

by Pablo Lerner

A Descent into the Navel. Or: Navel-Gazing In-Between the Knowable and the Unknownⁱ

In *Die Traumdeutung*, Freud tells of “the dream’s navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown” (Freud 1900a, 525).¹ The navel marks the spot in the dream where the knowable ends and the unknown has not yet begun. With an emphasis on *not yet*: the navel, as such, is not what is unknown, but what reaches down into it. “Its point of contact with the unknown”,² Strachey’s translation reads of one of the two passages on the navel, which, by suggesting that the navel is a point, misses the point itself: “Durch den er mit dem Unerkannten zusammenhängt” (Freud 1900c, 76).³ “Durch”, *through*. Meaning, that the navel is not the comical spot that interrupts the relative flatness of the tummy. It is not a residual dead-end. It is open. Freud’s navel accommodates the umbilical cord. Which, properly speaking, is not a cord, in the sense of a string that connects two separate points to each other, but a sort of *pipe*, or *tube*. And, as with all tubes, even when being full, it is essentially *empty*. We could thus tentatively say that

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what separates the knowable from the unknown is precisely *emptiness*, albeit cylindrically encapsulated.

Would it be possible, at least metaphorically, to picture us a descent into the navel, a fall through the void where the unknown has not yet begun? The question concerns neither the point of departure nor the presumed destination, that is to say, it concerns neither the knowable nor the unknown. Freud's metaphor would seem to suggest that the destination of this descent is what is most unknown of the unknown continent, of the woman, namely, the uterus, which, in turn, would push us towards the realm of originary myths. This is not what is at stake, neither here nor for Freud. It is not about determining what the unknown actually is. It is solely a question of the journey itself, remaining in the void, in the no-man's-land in-between the knowable and the unknown.

We depart from the proper realm of thoughts, and thus also of the dream work. Consequently, it would be erroneous to speak of the displacement, condensation, and overdetermination of whatever takes place in the interior of the navel. Were we to conceive of the realm of thoughts as an ordered structure, and of its *modus operandi* as being conditioned by some sort of structural necessity or determination, it seems we are obliged to conceptualize the interior of the navel differently. Being essentially empty, we would no longer speak of structure, but of *space*. And whatever takes place therein, it would not be ruled by any form of order or necessity, insofar as they imply structure.

What, then, is space? If the proper metric of structure, following Saussure, is difference, then the proper metric of space would be nothing but *distance*, which implies that the elements inhabiting space, generally speaking, are not to be regarded as being interconnected, as the constituents of a structure, but essentially *separated*. Otherwise put: the elements of space are *solitary*. They subsist, independently of each other, side by side, one by one. They would thus share the same characteristics as the atoms of the philosophers of Antiquity, from Leucippus to Lucretius.

What takes place in space? Atoms, and constellations of atoms, move about. They fall. Subsisting by themselves, they move independently of each other, each falling in its own direction, without interfering with each other, in a state of generalized disorder – until they meet, which they may equally well not do. In space, encounters *may* take place. They meet by chance, and these encounters may be fortuitous or disastrous, or have no effects at all. They may result in

fissions or fusions, in general disintegration or the formation of unexpected constellations. In space, there is no necessity or order, only contingency and disorder.

Accordingly, instead of differential constituents of structure whose reciprocal action is governed by the structural necessity of its operations – displacement and condensation of overdetermined thoughts – we would have separated elements in space whose interactions are governed by the contingency of the encounter. Hence, in contradistinction to the realm of the knowable, in the inner emptiness of the navel, there is space, not structure; distance, not difference; elements, not constituents; encounters, not action; contingency, not necessity; disorder, not order.

And thus we are prepared to propose what *may* occur when descending into the navel, beyond the reach of the dream work, through the empty space in-between the knowable and the unknown: unexpected encounters. Between what? Amongst other things, between elements from the realms of the knowable and the unknown.

