

GREENE NAFTALI

SPIKE

BERNADETTE VAN-HUY

IS YOUTH A FIX?



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"IS YOUTH A FIX?"
2026
OIL ON CANVAS
112 x 113 cm
GALLERIES
SPOKE, WINTER 2026: 112-13.

Van-Huy, Bernadette. "Is Youth a Fix?" Spike, Winter 2026: 112–13.

I made a film recently with two young women as subjects, a quasi-documentary (*The ADHD Muses*, 2024), but to be honest, I have very little experience with young people, IRL or online.

Youth sells. Sex sells and younger faces and bodies have better odds of selling. Fast, no-brainer sales. Because time is money. This belief, that if it's new, if it comes after, then it's better and right, is ... very old.

The tradition of our culture is to celebrate what's new, and replace it with what's newer. It's linear, without depth, and repetitive.

I read a text by French philosopher Simone Weil, I no longer remember which, where she was saying that we sustain ourselves through what we receive from the outside, like nutrients, like air. How ridiculous is the conception of ourselves as *ex nihilo*, *sui generis* phenomena, as self-determining, self-standing units. Especially considering we also form ourselves through the outside: A young artist will develop a voice and a practice by learning from and building on those of the artists she admires.

We're so inter-penetrated by what's outside us, before us, after us ... If someone weren't connected to other things, were in a vacuum, she'd be ... dead.

In the beginning of modernity, the Enlightenment newly conceptualized a person in the likeness of an economic unit, the two conceptions (of person and of economic expansion) going hand in hand. In this formulation, a person got grossly simplified, to receive the fluidity of and, well, crude simplicity of, an economic unit. One manner of simplification was to draw a circumference around her, and conceive her as isolated.

Jacques Lacan inhabited the same body of text as Sigmund Freud. He didn't imagine himself as at a place more advanced than Freud, just because he came after, whereas many of Lacan's contemporaries and successors considered themselves updaters – and authors of their own brands – of Freud's theories. Lacan maintained he was a Freudian, working off the text, enriching it, bringing it out. He could uncover more of Freud, and Freud could uncover more of Lacan. They created in concert with each other.

I also think of Gilles Deleuze, who applied himself similarly to channeling other philosophers, overlaying himself on them, making himself a sheer medium, so that new audiences, and he himself, could communicate with them more deeply. It's interesting how he varies his voice and writing in these different books, depending on which philosophy he's channeling. Like in his book on Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (*The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, 1988), because he considers that Leibniz's logic marks a break with the classical conception of the subject as a rational being, Deleuze writes in a way that conflates the subject and predicate, and keeps either (subject or predicate) from being an attribute of the other.

In Judaism, one searchingly, intensively reads and re-reads the same text, ongoingly, forever. Commentary around it grows and amasses over thousands of years, part of the point being that, depending on where you are looking from, in time and place, it's possible to discern or generate something new – these are rich texts and not disposable ones.

We are overlain onto those before us, we aren't replacing them. We suffuse ourselves with the exemplary people and things we love, and they continue emanating through us. We know the name Lacan, but productive as he was, his production wasn't for his name. Think of how averse he was to publishing, and how much of his published output had to be compiled by his students. His cigars weren't linear but crooked, convoluted, they had more of a circle, a cycle to them.

Neither was his driving straight. He disobeyed all traffic and safety rules – driving over sidewalks, through red lights and stop signs, at high speeds. He is as well known for articulating a pimp elegance as for his theories. His hairdresser appointments were as wild as his analysis sessions. So, I'll cut my speech short, like a Lacan session, but with one last thing, a paraphrased account from his hairdresser, Karolos Kambelopoulos, who worked at the Carita sisters' salon in Paris, where he also styled the hair of numerous other celebrities, like soprano Maria Callas and actress Brigitte Bardot.

"He was never one to wait, he never wanted to wait. Every day I did thirty clients, and so for his appointments, I knew I would have to arrange things around him. One time, he came, and I couldn't arrange them. He goes to have his shampoo and his blue rinse, and he asks 'What time will you see me?' 'I'm not free, so you have to wait a bit,' I replied. 'Go and sit down.' He had a pink bib on, the blue rinse running down it, he was annoyed, he got up and went out, with rinse and bib still on. Carita's owner told me that he'd gone home, and that I have to go see him there. She was furious. So I went and I found him sitting in his bathroom, waiting. I cut his hair, I took the hundred-francs tip he gave me and said 'Now Doctor Lacan, I don't want to cut your hair anymore.'" —

BERNADETTE VAN-HUY is a founding member of Bernadette Corporation. She is currently working on a narrative screenplay and a novella. She lives in upstate New York.