A high-contrast, black and white portrait of Jacques Lacan, showing his face from the nose up. The image is rendered in a stark, graphic style with deep blacks and bright whites, creating a dramatic and somewhat abstract effect. The text is overlaid on this image.

CRISIS & CRITIQUE

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**JACQUES LACAN: PSYCHOANALYSIS,
POLITICS, PHILOSOPHY**

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POLITICS, PHILOSOPHY**

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Jacques Lacan: Psychoanalysis, Politics, Philosophy

Frank Ruda & Agon Hamza

To go back to Jacques Lacan and *once again* discuss psychoanalysis – a theory which, as they tell us, has lost all legitimacy and is discredited – and its relation to politics, culture, etc seems nothing but a vain attempt. According to the brain sciences, with the new scientific breakthroughs of this field, psychoanalysis finally was sent to where it always belonged: the pre-scientific, quasi-religious universe. Psychoanalysis is falling behind or losing both at the level of the doctrine and clinic. The human mind appears to fit better to the models provided by neurobiology, than to the Freudian-Lacanian understandings of it. Further, the problems continue with the psychoanalytic practice: it is a long process, with no guaranteed result. It requires discipline and commitment from the analysand, but not in the sense of the analysand really desiring to change. There is a famous joke, which tries to make fun of the uselessness of psychoanalysts: how many psychoanalysts does it take to change a light bulb? One, but it really has to want to change. Funny, but incorrect. In principle, the analysand doesn't want to change his condition. As Lacan points out, the desire is always the desire of the analyst, that is, it is the engine of the psychoanalytic process.¹ As opposed to this, cognitive therapy and pills are advancing way too fast, thus having psychoanalytic treatment lag far behind.

The approach to Lacan gets more complicated when we recall his famous statement that his aim is to train analysts, thus reducing psychoanalysis strictly to the clinical dimension. We all remember his rather infamous statement: “I rise up in revolt, so to speak, against philosophy”² – a statement which continues to be an object of unresolved discussions. Perhaps here, in the spirit of Žižek's Lacanianism, we can suggest that when Lacan rebels against philosophy, he indeed rebels against a certain kind of a philosophical practice, which is a certain change in the positioning of the subject. Not quite a parallax positioning (an apparent displacement of the perspective), but rather a shift in the attitude of the subject itself. The conditions of the possibility of the rebellion against philosophy (or, against a certain practice) was made possible by philosophy itself and at the same time, was caused by philosophy. However, psychoanalysis is attacked, put into question, relativized, etc from all range of opposing field. From biology, to brain sciences, philosophy, and all the way to serious questionings of its clinic. He has very rigidly called for the need of doing an analysis even of the analytic community (so as to get rid off the fantasy that the analyst actually is someone who just knows and does not even have an unconscious). But, in his writings, the *Écrits* as well as in his Seminars, Lacan stubbornly refuses to keep psychoanalysis only within the terrain of therapeutic practice. His concerns

.....
¹ Lacan 1998, pp.9-10, p.276

² Lacan 1980

are far from only being clinical: in Lacan, we have ontological and epistemological commitments. As for example Alenka Zupančič has recently demonstrated, the central question of psychoanalysis, that is, sex, is the point of conversion between ontology and epistemology (that is, between being and knowing).³ In this sense, psychoanalysis is perhaps the opposite of philosophy, but as such, it has profound consequences for philosophy. But it doesn't function only at the level of consequences: the psychoanalytical event helped philosophy reinvent some of its fundamental principles.

So, why psychoanalysis, to refer to the title of a book, when all the odds are against it?

Althusser was someone who recognized that psychoanalysis, for all its obscure history and troubled situation in France, had crucial insights to offer politics and philosophy. He was one of most important Marxist philosophers who from the early phases of his work systematically engaged with Freudian, and especially, Lacanian psychoanalysis. He was one of the rare Marxist philosophers who not only accepted the consequences of psychoanalytic theory and practice for both Marxism and philosophy, but he worked through and with these theoretical consequences. Instead of doing a balance sheet of influences of one discipline to another, Althusser took another direction. Paradoxically, Althusser avoided taking the path taken by many contemporary Marxist-Lacanian, who hardly engage in any meaningful discussion of the contemporary critique of political economy and its categories, but instead they just throw the concept of *jouissance* and enjoyment as supplements or pointing out the similarities between the two fields. Althusser, on the contrary, was well aware that neither of these disciplines can serve as the supplement of other; nor they can be approached from the position of the *university discourse*. A philosopher once said that at one level of analysis, everything resembles everything else. But, this means nothing.

Consequently, he drew interesting and equally surprising parallels between the two fields. His premise was that both Marxism and psychoanalysis share nothing in common, no project and no agenda. The former is concerned with the forms of social production, whereas the latter is strictly concerned with the unconscious. However, in his *On Marx and Freud*, Althusser situates both disciplines within the same register. That is to say, both Marxism and psychoanalysis are 1) conflictual sciences (and, just like Marx and Freud, Althusser had a rather strange conception of what science is and what constitutes a scientific discipline), and 2) their main enemy does not come from the outside (brain sciences, counter-revolution), but rather springs from (internal-external) revisionisms.⁴

.....
3 Zupančič 2017

4 Althusser 2009, p.19

Althusser's point is Marxism and psychoanalysis are conflictual not only because they operate within a conflictual space, but because they constitute the very reality which they consider as antagonistic.

Ever since their beginnings, Marxism and psychoanalysis have suffered a similar fate. They have been declared irrelevant, quasi-religious, outdated, or even dead. For a certain time, this even happened by means of enthusiastic over-endorsement. It suffices just to recall the famous anecdote when Freud on the ship to the USA, told Jung that the American people do not know it, but the two of them were bringing them the plague. Yet, the plague that manifested in so called ego-analysis turned out quite different from what Freud expected. But today after many straightforward attacks on psychoanalysis from the outside, especially from within the realm of the sciences and with new discoveries in the brain sciences, it seems psychoanalysis suffered its final blow into oblivion. Finally, it seems to have become irrefutable: psychoanalysis is an obscurantist, non-scientific discipline, which at best can be used as a supplement to other disciplines. Perhaps it can be said that psychoanalysis today is the exact obverse of what Slavoj Žižek refers to as *ptolemization*, that is the process of supplementing or changing the existing theory (in crisis) with theses from *within* its own basic framework.⁵ But, from the perspective of the cognitive sciences, psychoanalysis is conceptualised only as a *ptolemization* of classical psychology, which fails to abandon its conceptual premises.⁶

On the other hand, with Marxism, the story is not that different. With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse and disappearance of most of nominally socialist or communist states (China and North-Korea are still standing, yet a hard case to defend for a Marxist), Marxism no longer seem a viable political project or horizon in contemporary debates (even if Marx became again a bestseller during the financial crisis, but this did not lead to the emergence of thousands of new Marxists). It has been declared outdated, a misfortune to humanity, and a potentially criminal idea. But Marxism's effectivity as a political orientation has also been impeded or limited by an enthusiastic over-endorsement that can go under different names, one of them being historical materialism (and the idea of a science of history).

Against this background, some went as far as to declare Freud and Marx – along with Nietzsche – to be the culprits of a fallback into problematic kinds of substantialist metaphysical thought by introducing unexplained explainers, that is terms that are themselves not explained or derived but are supposed to explain everything. For Marx, this is class struggle, for Freud the unconscious, and for Nietzsche certainly the will.

.....
5 Žižek 2008, pp.7-8

6 Ibid.

These attacks, internal and external, point to a dilemma – what is psychoanalysis after all? It is clearly not evident what to this day in which field of knowledge psychoanalysis belongs; the issue has not been resolved is very much part of the ongoing debates. However, let us recapitulate some of the theses or positions that constitute it. First, there is something profoundly erroneous to reduce psychoanalysis only to its clinical aspect. Schematically put, the theoretical and clinical dimensions of psychoanalysis are inter-related, they inform and constitute one another. It is not that one aspect provides the “raw material” for the other, a kind of causality. Perhaps in a similar way to how Marxist doctrine and political praxis function. Second, it is equally a mistake to conceptualise psychoanalysis as a philosophical orientation, or a supplement philosophy. Psychoanalysis, especially the one of the Freud-Lacanian orientation, is a singular theoretical orientation.

The present issue of *Crisis and Critique* starts from the premise that the time of psychoanalysis is not over but is actually only now about to come. It addresses a series of questions, which do not reduce Lacan to the clinical dimension alone, but also address the constitutive and formative dimension of Lacan's oeuvre. The essays collected in this issue, far from pretending to be comprehensive, are a systematic and profound engagement with Lacanian psychoanalysis and its philosophical, political and cultural consequences of it. The issue gathers some of the most important philosophers, theoretical and clinical psychoanalysts working in the Lacanian field today, albeit in different orientations, who help create a new context in which Lacanian psychoanalysis is not only actual, but a Lacanian perspective is necessary to grasp our contemporary present. This issue is not nor does it pretend to be exhausting. The hope of the editors is that the present issue of *Crisis and Critique* will not succeed in only pointing out the contemporary relevance, but together with Lacan, to orient ourselves in thinking.

Dundee/Prishtina, March 2019

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On Psychoanalysis and Freedom: Lacan vs. Heidegger

Richard Boothby

Abstract: This essay seeks to clarify a Lacanian conception of freedom with particular attention to its contrast with the perspective of Heidegger. The point of departure is Lacan's concept of *das Ding*, a concept which, while it appears to echo Heidegger's famous essay about "The Thing," must be carefully relinked with its point of origin in a brief passage from Freud's unpublished "Project for a Scientific Psychology." Of greatest import is to adequately appreciate the linkage between the Thing and the birth and function of the signifier. With that linkage in mind, it is possible to see the contours of a distinctly Lacanian conception of freedom, rooted in the subject's relation to language. The result is a theory of freedom that is significantly different from that put forward by Heidegger; broadly speaking, a theory framed in linguistic rather than phenomenological terms.

Keywords: Freedom, *das Ding*, *Nebenmensch*, cedable object, part object, extimacy, phenomenology, revelation

Lacan famously claimed never to have spoken about freedom, which may in a sense be true, depending on your definition of freedom.¹ Though if we accept the dictum of Epictetus—"free is he who lives as he desires"—we might equally well conclude that Lacan hardly spoke of anything else. In this respect, Lacan might even be offered as a worthy successor of Sartre, though certainly not for propounding Sartre's brand of radical voluntarism, nor by virtue of criticizing Freud, as Sartre did, for asserting the contradiction of an unconscious consciousness. If anything, Lacan can be said to have overcome the contradiction by means of fully embracing it and, in the process, to have opened up a new conception of a non-voluntarist freedom. Which ultimately means that Lacan was true less to Sartre than to the legacy of German idealism, the movement that upended two millennia of thinking about the meaning of contradiction in Hegel's concept of the negative, and that began with Kant's radical breakthrough in clarifying the paradoxical character of freedom, according to which the subject realizes its freedom in the moment that it submits itself unrestrainedly to the pure principle of the law. We should hear an echo of that paradox, albeit in a different conceptual frame, in Lacan's insistence that the refusal to concede upon one's own desire is achieved precisely by submitting to the defile of a signifying chain.

But let us start again at the beginning. How exactly are we to conceive Lacan's contribution to the problem of freedom? It was indeed Kant who set the parameters of the problem. The toughest part of the

¹ In part inspired by Lacan's claim never to have spoken of freedom, a one-day conference was organized in Maastricht under the title "The Phantom of Liberty: Psychoanalysis as a Philosophy of Freedom?"

question, even more difficult than determining whether or not we are in fact free, is conceptualizing how something like freedom might be possible at all. Perhaps the first thing to be said with respect to the question of freedom à la Lacan is that he offers a theory of the human being that is partially, but decisively detached from nature. The upshot of Lacan's theory of the mirror stage is to assert a deracination from instinctual predetermination.² As a result of the prematurity of human birth, motor coordination in the developing infant is guided less by any predetermined response to stimuli than by a more general tropism of perception toward formal unities, and in particular toward mimicry of the imago of the fellow human being. The result is the establishment of a margin of independence from the instinctual regulation of the animal and a concomitantly heightened attunement to what Gestalt psychologists call the perceptual *Prägnanz*, the pure unitary form, of objects.

With this result, however, we are already faced with a paradox, insofar as the Lacanian imaginary is as alienating as it is liberating.³ The subject comes to itself only outside of itself and, even then, only in the form of an illusion. We are well familiar with the extended consequences of this fact, among which is that the discourse of free choice becomes a mere alibi of the ego, an illusion of self determination, an almost irresistible temptation to be seduced by a fantasy of independent agency. Pressed into the service of its primary ideological function, this fantasy of freedom becomes the linchpin of the pivotal political *méconnaissance* of our epoch. From this perspective, the most proudly proclaimed achievement of modernity, that of the abolition of slavery, merely inoculates us more securely against recognizing its new reality. Congratulating ourselves about the end of chattel servitude paradoxically allows the exploitation of wage labor to disappear behind the apparently incontrovertible claim that every worker voluntarily contracts for his or her own employment. Trumpeting the end of slavery is among the more dependable pillars of support for the cardinal lie of bourgeois society: everyone is their own master. As Lacan himself observes, "we live in a society in which slavery isn't recognized. It's nevertheless clear to any sociologist or philosopher that it has in no way been abolished."⁴

.....
²The argument for such a deracination is a primary thrust of Lacan's early essay on "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the / Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," Lacan 2006, pp. 75-81.

³The point is made in "The Mirror Stage" and expanded upon in "Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis," Lacan 2006, pp. 82-101.

⁴ Lacan, 1993, p. 132.

Lacan and Heidegger

The question thus arises: is there some other, less merely ideological sense of freedom available from a Lacanian perspective? Certainly not in the view of Martin Heidegger, who counted himself among the critics who charge psychoanalysis with being incapable of doing justice to human freedom. As his Zollikon Seminars make clear, Heidegger regarded Freud's new science as an effort to extend the dominion of mechanistic causality from conscious mental life into the nether-realm of the unconscious, explaining dreams, symptoms, and parapraxes in terms of equally mechanical causes that operate beyond or beneath the level of conscious awareness. Meeting Lacan at the height of his interest in Heidegger's own thought apparently didn't help in this regard. In the aftermath of his visit to France, Heidegger quipped to Medard Boss that the psychiatrist seemed to him to be in need of a psychiatrist.⁵

But what if Heidegger had actually read Lacan? What if he had taken seriously Lacan's own definition of cause, which identifies it with *das Ding*? The stress Lacan puts on this point is striking. "At the heart of man's destiny," he says, "is the *Ding*, the *causa* . . . it is the *causa panthomenon*, the cause of the most fundamental human passion."⁶ Surely Heidegger would have been intrigued, given his own extended reflection on "*Das Ding*," an essay Lacan commented upon extensively, in which the Thing is identified with the void that inhabits the pot or jug.⁷ For Heidegger, this ur-object of human making, remnants of which are taken by archeologists to be among the surest signs of the ancient existence of *homo sapiens*, is essentially a core emptiness sheltered by a cowl of clay. Indeed, the emptiness is the essential thing. The wall of clay allows for a zone of pure vacancy to yawn open and offer itself for use.

How, then, to understand Lacan's teaching on this key point? How does *das Ding* function as cause, and how, if at all, is it related to freedom? More than once Lacan refers the answer to the reflections of the mystics. "Freud left us with the problem of a gap once again at the level of *das Ding*," he says, "which is that of religious men and mystics."⁸ In his twentieth seminar, Lacan compares his own *Écrits* to "mystical jaculations."⁹ It is there that Lacan recalls Bernini's rapturous depiction of Teresa of Avila, of which Lacan says that it's obvious that she's

.....
⁵ Heidegger 1987, p. 348.

⁶ Lacan 1992, p. 97. In this quote, Lacan intentionally indulges in a salad of Greek and Latin. Earlier, he had noted the etymological derivation of the French word "*chose*" (thing) from the Latin *causa*. Lacan 1992, p. 43.

⁷ Heidegger 1975, p. 166ff.

⁸ Lacan 1992, p. 100.

⁹ Lacan 1998, p. 76

coming, even if it isn't clear exactly what she's coming from. In the same sentence, Lacan also refers us to a more obscure figure, the 14th century Beguine, Hadewijch of Brabant. Lacan may well have been familiar with the following astonishing passage from one of Hadewijch's letters: "If it maintains its worthy state," she writes, "the soul is a bottomless abyss in which God suffices to himself . . . Soul is a way for the passage of God from his depths into his liberty; and God is a way for the passage of the soul into its liberty, that is, into his inmost depths, which cannot be touched except by the soul's abyss."¹⁰

It will be my thesis that this passage condenses Lacan's most essential point, namely that the subject comes to itself and is freed into the space of its own liberated singularity only by entering and being entered by the space of what is unfathomable in the Other. It is this unfathomable dimension, opened in the Other in a way that provides an opening in the subject itself, that Lacan calls *das Ding*. In what follows, I will rely on this point of Lacan's teaching to make a few tentative remarks about freedom from a psychoanalytic point of view, with special reference to its contrast with that of Heidegger.

Regrasping the Thing

Much of the commentary on Lacan's notion of *das Ding* has tended to follow a Kantian clue, posing the Lacanian Thing as cousin to the Kantian *Ding-an-sich*, the inaccessible and unknowable kernel of objects. This quasi-Kantian approach, while certainly not without some value, risks distracting us from an absolutely key point: the inaugural dimension of the Lacanian *Ding* concerns not objects but other people.¹¹ The original unthinkable object is *the fellow human being*. This conclusion is unmistakable when we return to the text of Freud's unpublished "Project for a Scientific Psychology" from which Lacan takes his point of departure. Freud there points to the "perceptual complex" of the fellow human being, or *Nebenmensch*, which is divided between what the child recognizes on the basis of similarities to its own body—precisely the sort of mirroring that Lacan associates with the imaginary—and a locus of something that is "new and non-comparable," a dimension of something unknown.¹² This uncognizable excess Freud calls *das Ding*. It is this division of the *Nebenmensch* between a familiar imago and a margin of something excessive and as yet unknown that will serve as the template for of all the child's future attempts to explore the world of objects. "For this reason," says Freud, "it is in relation to the fellow human-being that a

.....
10 Hadewijch 1980, p. 86.