How to conceptualize such an encounter? What would it even mean for a thought to encounter the unknown? Following this conception of space, it seems we would have to picture us a solitary thought, or constellation of thoughts, that to some extent detaches itself from the web of thoughts, a thought whose status, whatever we may take this to mean, in the moment of the encounter, is determined by its placement vis-à-vis the emptiness that reaches down into the unknown, rather than by its placement in relation to other thoughts, that is to say, the ordinary place that it occupies in the structure of thoughts that overdetermines its signification.

This may indeed sound somewhat bizarre, and that is precisely the point. Think of the bizarre object of Wilfred Bion:⁴ a perceived object, in itself unknown, into which a rejected thought from the fragmented realm of thoughts is projected. Or foreclosure according to Lacan:⁵ the expulsion of a thought from the symbolic into the real, from the knowable into the unknown. The bizarre is the product of an encounter between real object and thought in a space conditioned by the fragmentation of the structure of thought: thoughts reside in space. This is the navel turned into a world, but the bizarre is but one of several qualitative modalities of these contingent encounters in the space in-between the knowable and the unknown. The uncanny would be another. To indicate what kind of space and phenomena I am alluding to, we could somewhat suggestively say that the schizoid subject

inhabits the navel. The inner world of the schizoid subject, which at times has been described even as marvelous, is the navel itself.

You could even flip the metaphor on its head. The navel has a dream. Not in the sense that the navel dreams the dream, but that the dream as a whole, just like the thoughts in the navel-world of the schizoid subject, takes place in the navel, leaving behind, within the dream that it accommodates, but an empty spot, a tiny navel, which reaches down into space that accommodates the dream itself. These two spaces are one and the same. Which is to say, that the dream's navel descends into the navel that contains the dream, like a river that connects a lake in the interior of an island to the sea. The inner emptiness of the navel embraces and permeates everything, including the dream and its navel. "Everything is riddled with emptiness."⁶

FROM THE MAELSTRÖM TO THE ONE

A descent into the navel – or the Maelström. I am of course referring to the short story of Edgar Allan Poe, in which a Norwegian fisherman recounts being dragged down into the gargantuan whirlpool of the Lofoten archipelago. In the apex of the story, the fisherman, whirling along the liquid jaws of the abyss, finds the courage to open his eyes and gaze into the monstrosity that is on its way to engulf him. He retells:

Never shall I forget the sensations of awe, horror, and admiration with which I gazed about me. The boat appeared to be hanging, as if by magic, midway down, upon the interior surface of a funnel vast in circumference, prodigious in depth, and whose perfectly smooth sides might have been mistaken for ebony [...] as the rays of the full moon, from that circular rift amid the clouds [...] streamed in a flood of golden glory along the black walls, and far away down into the inmost recesses of the abyss. At first I was too much confused to observe anything accurately. The general burst of terrific grandeur was all that I beheld. [...] The rays of the moon seemed to search the very bottom of the profound gulf; but still I could make out nothing distinctly, on account of a thick mist in which everything there was enveloped, and over which there hung a magnificent rainbow, like that narrow and tottering bridge which Mussulmen say is the only pathway between Time and Eternity.⁷

Let us for a moment use the Maelström as an image of the navel viewed from within. Albeit bewildering, there is nothing bizarre or uncanny about it. The Maelström inspires horror and awe. The Maelström is the navel in its most horrifying and thus potentially sublime form.

In his third critique, Kant wrote of what makes the object properly sublime in the aesthetic experience of the subject.⁸ The sublime is unimaginable in size or in force: the grandeur or might of what does not let itself be fathomed by intuition or reason. In this sense, and with regard to the intellectual faculties of man, the sublime remains irremediably unknowable: the descent into the Maelström is a descent towards the unknown. All images and all concepts fail to capture what the Maelström truly *is*. The encounter with the sublime is an encounter with the unimaginable in the emptiness in-between the knowable and the unknown with what, although it cannot be, nevertheless *is*.⁹

However, it would indeed be possible to accuse Kant, amongst all thinkers in the history in Western thought, for being guilty of the deadly sin of monotheistic apologetics. The encounter with the sublime, which reduces the subject and his intuitive capacities to nothing, leads the subject to realize that the grandeur of the sublime in turn shrinks to nothing when compared to his capacity to think the infinite, and that its might, although being capable of annihilating him completely, owing to him looking at it from afar, leaves him be, reminding him of his freedom and his will to act in accordance to the Good instead of succumbing to the violence of nature. Man stands above the gods. Following Kant, the upshot of the encounter with the unknowable is a sort of monotheistic recoil, throwing the subject back to the world of the knowable: that of practical reason conditioned by the presumed Goodness sustained by the moral author of the world, namely, God.

