

Drawing Lines: From Kernberg and Haraway to Lacan and Beyond

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This paper reviews the key concepts underlying the diagnosis of “borderline personality disorder” as exemplified in the work of Otto Kernberg. It looks both to history and philosophy (Rousseau), to social thought (Erving Goffman) and to psychoanalysis (Deutsch, Freud, Lacan) to show the limitations and problems with the diagnosis. It also looks at later cultural developments attacking the idea of limits and ‘borders’ (e.g, Haraway refusal of metaphoric distinctions among human-animal-machine) as having their own vexed psychoanalytic profile. The paper concludes with strong speculation about the reasons humans, and humans alone, draw lines.

Let me begin by reviewing briefly the general assumptions in the hypothesis of a borderline personality (bpd) and attendant disorders. The bpd is a concept developed largely outside of the Freudian field, though it began there with Adolph Stern who, in 1938, gave this name to a psychological condition on the border between neurosis and psychosis. Once Helene Deutsch framed her famous ‘as if personality’ in the 1940s, however, the concept quickly evolved into a *character type*. A later star of the field, Otto Kernberg, concluded that borderline personality organization (bpo) “is an ‘as if personality structure,”¹ asserting the term should be “reserved for those patients representing a *chronic characterological organization* that is neither typically neurotic or typically psychotic,” (5, my emphasis). It should be recalled that Freud himself virtually never employed the notion of a ‘personality type,’² nor did he use the term ‘borderline.’ When on the few occasions he referred to ‘boundary’ concepts it was in the context of finding a spatial way to express his original concepts of *defence* and *repression* as compromise formations, participating in two different realms at once.³

Today, the scientific literature confirms a proliferation of definitions and an expanding number of approaches to the treatment of bpo, with psychiatry and psychology almost equally at sea. The *DSM IV*, published twenty years after Kernberg’s effort at clarification, offers little improvement on what has become an increasingly catchall concept.⁴ Where once the hallmark of the bp was ‘anger,’ recent studies claim the bp suffers from an inability to ‘feel anything.’ Moreover, borderline personality disorder can be a transient condition (if the patient is under the influence of drugs or

alcohol), and most psychiatrists and psychologists stress that the disorder has no really clear-cut symptomatology. To obtain a diagnosis, Kernberg says that the doctor must discover bpo as the personality's "underlying structure" (Kernberg 154).⁵ Thus the therapist faces the rather difficult task of discerning a borderline personality disorganization *beneath* the welter of a patient's multiple overt problems. But, as the Winona Ryder character in *Girl, Interrupted* responds when told of her diagnosis: "Borderline between *what* and *what*?"

The fact that there are no symptoms specific to the disorder, and none the doctor is primed to be on the lookout for is theoretically disturbing: how can one tell where the illness lies, in the patient or in the eye of the doctor? Otto Kernberg himself avoided the question of a lack of symptomatology by saying that bpo consists of a "group of psychopathological constellations" that have in common "a remarkably stable form of pathological ego structure," with a "characteristic pathology of object relationships" (3-4). These "typical constellations" include:

1. Anxiety.
2. Polysymptomatic neuroses (for example, 'paranoia plus hypochondria or any other neurotic symptom.')
3. Polymorphous perverse sexual trends.
4. Classical pre-psychotic, paranoid, schizoid, hypomanic and cyclothymic – but not depressive – personality organization.
5. Impulse neurosis and addictions.
6. Lower level character disorders along a continuum from high to low. (10-13)

Kernberg follows his sprawling list of "constellations" with three pages that detail the anti-social features of the borderline patient. He emphasizes that the bp is neither a "typical hysteric nor a typical infantile personality" and attributes its character to an even deeper narcissistic structure (17), summed up as an "absence of object relationships" (17).⁶ (Although the bp's "ego boundaries are stable," Kernberg says, at a deeper level the bp has "very intense, primitive internalized object relations of a frightening kind and an incapacity to depend on internalized good objects" (18).

Most latter-day work on bp⁷ retains Kernberg's focus on the patient's ego as having deeply flawed object relations, which result in unstable external object relations

and thus wreak havoc on the social order around the patient.⁸ In other words, unstable or absent object relations underlie the bp's "clear-cut anti-social personality structure" (Kernberg 13). The underlying structure of the bp's behavioral disorders is thus presumptively the patient's flawed object-relations. A case history by Kernberg sums up his points:

A promiscuous, divorced, young woman, hospitalized after a psychotic regression, which followed years of disorganized behavior, was restricted in the hospital from male patients. On several occasions a few minutes of unobserved time had been enough for her to have intercourse in an impulsive way with other patients, practically strangers. Over many months this patient was regularly controlled and in the sessions with her hospital physician the implications of her behavior were discussed only in terms of her 'lack of impulse control' and her 'inappropriate behavior.' When a new hospital physician tried to evaluate further the implications of her sexual behavior, it evolved that her sexual activity had deep masochistic implications and represented the acting out of her fantasy of being a prostitute. (103-04)

When the physician suggests that not all sexual freedom implies prostitution, the patient becomes angry, calling him 'immoral.' This leads her to becoming "involved sexually with several other patients in a provocative manner," and that, in turn, leads the physician to confront her with "her masochistic fantasies. . . of submission to a primitive, sadistic superego which represented a prohibitive, combined father-mother image."

But it all comes to a 'happy ending' very quickly. After this confrontation, the woman

Was finally able to establish a good relationship with one patient, with whom she fell in love, went steady for a two-year period, and who she eventually planned to marry. During the latter part of these two years they had sexual intercourse, characterized by her being able for the first time in her life to have tender as well as sexual feelings toward just one man. . . (104)

Such ‘happy endings’ are, of course, exactly what Jacques Lacan criticized in contemporary psychoanalysis and especially in the American approach: the tendency to seek the patient’s conformity and smooth adaptation to prevailing behavioral norms—most pointedly, in this case, sexual ones. Such adaptation makes them and the world around them less disturbed: i.e., “happier.”

