not do so against the law, but in the name of *her* internal law. What dictates her body-concealing politics is indeed also what configures her internal law. Indeed, internal law is what the subject constitutes – with the implicit help of the social discourse – to account for its own impossibility to reach the object *a*. In this sense, the internalization of the notion of prohibition results from the constitution of the object *a*. The object *a* supports the law in that it supports desire. This means that what is desired and what is forbidden to the subject originate in the same source. In short, what is desired is desired because it is inaccessible. This inaccessibility can originate in something that has been concealed to the subject, arousing first his curiosity and then his desire. But it can also originate in something that has been actually forbidden to the subject. In any case, what is forbidden and what is concealed actually come together in the attempt of the subject to account for why s/he cannot reach his/her object of desire, forming the subject's personal fantasy, encapsulated within the retrospective illusion of the subject's "real image." Therefore the desirable and the forbidden are never very far away from each other. One's personal body-concealment politics both configures and is configured by the forbidden and the desirable. It is very clear that if it is impossible for a Western woman to wear a short skirt for instance in a Muslim country, it is not only because it can be forbidden by the state law but also because it is most likely to be considered as a "call for sex" by persons belonging to the local population. Wearing a *niqab* in France, or elsewhere, is a choice that has to do with the subject's relation to its own body regarding both what is forbidden and desirable – which are the two sides of a same coin.

As we have seen, clothing and law are both rooted in the imaginary constitution of the subject. This constitution results in the internalization of the norm of desire – the object *a* – which is what governs both the subject's internal law and its relation to what part of its body should/should not be hidden. A subject chooses to cover/uncover its body according to rules that allow it to hide its castration. And at the same time castration is what configures my relation to what is forbidden/not forbidden, or in other words it configures my internal law.

3 The internalization of the *Other* as gaze

The subject's way of clothing will respond to the constitution of its internal law. But one should note that dressing implies the implicit presence of an other. The question raised by both the Muslim woman wearing a *niqab* in France and the non-Nordic user of a Nordic public swimming pool is indeed: whose eyes are looking at me? Does the woman who feels that she cannot go out without a *niqab* in France feel that she has to hide her body from the people who are looking at her and who are very likely to be embarrassed by her clothes? And why should one feel uncomfortable being naked around other people who do not feel uncomfortable being naked and even create an atmosphere in which being naked is the rule? In both cases, what is at stake is not hiding from the actual people who are there, but hiding from an internal representation of the other. This is the question addressed in this last part: the constitution of the specular image studied in part two of the essay depends on the constitution of a figure of the *internal other*. This internal other is what binds the individual repression to the imaginary institution of society, that we have studied in the first part of the essay. In fact, one could say that the internal other originates in the internalization of the hiatus between the individual and the social. More precisely, it is an individual construct that serves to account for this hiatus and thereby find answers to the enigmas raised by the encounter between the individual and the other(s).

Lacan theorizes the internal figure of the other as *Other*, with a capital O. The Other is the implicit key to the illusionary representation I have of my body-image. And it is also through this internal representation of the Other that the subject relates to society. The Lacanian distinction between the Other (*Autre* in French) with capital letter and the actual other (*autre*) – without capital letter – is fundamental for the purpose of our argumentation. The Other is not an actual figure but a psychic representation which is necessary to the

subject. In the optic schema, the Other – noted “A” – is the psychic agent of the constitution of the “real image,” that is the illusionary body-image.³⁶ The Other (“A”) works as an agent that partakes in the constitution of the image of the ego and hence also in the norm of desire. According to Lacan, the mirror stage implies that the subject accesses its image through the *gaze* of the Other.³⁷ In other words, in order to see its own image in the mirror, the subject must internalize the Other, that is a psychic figure. As a result the subject will look at itself through the lenses of this imaginary psychic figure rather than through the actual eyes of the persons who are present. Stating that the Other is a psychic figure does not mean that it has nothing to do with real others. In fact, the Other is constituted through the internalization of the discourses that the subject has heard from its parents, in society and so on. But the Other does not perfectly match these discourses, rather it translates how the subject relates to them. From this view, the Other is indeed a creation of the subject, within a specific social and cultural context producing social discourses.

