

On the Pleasure Principle of Culture

Plattner

VII

中华女子学院图书馆

G0
9

On the Pleasure Principle in Culture

Illusions Without Owners

Robert Pfaller

Translated by Lisa Rosenblatt,

with Charlotte Eckler and Camilla Nielsen



VERSO

London • New York

First published by Verso 2014
Translation © Lisa Rosenblatt 2014
First published as *Die Illusionen der anderen: Über das Lustprinzip in der Kultur*
© Suhrkamp Verlag 2002

All rights reserved

The moral rights of the author have been asserted

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Verso

UK: 6 Meard Street, London W1F 0EG
US: 20 Jay Street, Suite 1010, Brooklyn, NY 11201
www.versobooks.com

Verso is the imprint of New Left Books

ISBN-13: 978-1-78168-174-9 (PB)
ISBN-13: 978-1-78168-175-6 (HB)
eISBN-13: 978-1-78168-220-3 (US)
eISBN-13: 978-1-78168-643-0 (UK)

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

Typeset in Minion Pro by Hewer Text UK Ltd, Edinburgh, Scotland
Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Marston Book Services Limited, Oxfordshire

On the Pleasure Principle in Culture

'Tis a vulgar Error to imagine Men live upon their own Wits, when generally it is upon others Follies . . . almost every Wind blows to Dover, or Holyhead some fresh Proprietor amply qualified with sufficient Stock.

Bernard Mandeville, *A Modest Defence of Publick Stews*

Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
1. INTERPASSIVITY: Fleeing from Enjoyment, and the Objective Illusion	15
2. BELIEF: Octave Mannoni and the Two Forms of Conviction, <i>Croyance</i> and <i>Foi</i> ('Belief' and 'Faith')	35
3. PLAY: Johan Huizinga – The Suspended Illusion and Sacred Seriousness	73
4. THE CONDITION FOR GREATER FASCINATION: Ambivalence – 'Knowledge' is Hatred	99
5. DIALECTICS: Sigmund Freud – Ambivalence and the Loss of Play in Culture	121
6. THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE: All Cultural Enjoyment is 'Fetishistic' – The Other's Illusion: Civilization and Its Contentments	135
7. ASCETICISM: Ascetic Ideals and Reactionary Masses – On the Organization of the Libido in Belief and Faith	193
8. HAPPINESS: Happiness and Its Obstacles: One's Own Illusions	211
9. APPEARANCE: The Invisible Other – Theory of the Naive Observer	231
INDEX	283

Introduction

Imagine you're sitting in a bar reading a newspaper, waiting for a friend. The friend arrives. He says hello, and then continues: 'Excuse me, can I have a quick look at your newspaper? I know it's silly, but I just have to know the score from yesterday's game.'

What we have here is a very special relationship between a subject and an illusion (in this case, the illusion that sports results really matter). The friend is in no way taken in by this illusion. On the contrary, he says that he knows quite well that it is silly, distancing himself from it. He does not claim allegiance to it, declare it as *his* illusion, or make any claim of ownership.

This is quite a different structure from the one we usually find. The ordinary relationship between an illusion and a subject is one in which the subject proudly attests to ownership – by professing, for example, a belief in God, or in human reason, or in self-regulation of the markets. Such subjects agree completely with their illusions and proudly claim ownership of them. They would never put themselves at a distance from these illusions, for instance, by saying things such as, 'I know it is quite foolish, but I have to go to church now,' or 'I know it is silly, but I believe in the self-regulation of markets.'

It thus appears that we are dealing with two different types of illusion: illusions with owners and illusions maintained by people who are not their owners; illusions with subjects and illusions without subjects. We are thus faced with a distinction based on a difference in the *forms* of illusion rather than a difference in their *content*: it is a distinction based on the relationship between subject and illusion, on the different ways in which people refer to these illusions (regardless of their contents).

In some cases, people identify with their illusions, which they often emphasize by adding the assertion, 'I believe (in) that, I really do.' On the contrary, in other cases, people 'know better'; they know that the illusion is 'nonsense' or 'something silly', and this knowledge seems to place an insurmountable gap between them and the illusion.