Yet it is easy to see where Kernberg’s approach is problematic. It has to endow the treating doctor with extraordinary powers of perception, almost x-ray vision, and with an automatic superiority over the patient, who is never, we should note, given to us in her own words, except one: “immoral”—a social term. Moreover, despite the critical importance of the prevailing social norms in defining bpd, Kernberg shows absolutely no recognition of the fact that the social context and (its prevailing norms) were rapidly changing—if not unraveling—at the time this case occurred: the later 1960s and early ‘70s. Should we not ask to what extent the socio-cultural context is necessarily implicated in a psychiatric diagnosis—on a practical, immediate level as well as on a more theoretical plane? After all, Kernberg’s narrative of his borderline patient’s nymphomania never takes into account the leading cultural phenomena of the time: the ‘sexual revolution,’ ‘women’s liberation’ and the increasingly destabilization of the socio-political order (e.g., Vietnam, urban riots, the Nixon scandals, et al.). Kernberg published his book in 1975, yet not a whisper is heard regarding ~~what were~~ the era’s visibly altering norms and ethical standards. Instead, to Kernberg’s eyes, society appears to be a set of timeless or time-honored rules and regulations that the anti-social patient has no real reason or cause to rebel against—norms that include the sexual rules that his anti-social patient so ‘crazily’ insists on challenging.

Compare sociologist Erving Goffman, who did take note of the changes in the behavioral norms of the day:

In the last few years the non-psychiatric character of considerable symptomlike behavior has become much easier to appreciate because situational improprieties of the most flagrant kind have become widely used as a tactic by hippies, the New Left, and black militants, and although

these persons have been accused of immaturity, they seem too numerous to be able to sustain collective rapport, and too facile at switching into conventional behavior to be accused of insanity. 355-6⁹

There is an even more grievous difficulty with Kernberg's approach than that of his ignoring the changed social context of his treatments. It is his assumption that the anti-social borderline personality disorder is rooted in a disturbed ego-object relation that sets off misbehaviors, ~~and that~~ which only the trained psychiatrist can access. Can we really separate the 'chicken from the egg' (the priority of social or the mental) that produces the bp's chronic 'anti-socialism'? Goffman, at least, turned the whole business around, and made the social definition of the 'mental patient' primarily an *effect of social arrangements*, with no need to resort to the hypothesis of an 'underlying structure,' or a 'chronic characterological disorder'. In a stunning article first published in *Psychiatry* in 1969 entitled, "The Insanity of Place." Goffman's explanation of the anti-social patient's disorders is seen as entirely *social* in perspective:

Mental symptoms are not, by and large, *incidentally* a social infraction. By and large they are specifically and pointedly offensive. (356)

and

The position can be taken that mental illness, pragmatically speaking, is first of all a social frame of reference, a conceptual framework, a perspective that can be applied to social offenses as a means of understanding them. The offense, in itself, is not enough, it must be perceived and defined in terms of the imagery of mental illness. (354)

Goffman thus argues that the fact that one offends the social order is what indicates s/he has a mental disorder. "We must examine the patients' symptoms for his *others*" (337), he writes—a dictum that he proceeds to model in this way: According to Goffman, social (and especially family) life is made up of a perpetually shifting set of alliances or "collusions" between some members *against* others, whom he calls the "excolluded." One member gets split off, arbitrarily, by some others.

The everyday tacit betrayal of a 'third person' by two others, Goffman argues, is one of the main ways that two people "express the specialness of their own relation to each other" (339). If the third person senses that such a collusion against him exists, and if he questions or rebels against being "excolluded" from the existing factions, he might well rebel by trespassing against its unwritten rules regarding where he 'fits' in. When and if he does so, however, he will be, sooner or later, liable to be labeled a "mental patient." Goffman writes, "[M]ental symptoms are willful situational improprieties, and these, in turn, constitute evidence that the individual is not prepared to keep his place" (355).¹⁰ Thus, for Goffman, no single act can be seen as a "mental symptom" unless it creates a certain amount of 'organizational havoc' in the 'relationships and organizational memberships of the offender and offended':

Although the imputation of mental illness is surely a last-ditch attempt to cope with a disrupter who must be, but cannot be, contained, this imputation in itself is not likely to resolve the situation. Havoc will occur even when all the members are convinced that the troublemaker is quite mad, for this definition does not in itself free them from living in a social system in which he plays a disruptive part.... It is this havoc that psychiatrists have dismally failed to examine and that sociologists ignore when they treat mental illness merely as a labeling process. (356-7)

Goffman might say that Kernberg's exemplifies a "traditional social control approach [that is] an unrealistically mechanistic version of the social act..." (349), whereas he himself proposes that groups are, in reality, a variable order of shifting alliances whose arbitrariness (and vulnerability to change) is willingly ignored by most people. At the same time, this arbitrary structure is precisely what the borderline patient senses and focuses on, seeing it rather more clearly than Kernberg, "sociologists" and "psychiatrists" do.

Who is right? The Kernberg approach is to separate and neatly partition off the disordered mind such that it neither influences nor is influenced by social changes. But is the bpo really, as per Kernberg, locked inside the ego of the patient: a walled off,

'underlying structure' that breaks out of its prison into disruptive acts and behavior? Is this underlying structure so deeply hidden that only the expert psychiatrist is skilled enough to enter its 'frightening' domain? Or is borderline disorder a more or less 'purely' social problem of the surface, a la Goffman: a twin failure to keep to one's "place" and to credit the established order of social groups—failures that provoke the 'anti-social' behavior that causes the rebel to be labeled a 'mental patient'?

Goffman's reasoned, fierce and unanswered critique of medicalized psychiatry and cognitive-behavioral psychology prompts a number of questions that I would like to begin to address here.

I. What are the Borderlines of Psychoanalysis?

My first concern will be the borderlines of psychoanalysis, (rather than medical psychiatry). Does psychoanalysis avoid the impasse that Goffman's response to the psychiatry of his day, as exemplified by Kernberg provides?