Most likely, however, the fisherman's descent into the Maelström, which irrevocably took from him all of his strength and the life of his brother, did not make of him a believer. Neither in the depths of the whirling abyss nor up on dry land was God to be found. The purpose of the encounter with the unimaginable in the empty space in-between the knowable and the unknown is not to return to safety at home, illuminated of the value of whatever is to be found in

civilization only. It serves no purpose at all. It is the death of purpose. The descent into the navel can only be endured.ⁱⁱ

Looking down into the unimaginable dimensions of the Maelström, the fisherman gazed into the depths of the navel. This act of looking down towards the unknown, we could speak of as *navel-gazing*. And the affective disposition proper to this navel-gazing, is precisely *awe* – awe before what emerges from the depths of the navel, what no thought can ever fathom: the unimaginable.

In descending into the navel, the subject *witnesses* what cannot be thought. In the navel, he is no longer a dreamer or a thinker. He is reduced to being a witness. He is, as Rimbaud famously put it concerning the poet, *un voyant*, a seer. He wrote:

The Poet makes himself a *seer* by a long, gigantic and rational derangement of all the senses. All forms of love, suffering, and madness. He searches himself. He exhausts all poisons in himself and keeps only their quintessences. Unspeakable torture where he needs all his faith, all his superhuman strength, where he becomes among all men [...] the supreme Scholar! – Because he reaches the *unknown*! [...] He reaches the unknown, and when, bewildered, he ends by losing the intelligence of his visions, he

ii In his comment on the story of the Maelström, Žižek emphasizes that Poe himself follows the very same path which I here attribute to Kant, but with regard to theoretical rather than practical reason: the fisherman in effect succeeds in leaping from being overwhelmed by awe and horror to being able to reason his way towards a «solution» to the «problem». The fisherman observes that while the Maelström tends to engulf large objects, small objects may very well escape it; hence he holds on to a small cylinder and manages to survive to tell the story. Otherwise put, the fisherman succeeds in transforming the unimaginable into an enigma that may be solved with the aid of reason – a sort of detective's counterpart to Kant's monotheistic recoil with regard to the sublime. Žižek, who perceives the Maelström as a representation of the unnameable Real Thing in the heart of the symbolic, thus relating the repetitive circulation around the vortex to the death drive, goes so far as to proclaim that «the death drive is on the side of reason, not on the side of irrationality» (p. 19). Given that we, following Žižek and Lacan, are to understand the Maelström as precisely the *unnameable*, which is to say as the real at the empty heart of the symbolic, we would be obliged to nod in agreement; but if we instead see it as the *unimaginable*, as what ex-sists correlative to the imaginary, the alternative would no longer be to relate it to irrationality, but to non-rationality – or rather to nothing that should be conceived as being related even negatively with regard to rationality, as will hopefully be clear further on in the text. See Slavoj Žižek, «Some Thoughts on Divine Ex-sistence», *Crisis & Critique* vol 2 nr 1 (2015), 101-117.

has seen them. Let him die as he leaps through unheard
of and unnamable things.¹⁰

The seer forces himself, throws himself down into the Maelström of the soul, letting everything thinkable perish along the fall, solely in order to witness the unknown. Seldom has anyone in the history of Western literature formulated this with greater clarity than Rimbaud. The seer is a navel-gazer.

