

**Getting the Real to Respond: Repetition, Pawns, and Missing Encounters in
Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment**

Symmetries of pawning. In late 19th-century Russia, as elsewhere in Europe, the institution of pawnbroking was fast becoming widespread among the lower middle classes, including the urban intelligentsia. A pawn is a hostage held to ensure that a debt or loan is returned to its lender. As soon as the debt is returned (with interest), the lender has the right to “redeem” the deposited object. Yet this symmetry of giving and redemption veils the fundamental asymmetry of the act; I have in mind the discrepancy between the pawn’s significance to the pawner, on the one hand, and its objectified exchange value to the broker, on the other. The money offered in exchange by the broker for the object pawned is always less what the object is worth to the pawner; its symbolic surplus value cannot as a rule be met in the exchange. What the pawnbroker takes in commission is, in truth, not the object itself but our desire to repossess what we cannot live without. Which is why pawnbroking is an ideal illustration of the workings of the pleasure principle. Pawns have attached to them a kind of string by which they remain connected to those forced to cash in on the family silver. A good example of this asymmetry occurs in Dostoevsky’s Prestuplenie i nakazanie (Crime and Punishment, 1866), a novel involving the slaughter of the pawnbroker Alyona Ivanovna and her sister Lizaveta by the impoverished former student Rodion Raskolnikov. On the evening before the murder, Raskolnikov “rehearses” his plan to kill the old woman, bringing her his father’s silver watch:

“How much for the watch, Alyona Ivanovna?”

“It is not really worth anything; you bring me nothing but trash, my friend.” [. . .]

“Let me have four rubles. I will redeem it; it was my father’s. I am expecting some money soon.”

“A ruble and a half, interest in advance. Take it or leave it.” [Dostoevsky, 1989, 5)

The gap between the watch’s symbolic value to Raskolnikov and its objectified exchange value as a collateral is evident in this scene (in the end, Raskolnikov decides to leave the watch with Alyona, anyway—he knows he will be back). The scene illustrates the power of pawnbroking as an institution that cashes in on our desire to be reunited with an absent object.

Wieder-holung vs. Wiederholung. Freud’s well-known description of the Fort/da game in his essay Beyond the Pleasure Principle involves the temporary pawning away of a desired object and its subsequent retrieval by his one-and-a-half-year-old nephew, the son of his eldest daughter. Freud’s observation of his nephew’s play is fuelled by the fearful suspicion that there might exist a force that contradicts the almighty Lustprinzip (pleasure principle). The situation is well known. Freud has for a while observed how the “good little boy” “had an occasional disturbing habit of taking any small objects he could get hold of and throwing them away from him into a corner, under the bed, and so on, so that hunting for his toys and picking them up was often quite a business” (Freud 1953, 45). As

he does this, he emits a loud sound (“o-o-o-o-“) that, as Freud concludes, is in fact the German word “fort” (<away, gone). As it turns out, fort receives its significance through its opposition to a second gesture that is its direct opposite, “da” (there). One of the toys thrown away by the boy is a Spule, a wooden reel with a piece of string wound around it:

It never occurred to him to pull it [=the reel, S.S.] along the floor behind him, for instance, and play at its being a carriage. What he did was to hold the reel by the string and very skillfully throw it over the edge of his curtained cot, so that it disappeared into it, at the same time uttering his expressive ‘o-o-o-o’. He then pulled the reel out of the cot again by the string and hailed its reappearance with a joyful ‘da’ [‘there’]. This, then, was the complete game—disappearance and return. (Freud 1953, 45)

Freud declares the “fort/da game” to be related to “the child’s greatest cultural achievement—the instinctual renunciation”, consisting in allowing his mother to leave without protesting against her departure, a fact that also marks the boy’s entry into the order of language as an act of renunciation (Triebverzicht). Yet while this interpretation would inevitably have led Freud to the conclusion that the entry into the symbolic order compromises the pleasure principle, an alternative interpretation is found; now, the wooden reel is taken to symbolically represent the absent mother, while the reel’s repeated distancing/subsequent retrieval during the fort/da game suggests symbolic control over the mother’s traumatizing absence (Freud’s nephew literally holds all the strings), and hence the restoral of the energy balance (Lustgewinn).¹ The fort/da game,

then, is a game of repetition not only in the sense that it is repeated over and over, but also in the sense that it makes its object symbolically return to its sender; the pledged object is hence redeemed (Wieder-holung<German wieder + German holen).ⁱⁱ