Freudian psychoanalysis, from the beginning, always crisscrossed the psychical, social and cultural orders. For Freud, as later for Lacan, the very premise of psychoanalysis is that the subject is always already a *trans-subject*, linked to others by history, genealogy and the social division of labor and wealth. Freud put it this way in his "History of the Psychoanalytic Movement": each subject, he says, is "linked already to other subjects. . . as a link in a chain, which he serves against his will, or at least involuntarily."¹¹ Further, Freud says that he could never see mental patients as a distinct category, divided sharply from ordinary human beings. Indeed, while studying hysterics with Breuer, Freud tells how he began to realize that "everywhere I seemed to discern motives and tendencies [in the patients] analogous to those of everyday life," (SE XIV 11). This led him to doubt seriously that *any part of the mental apparatus was sealed off from the others*, which is precisely the opposite conclusion from Breuer's. Breuer had constructed a hypothesis of 'hypnoid states' that explained the "mental splitting in hysterical patients by the absence of communication between various mental states" (11). According to Breuer, the "hypnoid state" sent "its products," like little bullets, to penetrate into "waking consciousness like unassimilated foreign bodies" (11). Freud recoils:

I had taken the matter less scientifically; everywhere I seemed to discern motives and tendencies analogous to those of everyday life, and I looked upon psychical splitting itself as an effect of a process of repelling which at that time I called 'defence', and later, 'repression'. . . . [I]t was not long before my 'defence' theory took up its stand opposite [Breuer's] 'hypnoid' one. (SE XIV 11)

The result of his refusal to credit the existence of separate, walled off mental states was Freud's theory of *repression*, which, when one looks at his famous sketch of the psychical apparatus is a line only part of the way through it. There is not nor can there be an actual wall dividing conscious and unconscious, ego and id.

Figure 1: Freud's sketch of the Ego, Preconscious, Id and Repression, From "The Ego and The Id," Sigmund Freud, SE XIX, 1961 (1923): 24.

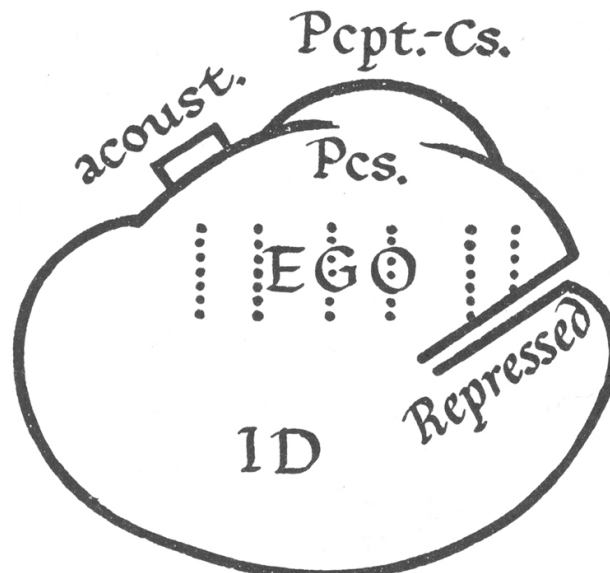


FIG. 1.

II. Social Order: Is It Coextensive with Drawing Lines?

My second concern regards the fundamental correlation of social order *with its differentiations and distinctions*: with, effectively, the *drawing of lines*. Societies designate certain spaces and specific roles for members of their group, either in the heavy-handed

manner of hierarchical societies, or in the precariously shifting way found in the democratic modern settings Goffman describes. At one point in the mid-eighteenth century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau suggested that the social order only truly begins (as a legal, civil order) once certain literal lines are drawn. Permit me to quote a justly famous line from his 1756 essay “On the Origin of Inequality Among Men.” It is a line that has been endlessly interpreted, misinterpreted, laughed at and taken far too seriously. Let us take a third look at the phrase.

Throughout his *Second Discourse*, Rousseau imaginatively reconstructs human life and society at their very dawning, when hunters and gatherers roamed freely over the land and answered to no social hierarchy. ‘Civil society,’ the world of law and order, succeeds this condition, but how and why? Rousseau speculates that

The first person who, having drawn a line around a piece of land, decided to say, ‘*This is mine*’ and found others fool enough to believe him was the true founder of civil society.¹²

While Rousseau says that, in theory, ‘the earth belongs to no one,’ in the *Second Discourse* he also argues that well before the first actual enclosures of land, humans had already *psychologically* moved away from assuming nature was unmarked by divisions of human power. People had, he argued, already realized that only in theory, and not in practice, were the earth’s abundant fruits freely available to all, since the stronger or cleverer could always deprive the weaker of an equal share in these fruits. The installation of civil society, however, formalizes an intentional distribution of these natural goods, however equitable or inequitable this distribution might be.

While later radicals would alter Rousseau’s infamous line to mean “All property is theft” (and still others would praise the right of the superior first comer to what he had duped others out of), Rousseau’s main point is something quite different. It is this: that every division made, every line thus drawn around some domain, is 1) *arbitrary* and 2) *requires the overt or tacit agreement of others* if it is to be sustained.

Rousseau’s position is thus that human social space is constituted, first of all, by an *imaginary drawing of lines*, which then become the *legal fictions* that support the social

division of wealth – *and* that everyone must agree on or consent to them that if these arbitrarily drawn lines are to found civil society as a society of *laws*. It follows that these laws must then be far from immutable or eternal in character. For, should the people come to believe that the lines have been drawn erroneously or have enabled a tyranny that should not stand, they can move to erase them and abolish the order they have founded so awry. In other words: ‘the consent of the governed’ for legitimate order is already implied in Rousseau’s famous sentence.

In this regard, the passage is therefore the equivalent of another of Rousseau’s lines, though not so famous, from his *Social Contract*¹³: Opposing the long held belief that laws are eternal and that flawed human beings must be forced to conform to them to improve themselves, Rousseau makes an entirely new departure when he states that in his work “he takes men as they *are*, and the laws as they *might be*.”