11 Lacan lays out his reading of *das Ding* in the first half of his seminar on *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. See Lacan 1992, pp.

12 Freud 1955, 1:331.

human-being learns to cognize."¹³

Lacan's crucial addition to Freud's sketch of *das Ding* is to assert that the enigmatic locus of something uncognized in the Other becomes the root source of anxiety.¹⁴ "Not only is [anxiety] not without object," he says in the seminar devoted to topic, "but it very likely designates the most, as it were, profound object, the ultimate object, the Thing."¹⁵ The challenge of the Other-Thing consists not simply in the discovery of something inaccessible at the heart of the Other but in the way that discovery raises the unsettling question of what object I am for that unknown desire. "What provokes anxiety....," says Lacan, "is not, contrary to what is said, the rhythm of the mother's alternating presence and absence. The proof of this is that the infant revels in repeating this game of presence and absence. . . . The most anguishing thing for the infant is precisely . . . when the mother is on his back all the while, and especially when she's wiping his backside."¹⁶

There is a striking resemblance between this Lacanian version of the mother/child relation and the account offered by Simone de Beauvoir.¹⁷ At a crucial point of her argument in *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir appeals to the Freudian Oedipus complex for understanding the deep roots of masculine ambivalence toward the feminine, though, as she is quick to point out, the lesson to be taken depends on inverting a key piece of Freud's conception. The core of the Oedipus complex is not, as Freud thought, that the child's tie to the mother must be broken by the threat of castration. On the contrary, the child initiates its own separation, seeking an autonomy that can be achieved only by a certain rejection of the maternal embrace. Lacan's argument appears to echo this key point. He could well be paraphrasing de Beauvoir when he insists that "it's not true that the child is weaned. He weans himself. He detaches himself from the breast."¹⁸

.....
13 Ibid.

14 I capitalize "Other" here and will continue to do so throughout this essay, but the choice is an awkward one in so far as "Other" must do double duty between the concepts of the little and big Others. In fact, Lacan himself alternates in his capitalization of *Autre* throughout his work without any perfect consistency. The most logical thing would seem to be using the lower case for the little other and the upper case for the big Other. But then again, even the little other of the fellow human being sometimes deserves the emphasis lent by the capitalization, precisely because, when its Thingly dimension is taken into account, the fellow human being becomes something totally different than the impression of ordinary experience leads us to conclude. It is to recognize this point that I will retain the capitalization even of the "little Other."

15 Lacan 2014, p. 311.

16 Lacan 2014, pp. 53-54.

17 de Beauvoir 1989, pp. 195-196. The passage in question occurs at the climax of what is arguably the most essential chapter of *The Second Sex*, Chapter Nine "Dreams, Fears, Idols."

18 Lacan 2014, p. 327. Cf. also: "It's not longing for the maternal breast that provokes anxiety, but its imminence." Lacan 2014, p. 53. "The most decisive moment in the anxiety at issue, the anxiety of

Is Lacan then merely repeating de Beauvoir here? Not at all. The point of convergence between them only makes it more essential to clarify Lacan's distance from de Beauvoir, who departs from Freud merely in claiming that what separates the child from the mother is not the father's threat of castration but rather the force of the child's own desire for autonomy. For Lacan, by contrast, the problem isn't the desire of the child, but rather that of the mother, in as much as her desire is at some level encountered as a disconcerting unknown. The child turns away from the mother to avoid the abyssal question about what she really wants.

It is in the light of this perspective that we can make sense of Lacan's likening the mother to a giant praying mantis.¹⁹ To the extent that the mother appears animated by an unfathomable desire, the child is left in a vaguely unnerving uncertainty about whether, or how, he or she can possibly succeed in satisfying it. In the same stroke, we can interpret Lacan's characterization of the *objet a* as *un objet cessible*, a cedable or yieldable object. In the prototypical incarnations of the *objet a*—the breast, the feces, the penis—the subject's "pound of flesh" is exchanged, even "sacrificed," in order to create a margin of safe separation from the Other.²⁰ In effect, a body part is psychically given up in order to establish a space of exchange, a kind of security zone, between subject and Other. As Lacan says of it, "sacrifice is not at all intended to be an offering, nor a gift, both of which are propagated in a quite different dimension, but the capture of the Other in the web of desire."²¹

From the Thing to the Signifier

In the originary drama with the maternal Thing, the inarticulate cry of the infant becomes in itself a ceded object, indeed the very first such object, given up into the space between the subject and the Other.²² As Lacan says, "this manifestation of anxiety coincides with the very emergence in the world of he who is going to be the subject. This manifestation is his cry... this first effect of cession... the nursling can't do anything about the cry that slips out of him. He has yielded something and nothing will

weaning, is not so much when the breast falls short of the subject's need, it's rather that the infant yields the breast to which he is appended as a portion of himself." Lacan 2014, p. 313

19 Cf. Lacan 2014, p. 22

20 "In the body there is always, by virtue of this engagement in the signifying dialectic, something that is separated off, something that is sacrificed, something inert, and this something is the pound of flesh." Lacan 2014, p. 219.

21 Lacan 2014, p. 277

22 It is useful to note at this juncture that Lacan adds to the list of more familiar embodiments of the *objet a* not only the gaze and the voice, but also the phoneme.

ever conjoin him to it again."²³ The first inchoate eruptions of the voice are thus inflected with anxiety, and inevitably so. But as such, they also open and begin to shape the interval between the subject and the Other and, with the unfolding of a signifying network, become the means by which the question of the Other, the enigma of *das Ding*, will be ceaselessly re-posed. In the process of such repetition, the resources of the signifier allows for the posing the question of the subject's own coming-to-be, rooted in the real of the subject's mute *jouissance*.

This little series of notes on *das Ding* prompts us to emphasize three elemental dimensions of the Lacanian signifier.

1) Separation

The first dimension concerns *separation from the Other*. A primary result of Lacan's view is to assert that most archaic function of speech and language, far from connecting the subject to the fellow human being, is to achieve an indispensable degree of detachment, a margin of separation and independence that puts the neighbor-Thing at a distance. We can therefore assert anew, with a shock of unexpected literalness, that the word is indeed "the murder of the Thing."²⁴ The function of the signifier might therefore be said to be an exemplary instance, indeed *the* exemplary instance of *Aufhebung*. The signifier both cancels *das Ding*, distancing the subject from it, yet also preserves it in a locus suspended between the subject and the Other.

For this Lacanian perspective, the word functions less to connect the subject to the Other than to insert a distance between the two.²⁵ In this respect, Lacan's account is as violent to common sense as it is to mainstream linguistics. Nevertheless, we get glimpses of a similar notion elsewhere. When, for example, Hannah Arendt begins *The Human Condition* with the 1957 launching of the first orbital satellite, the Russian "Sputnik," she expresses her amazement that this unprecedented achievement was immediately recognized, in the words of one American reporter, as a first 'step toward escape from men's imprisonment to the earth'." The reporter's comment echoed the words of the pioneering Soviet physicist Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, words that came to be inscribed on his tombstone, that "mankind will not remain bound to the earth forever." To follow out the consequences of Lacan's concept of *das Ding* is to realize that Sputnik was merely a technologically elaborated successor to the primordial example, as Arendt puts it, of an "object made by man launched into the universe." The original such object is none other than

.....
23 Lacan 2014, p. 326.

24 Lacan attributes the phrase to Hegel, though it is fairly evident that the actual wording derives not from Hegel himself but from Alexandre Kojève, whose lectures on Hegel Lacan assiduously attended.

25 This point is audible in Lacan's repeated rejection of notions of "intersubjectivity" and his frequent critiques of conceiving language as first of all a means of "communication."

the signifier, and it is launched for the same underlying reason, that of gaining a measure of escape, of achieving a margin of independence, from the gravitational bond of the Other.

Some echo of the same point is audible in a remark by the primatologist Sue Savage-Rumbaugh. While most of Savage-Rumbaugh's work aimed at closing the gap between humans and our simian relatives, she remained acutely cognizant of the distance between humans and the apes. "When I am with bonobos," she said, "I feel like I have something that I shared with them long ago but I forgot. As we've clothed ourselves and separated ourselves, we've gained a wonderful society, but we've lost a kind of soul-to-soul connection that they maintain."²⁶ Lacan's theory of *das Ding* points to precisely such a loss of fusional connection. The implication of the Lacanian view is that a certain loss of immediate creaturely communion, the replacement of an empathic link with a distinct measure of distance from the Other, is a prime condition of becoming human. Paradoxically, the acquisition of language in human beings relies first of all, not on an *addition* to animal endowments, but a *subtraction* from them.

2) The Question

The second dimension is that of *the question*. The signifier holds open the zone of something unknown, discovered in the excessive overflow of the imago in the Other. Indeed, it is no accident that on the level of its most elementary structure the signifier is itself composed of an image and some excess or surplus. The image furnishes the material body of the signifier, and the excess is the question about the directionality of its meaning, the question of the signified. This view of the matter suggests how the primordial question of the Other is always and implicitly repeated with every signifier. What most distinguishes Lacan's view of language and its function is that meaning can never be fully stabilized, that a question not only can but always implicitly *is* posed by every entry into language. As Lacan never tires of emphasizing, it is always possible to ask, "yes, I heard what you said to me, but what is it that you really want by saying it?"

At this point, we might venture a partial explanation of how this intimation of the question of the Other is literally inscribed in the infant's speech. I'm thinking of the phonemic repetition that is so characteristic of parental names across many languages: ma-ma, pa-pa. Roman Jakobson famously suggested of this repetition that the second phoneme functions to indicate that the first is to be taken as no mere sound but rather as a *signifier*. The Lacanian view fully endorses Jakobson's point, though might also be taken to expand upon it. We are accustomed to thinking of

26 Quotation from interview, Savage-Rumbaugh 2012.

this elementary *Nachträglichkeit* of meaning as a matter of retroactively specifying the intention, buttoning it down in the way that the last words of a sentence typically establish *après coup* the meaning of the opening phrase. But what if we are also to recognize in the infant's phonemic repetition—ma-ma—a posing of the question of what is unknown in the Other? When the second sounding of the phoneme indicates that the first is a signifier, the effect is also to open a potential question about what exactly it means. In this way, the doubling of the phoneme rehearses the originary partition of the Other, the division in the *Nebenmensch* remarked by Freud that posits one portion of the "perceptual complex" as corresponding to imaginary form and another portion that escapes registration in the specular image and that remains wholly enigmatic, an open question. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that in Chinese, a language that shares the "ma-ma" of English and many other tongues, the phoneme "ma," with appropriate alteration of the tonal pronunciation, has two very different significations. In the first case, it functions to signify "mother." In the second case, sounded with a different tone and available for being appended to most any phrase, it functions to announce the interrogative mood. In this second employment, "ma" becomes the indicator *par excellence* of a question.

3) The Wall of the Law.

The third dimension is relevant to the distinction between the little Other of the fellow human being and the big Other of the symbolic code. When the signifier is stabilized by the network of an elaborated symbolic order, the separation from the neighbor-Thing is reinforced. The subject is protected from the neighbor-Thing by the "wall of the law."²⁷ This perspective is audible in a question posed by Slavoj Žižek, apropos Lacan's distance from Levinas: "What if the ultimate function of the Law is not to enable us not to forget the neighbor, to retain our proximity to the neighbor, but, on the contrary, to keep the neighbor at a proper distance, to serve as a kind of protective wall against the monstrosity of the neighbor?"²⁸ To in this way identify the elementary function of the signifier with an *Aufhebung* of the enigmatic neighbor-Thing, reinforced by the wall of the law, merely reposes of the basic terms of Lacan's paternal metaphor in which the Name of the Father is substituted for the Desire of the Mother. In fact, it becomes clear how Lacan's notion of the Thing stands at the core of his rewriting of the central pillar of Freud's theory, that of the Oedipus Complex. To be sure, the result is to center the origin of the subject upon a *complex*, but shifts the terms from the *Oedipus Komplex* to the *Komplex der Nebenmensch*.

27 In his "Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis" Lacan refers not to the "wall of the law" but the "wall of language." Lacan 2006, p. 233.

28 Žižek 2005, p. 163.

Anxiety and Freedom

Taking these three points together returns us to Heidegger. In particular, it becomes possible to see how the Lacanian Thing is relevant not only to the Heideggerian essay by that title but even more profoundly to the cardinal notion that underlies all of Heidegger's thought: that of the disclosive field of *die Lichtung*, the lighted clearing of Being. What Lacan theorizes in his notion of *das Ding* is not merely reminiscent of Heidegger's open horizon of revelation, *it is in a crucial respect coincident with it*. The openness of the open is traced by Lacan back to the enigma of the Other, the way in which the Other fundamentally embodies a question. What Heidegger thinks as the very being of *Dasein*, that being for which, in its being, its being remains a question, is distributed by Lacan across the gap of the subject's relation to an Other under whose gaze the question first arises. Moreover, insofar as the signifier functions to mark that space of the questionable, the being of the subject is an open question that radically relies on the open margin of signifier. The subject, as Lacan repeats time and again, is represented by a signifier for another signifier.

How, then, to link this discussion with the problematic of freedom? The connection becomes more palpable when we consider the contrast between the Heideggerian and Lacanian treatments of anxiety, the affect that for Heidegger is the privileged index of *Dasein*'s free potentiality for being.

Whatever one's larger judgment of Heidegger's thought, it's hard not to admire the conceptual elegance of his account. In anxiety, *Dasein* comes face to face with its own pure possibility. Anxiety is the dizziness of *Dasein*'s raw exposure—at once and in its totality—to the lighting of Being. Yet such pure exposure to presencing *is* *Dasein*. The elegance of Heidegger's definition of anxiety thus consists primarily in the way that it neatly certifies *Dasein*'s wholeness from out of its own being. Because anxiety is grounded in nothing but *Dasein*'s encounter with itself, the essential mineness of *Dasein*, the *Jemeinigkeit* of existential identity that Heidegger so stresses from the outset, comes to function as its own guarantee.²⁹ It is for this reason, as Heidegger puts it, that “anxiety individualizes *Dasein* and thus discloses it as ‘*solus ipse*’.”³⁰

For Lacan, however, it is the very self-containedness of Heidegger's conception that is the problem. Where the Heideggerian account provides a special satisfaction by means of finding in anxiety the challenge that *Dasein* poses to itself, anxiety for Lacan reflects the subject's primordial alienation in the Other, the fact that the path by which the subject comes

29 Despite his otherwise critical appraisal of Descartes, Heidegger's view of anxiety as an affect that displays in a privileged way the essential being of *Dasein*, that *Dasein*'s very abyssal uncertainty is what certifies its wholeness, enacts an echo of Descartes' own approach, for which it is the capacity of the cogito to doubt that ultimately undergirds its unshakeable self-certainty.

30 Heidegger 1962, p. 233.

to itself necessarily begins outside itself. The problem is not unnerving intimacy but unavoidable *extimacy*.³¹

Ironically, Lacan's different conception on this crucial point arguably enables him to be truer to Heidegger's vision than Heidegger himself, at least with regard to Heidegger's rejection of existence in favor of *ek-sistence*. As Heidegger himself emphasizes, most clearly in his disavowal of Sartre's existential voluntarism, the change of prefix is meant to emphasize that *Dasein* is in some essential way outside and/or beyond itself. It is not accidental, then, that Lacan seizes with special enthusiasm on the altered spelling of *ek-sistence*, as it captures precisely the elementally *ek-centric* structure that Lacan wants crucially to assert. The subject comes to itself only by means of the detour through the Other. At the same time, Lacan affords a new angle of view on another central Heideggerian theme, that of *Gerede*, the idle chatter that enables everyday *Dasein* to evade its ownmost potentiality for being. In mundane small talk, *Dasein* loses itself in formulaic banter about the weather, the box scores, the police blotter, local gossip, etc. What Lacan adds to this Heideggerian insight is an insistence that what is covered over by idle talk is first and foremost the abyssal character of the Other.

We also begin to see how the margin of freedom emerges in a Lacanian conception of it. For Lacan, the alienating, inauthentic discourse of everydayness, what Lacan in his early work called “empty speech,” is merely one species of the more general phenomenon of the symbolic Law—call it the “soft power” face of the big Other—which taken broadly comprises all the ways in which the open horizon of signification is controlled by routinized linkages between signifiers and signifieds. The fundamental function of the Law is to provide a defense against the vertiginous question of the Other-Thing. When the subject contends a break with the Law of the big Other that regulates the defile of the signifier, the subject is re-confronted by the force of the real that resounds in the question. Confronting the gaps and inconsistencies in the law, engaging its failures in ways that push the subject toward the conclusion that the big Other doesn't know, or even doesn't exist, has the effect of animating an unsuspected richness of the signifier, alive not merely along the less traveled by-roads of signification but even in the play of nonsense. The repressed of *das Ding* returns in the poetics of the impossible and the absurd. It is in this way, I submit, that we should interpret Lacan's twin claims that “speech is able to recover the debt that it engenders”³² and that “jouissance must be refused, so that it can be reached on the inverted ladder of the Law of desire.”³³

31 Lacan introduces his neologism of the “*extimate*” precisely in his elaboration of the Thing. See Lacan 1992, p. 139.

32 Lacan 2006, p. 144.

33 Lacan 2006, p. 324.

Revelation vs. Reverberation

At this point, we could easily enlarge upon the proximity of Heidegger's celebration of poetry to Lacan's insistence on the polyvalence of the signifier, comparable, as Lacan says, to the multiple staves of a musical score.³⁴ But let us instead risk posing another question about the difference between the two thinkers. The key for highlighting that difference is to see how, despite strong currents of his thought that lead in precisely contrary directions, Heidegger might still be characterized as a thinker of *revelation*. Despite his insistence that Dasein is always equiprimordially in the truth and untruth, or that revelation is always counterbalanced by concealment, Heidegger's conception of Dasein's disclosive clearing continually evokes the promise of something like a shining-forth of revelation, the flashing of some extensive coming-to-presence.³⁵ Dasein's disclosive potential as Heidegger conceives it tends toward something like a "full screen" appearance. What we have here, I submit, is perhaps the capital expression of Heidegger's phenomenological point of departure. It is a commitment to the sweep of the phenomenal field which in turn undergirds the emphasis on Dasein's being-as-a-whole. The Heideggerian clearing thus tends to suggest an open stage upon which some completely new tableau might unfold. The Greek temple is thus thought by Heidegger to clear the open space for the meeting of the "four-fold" of earth and sky, mortals and divinities. In another context, that of his essay on "The Question Concerning Technology," Heidegger champions meditative thinking that eschews the flattening influence of technological "enframing" and thereby opens the possibility of a entirely altered apprehension of the Rhine River. It is tempting to hear something of the same evocation of the revelatory whole when, giving free play to the verbal gerund, Heidegger elsewhere suggests that "the Thing things world."³⁶ This general orientation toward an open canvas upon which something akin to an epiphany may suddenly unfurl itself disposes Heidegger's entire reflection on Being in the direction of a fundamental receptiveness on the part of Dasein, oriented, as he repeatedly says, towards some gathered wholeness.