Whereas the first type is common and not difficult to detect, the second type of illusion, dismissed by knowing better, turns out to be

elusive – so much so that often it is difficult even to recognize its presence. The epistemological problem with regard to this form of illusion initially rests on the fact that it is not easy to tell exactly who maintains such illusions. At first glance it might seem as if every illusion must have at least one believer, as though those illusions that are not one's own must necessarily belong to someone else. But might it be possible that there are illusions that always belong to others, that are never anyone's own illusions?¹

This seems to be precisely the case for the illusion that sports broadcasts, the horoscope and a number of other similar things are actually important: they are obviously not *one's own illusions* (because there is that better knowledge); thus, they are *those of others*. But which others? Children? Ancestors? Fools? If not those in the know, often we cannot really say who is meant to be their bearer. It is not always possible to find those who aren't in the know. After all, who actually says, 'I believe in the horoscope, and I am proud of it'? We are dealing here with a form of illusion for which we are sometimes unable to locate any believers at all. These illusions, which perhaps at first seem to be the *others' illusions*, upon closer inspection prove to be *illusions without subjects*.

A further difficulty in recognizing the presence of these illusions without owners seems to stem from the assumption that knowledge cancels them out. If someone has access to relevant knowledge, as a result, they must be free of illusion. Perhaps they are aware of illusions without owners; but does that really mean that those illusions have power over them? Oddly enough, illusions without owners, without

1 Slavoj Žižek has formulated this type of thought most clearly: 'The paradox . . . is such . . . that the shift is original and constitutive: there is no immediate, self-present subjectivity that . . . belief can be attributed to and from which it was later expropriated. There are several beliefs, and the most essential of them are "decentred" right from the start: that is, they are the beliefs of others.' Slavoj Žižek 'Die Substitution zwischen Interaktivität und Interpassivität', in Robert Pfaller, ed., *Interpassivität. Studien über delegiertes Genießen* (Vienna/New York: Springer 2000), p. 14 ; English translation, 'The Interpassive Subject', Centre Georges Pompidou, Traverses, 1998, lacan.com/zizek-pompidou.htm. Some current philosophical advances seem to point in a similar direction to this question of the possibility of illusions without subjects – for example, those that search for the possibility of feelings without owners, or experiences without subjects. See also Mario Perniola, *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic* (Athlone Contemporary European Thinkers), trans. Massimo Verdicchio (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 1ff, 127ff; Martin Jay, *Cultural Semantics: Keywords of Our Time* (London: Athlone Press, 1998), pp. 46, 58–9.

subjects, are evident only in those who know better, precisely because they are always the illusions of others. Angry people slam their fist down on the table although everyone knows that the table is not guilty. Computer users know perfectly well that their machines are not equipped to respond to encouragement, yet they nonetheless talk persistently with their electronic darlings (which are, incidentally, sometimes given pet names) as if they could respond; and when a machine experiences a major mechanical breakdown, many users even resort to crude acts of violence, inflicting damage, hitting the machine, or even going so far as throwing it out of the window, as if the punished PC were actually capable of redeeming itself in response to the painful experience. When faced with the power of such illusions, people's knowledge does not seem to offer sufficient protection; quite the contrary, when considering the striking correlation between our knowing better and the illusions of others, we would even have to ask if knowing better does not somehow contribute to the power of these illusions. Is it possible that there are illusions that are not only not dismissed by knowing better, but are even first installed by it?

In addition to the problems of the bearer and the role of knowing better, the third difficulty is that of the compulsion that the illusions of others seem to exert. Although, due to their knowledge, bearers appear to be at a distance from these illusions, they are nonetheless obviously highly susceptible to them: 'I have to read the horoscope'; 'I have to see the ballgame on television right now.' Turning the key in the ignition of a car that doesn't immediately start, reasonable, civilized people, in particular, are often compelled to blurt out: 'Come on now, you can do it. Start!', and the like.² Those people, especially, who know that these types of reactions are childish, unimportant, and nonsensical are nonetheless unable to stop.³ The others' illusions demand their immediate action. In comparison, some convinced believers appear more liberated with respect to their own beliefs: Catholics who miss mass can possibly visit a different one later in the day, whereas football fans have to see the game *live, in real time, on television*; strangely enough, they can

2 A wonderful illustration is offered by the scene played by George Clooney in *Out of Sight* (dir. Steven Soderbergh, USA, 1998).