The role of the Other in the individual body-concealment politics can be elucidated through Lacan's comment on a short video by Jenny Aubry which he uses in order to illustrate the mirror stage. Aubry filmed a naked child watching itself in the mirror during the phase of the mirror stage. When commenting on the film in his seminar *R.S.I.*, Lacan says that he does not remember if the child is a girl or a boy, but he adds that this would not change anything.³⁸ The child,

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36 Lacan, *L'Angoisse*, 52. [“Cette i(a) est donnée dans l'expérience spéculaire, mais, comme je vous l'ai dit, elle est authentifiée par l'Autre.”]

37 Lacan has not yet theorized the distinction between other and Other but he indicates, describing the mirror stage: “C'est ce moment qui décisivement fait basculer tout le savoir humain dans la médiatisation par le désir de l'autre, constitue ses objets dans une équivalence abstraite par la concurrence d'autrui, et fait du *je* cet appareil pour lequel toute poussée des instincts sera un danger, répondît-elle à une maturation naturelle, – la normalisation même de cette maturation dépendant dès lors chez l'homme d'un truchement culturel: comme il se voit pour l'objet sexuel dans le complexe d'Édipe.” Jacques Lacan, “Le Stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je telle qu'elle nous est révélée dans l'expérience psychanalytique,” in *Écrits I*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: PUF, 1999), 93–100, 97.

38 “J'avais vu un petit film qui m'avait été apporté par Jenny Aubry pour me proposer, à titre d'illustration, ce que j'appelai à ce moment le stade du miroir. Il y avait un enfant devant le miroir, dont je ne sais plus si c'était une petite fille ou un petit garçon – c'est même bien frappant que je ne m'en souviens plus... quelqu'un ici s'en souvient peut-être – mais ce qu'il y a de certain, c'est que petite fille ou petit garçon, j'y saisis, dans un geste, quelque chose qui à mes yeux avait valeur de ceci que, à supposer comme je le fais sur des fondements peu assurés, ce stade du miroir consiste dans l'unité saisie, dans le rassemblement, dans la maîtrise assumée du fait de l'image de ceci que ce corps de prématuré, d'incoordonné jusque-là, se semble rassemblé. [...] Eh bien! il y a

either a boy or a girl is at the age of the mirror stage. When confronted with the mirror, s/he looks at the reflected image and suddenly puts the hand before his/her sex, hiding it. The possibility to hide something implies then the implicit presence of an other I am actually hiding *from*. But nobody is actually looking at the child. What makes possible the mirror experience is the fact that the child has internalized an Other functioning here as a gaze which looks at him/her. In other words, the function of the gaze is played not by a real other but by an imaginary figure that the child has internalized: the Other is the internalization of the function of the gaze.

Indeed, why would the child hide any part of his body if he did not have the feeling of being looked at and that something was too visible and therefore had to be hidden from the gaze? Interestingly, the child does not hide any other body part but the genitalia, which implies some privilege in the child's own body-image, that is in the illusionary image s/he constructs in relation to the Other/internalized gaze. One can note that the English expression "private part" in itself expresses the delineation between what can be shown and what should be concealed: this is only private. One can understand that here the language itself contains a certain social normativity. This type of social normativity that is implicit in language and in the way people interact – which is also part of language – participates in the child's internalization of the gaze. The body becomes signifying through, on the one hand, the child's experiences of pleasure and displeasure and on the other, the discourses that the child hears which include both explicit and implicit – very often unconscious – contents. More precisely the child's experiences of pleasure and displeasure come to be internalized by the child through the signifiers – and thereby enigmas³⁹ – that they get associated with, through the different interactions the child has with the others around him/her – first the parents, then the brothers and sisters, the broader family, the friends, and so on. From a Lacanian viewpoint, the child's

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vraiment un lien, un lien de ça à quelque chose qui était rendu sensible dans ce film, par quelque chose qui, que ce fût un petit garçon ou une petite fille, je vous le souligne, avait la même valeur, l'élosion, sous la forme d'un geste, la main qui passe devant, l'élosion de ceci qui était peut-être le phallus, ou peut-être son absence. Un geste, nettement, le retirait de l'image." In Jacques Lacan, *Seminaire XXII, R.S.I.*, Unpublished, 103–104. Lacan also comments on Jenny Aubry's film in 1966, in Jacques Lacan, "De nos antécédents," in *Écrits I*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: PUF, 1999). There, he describes a little girl.