Freud's nagging suspicion that, still, there might be a "beyond the pleasure principle" is fueled by his observation that his nephew is considerably less interested in the second part of the game ("da")—the retrieval or redemption of the reel from the cot by means of the string attached to it—than in the first ("fort"), a.k.a. the throwing away of the reel. Which is to say that the return of signs, reproduction, and symbolic control over the repeated scene are here overruled by a force unconcerned with the return of signs and our desire to repay our debt in order to repossess the lost object (Wieder-holung). Which is to say that there is, or there might be, a form of Wiederholung that does not involve the redemption of the object, a.k.a., the return of signs. This, however, means that what language returns is not what we crave for, what we lack, or what is painfully absent from our lives. As his analysis progresses, it becomes more and more apparent that the fort/da game is less a means to compensate for the absence of the boy's mother as it is a means to make her disappear. As it were to make up for this, Freud suspects that the little boy in fact avenges himself on his mother for leaving him ("Throwing away the object so that it was 'gone' might satisfy an impulse of the child's, which was suppressed in his actual life, to revenge himself on his mother for going away from him. In that case it would have a defiant meaning: 'All right, then, go away! I don't need you. I'm sending you away myself.'" (Freud 1953, 45) The symbolic "return" of his nephew's mother, then, returns a death wish; what the fort/da game renounces is the very pleasure principle it

was thought to sustain. The symbolic substitution of the mother by the wooden reel turns out to be nothing short of symbolic murder. Confirmation of this may be seen in the footnote Freud appends to this analysis, explaining that when the child was five and three-quarters, his mother died. Now that she was really ‘gone’ (‘o-o-o’), the little boy showed no signs of grief”. During the war, when the boy’s father was at the front, his son was, according to Freud’s (no doubt biased) testimony, “far from regretting his absence”, now “throwing away his toys as if he was angry with them, explaining: ‘Go to the fwont!’” (46). Which leads to the conclusion, first, that from the point of view of the symbolic order, the pleasure principle with its mandate that the sign “return” to its sender is indeed “automatically” contradicted. This means, secondly, that, as Lacan explained, the wooden reel, rather than being a substitute for the missing object, is the cause of that absence (and hence of desire). The reel, then, is a fragment of what Lacan called le réel (the real).ⁱⁱⁱ The real, precisely, is what is returned when the boy’s reel is not pulled back, when the pawn is not redeemed, when the encounter with the lost object is missing (manquée). To say that the real is “what cannot be symbolized” is to elude the fact that the game always yields a return; yet what is returned to us is not necessarily what we expect to redeem.

The re/e/al behind the dream. In Dostoevsky’s Crime and Punishment, the real manifests itself especially in those parts of the text with a high degree of symbolic organization, such as dreams, fantasies, and dialogues. Dreams, in Dostoevsky’s fiction, do not, as is often said to be the case, simply suggest that “life is a dream”. Such romantic clichés, while they do play a role in the author’s texts, do not go to the essence of

Dostoevsky's description of dreams. That essence, I submit, consists in the description of instances of dreaming where the dreamer encounters, or fails to encounter, a reality that is located literally "behind" the symbolic enactment staged by the dream, i.e., the real. The following scene from Crime and Punishment shows what I have in mind. Raskolnikov has just returned home from one of his aimless wanderings through the city that always lead him on circuitous paths:

It was evening when he reached home, so that he must have been walking for about six hours. [. . .] He undressed and lay down, shuddering like an overdriven horse [. . .] and fell instantly asleep. It was dusk when he was startled awake by a terrible cry. God, what was that shriek? He had never before heard such a babble of unnatural noises, such howling and wailing, grinding of teeth, tears, blows, and curses. He could never even have imagined such ferocity and frenzy. He raised himself in a panic, and sat on his bed in a torment of fear. The sounds of struggling, wailing, and cursing grew louder and louder. Suddenly, to his utter amazement, he recognized his landlady's voice. She was howling, shrieking, and wailing, the words tumbling out of her mouth in an indistinguishable spate; she seemed to be imploring someone to stop, for she was being unmercifully beaten, out there on the stairs. Her assailant, hoarse with rage and fury, was also pouring out a stream of unrecognizable words, stuttering with haste. Raskolnikov began to tremble like a leaf; he knew that voice, it was the voice of Ilya Petrovich. Ilya Petrovich here, and beating his landlady! [. . .] 'But what is it for? What is it all

about? How could it possibly be happening?’ he repeated to himself, seriously wondering if he had gone mad.