Human beings are, from the very start, already alienated from any direct, primal or animal relation to nature. Rousseau analyzed the cultural, economic and psychical impact of our original (and arbitrary) distinction between *natural* (undivided) spaces and *civil* (divided, enclosed) spaces, in the *Second Discourse*, creating models of the lives of the solitary hunter/gatherer, the pastoral herdsman, the peasant and the urban denizen, each representing a different regime of perception and of spatialization. Contrary to common opinion, Rousseau does not see each of these as ‘stages’ in a straight line of historical progression (in which each “advances” over, and supplants the previous one). Rather (as Marx later remarked) well before Hegel did, Rousseau treated human history dialectically: as endlessly changeable. Indeed, each of Rousseau’s successive ‘ideal states’ is turned inside out to become its virtual opposite, before transforming or transitioning to a new civil order.

Rousseau’s is perhaps the first non-mythic approach to the human relation to dividing space. He is not nostalgic for a lost, pastoral Golden Age where all freely roamed and shared equally—although he has certainly been accused of this. But he also did not participate in the alternative chosen by his contemporaries: a dream of “perfectibility” and inevitable progress toward a utopia wherein divisions and differences would also disappear.¹⁴ Instead, Rousseau saw the *human mind itself as formed by a dialectical relation to socio-spatial divisions*—to drawing lines—and like the later Freud, he

felt each successive regime of socio-spatial difference contributed to the configuration of the human mind in (and as) a fundamental break with nature.¹⁵

III. Lacan's Four Discourses: More Lines

The link with Lacan in my arguments should by now be obvious. Lacan, too, took fundamental shifts in forms of the social tie as his theme, in the guise of what he called 'the discourses.' The discourses work the same dialectic that Rousseau did, the formalization of social change and attendant psychological reconfigurations. Lacan's 'little letters' that make up each discourse (written as \$, S₁, S₂, a)¹⁶ line up or align all subjects of a particular discourse in a specific relation to each other at a given moment—but also in relation to what is *impossible* for any and all of them (*jouissance*). Each turn of the discursive 'wheel' results, according to Lacan, in a new subjective relation to the constants of discourse. What all begins (according to Lacan) with the meaningless mark—the unary trait (*trait* in French means 'line' or 'drawing' as well as characteristic)—ends up in and as elaborated social forms, or *discourses*.

The originality of Lacan's theory is that discourses structure the subject and evoke its psychological responses, which to me seems indisputable. But what most interpreters of Lacan, who too often prefer to imagine his Symbolic Order as a heavy-handed, meat-fisted regime of coercion, generally fail to realize is the degree to which *discourses do shift*, and that this shift is absolutely crucial to Lacan's perspective. "Love is," after all, he says, "a sign you are *changing discourses*." This phrase appears in his *Seminar XX*, in which he continued the ethical exploration of psychoanalysis begun in his seventh seminar in order to try to account for the emerging feminine and its subjective ethic.

So if Lacan makes us aware that social ties—discourses—impact the psyche, he also knows that he (or any other teacher or analyst) must experience this impact not as eternalized formal structuring, but as a visceral experience, the experience ~~they~~ one undergoes of ~~their~~ one's own time. In his *Rome Discourse* (1952), Lacan expressed not so much the *desire* as perhaps the *passion* of the analyst as a *need to link psychological and existential life*. He exhorted his listeners:

Let he who cannot reach at its horizon the subjectivity of his epoch therefore renounce [analysis]. For how could he who knows nothing of the dialectic that engages him in a symbolic movement with so many lives possibly make his being the axis of those lives? Let him be well acquainted with the whorl into which his era draws him in the ongoing enterprise of Babel, and let him learn his function as interpreter in the discordance of languages.¹⁷

If there is a firm division between the socio-cultural “Babel” of one’s time and the subjective, psychical experience of that time, Lacan does not see it. If there is a timeless time in which psychoanalytic theory dwells, Lacan does not dwell there. Rather, Lacan turns the ‘wall’ between these seemingly discrete entities (culture and psyche) into their common horizon: a horizon that can never be reached, a line that ever-recedes, yet on which we must vigilantly keep our focus.

IV. But, Do We Still Need Borderlines?

The question now poses itself: Why would we still need borderlines? A brief excursion into Donna Haraway's 1985 *Manifesto for Cyborgs*, perhaps the most thoroughgoing attack on the need for the borders and lines we humans have been drawing from the beginning, is in order here.

The drawing of lines (particularly Descartes' classical line between human and animal and between both of these and machines) is the object of Donna Haraway's attack in the *Manifesto*. Haraway espouses the alternative ideal of erasing all borderlines. At the same time, she rejects the patriarchal theses of psychology as well as its prevailing biases against 'disruptive' or anti-social behavior. Her cyborg is a composite of the internal mechanisms of control and the power of free transgression of borders made possible by cybernetics. "The cyborg," she writes, "appears in myth precisely where the boundary between human and animal is transgressed" (152).¹⁸

A cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints.
(154)

The *Manifesto* begins by accepting the premise that Western patriarchal masculine social models, Freud's included, have caused such social wreckage that patriarchy must be dethroned as the principle and the principal of social order. She takes on virtually all previous theories of human cultural origination ~~make~~ designating the 'father' (whose reproductive role is hardly as evident as the mother's) key to the development of ideation or human *thought*: the father is a 'concept', not a tangible reality. Paternal authority is thus thought to be more *symbolic* than real, rooted in the peculiar human capacity for metaphor-making: "this [child] is like that [man]." Moreover, in the mid-20th century, the human sciences found such conceptualization coeval with *language*: no human society without language, and no language without an established social order.