3 See also Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 81: 'Oedipus is one of those things that becomes all the more dangerous the less people believe in it . . .'

never watch it later, from a recording. Why are the illusions of others more compelling than our own?

This compulsion is, by the way, often the only characteristic that allows us to recognize this form of illusion. The knowledge that produces a distance from such illusions is often so self-evident that it is not even worth mentioning (*à la*, 'I know perfectly well that the table is not at fault'). Based on the self-evidence of the knowledge, its object (the content of the illusion) often seems unthinkable, and is also never really thought. With illusions distanced by self-evident knowledge, we often do not even notice *that we are dealing with an illusion*. As Slavoj Žižek quite aptly remarks, not only do we not know how things really are, we do not even know how they appear to us. According to Žižek, if our boss is someone who we know is foolish and incompetent, we usually act with an odd respect. Despite our better knowledge, an appearance of respectability is called for.⁴ This means, then, that we often do not even notice that something 'appears' to us. This realization adds a further challenge, formulating the problem of appearance in a new way. A strong philosophical tradition, embodied for example in the meditations of Descartes, examined the problem of appearance primarily in relation to one of its particular aspects – namely, that we see human beings but do not know whether they are mechanical figures; or, we see a city in the desert, and do not know whether it is a mirage. The content of such appearances would be manifest and evident; only their truth-value remains unknown. The illusions without owners, on the contrary, display exactly the opposite structure: we are entirely aware that they are not true; but the fact that we are nonetheless still defined by them, that we act on them, remains undetected. The problem does not concern a mere lifting of the veil of a manifest illusion for the benefit of a truth that lies hidden behind it. Instead, it concerns recognizing, at least, the additional presence of a veil where it seems as though nothing exists beyond self-evident, matter-of-fact knowledge of the truth.

The issue is not always one of having an image and not knowing whether or not it is a true image corresponding to reality. Often the problem consists, conversely, in having a thoroughly adequate picture of reality, and knowing that, but not knowing that, in addition, one also has another picture. We know exactly how things really are, and

4 See Žižek, 'Die Substitution', pp. 29–30.

perhaps believe that we don't believe in anything beyond that; and yet, without noticing, we are already wrapped up in an illusion without an owner – deeply and compulsively. Bang! That fist slams down on the table.

When it is not clear that we are dealing with an illusion, it is generally also difficult to recognize *the content of this illusion*. Why do people have to have music playing in a room, chew gum, doodle on paper while on the telephone, or drive around aimlessly? Where could there be an illusion in such seemingly simple, matter-of-fact, banal occurrences? For an illusion to take place, doesn't something at least have to be depicted, such as the deceptively realistic notepapers in *trompe-l'œil* painting,⁵ which cast painted shadows on painted notice boards? Or can an illusion also be found in *non-representative* occurrences and products – such as in painting that comprises nothing but numbers or letters or lines on ruled paper?⁶ The illusion without an owner, which has hitherto made itself noticeable only by the characteristic of compulsion, is quite often *an imagination without an image*.

Summarizing these first, rough observations, it is clear that we are dealing with illusions that (1) seem to have no bearer; (2) are not dismissed by knowing better, but instead even seem to be strengthened by it; (3) exert themselves in the form of a compulsion, albeit foreign and kept at a distance through knowledge; (4) often remain unnoticed; and (5) appear to be without content.

This form of illusion seems to contradict five seemingly plausible principles – namely, the assumptions that (1) there is a bearer for every illusion; (2) knowing better dismisses the corresponding illusion (or at least, if it does not dismiss it, does not strengthen it); (3) only our own, recognized illusions can be mandatory or compulsory for us; (4) when we imagine something, perhaps we do not know the truth but at least we know the illusion; and (5) we can immediately identify the content of every illusion.