Raskolnikov fell back exhausted on his sofa, but he could not close his eyes again; he lay there for half an hour, in the grip of such anguish [. . .] as he had never before experienced. Suddenly a bright light illuminated the room.; Nastasya had come in with a candle and a plate of soup. She looked at him and, seeing that he was not asleep, put the candle on the table and began to set out the things she had brought [. . .].

‘Nastasya. . .why were they beating the landlady?’

She stared at him.

‘Who was?’

‘Just now . . . half an hour ago. [. . .].’

‘Nobody was beating the landlady’, she said.

(Dostoevsky 1989, 97/98; emphasis mine, S.S.)

Fast asleep, Raskolnikov is woken up by a sudden “shriek”; yet what he awakens into is not simply empirical reality. As becomes clear when Nastasya informs him that “noone” in fact was beaten on the staircase, the shriek that wakes Raskolnikov never occurred in reality. Which is not to say that Raskolnikov did not hear a sudden sound or thud (perhaps in the street outside or in the staircase) before waking up from his dream. Instead of registering in the sleeper’s consciousness and waking him up, however, the outside sound fell straight into Raskolnikov’s dream just before he woke up. Once that had happened, the sound was registered as the “landlady’s shriek” by the dream that was already

unfolding in Raskolnikov's unconscious when the sound reached his ears. The dream, then, comes to be organized around an empty husk of a sign (the shriek) without a referent in conscious reality. The reason for the transformation of the sound into the landlady's "shriek" cannot be sought in empirical reality; instead it has to be located in the dream itself, or, more to the point, in a desire or a wish behind that dream.^{iv} It is to this "real plane" behind the dream, a plane without semiosis, and to its location in the void between perception and consciousness that Raskolnikov's dream refers us. What, we have to ask, wakes Raskolnikov up? It is not Nastasya putting on the light who awakens Raskolnikov ("She looked at him and, seeing that he was not asleep, put the candle on the table..."), nor is it the actual sound outside in the street or the staircase. What awakens Raskolnikov comes from inside his dream, not from empirical reality. It is not reality but the real that awakens Raskolnikov, an element "behind" the dream that is not simply identical with reality.^v Raskolnikov, then, wakes up without waking up. His "recollection" of the scene on the staircase is neither simply a fantasy, nor is it exactly a recollection of empirical reality. It is both at the same time; after waking up, Raskolnikov cannot but reconstruct his perception of the sound he never perceived consciously in terms suggested to him by his dream. As he says to Nastasya: "I heard it myself . . . I wasn't asleep . . . I was sitting here". What we are given in the quoted scene, then, is not Raskolnikov's sudden transition from sleep (his dream of the landlady being beaten) to wakefulness (Nastasya turns on the light), but the gap between the two, the very place where Raskolnikov's conscious perception is reconstructed as a fantasy. Which is also to say that this is the place from where the "hidden voice" emerges that Porfiry hopes will "break out into the open" from Raskolnikov's speech. That voice is not a property of

perception, nor of consciousness; it emerges instead from the gap separating the two. Raskolnikov's name contains the Russian word "raskol" (<schism, gap), a fact that is often taken to refer to the historical schism in Russian Orthodoxy. More to the point, it refers to the schism inside Raskolnikov himself, the split between wakefulness and sleep, reality and real, consciousness and perception that structures his perception. It is as if Raskolnikov exists in that "in between" between perception and consciousness; it is from here that the "real" Raskolnikov would have to emerge.^{vi} We might hence apply to Raskolnikov what Lacan argues about himself in his 1964 seminar, "Je suis [. . .] avant que je ne me réveille" ("I am before I do not wake up", Lacan 1973, 67).^{vii}

Real dialogue. It is often said that M. Bakhtin's thesis regarding the "dialogicity" of Dostoevsky's prose cannot be reconciled with the conclusions of psychoanalysis. While both Bakhtin and psychoanalysis view the formation of subject positions as discursive, Bakhtin, it is said, denies the existence of the unconscious as part of the process of subject formation. It is surprising, then, to find that Bakhtin's conception of dialogue, by far the most influential of his descriptive categories, seems to include an element fully commensurate with the Lacanian real. As is well known, Bakhtin argued that Dostoevsky's fiction is structured by what he called the "interaction of several unmerged consciousnesses" that conceives "every thought as the position of a personality" (Bakhtin 1984, 9). While it might be thought that this statement presupposes the existence of an integrated subject before such an interaction, the opposite is the case. Discourse is not for Bakhtin a means to an end, it is "not the threshold to action, it is the action itself. It is not a means for revealing, for bringing to the surface the already ready-made character of a