39 The questions are aroused in the child's mind because s/he cannot find signified associated to these signifiers. This relates to the interpretation of the imaginary in Castoriadis: "C'est que, dans le cas de l'imaginaire, le signifié auquel renvoie le signifiant est presque insaisissable comme tel, et par définition son 'mode d'être' est un mode de non-être." Castoriadis, *L'Institution imaginaire de la société*, 213.

concealing gesture shows its *phallic jouissance*, which has been constituted through the individual association between the experiences of enjoyment and displeasure in the genitalia: These experiences came to be associated with the interactions with others, that are themselves situated in a specific historical, cultural and social context.⁴⁰ As a result *phallic jouissance* can be expressed through different ways in different cultural environments and by different individual subjects.⁴¹

According to Freud, phallic jouissance characterizes the phallic stage, which enables the child to move from auto-erotism – infantile sexuality – to genital sexuality. This would be the enjoyment that the child feels should be hidden from the gaze of the Other, showing that s/he has internalized the forbidding of enjoyment (*jouissance*). The forbidding can be understood as the child's interpretation of the limitation – castration – of the enjoyment since it is not necessarily related to actual interdictions pronounced by parental figures. It can very well be the child's interpretation of the enigmas encountered: “what does it mean exactly to have a genitalia?,” “how come I feel pleasure and displeasure there?,” “what does it mean to have this kind of genitalia, when others have a different one?” etc.. The word *enjoyment* most often translates the Lacanian concept of *jouissance* which shows its limitations: what is forbidden is of course not the possibility of enjoyment as such but the total satisfaction through *jouissance*. In fact, total satisfaction is impossible but, from a psycho-analytical viewpoint, this lack of satisfaction has to be *symbolized* as forbidden satisfaction in order to be internalized.⁴² When the forbidding of enjoyment is internalized, it coincides with the urge to hide its source and put on clothes. When looking at its genitals the child sees more than an organ, it sees its

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40 The notion of phallic enjoyment and phallic function can therefore be interpreted as a social and cultural notion.

41 It is likely that depending on the implicit normativity present in their cultural environment, children will have different or slightly different experiences, if confronted with a mirror in the same condition as the child from Jenny Aubry's movie. This simply means that the cultural context configuring phallic jouissance is different and thereby it will be configured accordingly. Phallic jouissance does not have any fixed meaning. I set aside here the debate on whether or not the word “phallic” is well-chosen. Its name is obviously determined by one broad social, historical and cultural context. One could argue that naming the phallus phallus is already determining. But choosing an abstract word that would not reflect any social, historical and cultural context would be equally dissatisfying: jouissance by definition cannot be extracted from this context as it is intimately intertwined with signifiers.

42 This process does not take place in psychosis, which puts the psychotic subject at the mercy of its unlimited jouissance, that is, at the mercy of his death drive.

own enjoyment and because enjoyment is *forbidden*, what it sees is its own castration. In other words, in the mirror, the child encounters both the Law that castrates – and thereby rules – its own pleasure and the necessity of clothing.

The experience of the mirror joins the constitution of an internal sense of law, through the internalization of forbidding, and a concealing gesture, which embodies the internalization of the Other as gaze. This internalization comes to answer the child's internal dilemmas as well as it allows him/her to symbolize the lack of satisfaction that s/he experiences. In this sense, the fiction of the Other is what allows the child to overcome traumatic experiences. This is why, from the perspective of the internal functioning of the subject, this fiction is not contingent, as would suggest its status of fiction, but necessary: It is necessary to protect the subject from the trauma and this necessity is anchored in the subject's intimate modalities of *jouissance*. In a nutshell, the necessity at stake is that of the *symptom*, which is precisely my alienation to the Other, according to psychoanalysis. Whereas, from an external viewpoint, the symptom can appear to be contingent, the subject *needs* its symptom and thereby will never be able to absolutely escape from it. One does not get rid of its alienation to the Other so easily! The fiction of the Other is therefore paradoxically both necessary – with respects to the subject's symptom – and contingent, since it is only a pure fiction that does not exist outside of the subject. This paradox is what connects the subject to the social: The necessity of the social norms will only appear to the subject through the lenses of its own fiction of the Other. This explains that depending on the subject's symptom, that is his/her own individual alienation to the Other, one will relate to the social norms in a very different way, that can be, for instance, absolutely rigid, more flexible, rebellious, ambivalent, passionate, passive, etc. In addition one's fiction of the Other will shed light on specific aspects of the social norms, stressing some, covering others, possibly introducing some displacements in the social norms, etc. As a result, the social norms will not appear to be exactly the same, nor will they be equally binding for two different individual subjects, even though they belong to the exact same society and cultural subgroup. This stresses the contingency of the subject's relation to the social norms that can nonetheless be considered as absolutely necessary by the subject.