If these characterizations are accurate, then the illusions without owners stir up a whole series of theoretical problems. Apart from those issues related to an explanation of their own paradoxical

5 See also, for example, C. N. Gijsbrechts, 'Trompe-l'œil 1672' (illustration 128), and W. V. Nymegen, 'Trompe l'œil mit der Bastille' (illustration 107), both in Patrick Mauriès, ed., *Le trompe l'œil. De l'antiquité au XXe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard 1996).

6 See also, for example, the works by Roman Opalka, On Kawara and Hanne Darboven.

structure, they afford us the opportunity to ask more generally what it means to imagine something, or to be involved with illusions and the relationship of others' illusions to those illusions that we call our own, of which we are often quite proud and which we 'really believe in'. Taking this into consideration, acquiring a new, disturbingly uncanny nature is mainly the question of what 'enlightenment' might mean – that is, what it means to rid oneself of illusions through insight.

Research on this issue faces an extremely difficult situation. The problem of the illusion's *form* is seldom clearly posed. And even when it is posed, the attempt is usually made to solve the problem exclusively through information about the *content* of the illusion. Paul Veyne, for example, raised a number of very precise questions that touch upon our theme in his treatise *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths?* Veyne writes: 'How is it possible to half-believe, or to believe in contradictory things?'⁷ He proposes the example of an Ethiopian tribe, the Dorzé, who believe that the leopard is a Christian animal and that it observes days of fast; nonetheless, they guard their livestock on these days in order to protect them from leopards.⁸ This is a good example of an illusion that is kept at a distance through knowing better: the religious myth seems to have been dismissed by an 'enlightened' practice. Veyne approaches the issue of ancient Greek 'theology' in a similar way. At first glance, the question arises of whether anyone could have ever seriously 'believed in' this theology – or at least the question is posed by those who have acquired their notion of religion from monotheistic religions. This is mainly because of the amazingly low moral standards among gods of the ancient world, rather than any possible contradictions (of which other theologies are no less at risk). Gods who exhibit behaviour that is frequently far less moral than that of people (or at least the more decent people) raise doubts about whether it was ever possible to believe in this type of mythology; or, at the very least, such deities bring up the question of what it actually means to believe in gods like these.⁹

Rather than following his own tracks and arriving at the conclusion that there must have been various historical forms constituting

7 Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination*, transl. Paula Wissing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. xi.

8 Ibid., p. xi.

9 Ibid.

the meaning of 'belief', Veyne hastily resorts to the assumption 'that truth is the most variable of all measures', which he considers 'Nietzschean'.¹⁰ Belief is always the same, but its contents change – according to the particular, historical transcendental conditions: one cultural construction allows one thing to appear plausible, another cultural construction, something else. Following Veyne, we must consequently answer 'yes' to the question of whether or not the Greeks believed in their myths.¹¹

Veyne's theory surmises that belief occurs in the same way every time, but in one case it is belief in one thing, and in another, something else. And we only erroneously consider our own uncertain knowledge (about Tokyo's existence¹² or the truth of Einstein's theory¹³) as certain, and the assumptions of other epochs, on the contrary, as questionable or foolish. For this reason, things that were once self-evident to others seem peculiar to us. Without noticing, Veyne silences his own question with a series of relativistic platitudes, which might be true yet offer no answers to his own, very interesting question.

A remark from Friedrich Engels could have shown him the way out of this cul-de-sac. In his text from 1884, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, Engels maintained 'that Bachofen believe[d] at least as much as Aeschylus did in the Furies, Apollo, and Athena'.¹⁴ According to Engels, the nineteenth-century scholar Bachofen had the same belief as Aeschylus. Consequently, there is not necessarily a difference in the content of the beliefs of two different epochs, as Veyne assumed, so that the one believes in one thing and the other in something else. Instead, in this case, members of different epochs in fact have the same content to their beliefs. The difference between them lies elsewhere: Bachofen, Engels states, believed 'at least as much' in the Greek myths as had the ancient poet. Does that mean that he might possibly have believed in them *even more* than

10 See *ibid.*, pp. 117, 118.

11 See *ibid.*, p. 129.

12 See *ibid.*, p. 28.

13 See *ibid.*, p. 117.

14 Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1973), p. 14. For the translation used here, see Friedrich Engels, *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, preface to the fourth edition (1891), at marxists.org. See also Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 107.