person; no, in dialogue a person [. . .] becomes for the first time that which he is—and, we repeat, not only for others but for himself as well.” (Bakhtin 1984, 252). Discourse, we must conclude, is performative; rather than presupposing a subject for its functioning, dialogue constructs that subject as it goes along. Which is to say that for Bakhtin the subject position is established literally “through” the dialogue, at a point where its surface is ruptured by another voice, a new intonation that momentarily invades its discourse. This new intonation punctures speech beyond the speakers’ conscious control, the way an accident suspends our belief that the things that happen to us carry with them an inherent meaning. It is at such moments of maximum resistance to symbolic representation that the participants in the dialogue become who they are, both to themselves and to the other. And so, when Bakhtin analyzes the dialogue between the police detective Porfiry Ivanovich and Raskolnikov in Crime and Punishment, he argues that the police inspector’s speech addresses itself principally to the openings or gaps in his adversary’s discourse, openings Bakhtin refers to as Raskolnikov’s “hidden voice”. Porfiry’s strategy is to induce that voice to “break out into the open”, creating “interruptions in his [Raskolnikov’s, S.S.] deliberate and skillfully performed replies”. As a result, “the dialogue from one plane—the role-playing plane—passes from time to time to another plane—the real, but only for a moment” (Bakhtin 1984, 261). It is this “real plane”, as opposed to the “reality” of the dialogue, that exposes all of a sudden another dialogue between the real voice and the voice of the real. (In his discussion of the murder plot in The Brothers Karamazov, Bakhtin speaks of the “interruptions” in Ivan’s voice; Bakhtin 1984, 259). Rather than being part of the symbolic fabric of the defendant’s conscious speech, that voice has a disruptive, violent force that momentarily destroys or disrupts

that discourse from within. This is why, further, Dostoevsky describes the manifestation of the hidden voice in Raskolnikov's speech during his conversation with Porfiry as a violent "breaking out into the open", an "interruption" in Raskolnikov's consciousness. The shift from the plane of symbolic reality to the Bakhtinian "real plane" implies a moment of semiotic atrophy caused not by other competing signs but by a force that on the contrary resists all signification, a.k.a., the Lacanian real. As that which emerges between perception and consciousness, wakefulness and sleep, cause and effect, recollection and forgetting, the real cannot be "met" or encountered, only missed or missing^{viii}; by which I mean that while we can perceive it, our perception of the real can become conscious only ex post facto, after our encounter with it. (This is why Lacan refers to the real as "traumatic").

The answer from the real. The real intrudes upon our lives in the guise of an accident, shattering the symbolic networks into which we are placed. Yet, paradoxically, the real can also be said to sustain our customary beliefs, no matter how illogical or "superstitious" they may be. There is always some part or fragment of the real that allows us to believe in omens or forebodings and to receive in this way an "answer from the real."^{ix} Superstitions of this kind, i.e., an inclination to perceive a "return of signs"—equivalent to the little boy's returning his mother through his wooden reel—even in the most "accidental" events seem to abolish chance or, rather, they adjust chance to the demands of the signifying system. When viewed as his nephew's effort to assume symbolic control over his mother's departure, the Freudian fort/da game is a good example of such an answer from the real. In his 1964 seminar The Unconscious and

Repetition, Lacan distinguishes between two types of chance, automaton and tukhé^x. Automaton involves the return of signs to their sender (the answer from the real), the momentary victory of the symbolic over radical contingency. It is as if in such instances the real answered a call from the symbolic order, deciding for a moment to “make sense”. Tukhé, on the other hand, is the return of the real. In this case, there is only repetition (Wiederholung) without retrieval (Wieder-holung) or reproduction. Instead of reproducing a hidden object, what is repeated happens “as if by chance” (Lacan 1981, 54), which is why it is in the numbing repetitiveness of tukhé that the traumatic real manifests itself.

