

Solicitations, or, Asking For It: The Violations of Anish Kapoor's *Dirty Corner*

Solicit: vb [ME *soliciten* to disturb, take charge of, fr. MF , fr. L *solicitare* to disturb, fr. *solicitus* anxious, fr. *sollus* whole (fr. Oscan; akin to Gk *holos* whole) + *citus*, pp. Of *ciere* to move.

-- Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary

'I hope it's a mess. That's what I'm after. It's also very sexual. It's taking all those things Le Nôtre has hidden — that ordered space, it hides nature, it hides everything. This is an attempt to bring it into the conversation.'

--British artist Anish Kapoor describing his sculpture installed in the (otherwise highly ordered) Gardens of Versailles, summer of 2015.



In the summer of 2015, British artist Anish Kapoor was invited to create a temporary public art work in the gardens of Versailles, the comprising six large sculptures. The fifth installation in the series, *Dirty Corner*, a funnel-shaped steel sculpture surrounded by large slabs of stone, measured 200 feet long and 33 feet high. The not quite abstract representation was admitted by Kapoor to be 'very sexual.' More specifically, he described it as '...a big vulvalike form sitting watching' and 'the vagina of the queen coming into power.' (Martinez, 2015) *Dirty Corner* was site specific: Kapoor wanted to introduce a piece of art which messed with the order of Versailles itself—in true Marie Antoinette fashion. (<a id='XVUhvYOxRtZfcfPOkuLSQg' class='gie-single'

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Kapoor seemed to express surprise at the need to defend the sculpture against the attention paid by the press to the explicitness of *Dirty Corner*'s sexual expression: 'A work has multiple interpretive possibilities... inevitably, one comes across the body, our bodies and a certain level of sexuality. But it is certainly not the only thing it is about,' Kapoor told the BBC, (Sayej, 2015) perhaps disingenuously. The artist underestimated the repercussions of displaying what was read unequivocally as a giant vagina. His deflection of the primacy of the sculpture's sexuality also disclaims and disavows the historical context of the discursive impact of Marie Antoinette's vagina, namely, the context which on some level acted as the conditioning predecessor to the reception, if not the production of, *Dirty Corner*: the 18th-century pornographic pamphlets produced between 1787 and 1792 that dramatised the salacious sexual exploits of Queen Marie-Antoinette in the court of Versailles. These pamphlets circulated first through the court society and, within several years, increased their circulation into the general French public. With pamphlet titles such as *The Libertine and Private Life of Marie-Antoinette*; *The Uterine Furors of Marie-Antoinette, wife of Louis XVI*; *The Royal Dildo*; *The Austrian Woman on the RAMPAGE, or the Royal Orgy*; and *The Royal Bordello* (Thomas, 2001), it is difficult to ignore the fact that the figure of the Queen's open vagina was part of general public discursivity, claimed as public property, during pre-Revolutionary and then Revolutionary France.

Additionally, the pamphlets were illustrated. Vivian Cameron explains how the very name circulating at the time for the Queen's genitals as reinforced by the pamphlets, '*res publica*', is the Latin word for 'republic'. One of the most repeated poses of the pamphlets depicted the Queen, legs spread open, with some lover or another (of both sexes). Cameron explains the meaning of one of the pornographic illustrations of the pamphlet, captioned '*Ma Constitution*', in which Queen Marie-Antoinette is represented sitting in a chair with her legs spread, skirt raised, and her lover, General Lafayette, Commander of the National Guard, kneeling before her, his right hand resting across what is to be read as her 'public thing', that is, her naked vulva. They are against a pedestal, with a relief sculpture of an ejaculating penis, above which is a sphere with a crown being knocked off by a cheeky putti. (Cameron, 1991, 97-98) The figure of the '*Res publica*' was also included in the pamphlets, circulating up until and during the French Revolution as a pun for 'public thing' and 'public king'. (Cameron, 1991, 91, 97) In *Ma Constitution*, the putti's knocking down of the crown, composed as a parallel event to the Queen's spread-open invitation to Lafayette, indicates the toppling of the King's potency and his dispossession of ruling power, in that the '*Constitution*' of the nation has been compromised by the uncontrolled sexual indiscretion of his immoral foreign Queen. (Cameron, 1991, 97-98) The necessary boundary between private and public was transgressed in the circulation of the doubled meaning of *res publica*.