One wonders whether it isn't this tropism toward a revelatory shining-forth that animated Heidegger's claim toward the end of his life

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³⁴ Lacan 2006, p. 419.

³⁵ It is my contention here that the tension between Heidegger's emphasis on the equiprimordially of truth and untruth, and on the ineluctable couplet of revealing and concealing, on the one hand, and his tendency toward evoking a revelatory presencing that somehow claims Dasein's being in its wholeness, on the other, marks a crucial point at which Heidegger's outlook appears to be at odds with itself, a kind of unacknowledged fissure that runs through the entirety of his thinking. While it is especially prominent and problematic in the compass of *Being and Time*, this tension can also be discerned in Heidegger's more mature period.

³⁶ Heidegger 1975, p. 181ff.

that "only a God can save us." One might also ask whether this resonance of his phenomenological point of departure informed his disastrous flirtation with Nazism. Perhaps what above all seduced Heidegger into a complicity with the rising tide of fascism was less, as he himself claimed, a matter of seeing an opportunity to steer a dangerous movement in a more constructive direction, than it was a shared hope for a radical renewal, a complete remaking of the German *Vo/k* that would enable the dawning an entirely new day.

The keynote of the Lacanian approach is strikingly different. Already discernible in the original text of Freud, the encounter with *das Ding* always wavers in the secondary margin of some other, more definite apprehension. The Thing is an unaccountable surplus that overflows a given contour, it is the unassimilable excess of a primary presentation. This characteristic of the Thing as essentially a marginal phenomenon, something that flickers in the periphery, becomes even more prominent in Lacan's work after the 7th seminar, when the trace of the real is associated with impediment (of the stain, the blindspot, the mote in the eye) or with inconsistency (the point of gap, of failure, of split). Indeed, it is not difficult to imagine that Lacan's increasing emphasis on this peripheral, exceptional character of the pivotal detail is a key part of what moves him away from the reference to *das Ding* toward reliance on the notion of *objet a*, his mature expression of the object-cause of desire.³⁷ The *objet a* is ineluctably the partial object, the object that is always only apprehended obliquely, the object that is essentially accessible only by looking awry.

All of which returns us to the cardinal lesson of Freud's method of analyzing dreams, in which what is crucial can be grasped only by first deliberately refusing the whole picture in order to focus on the overlooked details, by ignoring the "full screen" of an inclusive sweep of presencing in favor of the strange tidbit, the almost-nothing that changes everything. By missing this crucial distinction, Heidegger's fundamental disposition might be said to incline toward the body of fantasy that structures ideology and to miss the discrepant detail, the part-object, that marks the site of the true opening in the wall of the law.

Despite the many ways in which the theoretical concerns of Heidegger and Lacan can be seen to overlap, the implications of this difference are hard to overstate. Heidegger tends to identify freedom with the very openness of the clearing, which in turn is tied to the general posture Dasein chooses in relation to that openness. In the

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³⁷ Despite the importance Lacan obviously attributes to *das Ding* when he first introduces the idea in the seminar on Ethics, he very soon and almost completely drops mention of the term. It is absent even from the second half of the seminar and is referred to only a handful of times in subsequent years (though, it should be noted, those few references are quite significant). My claim here, presented in extreme brevity, is that the problematic of *das Ding* comes to be spoken for in Lacan's later work by the concept of *objet a*.

context of *Being and Time*, that relation is construed as a posturing of will—that of anticipatory resoluteness—for which there is a deeply satisfying confluence of terms between disclosure (*Erschlossenheit*) and resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*). In later texts, Heidegger qualifies this reliance on willing, moving toward the notion of a willing suspension of will, a will-not-to-will. In his mature work, Heidegger further backpedals from his early embrace of the will, seeking to radicalize the self-imposed restraint of willing by means of his appeal to *Gelassenheit*. As a positive non-willing that consists in a radical letting-go, or letting-be, *Gelassenheit* would seem to envisage a form of ever-more completely unwillful release toward disclosure.³⁸ From start to finish, however, the red thread of continuity would seem to be a matter of Dasein’s posturing itself appropriately to receive something like revelation, with the further assumption that such revealing is a coming-to-presence, at least momentarily, *as a whole*.

Read in the strongest way, the Lacanian approach is diametrically opposed insofar as the aim is not to receive a revelation but precisely the opposite: to be brought up short by a knot in the otherwise seamless fabric of signification, a glitch in its smooth functioning. Here we encounter the essence of the Lacanian notion of cause as what doesn’t work.³⁹ The confrontation with this recalcitrant remainder delivers the subject over to a sense of a negative space, the sense not of what appears but precisely what doesn’t appear—a shadow of *das Ding*. Where the Heideggerian ethic abjures us to hold ourselves out into the nothing in order to receive a revelatory epiphany, the psychoanalytic counsel positions us toward an object that is taken as a signifier without a signified, in the process ushering us into a sublime lack that animates the object from within. It is this process by which, for Lacan, the object is raised to the dignity of *das Ding*.

The difference at stake here is audible in a passage from the seminar on “Transference” where Lacan contrasts the gods of revelation with the god of the Word. The pagan deities are associated with revelation: “the notion of god as the height of revelation, of *numen*, as real shining and appearance.” The Judeo-Christian deity, by contrast, is identified with Logos. The shift, we might say, is away from the promise of positive revealment, a sort of “innocence” of appearances in which what is real must ultimately show itself, toward a sublime summons that refuses to specify itself. Lacan attempts to emphasize this point in the sixteenth seminar, for our purposes significantly entitled “From an Other to the other,” when he analyzes the enigmatic character of Yahweh’s

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³⁸ A consummately articulate exposition of this transition is to be found in Bret Davis’s study on *Heidegger and the Will: On The Way to Gelassenheit*.

³⁹ Lacan 1981, p. 22.

response to Moses’s desire to know his name: *Eyeh Asher Eyeh*. Lacan insists that we refuse to read the divine name in the manner prescribed by Greek metaphysics: “I am what I am”—a reading that points us toward the self-coincidence of Being, the pure *ipseity* of God—in favor of sticking closer to the sense of the original Hebrew: “I will be what I will be”—a rendering that suggests a non-coincidence that corresponds to a temporal scansion. We are thereby invited to identify the voice from out of the burning bush with the act of speech itself, about which it is always necessary to distinguish the subject of enunciation from the subject of the enunciated. The divine is here identified with the subject of pure enunciation that foreswears all fixity of the enunciated. The upshot, as the Judaic tradition has it, is that the divine power is contacted less effectively in the achievement of naming than in respecting its very failure or refusal to be named.

These observations can be taken to frame a final brief comment relevant to a theme that is almost totally absent from Heidegger’s meditations on being and, we must admit, not as much commented upon in Lacan as it might be: the way in which the thematic of *das Ding* points us back to the crucial importance of the relation of the little

Other, the fellow human being, in so far as it can become the site of an event of singularity. For Heidegger, the little other tends overwhelmingly to be lost in the blur of *das Man*. Not only is the whole problem of the Other introduced conspicuously late in the argument of *Being and Time*, but the concept of *Mitsein* with which Heidegger thinks the Other tends to emphasize a seamless connection, a dimension of Dasein’s insertion into the integral wholeness of worldhood, and thereby to obviate the uncanny potential of the encounter with the Other. By contrast, the very mainspring of psychoanalysis, the linchpin of the transference, turns about a reanimation of the Thingly character of an individual Other. The efficacy of psychoanalysis crucially depends upon the power of the analyst to evoke a heightened sense of a figure that remains unknown and inaccessible. An indispensable condition of analysis consists in the extent to which the analyst impersonates *das Ding*.

The fuller implications of this relinking to the *Nebenmensch* in order to restore something of the original uncanniness of the Thing that inhabits it point us toward Lacan’s references to love. These references increase during the final phase of Lacan’s teaching, devoted more and more to the confrontation with the real, and deserve to be taken as a new gloss on Freud’s classical assertion that the love active in the transference is to be taken as fully real. This dimension of love in the real enables us to understand Lacan’s enigmatic dictum that “only love allows *jouissance* to condescend to desire.”⁴⁰ It is by this path that we are delivered over

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⁴⁰ Lacan 2014, p. 179.

into what is probably the ultimate paradox of love, one deeply relevant to our theme, that according to which the love bond sometimes joked about as a willing submission to slavery, may at the same time offer the most profound experience of freedom. What is at stake is a definition of love reminiscent of the words of Hadewijch, the mystical Beguine, with which we started. "Soul," she writes, "is a way for the passage of God from his depths into his liberty; and God is a way for the passage of the soul into its liberty, that is, into his inmost depths, which cannot be touched except by the soul's abyss." Hadewijch here ties freedom to love, and love to the embrace of something profoundly unknown. We hear something of the same in a particularly suggestive passage from Fichte, in which he claims that "true love [...] rejects any and every object in order that it may launch into the infinite [...It is] a desire for something altogether unknown, the existence of which is disclosed solely by the need for it, by a discomfort, and by a void that is in search of whatever will fill it."⁴¹

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41 Quoted by Fink 1983, p. 144.

The Trojan Castle: Lacan and Kafka on Knowledge, Enjoyment, and the Big Other

Lorenzo Chiesa

Abstract: There are only three passing references to Kafka in the entirety of Lacan's vast oeuvre. In this article, I scrutinise these passages in their context and show how they can nonetheless throw light on key aspects of Lacanian psychoanalysis. More generally, through a comparative reading of Lacan's Seminars and Kafka's *The Castle* and *The Burrow*, I introduce a number of pivotal psychoanalytic notions such as the object *a*, the big Other, the fantasy of absolute knowledge, and surplus-enjoyment. The article closes with an outline of Lacan's epistemological, ethical, and political stance in his visceral opposition to the so-called university discourse, the contemporary late-capitalist Castle.

Key words: Lacan; Kafka; object *a*; big Other; knowledge; surplus-enjoyment

“At the table we were to do nothing except eat, but you cleaned and trimmed your fingernails, sharpened pencils, dug in your ears with your toothpick. Please understand me correctly, Father, these would in themselves have been utterly insignificant details, they only came to depress me because they meant that you, a figure of such tremendous authority for me, did not yourself abide by the commandments you imposed”

Kafka, *Dearest Father*

“Le névrosé veut que, faute de pouvoir – puisqu'il s'avère que l'Autre ne peut rien – à tout le moins il sache”

Lacan, *L'identification*

“[...]Those three words 'as you know'”

Kafka, *The Castle*

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“For the last time psychology”:² Kafka's resistance to psychoanalysis is well known. The question as to how his verdict should be understood – or as to whether it allows for any legitimate interpretation in the first place – has long been debated. Even limiting ourselves to the views, and respective overall stances on psychoanalysis, of two among the most

.....
1 This material was first presented as a seminar at Jnanapravaha Mumbai (December 2016), the Freud's Dream Museum, St Petersburg (April 2017), and the Freud Museum, London (October 2017). I wish to thank the participants for their questions and comments.

2 Kafka 2012, p. 198.

influential German-speaking Jewish thinkers of the twentieth century we are faced with opposite assessments. On the one hand, Arendt assumes a priori that Freudian readings of Kafka's work misconstrue it in an even "cruder" fashion than those of the "satanic theological" variety (in brief, those which presuppose that the kernel of his fictions lie in the domination of legal bureaucracy as a transcendent "instrument of lawlessness").³ On the other hand, while being equally suspicious of theological approaches, Adorno goes as far as maintaining that not only should Kafka's own words not tempt us to accept that "Kafka has nothing to do with Freud", but that, by "taking psychoanalysis more exactly at its word than it does itself" – for instance, by highlighting *à la lettre* the dimension of the "incommensurable, opaque details, the blind spots", where the ego is dissolved – Kafka transvaluates his very verdict and "snatches psychoanalysis from the grasp of psychology".⁴

2

In spite of their temporal, geographical, and cultural proximity, Freud did not spend a single word on Kafka. It has often rightly been argued that the father of psychoanalysis had a rather conservative appreciation of literature. The same clearly did not hold for Lacan, who produced refined commentaries on innovative modernist writers such as Duras and, most importantly, Joyce. Lacan dedicated the entirety of one of his last yearly seminars to Joyce, and widely discussed his writing with reference to some of the most important tenets of his psychoanalytic theory and practice: the letter, the Name-of-the-Father, the symptom, and the now clinically topical idea of "not-triggered", or "ordinary" psychosis.⁵ However, disregarding Adorno's recommendations, and thus indirectly supporting Kafka's own aversion to psychoanalysis, Lacan appears to be – and most possibly was – uninterested in Kafka. To the best of my knowledge, there are only three passing references to Kafka in the entirety of his vast oeuvre. They do nonetheless deserve considerable attention. Precisely because of their circumstantial origin – their being "opaque details", if not veritable "blind spots", in a constructive Adornian-Freudian sense – they can symptomatically throw light on key aspects of Lacanian psychoanalysis, especially when read together.

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The first passage appears in Seminar II (1954-1955). It is actually not Lacan who explicitly refers to Kafka, but Hyppolite, in dialogue with Lacan. Due to a somewhat Kafkaesque editorial choice, the sentence in

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³ Arendt 2007, pp. 97-98.

⁴ Adorno 2003, pp. 215-218.

⁵ Lacan 2016.

question was expunged from the official edition of this work – although the rest of Hyppolite's intervention has been preserved. Hyppolite, then a regular participant in the seminars – who incidentally and surprisingly protests: "I'm not Hegelian. I'm probably against" – opposes Lacan's understanding of Hegel's absolute knowledge as a "realization" and "end" of history and as a "more elaborated mastery".⁶ "That depends on what you are going to put under 'mastery'", Hyppolite argues. Hegel must be interpreted. It might very well be that absolute knowledge is experience as such, and not (against Lacan) a "moment of experience" (a final or ultimate moment). That is, Hyppolite specifies, it might very well be that absolute knowledge is "immanent" to every state of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, but consciousness misses it.⁷ In this regard, Hyppolite contends, (a certain interpretation of) Kafka's Door of the Law parable from *The Trial* would provide us with an *incorrect* conception of "a series of stages which are prior to absolute knowledge, then a final stage" – the one the fictional "man from the country" attains only on the verge of death.⁸ Lacan does not mention Kafka in his reply. Probably sensing that the point he has just made on Hegel is naïve, or altogether misleading, he retracts and shifts the focus of his reasoning. What is crucial in Hegel is – Lacan says – first, that absolute knowledge is "embodied in a discourse", and, second, that "discourse closes in on itself, whether or not it is in complete disagreement with itself" – or, as anticipated in Seminar I, that the Symbolic is "a [discursive] order from which there is no exit", it closes in on itself, yet "to be sure, there has to be one [exit], otherwise it would be an order without any meaning".⁹ Such a closure-with-an-exit – i.e. the symbolic order as such – has always been there, "ever since the first Neanderthal idiots" began to speak.¹⁰ Hyppolite now agrees with Lacan.

4

The second – short but lengthier – passage on Kafka can be found in the fourteenth lesson of the as yet unpublished Seminar IX (1961-1962). Lacan discusses Kafka's late short story *The Burrow* (1923) and its protagonist: an undefined animal, probably a badger or a mole, that has constructed a labyrinthine burrow to defend himself from outside intruders, but continues to feel threatened, even in the – significantly named – "Castle Keep" where he has stockpiled his modest yet constant food supply. At times, the animal is urged to exit the burrow, yet when he exits it he can

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⁶ Lacan 1991, p. 70.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 70-71.

⁸ Available at <http://staferla.free.fr/S2/S2%20LE%20MOI.pdf>, p. 54.

⁹ Lacan 1991, p. 71. Lacan 1988, p. 26.

¹⁰ Lacan 1991, p. 71.

never venture too far. He has scented and heard (though only as “an almost inaudible whistling noise”¹¹) potential enemies but has never seen them. He watches the burrow’s entrance for days, which partly reassures him. Yet, at the same time, he also secretly dreams of going back to his pre-burrow life and its “indiscriminate succession of perils”.¹² Dolar has concisely but effectively commented on two of Lacan’s main arguments about *The Burrow*. First, “the most intimate place of shelter is the place of thorough exposure; the inside is inherently fused to the outside”;¹³ this topological model well illustrates the subject’s desire in relation to the desire of the Other. Second, such a topology is not a mere architectonic addition to the subject; in Lacan’s words, it concerns “something which exists at the most intimate of [human] organisms”.¹⁴ That is, there is no pre-burrow life.