But Rimbaud was by no means the first to assume such an enterprise of enduring the descent into the navel in order to witness the unknown. One of the first detailed, methodological accounts to accomplish such a feat is to be found in the first major tradition of Jewish mysticism, nearly a millennia before the development of the Kabbalah: what has been called *Merkabah* or *Hekhalot* mysticism, meaning “throne” and “palace”, respectively. What the mystic seers endeavored to witness, was the Throne of God in Ezekiel’s apocalypse (1:1-28), beside which hovered the Cherubim and Ophanim, the horrifying four-faced, four-winged angels and the bizarre many-eyed wheels containing many-eyed wheels. The mystics spoke of the path towards the throne as a *descent to the Merkabah*, which, in turn, and somewhat paradoxically, was accomplished through an *ascent through the Hekhalot*, the seven palaces of Heaven, all of which were guarded by angelic beings, constantly threatening to annihilate the journeyer, that he be “dragged into the fire and the flame, the vortex and the storm which are around Thee [God], oh Thou terrible and sublime.”¹¹ Having reached the seventh palace, the mystic is finally allowed to witness, along with the angels, God sitting upon his Throne. In the *Hekhalot Rabbati* (2021), *The Greater Treatise Concerning the Palaces of Heaven*, we take part of the following recount of the theophany; safe to assume, the overabundant usage of hyperbolic pleonasms reflects the ecstasy accompanying the apocalyptic experience, as well as the absolute impotence of language in properly describing the unimaginable:

Forthwith do they stand in fear and in trembling and in shaking and in holiness and in truth and in humility and cover their faces with their wings that they behold not the likeness of God who sitteth upon the Merkabha, and there stand troops upon troops of a thousand thousands of thousands and ranks upon ranks of a myriad myriads of myriads and camps upon camps uncountable and hosts upon hosts without number, like unto

mountains upon mountains of fire, and like unto hills upon hills of flame, before the throne of glory. And then doth the Holy One, blessed be He, seat Himself upon the throne of glory, and His glory filleth the world, as it is said, “All the earth is full of His glory.”¹²

In preparation to this hellish ascent through the heavens, this fever-dream of a descent into the depths of the navel, the Merkabah mystics laid their heads between their knees and whispered various hymns and songs. Had their position been a bit more upright, this preparatory procedure would converge with the ancient meditative technique which in Greek was called ὀμφάλοσκέψις, *omphaloskepsis*, which, in English – rather appropriately – translates into “navel-gazing.” There were, however, other ecstatic methods within the Jewish mystical tradition, most notably that of the prophetic Kabbalah as developed by the 13th century mystic Abraham Abulafia. And, it needs to be said, it is somewhat surprising that no one, as far as I know, has ever really dwelled upon the quite evident affinity between the mystical logic of Abulafia and the dream-work as elucidated by Freud and, to an even greater extent, by Lacan.

The central technique which Abulafia utilized in order to enable prophetic ecstasy was entirely linguistic. It consisted of writing down Hebrew words on a piece of paper, preferably the 72 names of God, then starting to rapidly combine the letters they consist of in order to produce new, often nonsensical words, and then to rapidly permute the letters of the newly formed words into new, as a rule even more nonsensical words. “One proceeds to the moving of letters which [in their combinations] are unintelligible”, an anonymous disciple of Abulafia wrote, “thus to detach the soul [from the senses] and to cleanse it of all the forms formerly within it.”¹³ Then, the mystic goes on “skipping” between thoughts, as they called it, meaning that he lets his mind swiftly follow lines of association from the nonsensical words thus formed making their meaning so nonsensically overabundant as to effectively drain them from all signification:

The less understandable they are, the higher their order, until you arrive at the activity of a force which is no longer in your control, but rather your reason and your thought is in its control. [...] If sufficient strength remains to force oneself even further and draw it out still farther, then that which is within

will manifest itself without, and through the power of sheer imagination [...] one sees that his inmost being is something outside of himself.¹⁴

Otherwise stated, through the procedure of rapid combinations, permutations, and associations of letters and words, the mystic derails his thought process to the point where he has lost his capacity to think, and all that remains for him to do is precisely to *see*: “behold, the letters took on in my eyes the shape of great mountains, strong trembling seized me and I could summon no strength, my hair stood on end, and it was as if I were not in this world.”¹⁵