As historian Lynn Hunt and Vivian Cameron have both elaborated, the pornographic pamphlets circulating at the time relied upon a general fantasy about all the debauched aristocracy in the court of Versailles, but it was the female aristocrats,

and Queen Marie-Antoinette in particular, who came to be the main vehicles for the emboldening of a new, fraternally bonded, virtuous Republic. The pamphlets performed as agents which acted to banish corruption within the national collective body through scandal and calumny, and ultimately, through moral judgement. This corruption of the virtuous public body was seen to be an undoing of the cohesiveness of the French nation. The Queen's body, metonymized by her open legs, instigated a dangerous overflow of the private into the public. Bodies which should have remained in private spaces but which 'got out' into the public domain constituted what Hunt summarizes as 'the antonym of the nation'. (Hunt, 1991, 113) Female sexuality, Hunt argues, posed a distinct threat to what Enlightenment philosophers, already long before the Revolution, proposed for an ideal body politic because it comprised:

the major source of corruption for the [body politic,] ... blurr[ing] the lines between private and public; [female] eroticism was the intrusion into the public sphere of something that was at base private ... This public would come to see femininity as incompatible with a virtuous public sphere. (Hunt, 1991, 5,7)

Pornographic pamphlets manifested a fear of feminine sexuality and its incursion into the healthy body of the emerging Republican nation.

The metaphor of the body which was so diffusively constitutive to the emergence of the French Republic would have been carried over from earlier political articulations such as the one employed by Rousseau in *The Social Contract*, as well as that of the King's Body, and, by extension, the Palace at Versailles, being synonymous with the French nation. The interplay between individual, sometimes sexual, body, and collective national body, has historically been a powerful performative negotiation which seems to carry the potentiality for eruption, or, what the public artist Anish Kapoor characterises as 'interior disquiet'. In discussing his six-part installation across the Gardens at Versailles in France, Kapoor is particularly interested in coaxing out all that which the garden's designer, Le Nôtre, in his extreme orderly rationality, would have subjugated. In an interview with the French theorist Julia Kristeva about this installation at the Château de Versailles, which opened on took the 9th of June and ran until the 1st of November, 2015, Kristeva's ebullient remark that the installation comprises 'an exuberant expenditure of energies, a furious affinity between life and death, gestation at the very heart of the carnage... pulsing beneath the rational beauty of the place' prompts the following response from Kapoor:

The apparent rationality of Versailles belies a secret, a sort of abjection, an undeclared need to hide all that is untidy. Interior disquiet is suppressed, rational order is given supreme place. It is my purpose to push the unresolved, the untidy, the uncertain in this place – to have the body shrivelled up in all its naked, vomiting nastiness – somehow emerge out of the imposed order of Le Nôtre's grand scheme for the garden. One might say that there's always the parallel, it is always sitting there. And the question then is how to approach it without illustrating any problem, because as we know of course there is no problem, just the body and the body's sense that it so easily loses itself in this terrifying order. (<http://anishkapoor.com/4330/blood-and-light-in-conversation-with-julia-kristeva>)

Here, Kapoor carefully calibrates the way in which his sculptures would arouse the secrets repressed by the engulfing order at Versailles, observing that merely representing or illustrating the abject ‘interior disquiet’ might not be believed, nor would it be as efficacious as the performative impact of come-what-may indications of ‘the body and the body’s sense.’

As already noted, Kapoor’s installation at Versailles in 2015 consisted of six different large sculptures, each installed at a chosen site across the Château grounds: I Shooting into the Corner (2008-2009); II C-Curve, (2007); III Sky Mirror (2013); IV Sectional Body preparing for Monadic Singularity (2015); V Dirty Corner (2011-2015); and VI Descension (2014). (<http://anishkapoor.com/1032/chateau-de-versailles-2015>)

For reasons of space and argument, I am not able to look closely at each of these sculptures, but we can say that Kapoor wanted the entirety of the project to intervene and mess with what he saw as the suppressive orderly structure of the design of the Château de Versailles, and that for Kapoor, Versailles and its design operated through tense, ambivalent negotiations between collective and individual bodies. Part V of the entire installation, which Kapoor named *Dirty Corner*, is the piece which garnered the most public attention. This attention happened in three successive stages: first, as the scandalised reaction to the provocative placement, directly across from the Château, of a 60-meter long, 8 meter high rusted steel open funnel construction, surrounded by many large blocks of stone, weighing up to 25 tons each, a few of the blocks painted blood-red.