In Crime and Punishment, Raskolnikov interprets much of what happens to him before his crime, no matter how coincidental, as related to his plan to murder the pawnbroker Alyona Ivanovna. That murder, therefore, is but the climax of an entire network of apparent “chance” events that Raskolnikov interprets as encouragements to commit the act. In some cases, these are events from Raskolnikov’s past that he suddenly remembers. For example, “as long before as the previous winter a fellow student [. . .] who was leaving for Kharkov, had mentioned Alyona Ivanovna’s address to him in conversation, in case he ever needed to pawn anything” (Dostoevsky 1989, 54). Shortly before the murder Raskolnikov recalls the meeting: “For a long time he did not go near her [. . .], but six weeks earlier he had remembered her address” (ibid.). Such chance events provide Raskolnikov with a continuous stream of answers from the real that seem to impose the murder upon him like a destiny. When he overhears a student talk about Alyona, proclaiming that he could kill her “without a single twinge of conscience” (55),

Dostoevsky comments that “of course, it was the merest chance, but exactly when he was finding it impossible to rid himself of an extraordinary impression, here was something reinforcing it” (54). In clinical terms, the answer from the real corresponds with the symptoms of a disorder traditionally referred to as hysteria.^{xi} The hysteric insists that all signs always to return to him, interpreting everything that happens as a response to his own thoughts and actions. (Hysterics, of course, appear with great frequency in Dostoevsky’s fiction.) Raskolnikov’s hysteria is hinted at in the narrator’s remark that he had “recently become superstitious. [. . .] And in after years he was always inclined to see something strange and mysterious in all the happenings of this time, as if special coincidences and influences were at work” (Dostoevsky 1989, 54).

Like all hysterics Raskolnikov “suffers from reminiscences”; unable to recall a traumatic wound so shocking that no recollection of it is possible (Raskolnikov has followed his father’s advice “not to look”) he reenacts, automatically and “hardly conscious of what he is doing”, the symptoms of his trauma. That trauma is contained in his anxiety dream about the horse being beaten to death by the peasant Mikolka: “Papa, why did they . . . kill . . . the poor horse?” (Dostoevsky 1989, 50).^{xii} Little Raskolnikov, full of empathy for the horse’s suffering, is not only powerless to explain what he sees, he also witnesses his father’s traumatizing inability to explain to him the meaning of suffering in this world; all his father does in reaction to the beating is to drag the son away, admonishing him not to look. Through his murder of Alyona Ivanovna, therefore, Raskolnikov not only hopes rectify the traumatizing speechlessness/weakness of his father by becoming himself “strong”, he also assumes responsibility for the horse’s suffering, in the hopes that this

gesture will alleviate the trauma of his father's paralyzing impotence, giving him a measure of control. This is why Raskolnikov has come to "redeem" his father's silver watch from Alyona, eager to reintegrate this senseless fragment of the real into a symbolic narrative of which he alone would be the author.^{xiii} Raskolnikov seeks to elicit an answer from the real (a return of signs/Wieder-holung) that would confirm his reincarnation as the exceptional ur-father to whom "everything is allowed". By murdering the pawnbroker, he reproduces his dream—with himself as the main protagonist—in the hopes that the real might, finally, give an answer to his agonizing question. During the murder itself, Raskolnikov appears to hold "all the strings in his hand". Interestingly, the "pledge" he uses as a decoy equals the reel with its attached string that figures in the fort/da game:

It was not really a pledge [**the reel is not really a "toy"**] at all [. . .] but simply a piece of smoothly-planed board, about the size and thickness of a silver cigarette case. He had found it by chance [**as did Freud's nephew**], on one of his walks, in a yard where there was some sort of workshop in an out-building. On the same occasion he picked up in the street, a little later, a smooth thin iron plate [. . .]. Laying the two together, he had tied them securely with thread and then wrapped them neatly and carefully in clean white paper and made them into a parcel with a thin string [**the Spule**] tied in a complicated knot that would need a great deal of skill to undo. This was done in order to distract the old woman's attention for a time while she dealt with the knot, and thus enable him to choose the moment. (Dostoevsky, 1989, 59; all additions in square brackets mine, S.S.)

In the fort/da game, the wooden reel is used “to send the mother away”; Raskolnikov, too, uses his “reel” to “send Alyona away”—by killing her. Just as Freud’s nephew literally “strings his mother along”, so Raskolnikov, too, is at liberty to throw Alyona away or pull her back towards him as he pleases, using his self-constructed pawn/reel. In both cases, what is at stake is power over symbols. Raskolnikov, for one, seeks not so much physical power over an old woman (as many critics have pointed out, this would be futile; it would be ridiculous for Raskolnikov to assume that he possesses superhuman powers after murdering a helpless old woman) as power over the system of symbolic signification that sustains her authority (pawning). The false collateral Raskolnikov uses as a decoy to trap her is a direct equivalent of the wooden reel in that it, too, has received its significance/value from its owner (Raskolnikov) alone (it was he who decided that it was a decoy, just the little boy decided that his Spule represented his mother). In both cases, it is the (assumed) power over the symbolic act that is at issue, the idea that to control symbolic representation is to have power over everything. As Raskolnikov’s friend Razumikhin remarks, Raskolnikov’s murder in fact proceeds as a long sequence of chance events (it was “nothing but chance” that saved murderer of Alyona Ivanovna from disaster, for, after all, “what cannot chance accomplish?”, 128). Yet, with Raskolnikov in charge of the symbolic, all these instances of chance are seen by the murderer as instances of automaton, as returns of signs, answers from the real. “Mechanical” or “automatic” are indeed the dominant epithets used by Dostoevsky in his description of Alyona’s murder. Dostoevsky highlights the “mechanical” manner in which he raises the axe above his victim, “hardly conscious of what he was doing”. When the axe falls on