5

Moving from these considerations, Dolar soon turns to an intriguing reading of the role of the voice in other works by Kafka. There are, however, at least two further sets of important arguments advanced by Lacan with direct reference to *The Burrow* or in close relation to it, which, moreover, resonate with the cursory remark on Kafka we find in Seminar II.

a) In line with Lacan’s treatment of the Symbolic as a dialectic of closure and exit in Seminar II – and complicating Dolar’s point – not only does any “engagement” or “commitment” with the Other rest on the precondition that “the interior and the exterior [...] open and command each other”, but *this* topological space itself erects “the image of the aisle, or corridor, the image of the entrance and of the exit, and the image of the way out behind oneself being closed”.¹⁵ That is to say, what is at stake is not so much an elimination of the barrier between subjective inside and outside otherness – since, strictly speaking, no subjectivity or otherness precede the building of the burrow – but the fact that this very spatial fluidity goes together with the construction of a “no exit” image.¹⁶ “It is precisely in this relation of closing the way out

11 Kafka 1971, p. 370.

12 Ibid., p. 363.

13 Dolar 2006, p. 313.

14 Available at <http://staferla.free.fr/S9/S9%20L'IDENTIFICATION.pdf>, p. 100 [henceforth SIX].

15 Ibid., pp. 99-100.

16 On close inspection, Lacan’s point here is, more precisely, that the fundamental difference between animals and the human animal (plus Kafka’s “asocial” badger) lies in the latter’s construction

that [...] the engagement [with the Other] is revealed”.¹⁷ Or, as Kafka’s badger nicely puts it at one point, “it is almost as if I were the enemy spying out a suitable opportunity for successfully breaking in”.¹⁸

b) Again in line with Seminar II, and, more specifically here, its juxtaposition of Kafkaesque imagery and the dimension of – discursively embodied – knowledge, the engagement with the Other and its desire inevitably involves a demand¹⁹ (concerning what it wants, but eventually a desperate demand for whatever answer), which the Other – like the subject – cannot answer, or better, does not want to know anything about.²⁰ The demand for absolute knowledge – for a closure without exit – and the desire not know – that there will always be an exit, in spite of the image “no exit” – are the two sides of the same coin. In the last resort, “the Other cannot formalize itself, signifierize itself, except as itself marked by the signifier, or, said otherwise, insofar as it imposes on us the renunciation of any meta-language”.²¹ If the Other does not answer, it is because of the “limitation of his knowledge”. But it is precisely this structural impossibility of the ignorant Other that “becomes the desire of the subject”, to the extent that at the same time the subject manages “to exclude [or suspend/repress] the Other’s non-knowledge”²² (through the erection of the image “no exit”). Kafka’s badger seems to know all this. He assumes his enemy’s knowledge is limited – “probably he knows as little about me as I of him” – and yet, at the very conclusion of the story, he turns the Other’s non-knowledge – and his own previous “I do not know what I want,

of the “no exit” image – i.e. an image of totality – which is somehow unnatural. The topological complication of the false dichotomy inside/outside “is not our privilege” (“ants and termites know it”) and a “natural relation of structure” (ibid., p. 100). Instead, what is peculiar to our species is a certain “misrecognition” (ibid.) of this natural structure, which leads to the “no exit” image (i.e., in brief, the ego as a mental object produced through an alienating identification with the image of the counterpart).

17 Ibid., p. 99.

18 Kafka 1971, p. 364.

19 “The relation to the Other [...] is specified by demand” (SIX, p. 98); “It is from elsewhere that we should begin; from the position of the question to the Other, the question about his desire and its satisfaction” (ibid., p. 97)

20 “So the Other doesn’t answer [*ne répond rien*], except that ‘nothing [*rien*] is certain’, but this has only one meaning, that is, that there is something about which he does not want to know anything [*rien*], which is precisely [the] question [he was asked]” (ibid., p. 102).

21 Ibid., p. 100.

22 Ibid., p. 102.

probably simply to put off the hour” – into the object of his desire: “The decisive factor will be whether the beast knows me, and if so what it knows”.²³

6

In the same lesson from Seminar IX in which he discusses *The Burrow*, Lacan goes on to explain that there are two ways in which the subject can exclude the Other’s non-knowledge. The first is pathologically neurotic and tries to compensate this non-knowledge with an “It is absolutely necessary that you should know” directed at the Other. Such an attempt automatically turns the neurotic into a “victim” of the Other, Lacan adds.²⁴ The second is, at least in principle, non-neurotic and functions according to an “I wash my hands of what you know or what you do not know, and I act”.²⁵ On this basis, I would argue that the badger epitomizes a sort of “ordinary”, or at least “normally” neurotic subjectivity – and this may well account for the utter uncanniness and unpleasantness of this short-story. The badger is most definitely always active: “I had to run with my forehead thousands and thousands of times, for whole days and nights”.²⁶ In spite of continuous doubts, his actions are effective and relentless: “I have completed the construction of my burrow and it seems to be successful”; “in sincere gladness of heart [I] started on the work anew”; “I am still quite fit for all sorts of hard work”.²⁷ Moreover, he is certainly not a “victim” but a predator: “all sort of small fry come running through [the passages], and I devour these”.²⁸ One could at most speak of these traits as displaying an obsessional disposition, which however does not really inhibit him. In the end, the badger washes his hands of what the enemy knows or does not know, and acts. For him, the whole question is indeed finally “whether the beast knows me, and if so what it knows” – this becomes the object of his desire²⁹ – *but* the “whether” marks precisely the point at which the Other’s non-knowledge is excluded, suspended, or, better, repressed (Lacan will speak of “separation” in Seminar XI), in that it opens up a space for choice between alternatives,

23 Kafka 1971, p. 355, p. 378, p. 384.

24 SIX, p. 102.

25 Ibid.

26 Kafka 1971, p. 356.

27 Ibid., p. 353, p. 356, p. 384.

28 Ibid., p. 354.

29 Although it is different from (pre-Oedipal) demand and its unanswerable dimension, (post-Oedipal) desire always remains a desire for *recognition*. We should also bear in mind that Lacan contextualizes the same lesson of Seminar IX in terms of the emergence of desire in the Oedipus complex: “Desire is fundamentally and radically structured through this knot called Oedipus [complex]” (SIX, p. 97).

that is, a space for *possibility*.³⁰ Not coincidentally, Lacan discusses “real” subjective “Möglichkeit”³¹ just a few paragraphs after the one devoted to *The Burrow*. For all these reasons, I have to disagree with Dolar when, in a different article, he associates the badger with paranoia.³² If the badger were a paranoid, he would be paralyzed by the certainty that the less his enemy displays a rationally consistent behaviour, the more he is nonetheless malignantly succeeding in taking over the burrow. For instance, the “small fry” of the short story would not be annoying but ultimately innocuous little animals that dig out unauthorized new channels and do not deserve to be “spared”,³³ but undefeatable emissaries or emissions of the Evil Beast...

7

The third and final time Lacan fleetingly mentions Kafka is in one of the final lessons of Seminar XVI (1968-69). Pre-emptively, it should be stressed that this rich – and difficult – passage evokes both, as in Seminars II and IX, the complexity of the inside/outside (or entrance/exit) relation and of defining a border between subjectivity and otherness, and, as in Seminar II, Hegelian philosophy (the “game of mastery”,³⁴ as Lacan calls the master and slave dialectic in this later context). Let us first focus on the explicit reference to Kafka: Lacan speaks of an “entire population [...] queuing up in front of the Kafkaesque castle of power”.³⁵ He suggests that this image should be linked with another seminal literary image: that of the Trojan horse – an outside object containing something inside, which, when reluctantly brought into the city, is first adulated and soon after causes its destruction. Kafka’s Castle would provide us with a key to correctly interpret the Trojan horse as a symbol of power. What is fundamentally at stake in the latter – Lacan surprisingly

30 So, in the end, we schematically obtain the following – retroactive – ontogenetic sequence with regard to knowledge, which also gives us what is more technically for Lacan the passage from “demand” to full-fledged “desire” (i.e. his reworking of Freud’s Oedipus complex and its resolution):

1 “You (Other) must know!” (demand/frustration);

2 “You do not know!” (privation);

3 A split between two defining statements:

a) “Who cares (about what you know and don’t know)! I know you rascal! (level of self-consciousness / the ego)

b) “But do you know (me) or not?” (level of the unconscious/phantasy – where the “or not” opens the space for possibility/Möglichkeit).

The splitting of this third stage corresponds to the emergence of desire *stricto sensu* (through castration).

31 Ibid., p. 101.

32 See Dolar, “The Burrow of Sound”, available at <http://www.saltonline.org/media/files/232.pdf>

33 Kafka 1971, p. 370.

34 Lacan 2006, p. 369.

35 Ibid.

argues against common readings – is not the Achaeans warriors who will come out of it, but the Trojans who party outside the horse and, most importantly, desire to be “absorb[e]d” by it³⁶ – in his view, like Kafka’s K. and the villagers lining outside the apparently inaccessible castle. Lacan adds that the desire in question amounts to nothing less than the “discontent of civilisation”.³⁷ He then bluntly concludes that these two literary images “have a meaning only if we take into account [object] little *a*”,³⁸ which elsewhere in Seminar XVI he pertinently conceives as an “extimate”, or intimately external, object.³⁹

8

In his works, Lacan makes several references to Troy and the Trojan horse, some of which are quite revealing. In Seminar I, he reminds us that, at the beginning of *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud uses the ruins of Rome as a metaphor for the unconscious. For Lacan, it is rather the ruins of Troy – a city upon which no other city has been built – that encapsulate the linguistic/symbolic nature of the unconscious, that is, the fact that the signifier (“Troy”) cannot be bi-univocally paired up with a thing (a city), but rather gives rise to a permanent “presence-absence” or differential structure (“city/not-city”), itself inseparable from an ineradicable objectal remainder (the ruins). “However little remains of the city of Troy”, its ruins witness to the fact that things that disappear “essentially remain there”.⁴⁰

9

In the unpublished Seminar XIII – which focuses on the status of object *a* – Lacan turns his attention to the figure of Sinon as treated in Dante’s *Inferno*. Sinon is the Greek soldier who pretends to have been abandoned by his comrades in arms; tells the Trojans that the horse is an offering to the goddess Athena; and persuades them to transport it into the city – especially by slyly insinuating that the wooden object is too large to be taken into the city. Endorsing a close commentary on Dante’s treatment

.....
36 Ibid. The most explicit source on the involvement of the Trojans in the transportation of the horse into the city, their excitement, and their partying is Book II of Virgil’s *Aeneid*: “All prepare themselves for the work and they set up wheels / allowing movement under its feet, and stretch hemp ropes / round its neck [...] Around it boys, and virgin girls / sing sacred songs, and delight in touching their hands to the ropes / Up it glides and rolls threateningly into the midst of the city [...]”; at night “the city is drowned in sleep and wine”.

37 Lacan 2006, p. 369.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid., p. 224, p. 249.

40 The passage in question has been shortened in the official version of Seminar I. For a more exhaustive transcription, see <http://staferla.free.fr/S1/S1%20Ecrits%20techniques.pdf>, p. 254. Lacan here closely follows the key argument Freud makes when he speaks about the ruins of Rome: “In mental life nothing which has once been formed can perish” (Freud 2001, p. 69).

of Sinon presented by Thérèse Parisot (itself in turn based on Roger Dragonetti’s article “Dante et Narcisse ou les faux monnayeurs de l’image”), Lacan briefly dwells on Sinon’s lies, and by extension on the luring function of the Trojan horse. For Dante, Sinon is twice guilty: not only is he a simulator who feigns to be what he is not (a deserter) but also a perjurer who insults the gods by making up the story that the horse is an offering. Especially in this second sense, he “abuses language” and is implicated – like Judas – in an offence that becomes universally notorious.⁴¹ Lacan observes that Sinon is thus deservedly condemned to inhabit one of “the deepest points of Hell”, and that this concentric yet topological space, defined by the “turning of speech into a fraud”, is precisely what provides us with one of the “necessary coordinates of the object *a*”.⁴²

10

The image of the Trojan horse in Seminar XVI (as similar to that of Kafka’s castle) and its being in close relation, or even identical, with what Lacan calls object *a* are further investigated in a fairly well-known passage from Seminar VIII. Here, Lacan dwells on the *Odyssey*’s original description of the Trojan horse, in Homer’s words, “the horse which once Odysseus led up into the citadel as a thing of guile [...] The Trojans themselves had dragged it into the citadel. There it stood, while the people sat round it, discussing it endlessly to no conclusion. Three suggestions found favor: to cut through the hollow timber with pitiless bronze, or drag it to the edge of the rock and over the cliff, or let it stand there, as a grand offering [ἄγαλμα] to the gods, in propitiation, which is what happened in the end”. Lacan singles out the following strictly interconnected issues:

a) The richness and complexity of the enigmatic signifier ἄγαλμα. In the *Odyssey* and elsewhere, the term does not simply designate a grand “offering”, but also a “trap for gods”, and a “device that catches the eye”. In short, Lacan concludes, the *agalma* is a “charm”⁴³ – which is what prevents the Trojans from ripping it apart to see what lies inside.

b) The dimension of lure and deceit as inextricable from the horse as ἄγαλμα. This is evident both at the conscious level of the Greek’s stratagem and at the unconscious level of the fascination it exerts on the Trojans – which makes them hesitate and thus leads them to ruin.

.....
41 Available at <http://staferla.free.fr/S13/S13%20L'OBJET.pdf>, p. 87.

42 Ibid., p. 93. Dante’s hell is a paradigmatically “extimate” place: a totally alien universe where, however, sinners are punished eternally in a fashion that fits their most defining sins. To put it bluntly, they suffer their intimate self from the outside.

43 Lacan 2001, p. 175.

c) The horse/ἄγαλμα as an “unusual” and even “embarrassing” object.⁴⁴ This is the case for Trojans and Greeks alike, Lacan specifies.

11

Based on textual evidence – that is, following Adorno, taking Kafka à la lettre – can we read the castle from the homonymous novel as an *agalma*-like object comparable with the Trojan horse as understood by Lacan? There are several elements that strongly support this hypothesis. Although the novel does not abound with descriptions of the outer appearance of the castle, from the outset, K. most definitely cannot take his eyes away from it. He is constantly “looking up”; “he could see the castle above, distinctly outlined in the clear air”; “his eyes fixed on the castle, K. went on, paying no attention to anything else”. When he meets the schoolteacher, the first thing he asks K. is “Looking at the castle, are you?”.⁴⁵ The fascinating building is, at the same time, also described as a cause for disappointment, if not embarrassment: “It was only a poor kind of collection of cottages assembled into a little town [...] The paint had flaked off long ago, and the stone itself seemed to be crumbling away [...] If he had come here only to see the place, he would have made a long journey for nothing much”.⁴⁶ And yet, K. surprisingly concludes that, altogether, “there was something crazed [*irrsinning*] about the sight” – a hallucinatory trait that confirms in broad daylight the first impression he had of the castle upon his arrival in the late evening, when due to the mist and darkness he perceived it as an “apparent void” [*scheinbare Leere*].⁴⁷ This dimension of uncanny captivation and of veiling/unveiling soon translates into the physical appearance and deceitful psychology of the characters most closely associated with the castle, or assumed to be so. For instance, Frieda – who immediately becomes K.’s lover, only to abandon him shortly after – is a “small blonde, rather insignificant, with a sad face and thin cheeks, but with a surprising expression of conscious superiority in her eyes”. Her first interaction with K. is letting him look at the unreachable Master Klamm through a “little peephole”. Not coincidentally, towards the end of the novel, Pepi tells K. that, with Frieda, “he f[ell] in the most obvious trap on the very first evening [...] What did he see in Frieda?”.⁴⁸

.....
44 Ibid.

45 Kafka 2009, p. 5, p. 10, p. 11, p. 12.

46 Ibid., p. 11.

47 Ibid., p. 11, p. 5 (translation modified).

48 Ibid., p. 35, p. 260.

12

What does K. see in Frieda – and the castle? In Seminar VIII, the main focus of Lacan’s interest on the *agalma*, and his privileged approach to the notion of object *a* (which is here still in the making), is Alcibiades’s description of Socrates in Plato’s *Symposium*.⁴⁹ Socrates looks like an ugly and hirsute Silenus (216d), yet he is irresistible for the handsome and proud Alcibiades, who still desperately loves him. Lacan explains that the image of the Silenus should be understood in relation to a “wrapping” that has the shape of a Silenus, or better – in Plato’s own words – to a “small sculptured Silenus” which the Greeks used as a jewellery box.⁵⁰ “What is important here”, Lacan argues, “is what is inside”, the *agalma* as a “precious object”.⁵¹ He adds that this is “an essential topological indication”.⁵² He also importantly specifies that if, on the one hand, the sources never tell us what the *agalma* contained in the otherwise empty casket really is,⁵³ on the other, it is adamant that those who are deemed to possess it are invested with a formidable power: Alcibiades only wants “to do everything that Socrates may have ordered”.⁵⁴ The subject is spellbound by what (deceivably) appears to be in the o/Other (Socrates, Frieda, the castle, the Trojan horse) more than the o/Other itself. At stake here, Lacan concludes, is object *a* as the object of the subject’s desire; or, which is the same, the object of the subject’s desire as the question asked to the o/Other: “Is there a desire that really conforms to your will?”.⁵⁵

13

In Seminar VIII, Lacan continues to discuss at length object *a* as *agalma* in a relatively straightforward fashion.

a) The *agalma* is not simply an icon or image, in the sense that the latter would simply be a “reproduction”, or copy.⁵⁶ Its “special power” can more appropriately be approached if we compare it with the function of fetishes in traditional

.....
49 For a more detailed reading of Lacan’s interpretation of the *Symposium*, see Chiesa 2006, pp. 61-81.

50 Lacan 2001, p. 170.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid., p. 171. Lacan also calls the *agalma* a “je ne sais quoi” (“I don’t know what”).

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid., p. 173.

cultures, or with the everyday expression “You are my idol!”.⁵⁷ The *agalma* thus preserves a relation to images but what is at stake is a “very special kind of images”.⁵⁸

b) As hinted by the use of the term ἄγαλμα with respect to ex-votos shaped like breasts, the *agalma* anticipates what psychoanalysis will call “partial object”. Against common misunderstandings of this notion, which see it as the “spherical object” that would constitute our counterpart as a whole worthy of our desire, the other becomes the object of our desire only as a “heap of partial objects”, which is far from amounting to a “total object”.⁵⁹

c) In remaining irremediably a partial object, *agalma* witnesses to the subject’s own structural split, that is, his being forcedly determined only by “his submission to language” and the differential logic of the signifier.⁶⁰ *Agalma* can thus never stand for an object of equivalence, transaction, or the “transitivity of goods”. It remains “unbalanced” with regard to all other objects.⁶¹ Yet it is precisely on this unbalance that not only “intrasubjectivity” but also “intersubjectivity” rest.⁶²

d) The non-exchangeable *agalma* structurally goes together with a void. Socrates knows he does not actually possess any *agalma* and that he is “nothing”, or “void” (*ouden*).⁶³ He knows that “there is nothing in him which is lovable” and warns Alcibiades: “You are mistaken” – or, more literally, “undeceive yourself” – “consider things more carefully (ἄμεινον σκόπει)”; “There where you see something, I am nothing”.⁶⁴ Knowing this *ouden* has paradoxical implications. It is because Socrates *knows* he is nothing that he does not love, but this very familiarity with the void gives rise to “non-

.....
57 Ibid.