(<http://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/475977980>)

The open cornucopia- shaped construction was large enough for spectators to enter. No sooner was the iron cornucopia placed on the grounds of Versailles (it had been exhibited previously in a gallery with no repercussions), did the French press dub it ‘The Queen’s Vagina.’ *Dirty Corner* from then onwards attracted international press attention for its scandalous implications, and for its sheer audacity. Kapoor was happy for his public art to elicit strong response; that is what art should do, he more or less explained, and, judging from what he had told Julia Kristeva and various journalists, he is happy for art to be ‘messy’. When interviewed by the *Guardian* about the controversial nature of the sculpture, he stated, ‘Art is a process of experimentation where certain things arrive and you try to follow them. In the end, one has to trust the work does its own thing.’ (Sayej, 2015) However, the first thing that the work ‘did’ was to receive angry lashings of yellow spray paint, de-facing the sculpture.



(image courtesy of Sophie Walker Studio, London)

Was it the beckoning of the giant open funnel, provocatively facing the Palace at Versailles, that solicited the slashings of paint both along the exterior of the funnel and also, even more substantially, along the inner walls? Although the funnel is an abstract shape, it is nearly impossible to miss the visual metaphor: Kapoor has sculpted a giant, open, steel vagina, with a beautiful convex vulva-like entry.

Facing the front of the sculpture, we see the paint thrown against the inner walls, framing the dark tunnel, a receding black circle. The paint has dripped down due to gravity but the vortex of the tunnel also conveys the whip force of a centrifuge, the paint a residue of a more complex amalgam of defensive utterances.

Not long after the yellow paint was removed, in September 2015, *Dirty Corner* did more of 'its own thing.' Extensive writing, painted all over the sculpture, appeared one morning. Painted across the right wall of the funnel, successive accusations appeared: '*HONTE; DESHONNEUR; TRAHISON; SATANISM*', ('SHAME; DISHONOR;

TREASON; SATANISM'), (<http://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/487106154> target='_blank'

href='http://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/487106154' target='_blank' style='color:#a7a7a7;text-decoration:none;font-weight:normal

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But in 2015, even though the words were immediately ascribed by the French Press to be the work of the ultra-nationalist Front National, to me, the inclusion of Anti-semitic invective, *at the time* seemed perplexing. Why would a public sculpture, provocatively vulvic, bring forth this particular strain of attack? And there was much more: painted across the rocks which led up to the giant funnel sculpture were phrases such as these: there was a warning, ‘Juifs tradis and Kabbalistes: ce taré vous metre en DANGER’ (‘Traditional and Kabbalistic Jews: This idiot will put you in DANGER’

(figure 7, Embed from Getty Images<script>window.gie=window.gie||function(c){(gie.q=gie.q||[]).push(c)};gie(function(){gie.widgets.load({id:'p8CAzIUSRWJGB6HmniODmA',sig:'thYvGv0vEtY9XzLzF17rPdcCi0HWW8aXGrR0w--agFk=',w:'594px',h:'396px',items:'949903340',caption:true,tld:'co.uk',is360:false}});</script><script src='//embed-cdn.gettyimages.com/widgets.js' charset='utf-8' async></script>

as well as the following painted inscriptions: ‘Baal-Talmud Faux prophets’ and ‘sacrifice sanglante’ (‘Baal-Talmud false prophets’; ‘blood sacrifice’ and ‘of blood and again of blood’, (Embed from Getty Images<script>window.gie=window.gie||function(c){(gie.q=gie.q||[]).push(c)};gie(function(){gie.widgets.load({id:'Rx2gARztTEFNC-MiSF_4RQ',sig:'InNv9meKD4b4cDdukMBqUXSDwNKv_bR0I3zLBh37Gkk=',w:'594px',h:'396px',items:'949903526',caption:true,tld:'co.uk',is360:false}});</script><script src='//embed-cdn.gettyimages.com/widgets.js' charset='utf-8' async></script>

Most people know of Anish Kapoor as an Anglo-Asian artist. But perhaps the National Front (or, more likely, an ultra-religious royalist individual from the conservative, Catholic town of Versailles) looked Kapoor up on Wikipedia and found out that Kapoor has an Indian Jewish mother, thereby posing a threat to Christian sovereignty. ‘À Versailles le Christ est Roi,’ (‘At Versailles, Christ is King’) the scrawler reminded his public, across the outside wall of the sculpture. (Embed from Getty Images<script>window.gie=window.gie||function(c){(gie.q=gie.q||[]).push(c)};gie(function(){gie.widgets.load({id:'5KbsQKD6RNpDLshTp7EVnw',sig:'Wwe1f2LZEx_HzmJdnStgJBqfmsFTZvcuQ0CkkXvw-sA=',w:'594px',h:'396px',items:'487106182',caption:true,tld:'co.uk',is360:false}});</script><script src='//embed-cdn.gettyimages.com/widgets.js' charset='utf-8' async></script>

Perhaps it was not primarily the ‘Jewishness’ of the sculpture that agitated the vandal so much as the extremity of the giant vagina-as-utterance, in full splendour in the center of the gardens at Versailles. This radical sculpture was so excessive and overloaded that it unleashed an equally excessive aggression.