Aeschylus had? With this phrase, Engels allows us to imagine something quite striking: it is not at all the case that, due to their specific transcendental tenets from this historical epoch, Greek myths could appear plausible only to the Greeks and must seem absurd to all other cultures or epochs. On the contrary: they appeared perhaps even more plausible to the nineteenth-century scholars than they had to the Greeks themselves. The transcultural misunderstanding that Engels identifies here takes exactly the opposite form than Veyne assumed: the error is not made in considering one's own culture as justified and the other as absurd; instead, it involves granting the foreign culture more plausibility and showing it less scepticism than that culture itself would have done. The scholar pursues an exaggerated appropriation. He assigns the foreign culture a form of belief that is entirely foreign to it. He identifies with illusions that may have been mere illusions without owners for the culture that produced them. According to Engels, what Bachofen treated as though it were the equivalent of the Ten Commandments – that is, as a conviction in which one must believe – might have had the same status for Aeschylus as Santa Claus does for us.

That is to say, belief cannot always have meant the same thing. The same content can therefore be believed in, in one form (the ironic distance of antiquity) and then in another (the respectful appropriation of the nineteenth-century scholar). There is no correlation, as Veyne assumes, between the form and content of a belief, so that every epoch necessarily only believes in its own content. Some epochs do believe in other epochs' contents; and perhaps they believe in them just as strongly as in their own (or even more so) – and even more than the other epoch believed in its own content. Thus, what changes is not simply the content of the belief, which does not necessarily always change. Instead, sometimes it is only the form of belief associated with the content that changes.

It is not certain, however, that the ancient Greeks, for their part, had a culture in mind that filled the same role as theirs did for Bachofen. If the Greeks believed in their own content with reserve, then they did not necessarily have other contents in which they believed with any less reserve. Perhaps it was characteristic of this ancient Greek culture that they maintained beliefs *exclusively* in the distanced form of illusions without owners. What was special about this Greek culture was not that they believed in strange gods, but

rather that their form of belief was one of divided, distanced belief – the form Veyne introduced so aptly with the example of the Ethiopian myth of the Christian leopards. What would separate Greek antiquity from some later epochs would be a historical break, in terms not of the content but more of the form of social illusion. Cultures with distanced beliefs are distinct from cultures that possess forms of appropriated beliefs and nurture illusions with which they proudly identify.

To insist on this break, and thereby on the appearance of something that had previously not existed, also seems more closely aligned with Nietzsche's position than with the relativism Veyne derives from it. Nietzsche says that all truths are illusions,¹⁵ but also that not every epoch has thought that equally. Instead, at a certain point in history something new suddenly appears – namely, the illusion of possessing an illusion that is not an illusion. At some point in history, the sceptical, distanced illusion of the other lost its dominance as the sole form of social illusion. A new form – the form with which we are familiar, that of *our own illusions*, in which we believe with a true belief, with conviction – began to dominate over the illusion of the other, to produce truth-effects. When the bearers begin to believe truly in their illusions, rather than keeping them at a distance through knowing better, their illusions become their truths. Nietzsche's whole argument can be grasped as an attempt to mark the historical point at which this happened – to clarify the conditions that led to the development of *one's own illusion* as truth.

Truth as an illusion in which one truly believes is not an epistemological form on its own; it does not fulfil any additional, novel cognitive function with regard to prior knowledge. The cognitive function was already fulfilled quite well by the knowledge that was used to keep the illusion at a distance. Truth, on the contrary, is first and foremost something practical, a position: it is that which one believes. And we believe in the truth just as we believe in our morals. For Nietzsche, the historical development of truth (as one's own illusion) is thus a moral development;¹⁶ its condition is the subject of a genealogy of morality.

15 See Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths?*, p. xi.

16 See Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Beyond Good and Evil', in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, transl. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 2000), p. 187.