The correlation *language: paternity* and *paternity: authority* rests entirely on a process of *metaphorization*—on a conceptual leap of faith in the kinship of disparate entities: between a rose and love, a ‘father’ and a child. Despite ethologists’ efforts to demonstrate language-like achievements in animals¹⁹ (Lucy, Koko and the recently killed chimpanzee who watched CNN and ripped off a visiting lady’s face); and despite A-I and fuzzy logic, no one has yet discovered in animals, or been able to engineer into machines, our unique capacity for metaphor-making (Zukovic 2006).

Extrapolated as a full-blown regime, of course, patriarchal social order has tended to draw strong lines and firm distinctions between or among things: between “this”/“that”; us/them; men/women. Paternal authority has therefore traditionally defined the limits that decide our human standing—a territory demarcated here, a practice forbidden there, a differentiating between sexes. Patriarchy *drew the line*.

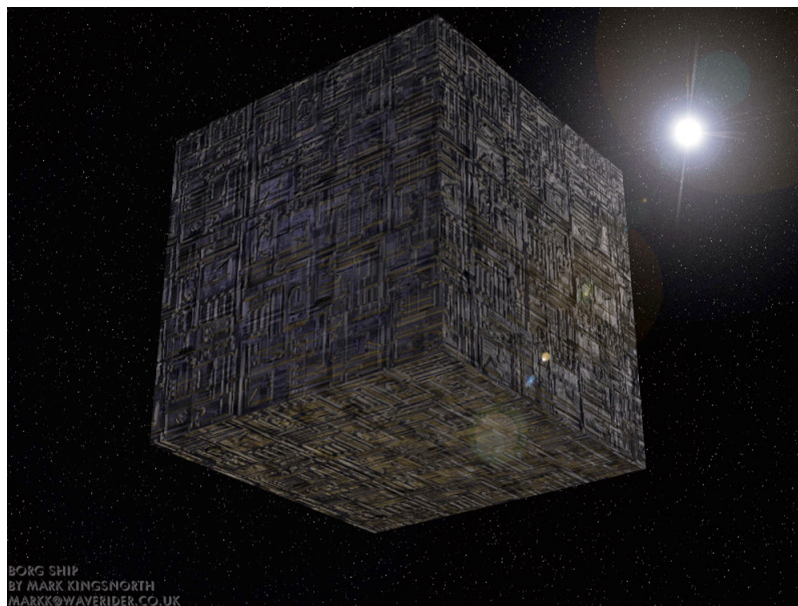
Even before Haraway, feminism challenged the power of patriarchy on almost every point, seeking the overthrow of patriarchal authority, and questioning strongly the priority of *metaphor* (Kristeva, e.g.) over other figures of speech, such as *metonymy*. Metonymy chains “this” to “that” rather than it does not distinguish or separate ~~distinguishes or separates~~ between them: it takes a part connected to something larger and makes it stand for that larger entity: “1,000 sails”=1,000 ships. For Haraway, woman’s metonymic capacity—their “connectedness” is what affords women a stronger relationship than men’s to the plant and animal kingdoms—and, surprisingly—also to machines, which have become our new form of “life.” Thus, rule by differentiation, drawing lines, must now, according to Haraway, be displaced by a new version of ‘reproducible life’ that includes, rather than excludes anything and everything. From the inorganic to the super-organic all are equally submitted to natural rather than man-made laws, to the biochemical codes that universally unite all the elements, forms and forces in nature:

In modern biologies, the translation of the world into a problem in coding can be illustrated by molecular genetics, ecology, sociobiological evolutionary theory, and immunobiology. The organism has been translated into problems of genetic coding and read-out. (164)

Haraway displaces metaphoric language as the fulcrum of human life and replaces it with the primacy of a universal code that thus unifies every form on earth and every entity in space, from atom to gene to cosmos²⁰—a code requiring a 1:1 connection to the ‘meaning it generates.’ Once code dislodges metaphor and man from cultural centrality, it moves us into a world that could or should be far more open than the world of our Fathers could ever be. It can, for example, dispense with the symbolic, affective ties of Father to Son as culturally represented in language, literature and law, now that a cut-and-dried verification of paternity can issue from a DNA code analysis. DNA is made up of little letters that need no assistance from metaphor to state and stake its truth claims.

But has cybernetics and universal coding made really our world richer and more open?²¹

Once coding displaces language as the basis of human life everything else really changes, too. The meaning-making, speaking being, who is formed by the series of gaps / articulations that only ideation or conceptual inference can bridge, disappears, replaced by a new hybrid form of intelligence—or better, an embodied intelligence—with the power to connect inorganic and organic into a new unity. Let us look at one imaginary that Haraway’s cyborg inspired:



BORG SHIP
BY MARK KINGSNORTH
MARKK@WAVERIDER.CO.UK

Figure 2. *The Borg Imagined in Star Trek the Next Generation*

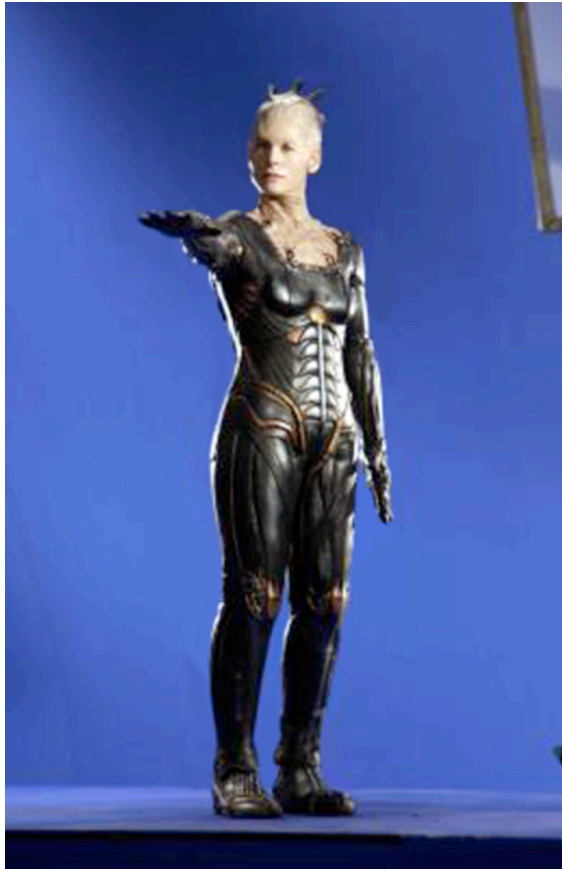


Figure 3. The Borg Queen.