Alyona's head, it is as if it is propelled solely by the force of gravity, not by Raskolnikov himself ("without putting any force behind it"):

He pulled the axe out, swung it up with both hands, hardly conscious of what he was doing, and almost mechanically, without putting any force behind it, let the butt-end fall on her [Alyona Ivanovna's, S.S.] head. [. . .] Because she was so short the axe struck her full on the crown of the head. She cried out, but very feebly, and sank in a heap to the floor, still with enough strength left to raise both hands to her head. One of them still held the 'pledge'. Then he struck her again and yet again, with all his strength, always with the blunt side of the axe, and always on the crown of the head. Blood poured out as if from an overturned glass [. . .] (Dostoevsky 1989, 66; emphasis mine, S.S.).

Alyona's murder proceeds "as if by chance", automatically (Freud's nephew also played his game mechanically, without thinking). It was Lev Tolstoy who pointed out that "when he [Raskolnikov, S.S.] was killing the first old woman and still more her sister, he was not living his real life; rather he was acting like a machine, he was doing something that he was not capable of doing: he was firing a charge which had been loaded inside him a long time before" (Tolstoy 1989, 487).

The answer from the real in Notes from Underground. The desire to elicit a response from the real is a recurrent trope in Dostoevsky's writing during the early 1860s. In Zapiski iz podpol'ya (Notes from Underground, 1964) these efforts falter in the most

striking way. For the underground man—a character so thoroughly caught in symbolic representation that the outside world exists, for him, only as a literary text—the idea of forcing the real into a response is of existential importance, which is why he carefully stages events that he hopes will trigger a “radical break in my life” (Dostoevsky 1972, 69). When he forces his way into his former schoolmates’ reunion, he does so with the explicit aim of facing “reality”, which in this case is synonymous with the real: “Obviously the best thing would be not to go at all. But that was utterly impossible: [. . .] I would have taunted myself all my life afterwards: ‘You faked it, you were scared of reality, you panicked!’” (Dostoevsky 1972, 70). As is the case with Raskolnikov, the underground man’s quest is directed at an utterly “different” experience. Obsessed like Raskolnikov with the idea of being an insignificant “insect”, the underground man attempts to rectify his powerlessness by setting up carefully staged “chance” encounters with his enemies in order to transform his impotence into omnipotence. This is the case, for example, when he decides not to yield to the officer in the street as the latter approaches him on the trottoir (the effort fails, of course). The central place of the real as that space from which the underground man expects his final encounter with “reality” is the brothel he visits in part II. When his schoolmates decide to visit that literally unnamable place (“‘Gentleman’, cried Zverkov, ‘now we’ll all go there.’ [79]), the underground man is thrown into a panic; he even feels a sudden urge to apologize slavishly to his enemies, prompting Ferfichkin to answer that he is evidently “not the man for a duel” (79). Shortly afterwards he decides to follow the others: “‘So here it is, it has come at last, my encounter with reality,’ I muttered, rushing down the stairs.” (81). After much hesitation (“‘What was I to do? I couldn’t go there [. . .]” [83]), the underground

man, “goes there” anyway, only to find that he is virtually unconscious during time he spends with the prostitute.