The painted words convey a nationalist, religious defense to an affront Satanic, dangerous, shameful, and treasonous. Was the nationalist vandal nobly protecting his late Queen’s honour against Kapoor’s insult to her modesty? ([Embed from Getty Images](http://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/949903466)
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Behind the funnel, a long steel tube stretched back into the garden space. This tube did not escape the words of the agitated vandal: ‘ceci est une mutilation sexuelle/ Open your f..... eyes’ it reads, seemingly defending the virginity of the female referent of the sculpture. ([Embed from Getty Images](http://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/949903286)
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Or: was the scrawler protecting the honour of the nation, *profaned* by the exhibition of the sexual interior of the Queen? Exactly whose honour is being proclaimed and defended here? I don’t think even the vandal knew, carried away by an overwhelming, inchoate ambivalence, brought on by the scandalous installation of ‘the vagina of the queen coming into power.’

Back to the words thrown onto the sculpture’s inner walls, revealingly, ‘Shame’ is the first charge levelled—at Kapoor? At the Queen?— and directly across from this inscription, on the left wall, is the word ‘VIOL’ (rape), which is, according to the words, inflicted upon the French nation by deviant Jewish activism. The message inscribed on the sculpture is highly ambivalent because although it introduces a sequence of terms associated with insulting the nation (the Christian nation)-- Dishonor, Treason, Satanism— ‘shame’ here indicates something about sexuality, about womens’ sexuality and in particular, the Queen’s sexuality. We can’t help but recall the established historical context of the Palace at Versailles which punishes the ‘shameful’ excesses of female sexual desire. The vandal’s violation of *Dirty Corner* is a defending reply to what he reads as Kapoor, a Jew’s, insult to his nation, but his own misogynist placement of the painted words on the inner walls of the ‘vagina of the queen’ feels like a violation, this word in French meaning ‘rape.’

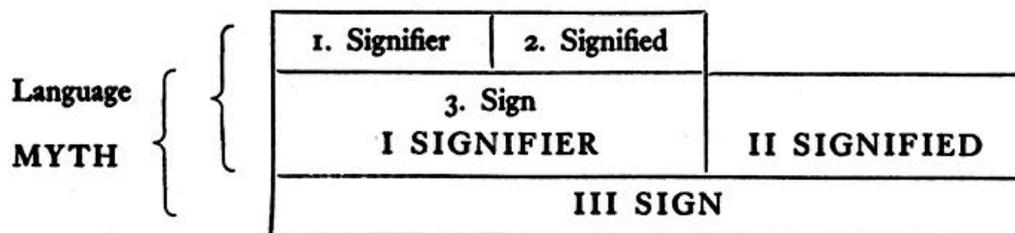
Queen Marie Antoinette was also, like the figure of the Jew, a foreign outsider who was also seen as an impure infiltration into the French nation. The Anti-semitic vandalism perpetrated upon *Dirty Corner* in many ways replays the treasonous characterisation heaped upon the Queen which by the French public during her reign, justified through the conjunction of misogynous-nationalistic il-logic. The French word *trahison*, which the Versailles vandal emblazoned on the inner wall of *Dirty Corner*,

translates as ‘treason’ and also ‘betrayal.’ ‘Treason’ is the name for an act of treachery towards a government or sovereign, and it encompasses ‘betrayal’ within its definition. In the semiotic system of *Dirty Corner*, ‘trahison’ signifies an offense against the nation, a disloyalty which breaks up the unity of the nation. Often, as is the case here, signifiers of blood accompany signifiers of ‘nation’. ‘The nation’ tends to embrace metaphors of pure-bloodedness, with betrayers breaking up the unity of the national bloodstream. In terms of the performance of the rhetoric in the vandalised *Dirty Corner*, something interesting happens: the sculpture signifies, simultaneously, the infiltrating, foreign monarch; the threat of the overly sexual Woman; and, the infiltration of the French nation by the anti-Christian Jew. This convergence seems ‘natural’ in the sense that Roland Barthes warns us in his 1957 essay ‘Myth Today,’ where he explains that the operation of mythic speech effects the naturalisation of ideologies and values. Barthes’ own ‘interpretive scouring and demystification,’ as the historian of Marie Antoinette Chantal Thomas describes his imperative to readers of myth, (Thomas, 13) teaches us to be vigilant of ‘*what goes without saying*’:

In short, in the account given of our contemporary circumstances, I resented seeing Nature and History confused at every turn, and I wanted to track down, in the decorative display of *what-goes-without-saying*, the ideological abuse which, in my view, is hidden there.
(Roland Barthes, Introduction to *Mythologies*, 1972 [1957])

Today, in 2018, with the monstrous sweep of conspiracy theories across the world, which also often seem to embrace misogynistic celebration, seems more and more to *go without saying*. What seemed in the summer of 2015 to be a bizarre eruption of anti-Semitism linked inexplicably to an aggressive discomfort with the artistic representation of a woman’s openly sexual body, now seems, in the summer of 2018, as if the connection between the two signs is obvious, normal, natural; it is a link in a chain of connecting signs which also includes ultra-nationalist sympathy. And so, it is currently not uncommon that it seems to *go without saying* that Jews, across the globe, are put forth as agents of betrayal through blood sacrifice. Myth today fuses these signs into a nuclear entity, so that Woman, Jew, and Foreigner merge as an amalgamated threat to the cohesion of the nation, set onto an inevitable track towards dissolving national unity.

In ‘Myth Today,’ Barthes’ configuration of the insidious appropriation of the linguistically constituted Sign by the bourgeois naturalization of the Sign into an ‘objective’ signifier constitutes Mythic discourse.



Barthes’ diagram of Mythic discourse, from ‘Myth Today,’ 1957

Here, Barthes diagrams the mythic operation of the ‘robbing’ of the signifier’s existence as language-object in the wholesale, systematic conversion of the *sign*,

produced in the register of language, into *signifier*, in the Myth register. The sign produced through the normal operations of language is now taken as signifier, and so it is no longer divisible, and its meaning, therefore, is taken as self-evident. This mythified sign ('III SIGN') is twice removed from the material object of the signifier, substantiating, instead, a naturalized, incontestable meaning. Barthes identifies the bourgeoisie, with its capitalist erasure of historical determinants, as the primary producers of myth, benefitting directly from a non-questioning status-quo society. But the cost to the rest of society is high: the mythic operation fuses any given sign into a purported signifier that bears naturalized meaning 'in itself.' This action creates an entrenchment and dominance of certain ideologies, and actively empties out possibilities for difference and resistance. Thus Barthes understands and emphasizes the urgency of recognizing the political dangers of 'myth today':

.....
It is now possible to compete the semiological definition of myth in a bourgeois society: *myth is depoliticized speech*. One must naturally understand *political* in its deeper meaning, as describing the whole of human relations in their real, social structure, in their power of making the world; one must above all give an active value to the prefix *de-*: here it represents an operational movement, it permanently embodies a defaulting. (Barthes, 2000, 131)
.....

The word 'defaulting' here merits unpacking: what exactly did Barthes mean? In his original French version, the word he used was *défection*, meaning, to abandon a cause. I think what Barthes is trying to say is that myth instantiates a moving away from the recognition of human relations in their social structure, moving away from engaged politics. This agenda of disengagement aids the embrace of essential truths, uncontested meaning, and erasure of political constructions of class and other producers of power. Barthes is calling upon us to shake apart the sign, to pry it apart, because the action of myth is one of dangerous fusion.

If this reading of Barthes' 'Myth Today' sounds as if his critique of bourgeois naturalisation is a critique of a perhaps fascistic tendency to fuse and unify, merging signifier and signified initially, and then, as that sign enters the mythic arena, when it fuses into the role of signifier, creating a bond highly resistant to any sorts of deconstruction, then you are understanding the political imperative of Barthes' diagram of Myth Today, a radical delineation of myth as "operation." Barthes wants us to understand that 'myth' is discursive, and that it exerts influence, and that it circulates in order to fulfil purposes. Myth is pervasive in its particular articulations, which more and more seem to bundle together to form an even more united front, indestructible and total.