The mirror stage can be seen as what introduces the subject to the complex and circular process of being fashioned by and fashioning the social norms. But one should remember that this process is never rigidly fixed, neither is the individual alienation to the Other. The actual mirror encountered in the mirror

stage anticipates and prefigures the following identifications⁴³ when the child and later the adult will internalize other dimensions of the Other's gaze, and through them, new rules and new codes. Each time, the subject will only be *fashioned by* new external norms to the extent that s/he will *re-fashion* them in the process of internalizing them. In other words: the subject will only be fashioned by norms that s/he has re-fashioned for him/herself.

4 Conclusion

The way someone dresses participates in what we have called the individual's body concealment politics, which has roots in what is the most intimate in the subject. This is why law meant to impose on the subject what should/ should not be worn and when can be received as an aggression and thereby it can arouse a strong resistance. In this sense, one can say that the individual subjects are indeed *fashioned by* external norms: they actually internalize them, making them their own, which makes it more difficult to perceive them as actual external norms imposed on the individual by the environment. But the process of internalization does not equal a determining process in the sense that it is actually using and even re-writing the external norms to make them fit the individual needs of the subject. This is what we have evoked first with the process of repression, as participating in the necessary individual adjustments to society. The individual will actually find in society the *signifiers* making it possible for him/her to account for the fact that s/he cannot reach total satisfaction, which is what psychoanalysis calls castration. The child encounters this lack of satisfaction in experiences that create enigmas that s/he will in part fill in by internalizing the gaze of the Other, or in other words, by creating the fiction of the Other, embodying the necessity of the rules, the codes, the norms. These rules, codes and norms are not created *ex nihilo*: they are found in the subject's environment, through the language and the interaction with others, which contain both explicit contents and implicit, unconscious contents. By internalizing the Other, the subject will find his/her own answers to the hiatus between the individual and the social. But s/he cannot answer to this hiatus outside the context of a pre-existing society in which imaginary answers have already been given, through what Castoriadis has called the *imaginary institution of society*.

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⁴³ Lacan, "Le Stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je telle qu'elle nous est révélée dans l'expérience psychanalytique," 93.

The imaginary of one society provides the individual with signifiers that answer to the questions that unconsciously aroused in him/her. For the same reason that according to Wittgenstein's famous word, "there is no private language," the subject will only be able to answer to the hiatus s/he encounters between the individual and the social, by borrowing signifiers from the imaginary that institutes society. This of course can be understood as an alienation of the individual to the social. One should add also that this process is mostly invisible to both the individual and the social, which can feed the illusion of a possible complete freedom. Not only is this part of an unconscious process in the individual but it also originates in the imaginary in which signifiers cannot be related to signifieds, according to Castoriadis' definition.⁴⁴ But precisely because these signifiers cannot be related to proper signifieds, the way one subject will incorporate them and make meanings with them can only be a work of fiction: the fiction of the Other, as I interpreted in a Lacanian way. In this sense, the individual shapes his/her own alienation, inventing⁴⁵ his/her own answers to the questions that came to be crucial for his/her development, namely his/her becoming a subject. It is therefore true to say that the subject is fashioned by the imaginary of one society. But this does not determine the way the subject incorporates the social norms. On the contrary, s/he will re-fashion the social norms that s/he internalizes. And, the institution being a constant historical process, this individual process of internalizing the social norms will fashion in turn the dynamic of the imaginary institution of society and possibly participate ultimately to re-write these social norms. To resume abruptly our conclusion: the subject is as fashioned by the social norms as s/he is fashioning them, although neither the individual nor the social is quite aware of the complex circular processes involved.

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⁴⁴ "C'est que, dans le cas de l'imaginaire, le signifié auquel renvoie le signifiant est presque insaisissable comme tel, et par définition son 'mode d'être' est un mode de non-être." Castoriadis, *L'Institution imaginaire de la société*, 213.

⁴⁵ I developed in a previous text that the subject is alienated to a "supposed transcendence," in the sense that the subject projects the necessity of the meanings s/he attributes to the Other, although these meanings are in themselves purely contingent. See: Isabelle Letellier, "Guérir du genre? Esquisse d'un dialogue entre Butler et Lacan," in *Souffrance et Jouissance*, eds. Marcus Coelen, Claire Nioche, and Beatriz Santos (Paris: Campagne Première, 2013).

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