This cannot be but of great interest for psychoanalysis. Famously, Roman Jakobson reduced the fundamental operations of language to the poetic tropes metaphor and metonymy, and understood metaphor as a substitution of one signifier for another based on similarity, and metonymy as a combination of signifiers based on contiguity.¹⁶ Lacan, furthermore, went on to equate Jakobson’s conception of metonymy with Freud’s displacement, and that of metaphor with condensation, which is to say, that he equated metaphor and metonymy with the fundamental operations of the dream-work. Hence, what the prophetic Kabbalists in essence are doing, when combining letters, is over-employing the operation of displacement; when permuting letters, which is to say substituting them for one another, over-employing the operation of condensation; and when skipping, enabling free bursts of associations. The mystic thus manically accelerates the dream-work beyond its own limits to the point where it effectively destroys itself, rendering everything knowable unintelligible, derailing thought as a whole, in order to clear the way for *seeing*, hence throwing everything in the domain of structure into space. Forcefully letting the dream-work run amok, the mystic destroys everything knowable pertaining to the domain of the dream in order to leave nothing behind but the navel, turning it inside out, essentially rendering himself into a hallucinatory navel-gazer.

The bizarre, the horrifying, the awe-inspiring, the sublime, the mysterious: these are some of the modalities of the encounter with the unimaginable in the dream’s navel, in the empty space in-between the knowable and the unknown. However, the question still remains, if it would be possible to take this even one step further, falling all the way down to bottom of the navel, which is to say, if it would be possible

to speak of a disposition *beyond* that of navel-gazing, implying that the unknown is no longer witnessed, but, even more radically – what?

Naturally, in order to look for an answer, we are obliged to once again turn towards the mystics. In the visions of the Merkabah, God remains wholly transcendent, and in the prophetic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia, everything divine is witnessed in the form of hallucinatory exteriority. Seeing implies distance and thus space. The question of the “beyond” of navel-gazing obliges us to leave the realm of transcendence and exteriority, even of space, and enter that of immanence.

What is the unknown? Remaining within the bounds of human experience, and resisting the temptation to speculate on scientific or philosophical grounds, we cannot but answer the question apophatically, to conceive of it in negative terms. In short, the unknown is what is not known, or what is not knowable. It thus becomes a question of the status of the unknown vis-à-vis the knowable. When leaping into the sphere of immanence, on the other hand, the question becomes the very opposite: to determine what the knowable is vis-à-vis the unknown. The unknown is posited as being more primordial.

In order to shed light on this, let us thus one last time return to the Kabbalah, more specifically to the 16th century mystic Isaac Luria. According to him, *Ein Sof*, literally the limitless, the unending, or the infinite, is all that truly is. It is existence in its absolute, unknowable, formless form. It is God, but not in the sense that we envision him. He cannot be envisioned. It is not even the God which goes under the names יהוה (*Yahweh*) or אלהים (*Elohim*). He has no name. In this sense, God is not *Ein Sof*, but *Ein Sof*, being everything, is, amongst other things, God. This is how the opening words of the *Torah* is interpreted in the *Zohar*:¹⁷ *Bereshit bara Elohim*, “In the beginning God created”; it is not interpreted in the evident way, as God, in the beginning, creating the world, but as, “in the beginning”, comma, “God created”; in the beginning was created the creator God of the *Torah*. God is not the subject, but the object of creation. Before God there was only *Ein Sof*, which is to say, pure, undifferentiated existence.

How, then, was our finite world created out of undifferentiated plenitude? By a contraction within *Ein Sof*: what Luria called *Tzimtzum*, the process whereby *Ein Sof* retreated from a region within himself thus leaving an empty space behind, *Khalal*, into which he emitted a burst of divine light, *Ohr Ein Sof*, from which was formed all of the finite things populating the universe. Hence, all things are simultaneously *Ein Sof* and not *Ein Sof*: all things are *emanations* of the

undifferentiated in a primordial void within the unknown itself. Accordingly, everything that is, including the realm of the knowable, and even the knower himself, is but an emanation of the unknown: the unknown in the guise of the knowable. Consequently, in order to become one with *Ein Sof*, the mystic must cleave away from the realm of the knowable in order to reach the pure, unknowable existence which everything knowable, including himself, fundamentally *is*.