The ironies in these images of the cyborgian aftermath should give us pause regarding Haraway's energetic effort to depend conceptually on real lines that firmly connect or tie the subject to the object (also found in Kernberg's approach to the borderline patient). In privileging of the cyborg's metonymic 'connectedness' we end not with open-ended possibilities but the image of corseting and almost impenetrable amalgamation.²²

V. What, after all, is a *line*, really?

Nothing—if language is its model: speech depends on *articulations*, whose two meanings are: 1) the *interruptions* that cut into a sound stream (e.g. a consonant), and therefore, an *absence* of sound; and 2) the links to what follows this breach: a vocalized sound.

Articulations produce words and meaning. A crucial nothing thus supports the more primary distinction between the (non-linguaged) animal and speaking human being.²³

We need to imagine the borderless universe not as automatically free and unfettered but as potentially retrograde and unfree; a universe that threatens to close in on us, encapsulating us.

But it is also true that it is virtually impossible to believe that the gaps/articulations of speech are sufficient any longer to give us a little breathing room, a space for creativity, room for a ‘next’ signifier to emerge and refigure the meaning of all that came before.

It may be time to ask a different question. *Why, even from our earliest times, have human beings been drawn to drawing lines?*

VI. “Why Do We Draw?”

A final question, then, and a distinction: ‘Why draw?’ Human beings are indeed the only animals who *draw* (at least if we do not credit that elephant painting the portrait of an elephant on YouTube). Yet what prompted the initial markings made by the Paleolithic artists of a hundred thousand years ago? What set humanity on the course of drawing lines, a course it has followed ever since?

One clearly has room to doubt that it was it a desire to stabilize egos around an inherently unstable borderline. To my mind, I believe it had the same motivation it still has for those of use who are also artists. Rather than ‘making space’ or ‘making room’ by defining and designating specific spaces, and rather even than the metaphoric spacing that creates a new ‘opening’ as the cultural innovator is thought to do, I believe that the mark, the drawn line, serves the function of opening out, but in an entirely different, inverse, mode. It is the mode of an *écriture* that *splits* the overwhelming totality of nature and marks itself off against the unity of Being.

To draw a line is to make at least a scratching on the surface of a 'whole' (Nature, the Social Order) that has either gone lifeless or that speaks to us only in cold commands—or ceases to speak to us at all. Instead, I will argue that *the line* distills our experience of being human, split off from Being, and that when we make it we are leaving it specifically for others as a new part of their experience.

I recently visited the cave at Pech Merle, in southern France, whose ancient drawings produced in me an amazing set of sensations. These drawings pre-existed me by 25,000 years. Yet because I draw and because these ancient artists also drew, these unnamed and unknowable ancestors nevertheless were instantly and intimately familiar. Not only to me, but also to anyone who engages human experience by marking it apart—taking our distance from it in time (memory) and in space.

Drawing is neither *the Thing itself* nor *the memory of It*. To draw a line is to create a new form that cannot be neatly divided from experience, for the simple reason that it is itself now the new experience—to be shared in by others. The act of drawing lines, especially aesthetic lines, has remained unchanged for thousands of centuries. And if Lacan in his Seventh Seminar seemed to make the essence of art the encirclement of an emptiness—the absence of the Thing—by something that substitutes for it (the potter's vase) perhaps in this he was somewhat overly Heideggerian. Even prior to this enclosure, this containment of nothing, from the very first, art consisted of drawing lines—lines that opened space out and made the *difference* in this nothing.

This then is my conclusion: that the dream of containerization, of compartmentalization that runs through so much of human life is one that we need to set aside. It is false to conclude that just because we have marked a difference or made a distinction—drawing a line—that we have managed to control, contain, and restrict its contents. Lines shared in are what open our experience to reflection, to speak our being.

