

# From Jocasta to Lolita



## The Oedipal Fantasy Inverted

Louis-Paul Willis  
Žižek Studies Conference - April 2012



# Part 1

## *A psychoanalytical Approach to the Cultural Fantasy of Girlhood*

Central interrogation:

*Why does our culture produce visual artefacts that posit girlhood as object of desire?*

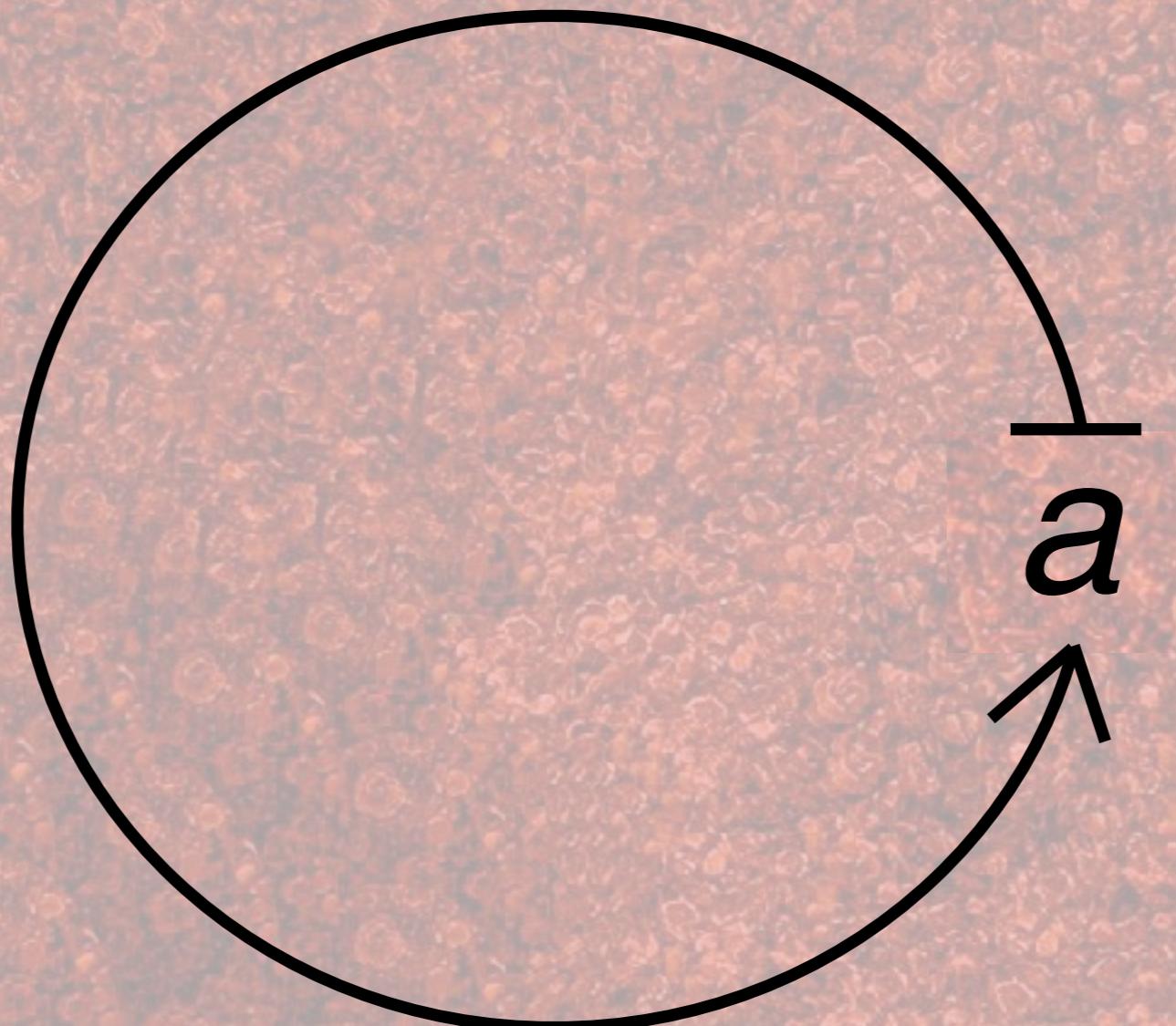
# Rethinking the filmic gaze

- Žižek (1989). “The Undergrowth of Enjoyment”  
“The Lacan who served as a point of reference for these theories [...] was the Lacan before the break” (p. 7).
  - Shift towards the Real and the *objet a*
- McGowan (2003). “Looking for the Gaze”  
“The gaze is not the look of the subject at the *objet*, but the point at which the *object* looks back” (p. 28-29).

# Filmic fantasy

- Fantasy:
  - ▶ “has come to mean the making visible, the making present, of what isn’t there, of what can never directly be seen” (Cowie, 1997, p. 128)
  - ▶ imaginary access to the *objet a*

# Filmic fantasy



Source: Žižek (1992), p. 56

# Filmic fantasy

$\$ \diamond a$

$\$$  = the split subject of the Symbolic

$a$  = the objet  $a$

$\diamond$  = “the tying of Symbolic ( $\$$ ), Imaginary ( $a$ ) and Real ( $a$ ) as it is operated by fantasy” (Chemama and Vandermersch, 1993, my translation).

# Filmic fantasy

- Žižek (2005). *The Metastases of Enjoyment*

“Lacan claims that an object of desire becomes an object of desire only in so far as it is prohibited (there is no incestuous desire prior to the prohibition of incest) - desire itself needs Law, its prohibition, as the obstacle to be transgressed ” (p. 174).