58 Ibid., p. 174.

59 Ibid., pp. 176-177.

60 Ibid., p. 179.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid., p. 180.

63 Ibid., p. 189.

64 Ibid.

knowledge constituted as such, as a void, as the void’s call at the centre of knowledge”.⁶⁵ Socrates is not a badger (who knows how to suspend non-knowledge).

e) In not accepting his luring role of *agalma* (i.e. in refusing to be loved by Alcibiades, since he knows he is nothing) Socrates is in turn luring *himself*.⁶⁶ He “misrecognises the essential function of the aim-object constituted by the *agalma*”.⁶⁷ That is to say, a subject cannot dispose of object *a*: the “triple topology” of subject, other, and big Other cannot do without it.⁶⁸ The badger is eventually wiser than Socrates. As the very lesson from Seminar IX in which *The Burrow* is discussed makes it clear, although “desire must include in itself this void, this internal hole” (in turn “specified in relation to the Law”), the “knot with the Other” necessarily presupposes a “relation of lure”.⁶⁹

14

Throughout Seminar XVI, and especially in and around the lesson in which he mentions the “Kafkaesque castle of power”, Lacan offers us the most advanced conceptualization of object *a*. While his works of the 1950s mostly centre on the passage from the small other (the imaginary counterpart as the origins of the subject’s alienating identifications) to the big Other (the symbolic locus of signifierness, inter-subjectivity, and, in short, “civilization”), starting from the early 1960s and culminating in Seminar XVI, Lacan’s interest shifts to the consideration of this same passage – which is also a link – with regard to the real otherness of object *a*. The title of Seminar XVI is suggestively “From an Other to the other”. Here the otherness of object *a* – as a luring void – is primarily discussed in terms of “surplus enjoyment”, which in short amounts to the “discontent” of civilization, and its being somehow content with this discontent. I am tempted to add that, through object *a* as surplus enjoyment, Lacan now scrutinizes the topology of the burrow and its complex dialectic of exit/“no-exit” and non-knowledge/knowledge precisely from the stance of the badger’s limited “supplies”, his “modest way of life”, whereby “it is the single huge accumulated mass of food that seduces

.....
65 Ibid., p. 190.

66 Lacan is very adamant on this point (ibid., p. 194, p. 198).

67 Ibid., p. 194.

68 Ibid., p. 182.

69 SIX, pp. 97-98.

[him]”.⁷⁰The “Castle Keep”, an underground and profaned version of K.’s Castle, is wrongly reputed to satisfy this image of completeness. However, in an instance of psychoanalytic clairvoyance, the badger also rightly acknowledges the following: “It is stupid but true that one’s self-conceit suffers if one cannot see all one’s stores together, and so at one glance know how much one possesses”.⁷¹The idiotic image of complete enjoyment remains structural.

15

Lacan explicitly derives the notion of surplus enjoyment (*plus-de-jouir*) from Marx’s notion of surplus value.⁷²To put it very simply, just as surplus value corresponds to the extra value that generates profit for the capitalist insofar as the value of a commodity exceeds that of the worker’s labour – that is, the worker is not fully remunerated for his labour – so surplus enjoyment involves a certain “renunciation of enjoyment”⁷³ on the part of the subject, who confers it to the Other. This renunciation should be seen as a fundamentally mythical renunciation of full enjoyment (Lacan evokes here again the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave). Yet, at the same time, it should also be taken as a structural “effect of discourse”, whereby the subject supposes that in the field of the Other there is a “correlative”, “a surplus enjoyment [that] is established [and] captured by some”.⁷⁴ Strictly speaking, object *a* is in turn not identical with surplus enjoyment; it is what is “produced”, as a *loss*, from surplus enjoyment as the “function” of the renunciation of enjoyment.⁷⁵The subject’s object *a* – as the cause of his desire – is the Other’s supposed surplus enjoyment.

16

The Castle is undoubtedly a novel about work and the renunciation of enjoyment. Poor life-conditions, exploitation, precarious employment, and even some precursory form of zero-hour or long-probation contracts seem to apply almost universally to the villagers, who accept them. For example, Pepi, a temporary replacement for Frieda at the Castle Inn, says her new job “is very tiring” and she “will hardly be able to stand

.....
⁷⁰ Kafka 1971, p. 354, p. 358.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 357.

⁷² See Lacan 2006, pp. 16-17.

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 17-19.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 18.

⁷⁵ “Surplus enjoyment is the function of the renunciation of enjoyment under the effect of discourse. This is what gives its place to object *a*” (ibid., p. 19); “Nothing can be produced in there without the loss of an object” (ibid., p. 21).

it”.⁷⁶When she is sent back to her previous job as a chambermaid – “an insignificant job with [even] few[er] prospects” – she does not complain: “She didn’t seriously expect to get very far, she had come to terms with what she had already attained”.⁷⁷ Barnabas indefatigably travels to the castle’s vestibule to find some work: “There seems to be an excessive number of employees there, not everyone can be given work every day”; yet, “after all, Barnabas is given work to do”.⁷⁸ He is said to be, like many others, a “semi-official employee”,⁷⁹ and this should be enough to content him. As for K., Klamm’s letter enjoins him not to desist from his “zealous labours”, but his appointment as land-surveyor is only the outcome of an administrative mistake: “You have been engaged, you say, as a land surveyor, but unfortunately we don’t need a land surveyor. There wouldn’t be any work for you here at all”.⁸⁰ Interestingly, although K. initially sees his alleged position as prestigious and well paid (“I am the land-surveyor, and the Count sent for me”; “the arrival of a land-surveyor was no small matter”; “they say [the Count] pays well for good work”⁸¹), he soon renounces it, without putting up too much of a fight. He instead accepts an unpaid “temporary post” on probation as school janitor.⁸² Paradoxically, it is only when the schoolteacher would like to dismiss him that K. strenuously fights and manages to keep his unremunerated job.

17

In *The Castle* there is also a clear connection between the peculiar occupations of the masters and surplus enjoyment. While the villagers – especially those who fell from the grace of the castle – are suspended in a limbo of extenuating precariousness and *work* in officially *not* working, they also invariably assume their masters to be always extremely busy. Commentators often misleadingly claim that this is just an “ideological” façade that covers for the masters’ idleness. What is rather at stake here is something more complex: the masters do *not* work in officially *working*. Emblematically, Klamm (as seen through the peephole by K.) sleeps whilst working: “Mr Klamm was sitting at a desk in the middle of the room [...] He had a long, black moustache, and a pair of pince-nez, set on his nose at a crooked angle reflecting the light, covered his eyes [...] ‘He’s asleep.’ ‘What!’ cried K. ‘Asleep? When I looked into the room

.....
⁷⁶ Kafka 2009, p. 89.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 253.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 158.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 196.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 106, p. 55.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 6, p. 7, p. 9.

⁸² Ibid., p. 82.

he was awake and sitting at the desk.' 'He's still sitting there like that,' said Frieda. 'He was already asleep when you saw him'".⁸³ We later learn that the masters are used to sorting out their business and even granting audiences while lying in bed, since for them "there is no difference between ordinary time and time spent working".⁸⁴ This obliteration of any division between private and public life seems also to account for the shared assumption – and acceptance of the fact – that the masters must have unlimited sexual access to the village girls ("very likely no official was ever rejected"; "we know that women can't help loving officials when the official turns to them"⁸⁵). Frieda sleeps with Klamm when he visits her workplace at the Castle Inn. Sortini tries to seduce Amalia during a fire brigade festival. Before losing her on the eve of their wedding, K. cogitates that if Frieda can never really forget her former role as Klamm's lover, this is because "nowhere before had [he] ever seen official duties and life so closely interwoven, so much so that sometimes it almost seems as if life and official duties had changed place".⁸⁶ K. then continues with an open question that beautifully condenses the structural discrepancy Lacan sees between the subject's projection of surplus enjoyment onto the big Other and the void actually lying at its – dysfunctional, ignorant, and impotent – core: "What was the meaning [...] of the power, so far only formal, that Klamm had over K.'s services compared with the power that Klamm really exerted in K.'s bedroom?".⁸⁷ This tension is further substantiated by two other unrelated passages from the novel. On the one hand, "Klamm acts like a military commander with women, he orders now one of them and now another to come to him", and "the officials' love is never unrequited".⁸⁸ On the other, and simultaneously, "official decisions are as elusive as young girls".⁸⁹

18

In Seminar XVI, Lacan presents the big Other as structurally inconsistent: "What is the Other? It is [...] the place where the subject's discourse *would* become consistent", yet "in the field of the Other there is no possibility for a full consistency of discourse".⁹⁰ Discourse does

.....
83 Ibid., p. 38.

84 Ibid., p. 228.

85 Ibid., p. 173.

86 Ibid., p. 55.

87 Ibid.

88 Ibid., p. 173.

89 Ibid., p. 153.

90 Lacan 2006, p. 24 (my emphasis).

not totalize itself; the big Other always remains "elusive".⁹¹ The big Other basically stems from the "existence of language".⁹² But signifierness and the symbolic networks it founds are such only because no meta-language guarantees them from the outside. There is no Other of the Other. Does it mean that there is only *one* Other? No, because otherwise "it would not be the Other".⁹³ To put it differently, as Lacan already anticipated in much simpler terms in Seminar II, the big Other must have an "exit". By Seminar XVI, Lacan thinks that the "exit" is concealed with surplus enjoyment in what he calls "fantasy". Here the subject – split by signifierness – maps himself as the object *a* of the Other's surplus enjoyment (that is, as the object the subject has allegedly "lost"). More importantly, this very concealment, which is acquired at the price of non-autonomy, needs to be repressed.⁹⁴ For the subject to emerge as an ego (or self-consciousness) he has to believe in the consistency – or lawfulness – of the big Other. The big Other thus occupies both the unconscious reservoir of the surplus enjoyment supposedly stolen from the subject and the conscious field in which enjoyment has been "purged".⁹⁵ The semblance of consistency can be reached – in the ego – through "naïve faith" only if the subject reduces the Other to an equivalent counterpart with whom he shares "non-enjoyment, misery, helplessness, and solitude".⁹⁶

19

For Lacan, the subject has fundamentally two ways of dealing with the inconsistency of the Other: perversion and neurosis. These can certainly manifest themselves in "pathological" ways – in Seminar XVI, voyeurism and exhibitionism are discussed at length – but they more importantly indicate at this stage of Lacan's work structural modes of subjectivation. The third mode, psychosis – which is, strictly speaking, not a mode of subjectivation – simply forecloses the problem – with terrible consequences – and blindly relies on the Other's consistency (as Schreber shows, even the dissolution of the "order of the world" would rest on a superior Order of God). Lacan's basic point in Seminar XVI is that the (inconsistency of the) Other and object *a* are coextensive.

.....
91 Ibid., p. 59.

92 Ibid., p. 226.

93 Ibid., p. 357.

94 Lacan in fact tells us that the inconsistency (or "exit") of the big Other "is the place of *Urverdrängung*" (ibid., p. 59), that is, primal repression.

95 Ibid., p. 225.

96 Ibid., p. 24.

Again, the big Other is not a “whole”; it does not “contain itself”.⁹⁷ And yet, the ensuing “lack, bar, gap, or hole” in the Other functions also as “a certain kind of lure, which is absolutely fundamental”.⁹⁸ The subject can eventually “measure” the field of the Other as a One precisely “through” the subject’s own loss of object *a*,⁹⁹ which is supposed to be possessed by the Other in the guise of surplus enjoyment, and on which the subject phantasmatically maps himself as a split being of desire. This move or measurement is particularly clear in perversion. In perversion “surplus enjoyment is unveiled in a bare form”.¹⁰⁰ To put it bluntly, the fantasy is here acted out. But this acting out is in turn a veiling of the void in the Other. The pervert “consecrates himself to corking the hole in the Other”,¹⁰¹ its inconsistency. He thus enjoys *for* the Other. In contrast to this, in neurosis the fantasy is repressed, since it stages an alleged theft of enjoyment. While the pervert openly aims at turning the Other into One – he is a “defender of the faith” in its existence, Lacan adds – the neurotic “would like to be himself One in the field of the Other”.¹⁰² The neurotic’s strategy entirely revolves around narcissism. His problem is that object *a* cannot be transposed to the imaginary level, that is, added to the specular/narcissistic image that always escapes him – and ultimately depends on a “retroactive illusion” of full enjoyment.¹⁰³ The neurotic then prefers not to enjoy rather than enjoy for the inconsistent Other. This further renunciation – which he attempts to impose on the counterpart – and the fragile semblance of consistency that accompanies it finally amount to his own paradoxical enjoyment.

20

The Castle could be read, with good reason, as a most potent allegory of perversion in its broadest sense – one that far surpasses the Silling castle of Sade’s *The 120 Days of Sodom* and its limited focus on morbid sexuality. The inconsistency of the masters goes to the point that Klamm not only works whilst sleeping – as Lacan has it, “the consistency of a system means that when you enunciate a proposition in it, you can say ‘yes’ or ‘no’”¹⁰⁴ – but he is even “different before and after he has drunk a

.....
97 Ibid., p. 311, p. 380.

98 Ibid., p. 252.

99 Ibid., pp. 132-133.

100 Ibid., p. 23.

101 Ibid., p. 253.

102 Ibid., p. 253, p. 260.

103 Ibid., p. 261.

104 Ibid., p. 98.

beer”, and there are those who swear that “Momus is Klamm”.¹⁰⁵ And yet this inconsistency only reinforces the landlady’s defense of his existence and unpardonable behaviors: she gladly gave herself to him for three nights eighteen years earlier and, although she ignores why she was no longer “summoned”, she remains firmly devoted to the “gentleman” through what K. cannot but call a “terrible fidelity”.¹⁰⁶ For the landlady this fidelity goes without saying since she will never lose her “rank” as Klamm’s mistress.¹⁰⁷ Such an indissoluble special relationship with the inconsistent Other as the object of its surplus enjoyment is in turn fetishized by the landlady through “three mementoes” of Klamm’s visits: a photograph – significantly enough, of somebody else – a shawl, and a nightcap – indeed, “the gentlemen sleep a great deal”. The landlady adds that “without those three things I could probably never have borne it here for so long, probably not even for a day”.¹⁰⁸ In turn, the very scene in which Frieda lets K. look at Klamm through a peephole, and the reflection of the light on the pince-nez “covered his eyes”,¹⁰⁹ strikingly conveys what, in Seminar XVI, Lacan says about voyeurism – which he takes as a paradigm of the pervert’s “corking the hole in the Other”. What matters for the voyeur is interrogating in the Other what cannot be seen, what “the Other as such is missing”, and, most importantly, “fix” it by means of a supplement, that is, the voyeur’s own gaze as object *a*.¹¹⁰

21

It is clear that K. is, at least initially, alien to perversion as a mode of subjectivization. As the landlady rightly suggests after being informed about the peephole incident, he is in “no position to see Klamm properly”.¹¹¹ Unsurprisingly, when K. later returns to the Castle Inn alone and searches for the peephole, “it was so well fitted that he couldn’t find it”.¹¹² If, following Lacan, we generally understand neurosis as a desire “to be One in the field of the Other”, this definition appears to fit K. well. His ultimate aim is to speak to Klamm, clarify all misunderstandings concerning his work status, and be given what is due to him. When this soon proves increasingly difficult, he clearly privileges “non-enjoyment”

.....
105 Kafka 2009, p. 156, p. 160.

106 Ibid., p. 73.

107 Ibid.

108 Ibid., p. 77, p. 38, p. 72.

109 Ibid., p. 36.

110 Lacan 2006, pp. 254-255.

111 Kafka 2009, p. 47.

112 Ibid., p. 88.

over the enjoyment for, and through, the Other. For example, rather than enjoying the services of the two assistants sent from the Castle – however unpredictable and utterly obscene they may be – he prefers to dismiss them and dreams of a life of hard toil with Frieda where he would nonetheless preserve his autonomy and even some power: “All my future prospects – sombre as they may be, still, they do exist – all this I owe to Frieda. [...] I have gained in stature, so to speak, and that in itself is something. Little as it all may mean, I have a home, a position, and a real work [as unpaid janitor] [...] I am going to marry her and become a member of this community”.¹¹³ A member of this community: that is, a monadic – and modestly immodest – element of the supposedly consistent field of the Castle.

22

The more specific neurotic mode in which K. confronts the Castle throughout the novel appears to be obsession. In Seminar XVI, and in the very lesson in which he refers to the “Kafkaesque Castle”, Lacan provides one of his most detailed – and clearest – accounts of the obsessional stance vis-à-vis the inconsistency of the Other. The basic trait of the obsessional neurotic is that he desperately and incessantly tries to *negotiate* with the inconsistent Other. As Lacan has it, “any enjoyment is for him thinkable only as a treaty with the Other”, and this treaty is always imagined as conclusive and indisputable, as a “fundamental whole”, which would establish him as One in the field of the Other.¹¹⁴ That is to say, in wanting to come to *terms* with the Other, the obsessional would like to occupy the impossible position of “the *signified* of the barred Other, *s(A* barred)”.¹¹⁵ Obviously, the problem is that, given the inconsistency of the Other, every contract and settlement that has apparently been agreed by both parties can only give rise to a spiraling series of “payments”, to “something that never equals itself”.¹¹⁶ In obsession, the neurotic enjoyment of non-enjoyment materializes as an enjoyment of the “ceremonies of debt”;¹¹⁷ of what, for the subject, is still *owed* to one or the other party.¹¹⁸

113 Ibid., pp. 174-175.

114 Lacan 2006, p. 335.

115 Ibid., p. 292 (my emphasis).

116 Ibid., p. 335.

117 Ibid.

118 I cannot discuss here Lacan's equally fascinating treatment of hysteria in the same context. This would inevitably also involve a close reading of the character of Amalia from *The Castle*.