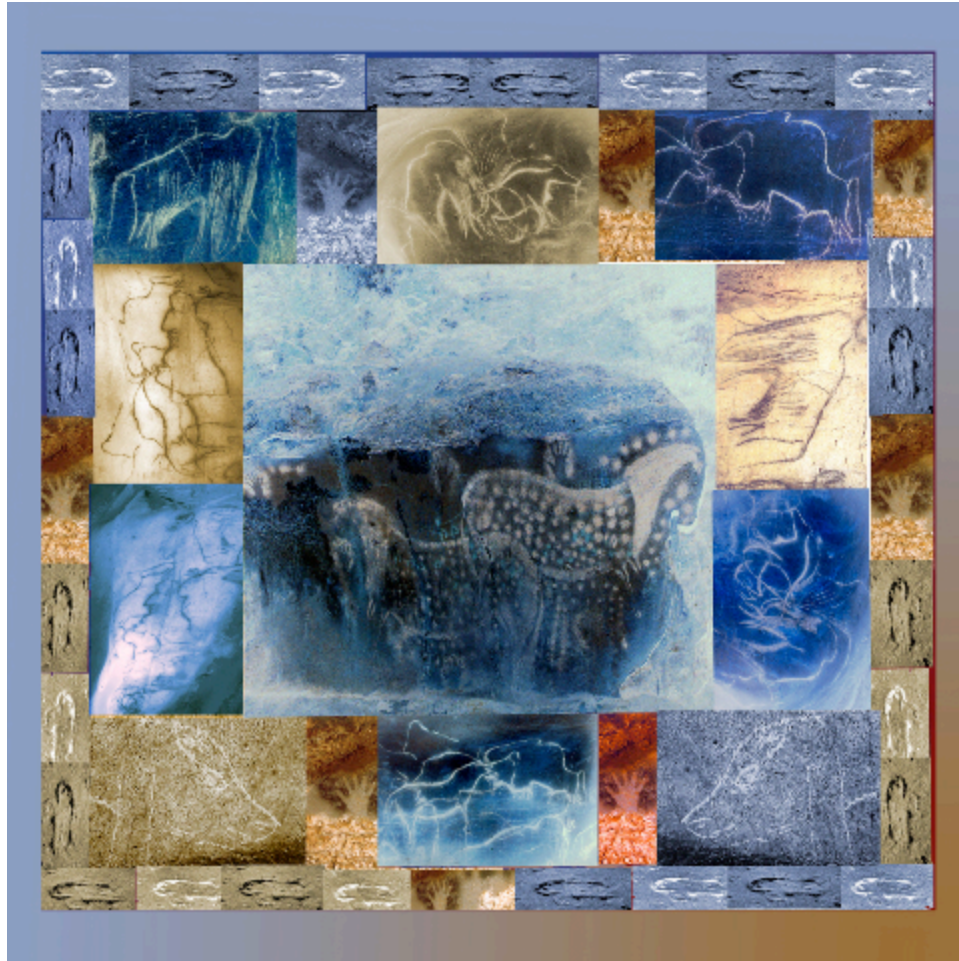


Figure 4. "Hommage à Pech Merle: A Paleolithic Altar for the First Artists." Juliet Flower MacCannell and Dean MacCannell, 2007 San Francisco. Somarts Gallery, Annual Day of the Dead Exhibition October-November, 2007

A PALEOLITHIC ALTAR


FOR THE FIRST ARTISTS

One hundred thousand years ago our ancestors began to bury their dead, often arranged in an embrace and lavishly adorned with shell bead jewelry. They decorated grave sites with thousands of flowers.


They were also the first artists.

Our altar to life features the cave paintings from Pech-Merle in southern France: bison, horses, bears, and other figures made by anonymous artists 25,000 years ago.


They left their personal image only in negative form (the outline of the hand of the artist, the footprint of a small girl embedded in clay).



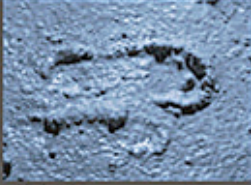
25000 year old skeletons, wearing shell ornaments




bisons and horses



the artist's hand



a girl's footprint




Paleolithic architecture had constructed of mammoth bones

Yet they gave us so many crucial gifts: language, kinship, music, dance, painting, drawing, engraving, sculpture, masks, architecture, jewelry and adornment. And gravesites marked with memorials to the dead.


Our unnamed and unknowable ancestors nevertheless seem intimately familiar to all of us who continue to engage in our most human experience from the distance of time (memory) and space (marking it apart): and creating a new form to be experienced.

Standing before this series of overlapping drawings we feel immediate kinship with the first artists who formed the first aesthetic lines. They *are* us ...

Please take a moment to remember and to thank the first artists.



flake, 25000 years old



carved ivory head of woman 25000 years old
 carved ivory head of man 32000 years old
 carved man with lion head mask 32000 years old
 carved horse 34000 years old

Figure 5. Artists' statement from "Paleolithic Altar for the First Artists"

¹ Otto F. Kernberg, M.D., *Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism*, New York: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1975, p. 13.

² Freud speaks of personality as split, altered and even disintegrating, but he does not make its spatial differentiation into a theory of a compartmentalized mind.

³ “Draft K: The Neuroses of Defence” (enclosed in Letter to Fliess 39, January 1, 1896), *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. I, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1966) 228-29.

Freud writes, “Repression does not take place by the construction of an excessively strong antithetic idea ... but by the intensification of a boundary idea, which thereafter represents the repressed memory in the passage of thought. It may be called a *boundary idea* because on the one hand it belongs to the ego and on the other hand forms an undistorted portion of the traumatic memory. So, once again it is the result of a compromise ... not manifested in a replacement on the basis of some category of subject-matter, but by a displacement of attention....”

⁴ The *DSM IV* used as a guideline for psychiatric diagnosis, says that BPD is classed on “Axis II”, i.e., as an “underlying pervasive or personality condition,” defined as: “a pervasive pattern of instability of interpersonal relationships, self-image and affects, as well as marked impulsivity, beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts.”

⁵ For Jacques Lacan, the unconscious is indeed “structured”—but “like a language”—and language is notoriously slippery or resistant to reduction to an ‘underlying structure’ e.g., its grammar. Lacan did devise algorithms for certain psychical formations (such as the hysteric and the pervert) which might be called ‘structures.’ They trace the way the subject relates to the object around which unconscious desire is formed. Lacanian practitioners often believe they will reach a patient’s psychical ‘structure’ by recourse to these algorithms. See note 16 below.

⁶ A description Kernberg repeats almost word for word on page 227. Compare the description by Erving Goffman below.

⁷ Excepting the cognitive-behavioral approach of Marsha Lineham, *Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment of Borderline Personality Disorder*, 1993. Her ‘dialectical therapy’ requires ‘that both patients and therapists find synthesis’: “...therapists must accept patients just as they are (angry, confrontational, hurting) within the context of trying to teach them how to change. Patients must end the borderline propensity to for black-and-white thinking, while realizing that some behaviors are right and some are simply wrong” (cited by John Cloud, “Minds on the Edge,” *Time* 19 January 2009: 45)

⁸ The overestimation of the importance of a stable social order and the ego’s placement within it as a sort of ‘container’ of its dictates must be seen in a broader consideration of the investment that any of us, but especially the theorists of borderline personality disorder, seem to have in drawing lines in order to fix a categorical border, control the contents of what is contained therein, and permit only initiates to enter this domain. But

neither Freud nor Lacan saw the ego, normal, psychotic or neurotic, in isolation from the socio-symbolic order, nor from the language that shapes it (e.g., the signifier, for Lacan, or for Freud, 'the symptom'). Below I discuss why, nonetheless, their theory does not mean that the drawing of lines itself is can or should be dispensed with.