The accident at the heart of representation. Raskolnikov’s slaughter of Alyona Ivanovna looks for a return of signs in the shape of a response from the real; at the same time, it also has to keep the real at bay, defending against it in order not to be overwhelmed by it (I am not giving away too much when I say that what Raskolnikov is defending against is of course the murder’s repetition, the second murder that is in fact the first—Lizaveta’s). In Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Freud had asked the question if there is a form of repetition that is not Wieder-holung, that does not respond to the demand of the pleasure principle that all signs return to their right place. In Crime and Punishment, it is not the expected answer from the real that is returned to Raskolnikov; instead the real returns in the guise of an object defying all control and symbolization. That object is the dead body of Alyona’s sister Lizaveta. While Raskolnikov expected from a return of signs from his first murder (the confirmation that he is indeed one of those human beings to whom it is given to overstep the boundaries of the moral law), what he comes up against instead is repetition without Wieder-holung, a second murder so senseless and “accidental” that the string attached to Raskolnikov’s decoy “pawn” literally snaps. For an unspecified amount of time after or even during the murder of Alyona, Raskolnikov had in fact shared the same locale with this “meek” character dominated by her greedy older sister who accidentally returns home while the murderer is still in the apartment. Raskolnikov intercepts Lizaveta by the side of Alyona’s slain body and proceeds to kill her in the same way as her sister (except that this time around he uses

the axe's blade rather than its blunt side). It is telling that while Alyona's murder sets off in Raskolnikov a long process of suffering, the slaughter of Lizaveta is instantly repressed, as if he never perceived it as having occurred in reality. During his conversation with Sonya, Raskolnikov admits: "It is strange though; I wonder why I hardly ever think of her, as though I had not killed her. . . Lizaveta! Sonya! Poor meek, gentle creatures, with meek eyes! . . . Why do they not weep? Why do they not groan?" (Dostoevsky 1989, 234) Raskolnikov's "encounter" with Lizaveta represents chance of a different order than that implied in his murder of Alyona. If Alyona's murder aimed at Wiederholung as symbolic retrieval and return, Lizaveta's appearance in the flat is pure contingency. There is, the two murders suggest, a repetition (Wiederholung; Lizaveta) in every act of retrieval or Wieder-holung (Alyona), an object that resists redemption, a void that cannot be reproduced or symbolized.

Repetition returns. Lizaveta's murder presents itself as a missing/missed encounter with the real in the guise of radical contingency (tukhé). This time around, no "return of signs" can be anticipated since Raskolnikov's murder simply re-acts, belatedly, to an object that utterly escapes his control. The fact that Lizaveta is pregnant only adds to our sense that this murder is utterly "senseless". Lizaveta's slaying qualifies far better as a reenactment of Raskolnikov's childhood dream about the beaten horse than Alyona's (and to this very extent is repressed by Raskolnikov). Lizaveta's meekness, quiet suffering, and expressive eyes all closely relate her to the mare that was beaten to death by Mikolka mare (like Lizaveta, the mare only put up the feeblest defenses against her oppressors, "lashing out feebly with her hoofs", 49), a fact that turns her murder into a repetition of the dream

sequence. Yet Raskolnikov is blind to this coincidence since he has followed his father's advice "not to look"! Which permits us to conclude that it is in the second murder that we have to look for Raskolnikov's "missed encounter with the real". For missed it is beyond a doubt, since Raskolnikov does not even remember it until his later conversation with Sonya. Raskolnikov has literally nothing to "retrieve" from Lizaveta. Her sudden appearance on the scene reveals the gap that separates, within Wiederholung itself, the iterative wieder- from holen, a split at the very center of repetition that separates it from reproduction. With Lizaveta's murder, while there is repetition (of murder), nothing is reproduced, retrieved, or recuperated, and nothing returns symbolically. This is made very clear in Dostoevsky's description of the event:

There in the middle of the floor, with a big bundle in her arms, stood Lizaveta, as white as a sheet, gazing in frozen horror at her murdered sister and apparently without the strength to cry out. When she saw him run in, she trembled like a leaf and her face twitched spasmodically; she raised her hand as if to cover her mouth, but no scream came and she backed slowly away from him towards the corner [. . .], still without a sound, as though she had no breath left to cry out. [. . .] The wretched Lizaveta [. . .] did not even put up her arms to protect her face, natural and almost inevitable as the gesture would have been at this moment when the axe was brandished immediately above it. She only raised her free left hand a little and slowly stretched it out towards him as though she were trying to push him away. The blow fell on her skull, splitting it open from the top of the forehead

almost to the crown of the head, and felling her instantly. (Dostoevsky 1989, 68; emphasis mine, S.S.)

Whereas during Alyona's murder all of the victim's sounds and gestures "fit" the occasion symbolically (she screams; attempts to protect her face, etc.), the second time around, everything seems to resist symbolization; Lizaveta's murder is accompanied by sounds and gestures that seem utterly inappropriate under the circumstances; the victim is incapable of screaming, she fails to perform the most expectable, "natural" self-protective gestures, etc. It is as if she were unable to symbolize her own agony, a fact that naturally has a terrifying effect on Raskolnikov. We may see in this inadequacy of signs another instance of a hidden voice of the real, not unlike the one Porfiriy wants to elicit in Raskolnikov.