Michel Foucault also recognized the general cultural discursivity and operation of de-politicisation and disengagement. I would like to look at Foucault's short text that applauds Deleuze and Guattari's radical announcement for the end of the lure of fascism. In his Preface to the book *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1983 [1972]), Foucault's inspired endorsement of the radical call to recognize and resist all forms of fascism is all too relevant today, when even the inclusion of the word 'fascist' by contemporary anti-fascist groups such as Antifa provokes aggressive defiance from the Alt-Right and from Donald Trump too. I think Barthes would celebrate the extension of his analysis in 'Myth Today' to the call for anti-fascism as noted by Foucault, who explicates '*Anti-Oedipus*' as '*an Introduction to non-Fascist Life*'. (Foucault, 1972, xiii) The larger questions being posed by Deleuze and Guattari in this call to ethics, writes Foucault, are the following:

.....

How do does one keep from being fascist, even (especially) when one believes oneself to be a revolutionary militant? How do we rid our speech and our acts, our hearts and our pleasures, of fascism? How do we ferret out the fascism that is ingrained in our behaviour? (Foucault, 1983, xiii)

Reading Foucault's Preface elucidates how Barthes politicises the operation of signs. For Barthes, semiotics goes far beyond linguistics into the suggestion that fascist tendencies towards the totality of signs drive and encourage the operation of myth. This drive towards the indivisible totality of signs, for Barthes, mandates a rigorous semiotical analysis which would pull apart those signifiers, signifieds, and signs which have been energetically fused to form a blockade against the introduction of difference and differentiation. These fused terms act to convert history into Nature in order to maintain bourgeois ideology:

In passing from history to Nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradiction because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves. (Barthes, 2000, 132)

This passing from history to Nature comprises the *de-politicisation* Barthes alerts us to, and it functions by way of the unification and fusion of "blissfully clear" meaning that happens semiotically, socially.

Before returning to our initial example of the vandalism of Anish Kapoor's sculpture, *Dirty Corner*, to then conclude with the identification 'myth today', today, I would like to refer to a recent gloss in the online journal *Hyperallergenic* examining the history of the *fasca* symbol currently being adopted by some members of the Alt-Right. (Bond, 2018) In 'Fasces, Fascism, and How the Alt-Right Continues to Appropriation Ancient Roman Symbols,' Sarah E. Bond traces the genealogy of the symbol used by Alt-Right members, the *fasca*. The *fasca* symbol is a bundle of bound sticks, and was first used by leaders of the Roman Empire to signify their consolidation of power. As Bond explains, the Roman use of the symbol also carried with it a message of threat and violence, because tied within the bundle of sticks was an axe. The *fasca* symbol was also used in other political movements, including the Sicilian peasant uprising, the French Revolution, and most notably, by the Italian Fascists, whose name reflected the original term for 'bundle of sticks'. Thus fascist tendencies have to do with binding multiple elements into a single, unified whole, for the purposes of consolidating and reinforcing a single, centralised, power which disallows disaggregation and difference.

Myth Today works through a process of metonymisation: signifiers are immediately linked by a naturalized proximity to one another. This chain of signifiers (e.g. woman—traitor--foreigner—immigrant (sometimes Jew) are then bonded together before anyone can even question their relationality to one another, forging a powerful nucleus, so that any act of isolating the signifiers and even just to see them a signifiers (and not signs) requires an act of immense fission. Fox News and UKIP unify and conflate 'immigration' with 'Islam' and 'terrorism' and 'crime' so forcefully that ICE and 'Brexit' perform—semiotically-- as 'natural' solutions to 'real', self-evident social problems.

Whether fusing sticks, signs, or subjects, the human tendency towards fascism seems to be accelerating with the myriad high-speed opportunities to blissfully glom