⁹ Erving Goffman, "The Insanity of Place," appendix to *Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1971, pp. 335-390) reprinted with some editorial changes from *Psychiatry: Journal for the Study of Interpersonal Processes*, vol. XXXII: 4 (November, 1969).

¹⁰ Goffman explains:

The manic begins by promoting himself in the family hierarchy. He finds he no longer has the time to do his accustomed share of family chores. He increasingly orders other members around, displays anger and impatience, makes promises he feels he can break, encroaches on the equipment and space allocated to other members, only fitfully displays affection and respect, and finds he cannot bother adhering to the family schedule for meals, for going to bed and rising. He also becomes hypercritical and derogatory of family members. He moves backward to grandiose statements of the high rank and quality of his forebears and forward to an exalted view of what he proposes soon to accomplish. He begins to sprinkle his speech with unassimilated technical vocabularies. He talks loudly and constantly, arrogating to himself the place at the center of things this role assumes. The great events and personages of the day uncharacteristically evoke from him a considered and definitive opinion. He seizes on magazine articles, movies and TV shows as containing important wisdom that everyone ought to hear about in detail right now. (364)

¹¹ "The individual does actually carry on a twofold existence. One, to serve his own purposes and the other as a link in a chain, which he serves against his will, or at least involuntarily" (Freud, "History of Psychoanalytic Movement," *SE XIV*, (1957) 77-78. Freud is speaking about self as a link in more or less vertical chain of biological and cultural reproduction, but placed on the horizontal, this link to others is characterized by the same conflict: one involuntarily serves the needs of society.

¹² "Le premier qui, ayant enclos un terrain, s'avisait de dire: Ceci est à moi, et trouva des gens assez simples pour le croire, fut le vrai fondateur de la société civile." Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité parmi les hommes, IIe partie*. *Oeuvres complètes III*, ed. B. Gagnebin et M. Raymond (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1754) 111-223.

¹³ "Du contrat social," *Oeuvres complètes III*, eds. B. Gagnebin et M. Raymond (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1762) 349-470 ; *On the Social Contract, Discourse on the Origin of Inequality, and Discourse on Political Economy*, trans. Donald A. Cress, intro. Peter Gay (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1964) 191ff.

¹⁴ For further discussion of this, please see the following note and my essays addressing Rousseau more fully on this topic: "The City, Year Zero: Memory and the Spatial Unconscious," *Journal of Romance Studies*, Vol. 7:2 (Summer 2007) 1-18 and "Das Negative Universale: Die Suche nach der Liebe am falschen Ort?" ("The Negative Universal: Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places?") in M. Kesel & D. Hoens, eds., *Wieder Religion?*

Christentum im Zeitgenössischen Kristischen Denken (Lacan, Žižek, Badiou), trans. Eric Vogt (Turia & Kant: Vienna, 2005) 235-268.

¹⁵ With one *proviso*: the reconstruction of space along the lines of a fantasized re-fusion with nature. All forms *persist* and *co-exist* to varying degrees, *inside* the fantasies of how we ideally organize space: in the *unconscious fantasies* hidden in our psyche, the seductive appeal of enjoying a carefree savage life. They can also be found in our *constructed fantasies*, in perverse, ironic built spaces that gesture toward all of these forms organized around a profit motive, e.g., Walt Disney's "Frontierland".

¹⁶ These 'little letters' represent the Subject split by language (\$), the Master Signifier (S₁), collective or accumulated knowledge originated by the elaboration of a network of signifiers (S₂), and the unconscious factor that acts as the object in/of the unconscious, and constitutes an impediment to 'full consciousness' and/or the social tie (a).

¹⁷ "Qu'y renonce donc plutôt celui qui ne peut rejoindre à son horizon la subjectivité de son époque. Car comment pourrait-il faire de son être l'axe de tant de vies, celui qui ne saurait rien de la dialectique qui l'engage avec ces vies dans un mouvement symbolique? Qu'il connaisse bien la spire où son époque l'entraîne dans l'oeuvre continuée de Babel, et qu'il sache sa fonction d'interprète dans la discorde des langues." Jacques Lacan, "Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage," *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil 1966) 321. (The so-called 'Rome Discourse.')

¹⁸ "The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity." Haraway, *Manifesto for Cyborgs*, 151.

¹⁹ In the 17th century, Descartes made an absolute distinction between human and animal—an iron law that inspired a strong desire to see it transgressed: in the following century, Denis Diderot reports, a Bishop was found shouting at a caged ape in a zoological garden, "Speak, and I will baptize you!" (Reply by Dr. Bordeu to Mlle. De L'Espinasse in *Le Rêve de D'Alembert*. Bordeu says, "Avez-vous vu au jardin du Roi, sous une cage de verre, cet orang-outan qui a l'air d'un saint Jean qui prêche au désert? . . . Le cardinal de Polignac lui disait un jour: 'Parle, et je te baptise.'" Denis Diderot, *Œuvres philosophiques de Diderot*, ed. Paul Vernière (Paris: Éditions Garnier Frères, 1961) 384-85.

²⁰ This contradicts Haraway's argument against the 'wholeness' she says is the primary seduction of patriarchy (which she criticizes as the "appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity"), since ultimately her own vision is of just such a universal unification.

²¹ Jeffrey Librett has suggested that Haraway is covertly rehabilitating the 'symbolic' she denounces with the erection of universal coding. If so, hers would be a symbolic that lacks the crucial link to the unconscious that drives and animates it in Lacan's theory.

²² Should we not also ask what *really* called the Father's authority so strongly into question? Rather than a natural result of scientific advances, I think it was also, at least, a reaction to the horrors of WWII. These horrors inspired us to rethink Western Culture—what had gone so very wrong?—and, as the essentially adolescent culture that we are, we did what adolescents do: we blamed the Father.

²³ Descartes regarded animals as machines because there was no possibility for intelligent conversation with machines, no matter how clever their programming.