- Žižek (1997). *The Plague of Fantasies*

“The relationship between fantasy and the horror of the Real it conceals is much more ambiguous than it may seem: fantasy conceals this horror, yet at the same time it creates what it purports to conceal, its ‘repressed’ point of reference” (p. 6).

# Part 2

## **“Look closer!”**

- McGowan (2007). *The Real Gaze*

“Cinema is valuable [...] for its ability to reveal **what reality itself obscures - the dimension of fantasy**” (p. 32).

# “Looking for the gaze”

- Ricky v/s the voyeur
- Voyeur:
  - ▶ looking for the subject unaware of his look
- Ricky:
  - ▶ looking for what evades his look;
  - ▶ looking for that which escapes his symbolic comprehension
  - ▶ looking for the “entire life behind things”



*American Beauty* (Mendes, 1999)

# The aesthetics of fantasy



*American Beauty* (Mendes, 1999)

# The aesthetics of fantasy

- Cowie (1997). *Representing the Woman*

“Fantasy involves [...] the arranging of, a setting out of, desire; **a veritable mise en scène of desire**” (p. 133)
- Filmic rendition of Lester's fantasizing:
  - ▶ Cheerleader's uniform
  - ▶ Shift in soundtrack
  - ▶ Filming and lighting of the strip-tease
  - ▶ Angela' wink



*American Beauty* (Mendes, 1999)



*American Beauty* (Mendes, 1999)



I'm very, very dirty.

*American Beauty* (Mendes, 1999)



**This is my first time.**

*American Beauty* (Mendes, 1999)

# The aesthetics of fantasy

- Churchill (2003). *The Lolita Phenomenon*
  - ▶ PhD thesis
  - ▶ posits the sexualized young girl as a “child (femme) fatale”

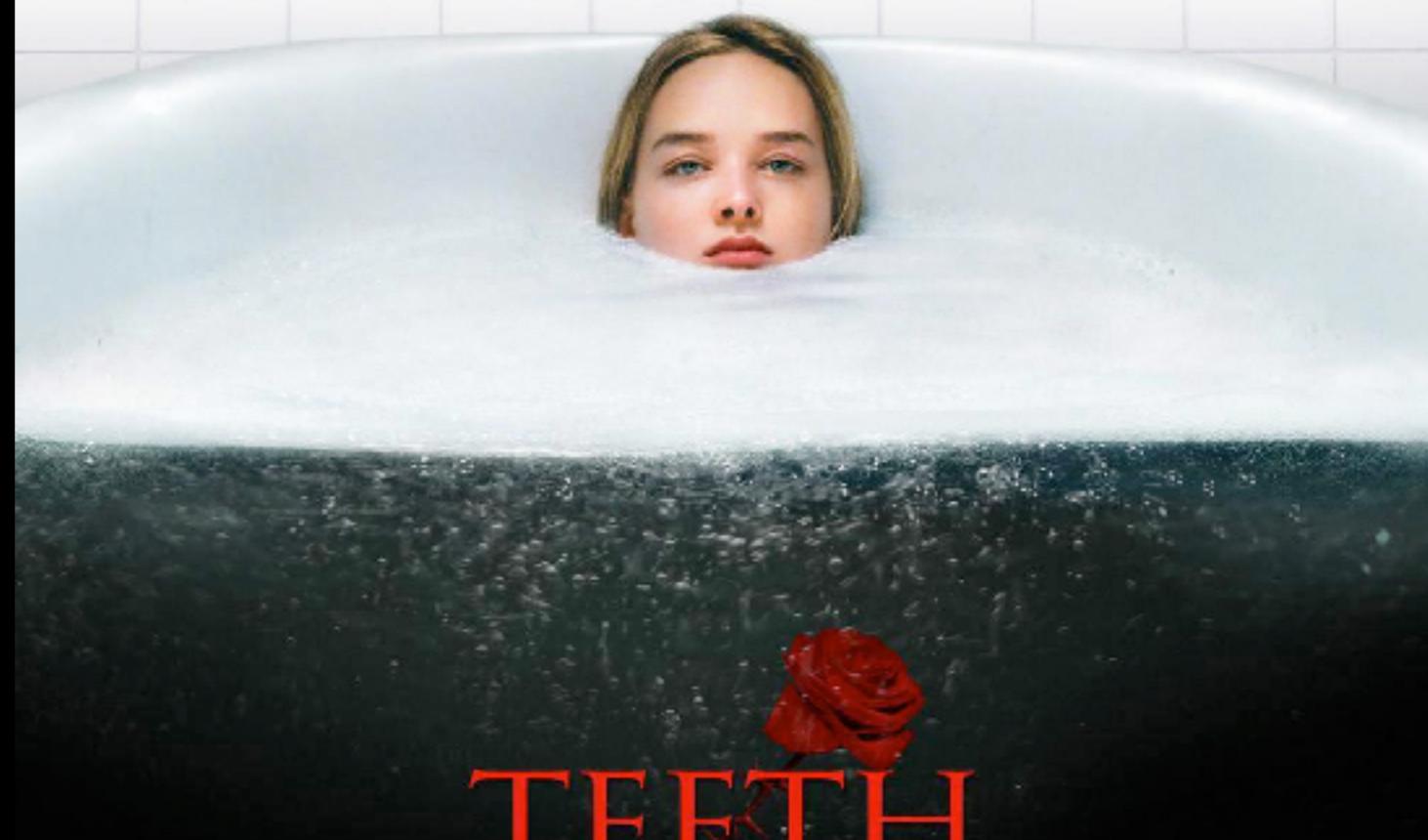


**Man, oh man, oh man.**

*American Beauty* (Mendes, 1999)

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-KIRK HONEYCUTT, THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER



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