onto the ‘coherency’ of mythic discourse. Myth, Barthes might say, invites and demands an ad-herence in the very way that it co-heres. This coherence/adherence is a constitutive part of what he critiques as the authoritative ascendancy of ‘what goes without saying.’ In this ‘fascistic’ sense, otherwise disparate signifiers such as nation, woman, and Jew become tied together, presenting as a coherent compound, bound by a naturalized logic. This compounded bundle, which materialised in the event of Anish Kapoor’s installation of *Dirty Corner*, is in itself highly problematic, but what I want to foreground in this article is the way in which, at the current geopolitical moment, *misogyny is the primary and most ‘naturalised’ currency*—it seems to ‘go without saying’ that women in powerful public positions are a threat to national unity. In the successive acts of vandalism perpetrated upon *Dirty Corner*, the immediate assumption and ‘cause’ of the acts was that those responsible were part of the Front National, and that Kapoor’s ‘offense’ was carried out against the French nation. The anti-Semitic expressions manifested through a mixture of typical blood libel, treason, and Satanism. Looking closely at the consistency of the letters in all the scrawling across the sculpture, it does appear to be the single hand, a religious Royalist who reacted very strongly to what he or she took as an extreme affront. The ambivalence of the scrawler about the honour of the woman in question, Queen Marie-Antoinette, is an index into the complex knot of signs and what that knot means in terms of ‘myth today.’ What I want to underline here is the repression of the obvious misogyny by even the liberal press and French politicians, who swiftly condemned the nationalist and Anti-Semitic acts of hate speech. The repression of the misogyny—ambivalent though it may have been—exemplifies what is becoming more and more an extreme normalisation of misogyny today. In this sense, the signifiers of French nationalist Anti-semitism in *Dirty Corner* end up explaining the representation of misogynist violence and even defending it. Anish Kapoor, typically inviting challenges to the norm in his artistic spirit, probably reckoned that *Dirty Corner*, in the scandal of its gaping cavernousness, would cause shock and possibly offense. He was playing dangerously with excess and extremity, walking a dangerous line that may have made for good art, but which elicited, in all its dirty corner-ness, what Barthes might have observed as a *naturalisation* of misogyny that happens when different signs come together and lose the history of their construction. This erasure of history, and of the historical construction of signs, comprises the danger of ‘myth today’.

“Myth Today”, today

Recently I was sitting on the Tube, reading *The Evening Standard* over my fellow passenger’s shoulder. The *Evening Standard* is an indicator of popular, if disagreeable, public opinion, and I was extremely disturbed to read the following on the front page (I obtained my own copy of this indicative reporting as I exited the station):

.....
WOMEN MPS are being targeted with vile abuse by hardline Brexit backers infiltrating the Conservative Party, the Evening Standard can reveal./Abuse including ‘mad bint’, ‘witch’: and ‘mentally ill’ has been used by Brexiteers backing a campaign to join the Tories in order to change the party’s leadership and direction... New members have branded the Prime Minister a ‘traitor’ and attacked ex-ministers Nicky Morgan and Dominic Grieve. Prominent Remain campaigner Anna Soubry has been called a ‘gold-plated dope’, ‘sour faced’, and a ‘tart’ who should be ‘demoted to a whinging tea lady’.
.....

Anna Soubry's reply to this litany was also quoted. She noted that these comments were 'highly offensive,' and came from the far-Right, whom she characterised as 'anti-women, anti-immigrant, anti-EU.' (*Evening Standard*, August 30, 2018, 1, 4) 2018) We know that the problem of 'trolls' online has been particularly aggressive across the political spectrum against female MPs. Violence against women in politics is now the norm, and it never seems to get isolated in and of itself as a problem. Even Anna Soubry herself combines 'anti-women' with 'anti-immigrant' and 'anti-EU'—as if the combination is already a kind of given—it is 'natural', as Barthes would say, to put them together—which, in the parallelism of their construction, actually diminishes the extremity of the misogynist offense. The *Evening Standard* may exempt itself from the offense by headlining their article with a judgement against the trolling misogynists ('Women MPs Targeted by Vile Abuse From Tory Infiltrators: Pressure on Party HQ to Act Against Trolls'), but the editors knew very well that such a headline, and such a litany of anti-woman charges on the front page, including the word 'traitor,' would lure the average London Tube traveller to read, even the surreptitious feminist reader. And the editors also knew that when the article was continued inside the paper, that the story directly opposite to this story, with the headline '[Female] Detective flew into violent rage at policewoman lover in row over salt on her meal,' (accompanied by a photo of the enraged female accused, cigarette hanging butchly out of her mouth), would certainly enhance the thrill of the witchy woman story. The shocking misogyny directed at women who hold political office is commuted, by being made sensationalist or dulled down: even Anna Soubry, a victim of misogynist trolling herself, effectively downplays the shocking hatred against women by grouping 'anti-woman' with 'anti-immigrant' and 'anti-Brexit', making these three categories equivalent. (And misogynist trolling is not exclusive to the Brexiteers).