Another question for an answer. Lizaveta's murder confronts Raskolnikov with a new unanswered question, or rather, it repeats the very question to which he had sought an answer. Lizaveta's silent suffering repeats the question after the meaning of suffering in this world ("Papa, why did they . . . kill . . . the poor horse?") rather than providing an answer to it. Instead of being the one who heroically challenges the real into a response, Raskolnikov becomes himself its instrument. With his second, "accidental" murder Dostoevsky demonstrates that what can be successfully symbolized, what can be translated into signs (Alyona's murder), is organized around a traumatic kernel that resists all symbolization. We cannot, in other words, have our questions answered; we can only be made to repeat our them. Lizaveta's murder is what ruptures the symbolic

texture of Alyona's slaying the way a traumatic flashback may rupture our conscious lives. Which is to say that the two murders do not simply follow each other the way an effect follows its cause. Alyona's murder is not the cause of Lizaveta's; Lizaveta's slaying, to the contrary, represents the omnipresent blind spot in Raskolnikov's first murder. The return of signs Raskolnikov expects from his murder of Alyona already presupposes Lizaveta's death. (Her death is what Raskolnikov necessarily misses in his murder of Alyona). Which is why Lizaveta's, and not Alyona's, slaying must be immediately repressed, like a traumatizing accident whose recollection would it be too painful to bear.

NOTES

ⁱ Freud's initial explanation of the game is to see in it an attempt at mastery that allows the boy to regain control over a situation that had left him powerless: "At the outset he was in a *passive* situation—he was overpowered by the experience; but, by repeating it, unpleasurable though it was, as a game, he took on an *active* part" (Freud 1953, 46).

ⁱⁱ On *Wiederholung* in the fort/da game, see also Derrida 1991, 520-25.

ⁱⁱⁱ From the mid-1950s, Lacan defined as "the real" (*le réel*) that which remains resolutely outside of language, resisting all attempts at symbolization, linguistic and otherwise. The real is the realm of the "impossible", which is to say that it cannot be coopted, acquired, or assimilated in any conceivable way. (Which is why any encounter with the real is by definition missing or missed). See Lacan 1981, 53-54.

^{iv} In one sense, Raskolnikov's dream is the fulfillment of the unconscious wish to have his landlady punished for legally pursuing him because he owes her money.

^v Lacan writes: "The question that arises [. . .] is—What is it that wakes the sleeper? Is it not, in the dream, another reality?" (Lacan 1981, 58).

^{vi} As Lacan notes, "[T]his real [. . .] brings with it the subject" (Lacan 1981, 54).

^{vii} The phrase cannot be adequately translated into English. See the English translator's footnote for comment on the French pleonastic particle "ne" and Lacan's use of it. (Lacan 1981, 56, note 2).

^{viii} I borrow the phrase "an encounter missed" from Lacan (*la rencontre manquée*—"the missing/missed encounter") who uses it to describe our (missing) brushes with the real. See Lacan 1981, 55.

^{ix} For a discussion of the Lacanian "answer of the real", cf. Miller 1988; Žižek 1992, 29-32.

^x Both of these terms are derived from Aristotelian physics. Cf. Lacan 1981, 64-75.

^{xi} The term hysteria dates back to ancient Greek medical practice, which saw it as a female disease caused by the womb wandering throughout the body (Greek *hysteron* <womb). Freud's interest in hysteria dates back to his studies under Charcot at the Salpêtrière. In Crime and Punishment, the narrator directly refers to Raskolnikov's behavior as hysterical: "He went out, shaking all over, with a feeling of wild hysteria mingled with almost unendurable pleasure; and yet his mood was gloomy, and he felt terribly weary." (Dostoevsky 1989, 141). Cf. also the hysterical protagonist in Notes from Underground: "Moreover, an anguish of longing would boil up inside me; a hysterical thirst for contradictions and contrasts would appear" (Dostoevsky 1972, 50).

^{xii} Dostoevsky's novel, then, focuses on a question, but that question is not simply, as is traditionally assumed, Chernyshevsky's "What Is To Be Done?"

^{xiii} This is why Raskolnikov ultimately rejects all the rational explanations given for his action. In truth, Raskolnikov murders, as he himself admits, "for myself, for myself alone [. . .]" (Dostoevsky 1989, 354).

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