What happens if the mystic actually manages to reach the unknown out of which he is made? This is the *unio mystica* of which the pantheist mystics speak, or the *ἕνωσις* of the Neoplatonists: the unification with the unknown, with the One. Here, all distance is annihilated, and thus there is no longer any space enabling the journeyer to see; there is only the plenitude with which the mystic merges and into which he is dissolved. Having reached the bottom of the navel, the mystic is no longer a navel-gazer, but rather, by being at one with the One, he is reduced, as such, into *nothing*.

Accordingly, following Luria, we are drawn towards a complete reversal of our way of conceiving the dream's navel. The void which *Ein Sof* creates within himself through *Tzimtzum*, that is to say, the very world itself, which encompasses everything that is but which itself is encompassed by the unknown, is more primordial than the knowable. The world is God's navel, the navel of the unknown. Hence, it would be possible to go beyond the metaphor that the dream has a navel that reaches down into the unknown, and also its first reversal that states that it is rather the navel that has a dream that has a navel; here, it would be possible to propose that it is ultimately the unknown that has a navel that has a dream that has a navel. The navel no longer reaches *down* from the knowable into the unknown: the navel reaches *up* from the unknown into the knowable.

TO CONCLUDE

What conclusions could we draw from these meditations on the dream's navel? Here follows a set of propositions that perhaps could be of value for psychoanalytic theory.

First, nothing obliges us to choose between the two alternatives concerning the direction of whatever takes place in the navel, if it is the knowable that reaches down into the unknown or vice versa. Given that we see the navel as a pipe, we may safely assume that its content can travel both ways. Which is to say, that the navel is but an *empty connection* between the knowable and the unknown.

Second, the navel that connects the knowable and the unknown is not conceived only as an empty spot, as an encircled void within the field of the knowable, but as a demarcated *space*. For Lacan, the navel is but a cut, a lack, gap, or a hole within the knowable itself – of what takes place therein, and by definition, nothing can be said, apart from that it is but a rupture in language wherein the real may irrupt. In other words, Lacan never considers the void in the symbolic in terms of space (it needs to be said that the symbolic void is the only void he could be said truly speak of, for even when he speaks of a hole in the real, this very hole is interiorized within language: it is a hole in the real *within* the symbolic). Terms such as contingency, encounters, and disorder he relates solely to encounters with the real – drawing heavily on atomist philosophy – yet *without* regard to the term space; it is in fact completely omitted.¹⁸ In Lacan's psychoanalysis, and with regard to his way of conceiving the void, it could be argued that space has no place.ⁱⁱⁱ Here, on the other hand, the navel is no longer solely seen as a hole within a structure, conceptualized negatively with regard to the structure itself, but revolves precisely around the void understood as a space. It concerns another causal modality: that of contingent encounters in space between elements from the orders that it connects. This allows us to speak not only of the phenomena occurring in these voids as to their effects on the level of structure, but also in their own right, and precisely in terms of space and not structure.

Third, if we grant ourselves the liberty to speculate on the contingent encounters taking place in the interior of the navel, we are naturally obliged to specify what phenomena they correspond to in contradistinction to those pertaining to the sphere of the knowable. Here, the term navel-gazing points us to the right direction: for the fisherman in the story of the Maelström, and Rimbaud, and the Merkabah mystics, and Abraham Abulafia, what occurs in the navel is described in terms of *seeing, witnessing, gazing*. Accordingly, if we speak of the unconscious and the dream as *eine andere Schauplatz*, would it not be reasonable to conceive of the interior of the navel as *eine dritte Schauplatz*, a third scene, owing to it being precisely here, to a far greater extent than the scene of the dream, that everything revolves around

iii It would be outside the scope of this article to dwell upon Lacan's treatment of space in, for example, his topical and topological schemes and models, settling with emphasizing that what is at stake here is not the concept of space in general, but only to think the void in terms of space – something which Lacan never does.

seeing rather than symbolic representation? The navel begins where the reign of the symbol ends. Entering the interior of the navel, there is nothing to do other than to witness the unknown, which, as such, is not necessarily primarily to be understood in relation to the symbol.