The problem that Veyne addresses – namely, whether anyone ‘really’ and ‘truly’ believes in something, or perhaps only ‘halfway’ – is not raised by truth as a cognitive achievement, but, rather, by truth tied to a moral. As we have seen, this problem does not emerge from the contradictions of Greek mythology, but is instead a result of the low moral standards of the Greek gods. Is it possible to believe in gods that deceive, rob, commit adultery, manipulate duels, and succumb to what are meant to be lowly emotions such as sexual desire, injured pride and vanity, jealousy, envy and anger? Can such characters seriously be called gods?¹⁷ The problem of belief is not an intellectual one, but a moral one. The difficulty lies not in conceiving intellectually of the idea that raises the problem of credibility, but rather in the *ideal’s lack of suitability for identification*.¹⁸

Any attempt to deal with this solely at an intellectual, epistemological level fails to address the problem. The issue is not ‘historical transcendentalism,’ which granted the Greek gods more or less plausibility in certain epochs. Instead, it is the issue of whether all cultures need ideals with which to identify. Might it be possible that some cultures can survive without moral ideals, or without the necessity to identify with them? Cultures without morals? How might an ideological system function – particularly in a so-called high culture – if there are no gods, or if the gods are even lowlier than the people?

Veyne evades his own question and conceals its disturbing, uncanny nature under the more familiar problematic embodied in his answers. This appears *symptomatic* – not only in the sense of the “‘symptomatic’ reading’ presented by Louis Althusser, which taught that a theory’s answers should be compared with its questions;¹⁹ but it

17 This problem already surfaces in ancient Greece. The ‘monotheistic’ pre-Socratic Xenophanes critically remarked: ‘Homer and Hesiod have ascribed to the gods everything which is shame (*oneidea*) and blame (*psogos*) for human beings: stealing, committing adultery, and deceiving one another.’ Xenophanes of Colophon, Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos* IX. 193, at csun.edu. See G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), p. 163; see also Karl Popper, ‘Duldsamkeit und intellektuelle Verantwortung,’ in *Offene Gesellschaft – offenes Universum. Franz Kreuzer im Gespräch mit Karl Popper* (Vienna: Deuticke, 1983) pp. 103–17.

18 Veyne confirms that, when he describes the Christians’ rejection of the pagan gods, ‘they did not call the myths “vain fables” so much as . . . “unworthy ideas”’ (*Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths?*, p. 117).

19 See also Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Verso, 1997), p. 28.

also seems to be the typical and inevitable result of the crisis of a particular way of thinking nowadays – a postmodern perspective that no longer sees any difference in the face of so many differences. *Everyone believes their own thing* – this simple formula, characteristic of some postmodern theories, eliminates the question of whether it might be possible that *some believe the other's things*, and thus also eliminates the search for the differences in the *form* (and not only in the content) of belief. Here, relativism erects an epistemological obstacle.

Breaking through this epistemological obstacle seems important for two reasons: first, to avoid a crucial contemporary misunderstanding. Postmodern theory fancies itself a formation that – perhaps for the first time since the sceptical positions of classical antiquity – has achieved a distanced relationship to all ‘great narratives’. All others, accordingly, believe strongly in one thing or another; only postmodernism believes in nothing, the theory exclaims, proudly – but not as cleverly as Madame de V*** in Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey*,²⁰ who tells her guest in short, that she believed nothing. But at least postmodern theory believes – as we have seen – that belief has always been the same. It is thereby unable to recognize those historical as well as contemporary phenomena in which a distanced relationship to certain illusions was and is practised. And starting from this wrong assumption, postmodern theory fancies itself more sceptical than it actually is. But, most importantly, it does not notice that its form of alleged non-belief fulfils exactly the same affective conditions as every conviction in which one believes: postmodern scepticism, like every illusion of one’s own, is a specific way of accommodating the libido that, instead of producing pleasure, first and foremost produces self-esteem. It creates the same ego-fixated enjoyment of those who believe in everything that they believe in, regardless of what it is, only in order to believe in themselves – including those who do not believe in anything else *but* themselves.

This libidinal function of postmodern scepticism, focused on the production of self-esteem, is the second reason why it seems necessary to break through the epistemological obstacle it erects. Not only does its sceptical *theoretical claim* seem dubious – so does its *promise*

20 Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy: By Mr. Yorick*, (Basil: J. J. Tourneisen, 1796), p. 153.