23

There is no doubt that K. attaches enormous importance to the letter in which Klamm states that he is “taken into the count's service” and personally reassures him that he will be “always ready to oblige him”, since he is “anxious to have contented workers”.¹¹⁹ After the mayor informs K. that the letter has no official status, and he is thus jobless, he protests that this “throws out all my calculations” and “I and perhaps the law too have been shockingly abused”.¹²⁰ K. does not certainly “want any token of favour from the castle”; he just wants his “rights”, that is, “work[ing] at a little drawing-board in peace as a humble land surveyor”.¹²¹ K. discusses at length his case with the mayor and, to strengthen his claim, eventually focuses on the authority of Klamm's signature. The mayor does not dispute its validity but informs K. that the letter really says “nothing binding”: insofar as it contains the phrase “as you know”, “the burden of proof of the fact that you have been appointed lies on you”.¹²² Upon reading the letter for the first time a few days earlier, K. himself already felt oddly responsible for his predicament: “The letter did not, after all, gloss over the fact that if there were any disagreements it would be the fault of K.'s recklessness – it was said with delicacy, and only an uneasy conscience (uneasy, not guilty) would have noticed it in those three words ‘as you know’, referring to his entering the appointment of the castle”.¹²³ Without K. ever stopping to regard himself as the victim of an “abuse of power”, this position of a priori and inextinguishable indebtedness, or at least of “uneasy conscience”, is perhaps what explains the fact that he receives the mayor's news (about his being dismissed before taking office) feeling “firmly convinced that he had expected some such information”.¹²⁴ And yet, we are told that the story of how he was appointed by mistake surprisingly also “entertains” K.; the mayor, whose unsuccessful attempt to produce K.'s file epitomizes a ritual of incompetent bureaucracy (he too is lying in bed; his wife looks in vain for the relevant document among a heap of unprocessed paperwork), seriously rebuts that he is “not telling it to entertain [K.]”.¹²⁵ Similarly, K.'s failed negotiation with the angry schoolteacher to obtain a salary as janitor ends with K. “laughing and clapping his hands”.¹²⁶ Their disagreement

119 Kafka 2009, pp. 23-24.

120 Ibid., p. 56, p. 64.

121 Ibid., p. 68, p. 62.

122 Ibid., p. 65.

123 Ibid., p. 25.

124 Ibid., p. 56.

125 Ibid., p. 59.

126 Ibid., p. 86.

unsurprisingly focuses on who is doing a favor to whom, and, conversely, who is indebted. K.'s "strange" assumption here is that "if someone [the schoolteacher] is forced to accept another person [K.], and that other person allows himself to be accepted, he [K.] is the one doing the favour".¹²⁷

24

The rest of the novel follows K. in his abortive attempts to be granted an interview with Klamm. As Frieda has it, his "sole aim was to *negotiate* with Klamm",¹²⁸ and even his apparent feelings for her should be considered in this perspective. In the process, he becomes more and more indebted to the villagers, up to the point that his assistants (who, among other things, spy on him when he makes love to Frieda and subsequently seduce her) submit a grievance against him to the Castle. And yet, when K. has the unexpected chance to solve his increasingly complex predicament with Bürgel – a well-informed secretary of the Castle – he falls asleep. K. literally ends up *in bed with the Other*: "[K.] had sat down on the bed at once on being invited, abruptly and *unceremoniously*, leaning against the bedpost".¹²⁹ K. cannot stay awake even though Bürgel tells him that "matters here are certainly not in such a state that any professional skill ought to be left unused".¹³⁰ More to the point, in sleeping on behalf of the insomniac secretary ("it's out of the question for me to sleep now"¹³¹), K. masks the void in the Other and quite evidently enjoys for and through it by – of all things – *groping* Bürgel: "K. was asleep [...] his troublesome consciousness was gone [...] Bürgel no longer had a hold on him"; it was rather "he [K.] [who] just groped out towards Bürgel from time to time [*nur er tastete noch manchmal nach Bürgel hin*] [...] No one was going to rob him of that now. He felt as if he had won a big victory".¹³² What we witness here is not a passage from obsession to perversion – which are for Lacan mutually exclusive modes of subjectivation – but the functioning of the unconscious perverse core of the fantasy (i.e., enjoying being the object *a* of the Other's enjoyment) that is present also in neurotics, albeit in a repressed form.¹³³

.....
127 Ibid.

128 Ibid., p. 138 (my emphasis).

129 Ibid., p. 226 (my emphasis).

130 Ibid., p. 227.

131 Ibid., p. 226.

132 Ibid., p. 231 (my emphasis; translation modified).

133 In this sense, Lacan speaks of fantasy as such in terms of a *père-version*. It could be argued that, towards the end of the novel, K. actually switches to a strictly speaking perverse mode of subjectivation when, in seeing a servant tearing up a document and thinking that it could be his own file, he

25

Bürgel explains in detail to a sleepy K. how the contradictory but somehow effective "negotiations" of the Castle are convolutedly carried out (the term *Verhandlung*, "negotiation", is repeated six times in less than four pages).¹³⁴ The expert secretary concludes that "the world corrects itself in its course and keeps its balance; it's an excellent, incredibly excellent arrangement, although dismal in other respects".¹³⁵ Only at this point, K. can no longer decide whether Bürgel is "amateurish" and "know[s] nothing" or, on the contrary, he has a "certain understanding of human nature".¹³⁶ Throughout most of the novel K. supposes that the Castle *knows* his case perfectly well, in spite of countless indications to the contrary. K. trusts what others tell him: or better, he relies on the big Other's supposed knowledge, which would grant him a precise position and status within it. A telephone voice from the Castle "knows" K. as "the eternal land surveyor"; one of the first things Frieda tells him is "I know everything about you. You are the land surveyor"; even the mayor seems to know him in advance and welcomes him with a "this is our land surveyor!".¹³⁷ K. thus assumes that "they knew all they need to know about him at the castle".¹³⁸ But, as the landlord retorts, K. does not know "what the castle is like". K. agrees with him but adds "all I know about the castle is that up there they know how to pick a good land surveyor",¹³⁹ and this should be sufficient for him to become "a member of this community". In Seminar XVI, Lacan points out that for the subject to establish himself in the field of the big Other it is necessary that the latter is in turn established as "the place where *that* is known". He specifies that this dimension is valid for "everybody"; it "gives a foundation to everybody", although it is particularly "prevalent" in the case of obsessional neurotics.¹⁴⁰ The big Other emerges as a "whole" primarily as "there is some place where everything that has happened, *that* is known".¹⁴¹ This paves the way to the further issue as to whether the structural – and universal – supposition that "*that* is known" holds also

nonetheless concludes that "even if it had been an irregularity, it could be forgiven" (ibid., p. 244).

134 Ibid., pp. 229-233.

135 Ibid., p. 236.

136 Ibid., pp. 227-228.

137 Ibid., p. 22, p. 37, p. 55.

138 Ibid., p. 8.

139 Ibid., p. 9.

140 Lacan 2006, p. 329.

141 Ibid.

reflexively: does “*that* is known” know itself? The answer is negative.¹⁴² And yet, even in the case of perversion, where the subject *knows* that the Other does *not* know that it knows and nonetheless acts as if he did not know it by enjoying for the Other,¹⁴³ what is not assumed is that “the Other has never known anything” – also and especially about the “satisfactions that are delivered to [it] by means of the inclusion of [object] *a*”.¹⁴⁴ Due to their sexual intimacy, Frieda believes she knows Klamm “very well”, but Klamm remains “indifferent”, and has not “summoned” her.¹⁴⁵ More generally, in terms of the big Other’s structural relation with knowledge, we are told that nobody “can keep anything from Klamm” (as the place where “*that* is known”), yet, at the same time, Klamm “never reads any of the [records]”.¹⁴⁶ “Klamm forgets at once”.¹⁴⁷

26

Along with the big Other, object *a*, and surplus enjoyment, knowledge is arguably the central theme treated in Seminar XVI. This still mostly remains uncharted territory, with commentators preferring to focus on the treatment of knowledge in the more famous Seminar XVII and its theory of discourses. Again, Lacan’s basic point in Seminar XVI is that the big Other is the place where knowledge is “illusorily” articulated as One.¹⁴⁸ The gap or flaw that renders the Other inconsistent amounts fundamentally to a gap of knowledge – which in turn basically means that the differential structure of language is such only insofar as it always lacks a signifier (or has an “exit”).¹⁴⁹ But this does not entail that “the Other does not know”; “the Other knows” in the sense that it corresponds to the very locus of the unconscious structured like a language.¹⁵⁰ Rather, the Other does not know that it knows; that is, the big Other is not another subject.¹⁵¹ It is the neurotic subject who, precisely while questioning the truth of knowledge, turns the Other into a subject supposed to know who would enclose an absolute knowledge. In this way, importantly,

.....
142 Ibid.

143 That is, the pervert’s logic follows the principle “Je sais bien, quand même” (“I know very well, but nevertheless”).

144 Ibid., p. 303.

145 Kafka 2009, p. 36, p. 40, p. 47.

146 Ibid., p. 102.

147 Ibid., p. 77.

148 See Lacan 2006, p. 349.

149 Ibid., p. 59, p. 320.

150 Ibid., p. 362.

151 Ibid.

“knowledge [becomes] the enjoyment of the subject supposed to know”, of a master who would know what he wants.¹⁵² More specifically, Lacan’s – sketchy but fascinating – arguments in Seminar XVI coalesce around four closely related issues concerning the triangulation between knowledge, enjoyment, and power:

- a) The conjunction between knowledge and power in Antiquity, and the latter’s professed extraneousness to enjoyment.
- b) An appraisal of the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave in terms of knowledge, power, and enjoyment.
- c) The disjunctive short-circuit “knowledge-power” [*savoir-pouvoir*] in capitalism and the parallel creation of a “market of knowledge” or, better, “knowledge-enjoyment” [*savoir-jouissance*] in the university discourse.
- d) The epistemological, ethical, and political stance of psychoanalysis in this context.

27

Lacan states that the inconsistency of the Other has always been “the same”.¹⁵³ What changes historically is the way in which the speaking animal relates to it. Lacan draws attention to how, surprisingly, the speaking animal has managed for a long time to “ward it off” effectively by means of (animistic and religious) forms of knowledge.¹⁵⁴ For instance, what is fundamentally at stake in the paradigmatic case of ancient Greek *episteme* is the wager that “all the places where there is no count” – i.e., all the manifestations of the inconsistency of the Other – will one day be reduced by wisdom to the “constitutive intervals” of a cosmic harmony.¹⁵⁵ This take on the alleged order of the Other goes together with the assumption that knowledge equals power. The wise-men who know how to “count” – especially in the “handling” of their emporia – must hold power, and what they distribute is by definition just.¹⁵⁶ Emporia and empires go together. In turn, the assumed equation between knowledge and power allows the wise-men of Antiquity to maintain a particular relation to enjoyment, which Lacan once defines as “innocent”. They somehow

.....
152 Ibid., p. 334, p. 63, p. 353, p. 385.

153 Ibid., p. 49.

154 Ibid.

155 Ibid., p. 296.

156 Ibid., pp. 296-297.

“withdraw” from enjoyment – as the triad given by the loss of the object a, surplus enjoyment, and the retroactive projection of absolute enjoyment – since, in line with their epistemic wager, what matters the most is finding a balanced pleasure (*hedone*) that is harmonious with the cosmos.¹⁵⁷ Pleasure consists of being “in tune” with a nature of which men are less the masters than the celebrants.¹⁵⁸ This attitude leads them to both accept apparently unnatural pleasures as in the end justifiable through what these very pleasures would give the “measure” of – that is, again, an ultimately harmonic cosmos – and promote a form of asceticism, or *otium cum dignitate*, whose motto is “not too much work”.¹⁵⁹

28

For Lacan, the great merit of Hegel is having articulated the disjunction between knowledge and power – which had always been there to begin with – and the incompatibility between power and enjoyment – which the Greeks did not sense as problematic. Hegel would, intentionally or unintentionally, demonstrate how:

a) The Cartesian cogito as the mastery, or power, of “I know that I think” and “I am where I think” actually conceals a more structural “I do not know where I am”.¹⁶⁰ In Hegel’s dialectic, thought as such ultimately amounts to “I cannot think that I am where I want to be”.¹⁶¹ “I am where I think” is thus an illusion, and there is no freedom of thought.¹⁶² That is, the master’s freedom – the power he has acquired by risking his life for the sake of recognition – is always already subjected to, and separated from, the unfolding of knowledge in the progress of history, which is carried out through the work of the slave.

b) Knowledge originates in the slave. The knowledgeable slave serves the powerful master. Yet thanks to the work of the slave the master only enjoys a “recuperation” of enjoyment “that has nothing to do with enjoyment but with its loss”.¹⁶³ Although Lacan claims Hegel fails to see this, his dialectic

.....
¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 332, p. 110.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 110.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 110-111.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 272.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 273.

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 272.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 115.

would clearly stage how, fundamentally, power entails a “renunciation of enjoyment”.¹⁶⁴ By risking his life, the master would paradoxically leave enjoyment to the slave, who in fact accepts to be dominated “for the safety of his body”.¹⁶⁵ We should therefore not confuse the – mythical yet somehow still present in Antiquity, Lacan specifies¹⁶⁶ – enjoyment of the slave, of which we know nothing, and the surplus enjoyment the master obtains from the slave, which initiates the master’s desire to know.¹⁶⁷ The Hegelian dialectic of master and slave applies structurally also to the classical world and its effective veiling of the inconsistency of the Other by means of the use of pleasure.

29

Seminar XVI, delivered in 1968-1969 a few months after the uprising of May ’68, offers Lacan’s most detailed discussion of capitalism. The discourse of the capitalist, which will never be properly spelled out in later works, is investigated in close connection with the discourse of the university, which will be systematized in Seminar XVII. The two discourses are to a large extent presented as synonymous or at least complementary. The basic novelty of capitalism lies in a different arrangement of knowledge and power in structure and the way in which this gives rise to a universalization of surplus enjoyment. In the capitalist-university discourse, the disjunction between power and knowledge is both maintained (in brief, the master-signifier S1 cannot but remain structurally distinct from the battery of signifiers S2 as knowledge; the master cannot but be an idiotic “dickhead” [*con*]¹⁶⁸) yet also as such short-circuited. In other words, knowledge is now in the position of the agency of discourse, which was previously occupied by the master. As Lacan puts it, “the master [has been] elevated to knowledge”, and this “has enabled the realization of the most absolute masters one has ever seen since the beginning of history”.¹⁶⁹ In parallel, the “liberation of slaves” only “enchains them to surplus enjoyment”, that is, to the enjoyment of non-enjoyment.¹⁷⁰

.....
¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 115-116, p. 396.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 370.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 385.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 396.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 116.

Lacan's tentative account of the rise, consolidation, and functioning of the capitalist discourse oscillates between economic considerations (in dialogue with Marx and Althusser), epistemological remarks (concerning the triumph of modern and contemporary science and technology), clinical observations (about the neurotic-perverse discontent of current civilization), and a ferocious critique of bureaucracy as epitomized by the University apparatus. In accordance with the claim that psychoanalysis is not "a science without knowledge" but rather aims at constituting itself as "a knowledge that is not One", that is, as a knowledge of how the truth of inconsistency "creates knowledge",¹⁷¹ his arguments are willingly left as open suggestions. It is nonetheless possible to isolate a number of quite well defined – and ambitious – recurring themes:

a) Since the emergence of the Galilean-Newtonian paradigm, the evolution of science – as a direct descendant of the knowledge of the slave – has constituted an increasing "problem" for traditional forms of power.¹⁷² Power becomes more and more aware that "positive power" lies "elsewhere", that is, in the knowledge of science as structurally disconnected from power.¹⁷³

b) Capitalism attempts to provide an answer to this predicament. On the one hand, as rightly sensed by Marx, the real economic novelty of capitalism amounts to its creation of a universal "labor market"; it is only on the basis of the latter that surplus value acquires a sense.¹⁷⁴ On the other hand, the same market also functions as a "market of knowledge", where an otherwise indomitable science is epistemologically "unified" through the "value of knowledge".¹⁷⁵ This enables the master-capitalist to finally somehow "manage to know what he is doing"; yet, at the same time, his "liberal" power can only be fundamentally "anarchic", or "divided against itself", since it becomes inextricable from the function of science in a *savoir-pouvoir*.¹⁷⁶

.....
171 Ibid., p. 204, p. 275.

172 Ibid., p. 238.

173 Ibid., p. 240.

174 Ibid., p. 17.

175 Ibid., pp. 39-40.

176 Ibid., p. 396, pp. 239-240.

c) The "homogenization" of knowledge (through the value of knowledge) leads to an "ordering" of enjoyment, or *savoir-jouissance*.¹⁷⁷ The replacement of the work, or know-how, of the slave with the surplus value produced by the worker – which renders him the "damned of the earth" – corresponds to the reduction of the slave's enjoyment – the enjoyment of the way in which the products of his work changed the world, following Kojève's Hegel – to the worker's *non*-enjoyment of surplus enjoyment.¹⁷⁸ Due to this mounting separation of work from enjoyment, the "I" of the worker is more and more characterized by frustration.¹⁷⁹ Knowledge is no longer primarily bound to work but to the price of knowledge, and this is precisely "the price of the renunciation of enjoyment".¹⁸⁰

d) This very universalization of surplus enjoyment as the enjoyment one does not have but supposes to be enjoyed by some others – which affects also and especially the capitalist himself; let us not forget that the logic of surplus enjoyment involved the master in the first place – is at the same time what relates the subject to enjoyment as taken from the "edge of its purity".¹⁸¹ The subtraction of enjoyment from work does indeed open, or better make obvious, the hole of enjoyment, but by the same token it also projects enjoyment as an "infinite point".¹⁸² This is the point/hole of the "discontent" of our civilization;¹⁸³ of the endless and self-phagocytizing accumulation of surplus enjoyment *for* the Other/Capital (perversion); and of the equally paralyzing – as ineffectively antagonistic – "sacrifice"¹⁸⁴ of surplus enjoyment *against* the Other/Capital (obsessional neurosis).

e) The place where knowledge is given a value and commodified – which in turn makes the "ordering" of

.....
177 Ibid., p. 40.