The figure of the powerful woman as traitor, as Theresa May has been called frequently at this point by the hardline Brexiteers, is all too familiar, and it has fuelled the fury from the French pamphleteers who wrote (salaciously) about Marie-Antoinette as a traitor, all the way up to the current historical moment, with far too many examples to catalogue here, but which reached a pinnacle in calls, still roaring, to 'Lock Her [Hillary Clinton] Up!', with similar calls to rid the American Congress of Speaker Nancy Pelosi, campaigns against whom are shockingly ageist and misogynist: Republicans despise her, and moderate Democrats run for office with the promise that they will dissociate themselves from her influence. The figure of the threat of the dangerous woman in power is more actively applied than ever in today's tense geopolitical global climate. She is becoming a kind of currency that 'goes without saying.' This woman is someone who runs counter to the nation, leeching it, betraying it, threatening its cohesion. Hillary Clinton and Nancy Pelosi are characterised as liberal drainers of the economy, overspending the national coffers. In addition to being the causes of porous borders to the nation. Theresa May is a 'traitor' because she is handing over British sovereign own-ness to Europe. The current liberal Swedish government, a beacon of feminist progressivism, introduced a book by the Nigerian feminist writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie into the national school curriculum, but this introduction into the Swedish national culture, as noted by the BBC journalist Gabriel Gatehouse, fed the fire of the neo-Nazi Sweden Democrats, who are campaigning to close Sweden's borders. (Gatehouse, September 9, 2018) In another example of a powerful woman endangering the nation and its intactness, albeit a more askew example, the country of Zimbabwe was run into ruin by its president, Robert Mugabe, for thirty years. Nothing and no one seemed to be able to remove him from power. One day, his cabinet realised that Mugabe's wife, Grace, was plundering the

treasury. Although many men in the Zimbabwean government had been doing that for years with absolute impunity, the much easier, more self-evident blame of an evil, greedy, draining-the-coffers woman was the only way to finally oust Mugabe from power.

And these are just political examples of blaming the woman in power. We have only to look at the rise of the Incel movement (Cauterucci, July 19, 2018), the name taken by a growing online community of ‘involuntarily celibate’ men who blame women, and particularly feminist women, because, in their mind, feminists give women the right to say no to being forced to have sex with men whom they do not find attractive. Inspired by the Canadian You-Tube psychologist Jordan Petersen, whose approach of folksy male populism serves as an apology for the violent sentiments and actions of his swell of young male misogynist followers, the ‘Incel’ movement is a growing force of overt, violent woman-hating. Peterson’s massive following embraces his outlook that ‘The masculine spirit is under assault’ by the ‘chaos’ caused by feminism. (Bowles, May 18, 2018)

Undoubtedly, feminism has recently been becoming more and more vocalised, embraced by women not only in the political and academic arenas, as might previously been the case, but in other arenas. The ‘Me Too’ movement spreading across the world has identified and duly combatted sexual harassment and sexual assault in the workplace, garnering momentum and helping women who otherwise would not have been able to tell their stories. But such feminism, gaining mainstream recognition and application, inevitably elicits vicious backlash, such as in the Title IX case, for example, of Professor Avital Ronell, accused on the front page of *The New York Times* of sexually harassing a male student, the reporter implying Ronell’s undeniable guilt *because* she is a feminist professor, hence being even more to blame than a male professor in the same situation. (Greenberg, August 14, 2018) The truth of this particular scenario is not of concern here as much as the fact that Ronell has become the recipient of heaped misogynist backlash (the case received lots of press attention and angry letters to the *New York Times* editor that a woman who professes to be feminist, and who has public support from her colleagues in this matter, might be even *considered* to be exempt from being a sexual harasser).

Myth Today, today, bundles all sorts of signs, values, and ideologies into naturalised, normalised, self-evident meanings. Roland Barthes, in his structuralist, Marxist, semiotic imperatives, laid out the erasure of historical determinants as an operation, an operation which can, with critical reading, be identified despite its very functionality being based on hiding itself. Barthes’ semiotics is political. His diagramming of the mythic operation identifies a tendency towards fusion with an attendant resistance to difference and differentiation, on the semiotic level but also, always for Barthes, on the social level. Reading Foucault’s Preface to *Anti-Oedipus*, which amounts to a manifesto for an anti-fascist life, alongside Barthes’ politically engaged semiotic analysis of Myth Today, I would like to propose a definition of fascism here which I hope will begin the work of pulling apart the fused, naturalised meanings of the signs in circulation today. If, as feminists, we understand fascism to be the willful dissolving of difference, including resistance, we can begin to see that one of the primary signs of difference, if not the most primary sign of difference, is sexual difference. Sexual difference poses a threat to homosocial unity and normativity by introducing difference itself. A feminist approach would require a vigilance against the active repression of signs of sexual difference, a repression which is in operation in profuse, discursive, often elusive articulations. Even the gaping announcement of Marie-Antoinette’s “Dirty Corner”, with all its performative womanly wallop,

diminishes within other signs of difference which are perhaps less threatening, but more newsworthy.

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