Consequently, and fourth, I want to point to the fact that I have utilized the term *unimaginable* and not unnameable. What the navel-gazer in actuality witnesses, in awe and in horror, is essentially what cannot be captured by an image. Hence, even if we were to affirm the apophatic position with regard to the encounters with the unimaginable, it is not fundamentally a question of the unnameable, since it does not concern language at all, not even negatively. It concerns not the impotence of language, but of imagination, which is to say, that the unimaginable is *not even* unnameable. Taking but one example, if we were to go on categorizing the courses of events corresponding to the unnameable and the unimaginable in theological terms, we could say that the unnameable corresponds to monotheism, whilst the unimaginable, as is hopefully evident from my examples, and if we resist the monotheistic recoil of Kant, corresponds to polytheism and mysticism.

To conclude, let us turn towards the nomenclature of Lacan in order to formalize what has been proposed above. The unknown is the real, and the knowable is the specific combination of the symbolic and the imaginary. The dream is an imaginary product of the workings of the symbolic, and within this formation, there is a void which leads down into the real. Otherwise put, in-between the imaginary and the real, there is a void.

We could generalize this and conceive of the field of subjectivity as follows. The real, the imaginary, and the symbolic are three separated orders containing a multitude of voids within themselves, internal spaces leading down into each other, effectively serving as pathways between the different orders. In terms of Freud's metaphor, we could say that the three orders are three stomachs containing a multitude of navels connecting them to each other. Hence, there are navels in-between the symbolic and the imaginary, empty spaces that connects the two realms of the knowable; there are navels in-between the symbolic and the real, which are the proper locuses of the unnameable; and there are navels in-between the imaginary and the real, which are the navels which I have spoken of, those enabling the subject to witness or merge with the unimaginable.

We could go on naming the voids inscribed in the different orders. A void in the symbolic order, we will call *silence*; a void in the imaginary order, we will call *darkness*; and a void in the real order, we will call *emptiness*; and within these in-between spaces, which serve as their sole connections, the voids internal to the respective orders *converge*. Hence, in the void in-between the symbolic and the imaginary, silence and darkness converge; in the void in-between the symbolic and the real, silence and emptiness converge; and in the void in-between the imaginary and the real, darkness and emptiness converge.

It is precisely concerning the last of these voids, the proper locus of the unimaginable, the space where darkness and emptiness converge, that the real problem arises. Being situated in-between the real and the imaginary, it lies radically beyond the reach of the symbolic. It is wholly independent of the workings of the signifier, and subsists by itself without it ever interfering. What are the implications of affirming the existence of a void that lies beyond language, even silence? If we accept the general Lacanian position that effectively prohibits us from speaking of whatever lies beyond the language in which we find ourselves confined, it seems we are obliged to reject it, along with the unimaginable, *a priori*. I would rather prefer to see it as a choice. We are free to consider it however we see fit, but certainly not without a certain risk. Like the journeyers through the navel, we do it at our own peril. And what such a consideration would ultimately put into question, is nothing but the sovereignty which we have come to grant language.

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- 1 Freud 1953: 525
 - 2 Ibid.: 111
 - 3 Freud 1900: 76
 - 4 Bion 1967
 - 5 Lacan 2006
 - 6 Lucretius 2007: 13
 - 7 Poe 1994: 313
 - 8 Kant 2008
 - 9 Rubenstein 2008: 37
 - 10 Rimbaud 2005: 377
 - 11 Cited in Scholem 1995
 - 12 Hekhalot Rabbati 2001: 22
 - 13 Cited in Scholem 1995: 154
 - 14 Cited in Ibid.: 155
 - 15 Cited in Ibid.: 151
 - 16 Jakobsen & Halle 1956
 - 17 *The Zohar* 2004
 - 18 See Lacan's lecture of 12 February, 1964 entitled «Tyche and automaton» in Lacan 1998

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