178 Ibid., p. 396.

179 Ibid., pp. 37-38, p. 239, p. 333.

180 Ibid., p. 39.

181 Ibid., p. 333.

182 Ibid.

183 Ibid., p. 40.

184 Ibid., p. 372.

enjoyment possible – is the University.¹⁸⁵ The latter is a specific institution, the “Alma Mater” of capitalism,¹⁸⁶ yet also a more general apparatus that sustains the bureaucratic arrangement of the capitalist discourse. In both senses, the University manages knowledge as the Other’s surplus enjoyment.¹⁸⁷ While the idea that knowledge could be constituted as a totality that is as such satisfying is “immanent to the political as such” – it clearly also applies to both ancient *episteme* and the dialectic of master and slave – the “problematic” and dangerous specificity of the University lies in the fact that it installs knowledge in the “dominant” position of discourse.¹⁸⁸ This “all-knowledge” [*tout-savoir*] as power, that is, bureaucracy, does not obviously know everything, but nonetheless renders “more obscure” the truth of the inconsistency of the Other – which was still evident in the master and slave dialectic, where the master is such only as a split subject.¹⁸⁹ All-knowledge represses, or better disavows, the structural impossibility of mastery – its inherent deadlock – and, with the same move, renders mastery “more unassailable, precisely in its impossibility”.¹⁹⁰ Power thus becomes anarchically more powerful. This is especially the case because in perversely “calculating”, “counting”, and eventually accumulating surplus enjoyment for the Other, bureaucracy successfully manages to “do a semblance of surplus enjoyment, [which] draws quite a crowd”.¹⁹¹

31

While we cannot assess here Lukács’s harsh contention that Kafka’s modernism is “bourgeois” and fundamentally nihilistic, and that his real subject-matter is “man’s *impotence* in the face of [...] the diabolical character of the world of modern capitalism”,¹⁹² it is safe to say that his work pitilessly reports on bureau-crazy, that is, literally, the power of

.....
185 Ibid., p. 39.

186 Ibid., p. 399.

187 This point is explained more clearly in Seminar XVII. See for instance Lacan 2007, p. 14.

188 Ibid., p. 31.

189 Ibid., pp. 31-32.

190 Ibid., p. 178.

191 Ibid., p. 81.

192 Lukács 1964, p. 41 (my emphasis).

offices. As Adorno has it, Kafka’s fictions – and *The Castle* in particular – stand as an “information bureau” of the current “human condition”.¹⁹³ Evidently, in *The Castle*, actual masters such as Klamm (a “Chief Executive”¹⁹⁴) are unreachable and should not be disturbed. In turn, the Castle’s master of masters is merely a name, significantly enough “Count *Westwest*”.¹⁹⁵ Not only does the schoolteacher (speaking in French...) forbid K. to utter his name before “innocent children”, as if there were something essentially corrupt about the count, and the landlord is “afraid of being interrogated about” him, but, most interestingly, the villagers do not even display any image of him: “‘Who’s that?’ asked K. ‘The count?’ He was standing in front of [a] portrait [...] ‘Oh no,’ said the landlord, ‘that’s the castle warden’”.¹⁹⁶ In *The Castle*, concrete power clearly belongs to wardens, deputy-wardens, clerks, attorneys, secretaries, special secretaries, and assistant secretaries. When K. defiantly asks the village mayor whether all he knows of the castle are its offices, the latter resolutely and proudly answers: “Yes [...] and they are the most important part of it”. The officials themselves wish each other well by saying: “May you be as well off as a servant”. At one point Olga self-evidently concludes that “*servants are the real masters in the castle*”.¹⁹⁷ Moreover, in *The Castle*, the chain of command whereby the power a servant exercises on another servant is itself subjected to the power of a third servant, and so on with no master in view, stands out primarily as a chain of alleged all-knowledge. In considering K.’s case, which he “know[s] all about”, the mayor relies on the “excellent memory” of his wife Mizzi, and in turn reports to Sordini, a bureaucrat “well-known for his conscientiousness” – whose office, however, is characterized by the sound of “huge bundles of files stacked one above the other [...] crashing to the floor”.¹⁹⁸ The mayor plainly explains to K. that there is one basic “working principle” underlying the Castle’s administration: “the authorities [...] do not even consider the possibility of mistakes being made”.¹⁹⁹ In this way, as Olga later adds, even in the case of “very dubious officials”, what cannot but be taken for granted is “how great [their] power and knowledge [is]”.²⁰⁰ After all, how can one prove that a mistake “is really a mistake in the long

.....
193 Adorno 2003, p. 211.

194 Kafka 2009, p. 24.

195 Ibid., p. 5 (my emphasis).

196 Ibid., p. 12, p. 9, p. 10.

197 Ibid., p. 63, p. 194 (my emphasis).

198 Ibid., p. 55, p. 60, p. 59, p. 61.

199 Ibid., p. 60.

200 Ibid., p. 200.

run?”.²⁰¹ Since “there are *only* supervising authorities [*Kontrollbehörden*]” with no ultimate authority – i.e., there is no ultimate master-signifier in the dominant position of discourse – it should rather be assumed that the “consistency of the offices involved” is especially admirable where “no such thing appeared to be present”.²⁰²

32

Unlike Mizzi, who remembers everything, the master Klamm “forgets at once” and “sleeps a great deal”.²⁰³ But, for the villagers, Klamm *is* Momus, his authoritative secretary. The rumors are in the end somehow correct. Although the name of the count should not be uttered – as this could evidence his absence – Momus does not hesitate to speak “in Klamm’s name” (the name of the count’s Chief Executive), when, in his vain search for the truth of knowledge, K. the foreigner dares to question the consistency of the Castle.²⁰⁴ This disavowal of the impossibility of mastery, which as such reinforces mastery and supports knowledge-power by delegating the role of the master (the count can only be named via “Klamm” and Momus can only speak in Klamm’s name), is also reflected in the topology of the Castle itself. The latter is both omnipresent and, at the same time, a missing center – which functions as an agalmic/luring void. On the one hand, Olga notices how “we all belong to the castle, and there is no distance at all, no bridge to be gaped”.²⁰⁵ This absence of distance is confirmed by the fact that her brother Barnabas – who holds the “high office of a messenger” in spite of the precariousness of his job at the castle – “passes [...] barriers in the offices [...] and they look no different from those he has never crossed, so it can’t be assumed [...] that beyond those last barriers there are offices of an essentially different kind from those into which Barnabas has been”.²⁰⁶ On the other hand, and concomitantly, Olga cannot avoid asking: “Is what Barnabas does service to the castle? He certainly goes to the offices, but are the offices really the castle?”.²⁰⁷ The least one can conclude is that the barriers of the castle should not be “imagined as distinct dividing-lines”.²⁰⁸ Accordingly, Barnabas can both “doubt that

.....
201 Ibid., p. 60.

202 Ibid., p. 60, p. 54 (Kafka’s emphasis).

203 Ibid., p. 77, p. 38.

204 Ibid., p. 99.

205 Ibid., p. 172.

206 Ibid., p. 107, p. 155.

207 Ibid., p. 154.

208 Ibid., p. 155.

the official who is described there as Klamm [is] really Klamm” and, at the same time and without contradiction, be unable to describe “in what way that man was different from the usual idea of Klamm” – or better, he describes the official in question, “but that description tallies exactly with the description of Klamm that we know”.²⁰⁹

33

To use a seminal expression that appears repeatedly in Seminar XVI, and that echoes with the discussion of *The Burrow* in Seminar IX, the exploited workers/villagers are thus “inside-outside” [*dedans-dehors*]²¹⁰ the Castle of alleged all-knowledge – ultimately as the object *a* of its surplus enjoyment. But for such a topology to take place, the *masters* themselves must first be “absorbed” by the Other. According to Lacan, this is precisely what is at stake in the myth of the Trojan horse, or, more to the point, in the passage from the fall of Troy – which is inevitable – to the construction of the Kafkaesque Castle. In Seminar XVII, he in fact returns one final time to the Homeric story, and says that the “interior”, or “guts”, of the Trojan horse lay the “foundations” for the “fantasy of a ‘totality-knowledge’” [*savoir-totalité*].²¹¹ He also specifies that the horse can take Troy only if the Trojan masters “knock on it” from the outside.²¹² This remark should be read together with the lesson from Seminar XVI where Lacan associates the Trojan horse with the Kafkaesque Castle. Here his complex and only hinted arguments revolve around two series of considerations. First, the Trojan horse epitomizes how the Other, the battery of signifiers (S2), is initially constituted as “*one* Other” in the guise of an “empty set” (or better, as one Other *in* the Other-that-is-not-One).²¹³ Second, this logical movement is only possible insofar as phenomenologically the pure prestige of being a master (S1) always already involves the master’s redoubling in the ideal image of the knowledgeable slave (“it is the slave who is the ideal of the master”; “the master is himself as perfectly enslaved as possible”²¹⁴). The image of the other is here no longer simply, as in Lacan’s early work, an image of specular perfection in whose place the subject would like to be – by being recognized by the other but also by ambivalently intending to obliterate him. As such this image also and especially circumscribes the slave’s unknowable desire as an agalmic void – that is, again, as an empty

.....
209 Ibid., p. 155, p. 157.

210 See especially *ibid.*, pp. 279-293.

211 Lacan 2007, p. 33.

212 *Ibid.* (translation modified).

213 Lacan 2006, p. 369, p. 363.

214 *Ibid.*, p. 366.

set – that initiates the master's desire to know and his erection of the Castle: "Through this lure, through this process [*procédé*] of the 1 [the S1] that equals itself to 1" – i.e., equals itself to the 0 as 1 of object *a* – "in the game of mastery, the Trojan horse absorbs always more of them in its guts, and this becomes more and more expensive. That is the discontent of civilization".²¹⁵ In other words, as soon as the object *a* emerges as the cornerstone of the subject's unconscious identification in fantasy, "the entire mechanism takes place there", and "the process [*processus*]" – the Kafkaesque *Prozess* – "does not stop until the end".²¹⁶

34

How does psychoanalysis confront the process/*Prozess* of the anarchically powerful Castle of supposed all-knowledge? In Seminar XVI, Lacan openly presents psychoanalysis as, firstly, an *epistemology*, whose primary task is to contrast all-knowledge and the subject supposed to know.²¹⁷ The fact that there is no universe of discourse (no meta-language or absolute knowledge) does not entail that discourse is impossible; on the contrary, psychoanalysis evidences that the flaws of discourse, the inconsistency of the big Other circumscribed as an agalamic void, initiate and sustain signification; in this sense, the field of the Other equates with "the field of truth insofar as truth does not know itself".²¹⁸ Secondly, focusing on the productive impasse of knowledge, psychoanalysis also stands as an *ethics* of the real. What is real and must be assumed is that "the desire of the Other cannot be formulated"; that the subject's desire originates precisely at this point as a desire (not) to know; and that surplus enjoyment as structurally *savoir-jouissance* calls for circulation, expenditure [*dépense*] and sharing, not reinvestment and accumulation.²¹⁹

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Seminar XVI is also surprisingly rich in *political* suggestions – possibly even more than Seminar XVII. On the one hand, the facts of May 1968 prompt Lacan to pair up capitalism and revolution as the two conflicting sides of the hegemony of all-knowledge in our political world: the emphasis on revolution follows from the frustration caused by the "ordering" of enjoyment as surplus enjoyment. This has no doubt a symptomatic value in pointing at the current generalized discontent

.....
215 Ibid., p. 369.

216 Ibid. I think that it is in this context that we should read the "infinite *anteriority* of the Kafkaesque Process" Lacan enigmatically mentions in Seminar IX shortly after discussing *The Burrow* (SIX, p. 101, my emphasis).

217 Lacan 2006, p. 48, p. 281, p. 344, pp. 346-348, pp. 349-352.

218 Ibid., pp. 14-15, p. 199.

219 Ibid., p. 190, p. 274, p. 109. See also Lacan 2007, p. 82.

of civilization, but one still does not realize that capitalism *requires* revolutions (and wars) to keep science at bay.²²⁰ On the other hand, although he disputes any idea of teleological "progress", Lacan clarifies that psychoanalysis should not advocate a "restraining" of science, which would automatically render psychoanalysis "reactionary".²²¹ It is absolutely not a matter of going back to an old configuration of power, that of the master's discourse – also because this discourse has always already undermined itself in favor of knowledge. If revolution shows a "strict and circular solidarity [...] with the capitalist system", then psychoanalysis should highlight the juncture "where this circle could be opened".²²² This juncture necessarily has to do with knowledge: "refusing the [capitalist] game acquires a meaning only if the question is centered on the relation of knowledge and the subject".²²³ "Novelty" can only originate from a subversion of the function of knowledge as the management of knowledge, whereby "this way of relating to ourselves that is called knowledge" would be subtracted from its "universal" and "unitary order".²²⁴ For the time being, the provisional "solution" seems therefore to be that we "enter the procession of knowledge", that is, scrutinize bureaucracy, "without losing [our] thread" in it.²²⁵ This could also help us to rethink class-consciousness and class struggle in terms that do not depend on the "educator-educated" couple, which currently submits most forms of Marxism to the University and its bureaucracy.²²⁶

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On 25 June 1969, Lacan concludes Seminar XVI by reading out to his audience the letter with which the École normale informs him that it will no longer host his Seminars. Overturning a previous concession granted on request of the sixth section of the École pratique des hautes études, the Dussane hall must be vacated. No other hall is apparently available. This is allegedly due to the "reorganization of the École", the "General Reform of Universities", and the "development of teachings".²²⁷ Lacan makes three hundred and forty-one photocopies of the letter, dates

.....
220 Lacan 2006, pp. 37-40, p. 240, p. 242.

221 Lacan 2007, p. 106.

222 Lacan 2006, p. 333.

223 Ibid., p. 399.

224 Ibid., p. 241.

225 Ibid., p. 397.

226 Ibid., p. 396. As will be restated in Seminar XVII (Lacan 2007, p. 149), Maoism, with its stress on the know-how of the slave, is in this regard a promising exception (Lacan 2006, p. 397).

227 Lacan 2006, p. 403.

them without signing, and delivers one to each of his students: “It is a diploma [...] a symbol [...] it is S1 [...] one day those who will have this piece of paper will be given access to a certain hall for a confidential communication on the subject of the functions of psychoanalysis in the political register”.²²⁸ A long quarrel follows on the pages of *Le Monde*. On 26 June 1969, the newspaper reports that the management offices of the École normale have terminated Lacan’s lectures since they are “mundane and incomprehensible for any normally constituted” human being.²²⁹ On the following day, the Director of the École disavows the article but accuses Lacan’s students of “depredations and several thefts”.²³⁰ Lacan answers on 5 July. He stresses how the Director does not seem to hold himself responsible for what the management offices say; specifies that saying a document is false “is not disavowing its content, but the publication of a [defamatory] text”;²³¹ and further notices how *Le Monde* has not doubted the authenticity of this second letter. The dispute continues until November 1969.²³²

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228 Ibid., p. 404.

229 Ibid., p. 422.

230 Ibid., p. 421.

231 Ibid., p. 422.

232 This article is dedicated to the pro-vice deputy wardens and the junior senior-senior assistant secretaries of the really existing Castle. May they adopt it – and photocopy it – for their market of knowledge.

Sophist's Choice

Mladen Dolar

Abstract: Alain Badiou and Barbara Cassin, close collaborators and friends, seem to stand at opposite ends in their philosophical choices. While Badiou adamantly stands up for philosophy against the ever new kinds of sophistry, Cassin's career is largely devoted to 'rehabilitating' the sophistry which she sees as a structural effect of philosophy, so that philosophy, in its epic battle against sophistry, was combatting its own shadow. The paper tries to investigate how these different choices are based in two strands of Lacan's theory. Lacan in his later teaching proposed two new concepts, *lalangue* and *matheme*, with on the one hand the capacity of language for homonymy and punning, and on the other the stringency of formalization and the letter. Both depart from his earlier theory of conceptualizing language and the symbolic, but seemingly in opposite ways. While Cassin makes a clear choice of *lalangue* and its *jouissance*, seeing in *matheme* a philosophical residue, an off-spring of philosophical obsession with logic and formalization, Badiou on the other hand takes *matheme* as his central issue. They both seem to take one part of Lacan's later teaching and play it against the other. The paper argues that there is no choice to be made between the two and scrutinizes the underlying assumptions of this apparent alternative. It proposes a 'speculative identity' of these two entities which seem to have no common measure, and considers the ways in which they are both involved with the real.

Keywords: Lacan, Badiou, Cassin, *lalangue*, *matheme*, sophistry, the unconscious, the symbolic, the real.

The psychoanalyst is the presence of sophist in our epoch,
but with another stature.
Jacques Lacan¹

'Sophist's choice' sounds good as a title (and I was quite a bit let down when I discovered that it has been used on some Christian evangelical blog ranting against the depravities of modern age and its sophistry), but actually it is meant more seriously than its rhetorical effect may suggest. There is a choice to be made about sophistry, the very appearance of the sophist always entails the call for a choice, a decision. Of course the first obvious choice that comes to mind is the one launched by Plato, and then by Aristotle: there is a choice to be emphatically made between the true philosophy and its counterfeit, between the philosopher and the impostor that is the sophist, the one who is going through the motions

.....
¹ *Problèmes cruciaux de la psychanalyse*, 12 May 1965, quoted in Cassin 2012, p. 52.

of philosophy without espousing its essential tenets, the make-believe philosopher. The fake philosopher is the greatest danger for philosophy, so the whole Platonic and Aristotelian enterprise can be seen as sturdy fortification that philosophy must erect against this threat. What should be applied when facing the sophist is the famous Marx brothers' joke,² though without its twist: 'This man looks like a philosopher and talks like a philosopher, but don't let that fool you, he is not really a philosopher.'

The condemnation of sophistry as the inner perversion of philosophy was indeed the founding gesture of philosophy, and since sophistry, in different shapes and sizes, kept haunting philosophy as its shadow, the history of philosophy also in many ways coincides with the history of reiteration and recurrence of this condemnation. There was a quasi-unanimity in harsh condemnation, yet the condemned vice nevertheless kept springing up, like jack-in-the-box, tenaciously reiterating the threat. It is as if Plato's *Sophist*, the paradigmatic instance and the origin of this contest, already staged this predicament, for in that dialogue there is curiously no sophist who would defend the cause of sophistry, the title-hero is conspicuously absent, yet he seems to be nevertheless unbeatable, he defies all the attempts to classify him, to pin him down, and even seems to take an ambiguous victory in the end. In the centuries long battle the epistemological grounds – safeguarding the true knowledge against its semblance, the proper argument against the faulty one – shook hands with moral outrage and indignation – safeguarding the true social values against relativism and degeneration. To say nothing of the questionable economic interest of selling knowledge for money.³

Barbara Cassin's work is largely and passionately devoted to taking a very different view of sophistry, and what an impressive oeuvre it is. If through the whole tradition the choice was to be made between philosophy and sophistry, and there was no doubt as to as to what one should choose in this alternative, she now courageously and undauntedly presents another choice to be made. She doesn't shy away from taking the Marx brothers' joke with its twist and all: 'This man looks like a philosopher and talks like a philosopher, but don't let the appearance deceive you, he really is a philosopher, a philosopher actually more interesting and subversive than the Philosopher.' The sophist is, quite literally, a philosopher 'with a vengeance', representing the revenge of discourse on philosophy, the price philosophy has to pay for the disavowal of its own discursive and performative gesture, for its blindness as to its own embeddedness in discursivity, its disowning the power and the effects of language it is using. So the choice between true philosophy and sophistry that philosophy since Plato has been imposing on us is

2 "Gentlemen, Chicolini here may talk like an idiot, and look like an idiot, but don't let that fool you: he really is an idiot." (*Duck Soup*, dir. Leo McCarey, 1933)

3 For a very good account of this last point cf. Hénaff 2002.

actually a non-choice, it is a choice whose terms have to be dismantled: one has to acknowledge that what is presented as a perversion of the true discourse is rather a structural effect of this discourse itself, indeed its necessary 'sophistic effect', as the title of her book goes, her *opus magnum*.⁴ Thus philosophy, in its crusade against sophistry which raged for millennia, was actually combating its own shadow, the shadow that it necessarily and unwittingly produced by its own discursive devices. There is a fateful disavowal, on the part of philosophy, of the powers of rhetoric, of its own rhetoricity, which it mistook for a mere tool in the deployment of its proper concepts. Conceptuality vs. rhetoricity – such was the choice made by philosophy, unaware that there is no concept without rhetoric and that conceptuality can never be disentangled from its discursive underpinnings. But showing that the choice between philosophy and sophistry is actually a false choice still implies that there is a choice to be made. Choosing not to choose between philosophy and sophistry is a choice of another stance, for what follows is not an ecumenical reconciliation between the two arch-enemies, or a division of labor between the former foes. A new battlefield presents itself, the battlefield of language and its incalculable effects, implying a structural subversion of philosophical propositions, where the new tenets have to displace the old ones. This is where, in her view, sophistry joins forces with psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysis looms large in this new battlefield, for Barbara Cassin takes it as an ally in these new struggles to be fought, as a kind of new embodiment of sophistry and its revenge on philosophy. In her reading psychoanalysis essentially takes sides with the powers of discursivity – let's say, to make it short, with the capacity of language for homonymy rather than its capacity for synonymy. Sophistry was traditionally accused precisely of using homonymy, this was one of the essential bases of sophistic reasoning and its contended fallacy, the linguistic ground of faulty reasoning.⁵ Words contingently and erratically sound alike, they reverberate beyond their capacity to make sense, they produce effects that blur the lines of all attempts to clearly delineate concepts and keep them well defined. The unconscious always appears as a glitch, a pun that uses the haphazard materials of homonymy, permitting a slide, a short-circuit, where a chance encounter brings together the unexpected distant meanings and plays tricks on them.⁶ This is clearly

4 Cassin 1995.

5 For the homonymy as the clue to sophistic reasoning cf. Cassin 1996, pp. 342-357, with her close reading of Aristotle's "Sophistical refutations".

6 To take just one example which is close to my heart: Freud's patient, in describing her family, says: "they all possess *Geiz* [avarice] – I meant to say *Geist* [spirit]". (Freud 1975, p 106) There is the contingency in German of *Geiz* and *Geist* sounding alike, almost a homonymy, bringing together in a short-circuit two entities that are starkly opposed: spirit as the elevation beyond the worldly concerns,

at the opposite end from the logic of synonymy, where one and the same meaning can be expressed by a number of different terms, keeping its unity of sense and the identity of a concept despite the divergence of means. The fact of homonymy, at the simplest, is a precondition for the unconscious (whereas synonymy conditions the realm of philosophy and its quest for meaning – this is what the principle *salva veritate* meant: one can use various means and vehicles, provided that truth be salvaged and remain intact). Sophistry always thrived on puns and double entendre, equivocations and faulty arguments, homonymy and short-circuits, rather than on conceptual unity, clear definitions and classifications. On the one hand, the claim to truth, universality, unity, idea; on the other hand, mere punning, parody, fakery, playing tricks with words, contingency. But psychoanalysis presents a new and particularly revealing stage in this eternal struggle, even its culmination and a reversal: aren't the formations of the unconscious constantly using precisely the sophistic means – bad puns, word-play, the faulty argument, the homonymy?⁷ And do the formations of the unconscious not use this as a vehicle to produce the crack of sense, the gap in the production of meaning – a crack where truth can arise? Couldn't one say that the unconscious is structured like sophistry, yet nevertheless producing truth? If Lacan claimed that the unconscious is structured like a language, then certainly not like the language of Plato, but rather like the language of Gorgias and company. Yet it is only in this sophistic element and with its haphazard means that truth emerges, and doesn't cease to surface. Lacan famously proposed the prosopopoeia of the unconscious: 'I, truth, speak' (*Moi, la vérité, je parle*).⁸ One can perhaps propose another one: 'I am the sophist who always speaks the truth'.

Psychoanalysis, in this view, aims at the locus of truth precisely in the erratic logic of homonymy rather than through concepts in their sense-making capacity. There is a fateful 'decision of sense' made by philosophy, to evoke the title of another of Cassin's books,⁹ the decision

striving for the ideal, the transcendence; avarice as the selfishness and greed, accumulating only for one's self-interest. The patient could say what she really thought of her family by the contingency of homonymy, the short-circuit of sound similarity, but one is tempted to elevate this to a parable: avarice is the symptom of spirit, its dark secret, its hidden clause, its sinister flip side – something that calls for writing a history of their intertwining, for which one could propose the most apposite German title *Die Phänomenologie des Geizes*. It so happens that I attempted to write one (Dolar 2002)

7 In his later teaching Lacan rather used the term homophony than homonymy. Is there a difference? Milner argued that homonymy is rather the way that linguistics acknowledges the facts of homophony and neutralizes them in order to salvage their object, *la langue*. "By invoking homonymy, the linguist relies on the external world and the practical use of language. In order to save *la langue*, he puts his trust in *le langage*." (Milner 2017, p. 91) Homonymy appears as a nuisance to be rid off in order to salvage sense and communication, while homonymy envisages it in its senselessness. I continue to loosely use 'homonymy' while one should keep this in mind.

8 Lacan 2006, p. 340.

9 Cassin & Narcy 1998.

to be debunked in its most telling birthplace (among others), the Book Gamma of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, with its emphatic choice of the principle of non-contradiction and the excluded third (the choice of 'signifying' vs. 'saying'). Psychoanalysis, the last avatar of the sophistic underside and underdog, stands at the opposite end, it consistently treats language through the ways that counteract the Aristotelian ban. Most conspicuously, there is no contradiction in the unconscious, as Freud adamantly maintained, nor the excluded middle, yet it is the very locus of an errant truth. There are far more interesting and far-reaching things one can do with language than avoiding contradiction and equivocation.

Lacan, with his knack for simplicity, invented a concept to cover this side of language, *lalangue*. If the signifier, based on differentiability and distinction, can give rise to linguistics and to science, even to the high scientific ambitions of a new epistemology of humanities (this was the epistemological program of structuralism), then the contingent nature of signifiers, based on chance encounters and overlaps, can only give rise to what Lacan called *linguisterie*, linguistery as opposed linguistics. If the first part can be summed up by *la langue*, then this second part can be aptly rendered by *lalangue*, a self-referential pun, which itself displays in its name what it was supposed to demonstrate. *Lalangue* is but a homonym, a minimalistic one, guided not by *salva veritate*, but *salva voce* (or *salvo sono*), rescuing the sound rather than truth, and yet pointing to another kind of truth through this – shall one say 'fidelity to the sound'? If the work of the unconscious can be epitomized by two basic mechanisms, condensation and displacement, *Verdichtung* and *Verschiebung*, metaphor and metonymy, then both are based on this second contingent flip side of the signifier.

Still, one is not easily done with philosophy and its elaborate procedures, and the symptom of this, for Cassin, is Lacan's insistence on matheme. The insistence on matheme goes back not to sophistry, but rather to Plato's and Aristotle's crusade against sophistry: on the one hand to Plato's extolling mathematics as the ultimate science,¹⁰ and on the other and in particular, Aristotle's invention of logic. For what is logic if not the formidable tool to cure language of punning, equivocations, ambiguities, slippages of sense? To be rid of precisely what makes the unconscious possible at all. Logic has always figured as a language doctor, with its proposal of constructing an ideal formal language that would be rid of trials and tribulations of ordinary language and would secure formal means for salvaging the unity of sense. The paradox of this enterprise was that one could eventually only do this by formal means, i. e. by relying on form devoid of content, ultimately by entrusting the rescue of sense and logos to the senseless letter. Logic always isolated

10The inscription on the entry into Academy allegedly ran: "Let no-one ignorant of geometry enter here". Plato's particular predilection for geometry stems from the Pythagorean tradition.

the form as opposed to content, and the invention of mathematical logic, with matheme proper, only brought this to the gist. Curing the language of equivocation and proliferation of meanings came at a price, that of maintaining univocity by something that jettisons meaning. Logic is a philosophical endeavor of long and venerable standing, at the end of which one can find Lacan's infatuation with matheme. (One can add that the most prominent example of this, the notorious formulas of sexuation, is entirely based on a certain reading of Aristotle's logical quadrangle.)

If one takes even a cursory look at *Encore (Seminar XX, 1972/73)* there is the striking fact that Lacan introduces two concepts (but they were long in the making) which go in completely opposite directions, *lalangue* and matheme, without ever explaining their conceptual relation, their complicity or opposition. For Cassin, there is a choice to be made. Indeed her book *Jacques le sophiste* (2012), with its ambition to spell out the relations between logos, sophistry and psychoanalysis, ends on the note of an emphatic choice. Let me quote the last sentence of the book,¹¹ first in her elegant French and then in my clumsy and glossing English translation:

Lacan de rester les bras ballants entre l'amour du mathème aux relents de philosophie et l'effectivité, au moins aussi joyeuse qu'angoissante, d'un blabla de parlêtre – que, et pas seulement en tant que femme, je choisis.¹²

Lacan stays balancing [oscillating, but this can also mean undecided, or idly, helplessly] between [on the one hand] the love for matheme with philosophical residues [where philosophy is still lingering] and [on the other hand] the efficacy, equally joyful and anguishing [at least just as joyful as anguishing], of a blabla of a speaking being – which, and not only as a woman, I choose.

The final word is thus 'I choose', 'je chosis', the choice that Barbara Cassin emphatically assumes as her own with this parting shot. There is a choice to be made between *Jacques le philosophe* and *Jacques le sophiste*, and it appears that there are two souls residing in Lacan's breast, just as in Faust's, the soul of a lingering philosopher and that of a sophist. They are at odds, at least in the way she presents her case, and it's the latter that would have to be chosen.

This choice subtends Cassin's entire argument and the final sentence takes a stand on something that kept presenting itself as a

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¹¹This is the last sentence before the Epilogue, which is written in another tenor and gives an account of an autobiographical event.

¹² Cassin 2012, p.238

choice throughout the book. E. g. the passage where she briefly comments on a quote from Lacan's ... *ou pire*:

'The real affirms itself, through an effect which is not the least, by affirming itself in the impasses of the logic [...]. There we can touch by the finger, in a domain which appears to be the most certain [namely arithmetic], that which opposes the entire sway of discourse [*la prise du discours*], the logical exhaustion, that which introduces an irreducible gap [*béance*]. It is there that we designate the real.' [Lacan 2011, p. 41] Hence my question, which persists since the prologue: are there [would there be] two distinct ways to touch the real, the enjoyment of discourse [*la jouissance du discours*] and the matheme?¹³

The discourse vs. the matheme – such are the terms of a choice, posited midway through the book as a question, to be decisively resolved in the last sentence. (But was there ever really an unresolved question? Wasn't there rather a decision already taken at the beginning, defining the standpoint from which the book could be written at all? A script subtending already its title?). The choice furthermore involves a choice in favor of enjoyment, enjoyment which pertains to the discourse as such, to the blabla, to speaking for the pleasure of speaking – which was what the sophists were constantly accused of. Whereas it seems that there can be no question of the enjoyment of matheme – is matheme thus singularly devoid of enjoyment, the kill-joy?¹⁴ It seems that discourse with its *lalangue* is endowed with an endless and limitless proliferation of enjoyment, whereas the matheme looks like an attempt to cut it short.

If the sophist is to be rehabilitated and put on a par with the analyst, one can see that there are indeed some statements by Lacan that clearly point to the support of the sophist. Apart from the one put up as the motto (the psychoanalyst as the presence of the sophist in our age) we can also read e. g.: "I was wrestling with [Plato's] *Sophist* during these pseudo-holidays. Probably I must be too much of a sophist myself for this to interest me."¹⁵ He seems to be unimpressed by Plato's condemnation

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¹³ Ibid., p.153

¹⁴ Cassin opposes Badiou's coupling of matheme and anxiety (anxiety being a tell-tale sign of touching upon truth, *index veri*) with the coupling of discourse and enjoyment. But surely anxiety is also an index of enjoyment (of its too-muchness)? In the last sentence she quite rightly by-passes this distinction ('just as joyful as anguishing'). But there is no word of the 'affect of matheme'.

¹⁵ "La troisième", quoted in Cassin 2012, p. 56. '*Efficace*', says Lacan – but what is the relation between efficiency and truth? Is truth efficient? "The fact that the sense of their interpretation had effects doesn't entail that the analysts are in the truth, its effects are incalculable. It doesn't bear witness to knowledge since in its classical definition knowledge is ascertained by a possible prediction." (Lacan 2001, p. 558) So both knowledge and truth are divorced from efficiency.

and rather taking the side of the absent sophist under attack, but admitting to not knowing enough about the status of the sophists at the time. Furthermore, part of Lacan's constant and ample engagement with philosophy can be put, in a wide sense, under the heading of what Cassin proposes as "sophistic listening to the history of philosophy",¹⁶ listening with an analytic ear to the embeddedness of philosophical concepts in *lalangue*, their slippages, the unwitting discursive consequences of philosophical propositions (think of his multiple readings and usages of cogito, to take but one instance). – Moreover, there is the striking similarity in the fact that analysts, like the sophists, take money for what they are doing, thus entering into the suspicious realm of being paid for 'delivering (the alleged) knowledge/truth'. "There is like a black-out concerning what people were getting from the oracle of the sophists. No doubt there was something efficient/effective, for we know that they were paying them very dearly, like the psychoanalysts."¹⁷ Even more: Socrates "was practicing a sort prefiguration of analysis. Had he demanded money for it [...] he would have been an analyst, before the Freudian letter."¹⁸ But I can't pursue this line here any further.

In this choice, such as it is set up by Cassin, it is not merely the enjoyment which is at stake, but in the same breath the question of sexual difference. Barbara Cassin chooses '*pas seulement en tant que femme*', not 'just like a woman' (*pace* Bob Dylan), not only in the capacity of a woman (one can perhaps surmise the structure of 'this is not my mother), thereby implying that there is indeed the feminine side of enjoyment which is at stake in discourse, in the blabla, which then entails that the other side, the side of matheme pertaining to philosophy (*aux relents de philosophie*), is to be taken as masculine. There is a choice of femininity vs. masculinity, in line with sophistry vs. philosophy, and one has to opt for the feminine part, but not merely on the grounds of being a woman – the implication is that there would have to be grounds independent of sexual position for making the choice of the feminine side as the viable one, rather than the matheme in its alleged masculinity. This could be strangely in line with Nietzsche's exclamation that truth is a woman (in the opening line of *Beyond good and evil*), so that in this new avatar the non-whole nature of *lalangue* would present the part of the speaking truth, while matheme would represent the 'masculine' knowledge trying to capture it, with no more success than the caricature philosophers, clumsy seducers, that Nietzsche depicted and derided.

There is a subplot to the sexual part of this story, for the particular proponent of the matheme who is secretly and openly the target all

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16 Cassin 2012, p.63

17 "Mon enseignement, sa nature et ses fins" (1968), quoted in Cassin 2012, p. 80.

18 Lacan 2001, p.569

along is Alain Badiou, and on only needs to peruse his books to see the absolute centrality of the matheme, at the simplest as something which is not the effect of discourse and cannot be reduced to the properties of language. Thus she would find in Badiou, her closest friend-foe, a worthy representative of masculinity. So we are bemused to learn that Badiou is a man and Cassin is a woman, and that this bears important theoretical consequences, if obliquely, for of course there can be no question of biological sex – but nevertheless ... As they state themselves in the Introduction to their joint book:

What is at stake in these two studies, or readings, or openings, one by a woman and the other by a man (an important point), is indeed knowledge, considered by one of us in terms of its intimate connection with matters of language and by the other in terms of what philosophy purports to say about truth. So, with regard to Lacan's "L'Étourdit," to the modern theory of sexualization, and to the paradoxes of language and the unconscious, the (male) philosopher, at any rate, can say that what we are dealing with here is a new confrontation between, or a new distribution of, the masculinity of Plato and the femininity of sophistics.¹⁹

So, oddly, they both subscribe to this division themselves. For Cassin, the danger that lurks in matheme is not so much that of reinserting psychoanalysis into philosophy (that too), but rather that of inserting philosophy into Lacan, to make him espouse the philosophical agenda through the matheme, and generally through the concern about logic and formalization, the dimension cut of a different stuff than the punning of discourse and its *jouissance*. "My question remains the same since the beginning: do matheme and discourse touch the real in a different way?"²⁰

Badiou, for his part, also always adamantly insisted, throughout his career, that there is choice to be made, first of all the emphatic choice of philosophy vs. sophistry. The mission of philosophy is ultimately to repeat, to reassert, in each epoch and under different circumstances, the Platonic gesture against the ever new varieties of sophists. The battle of/for philosophy is always the same, up to the new avatars of sophistry under the guise of the linguistic turn, deconstruction and various postmodern brands of anti-philosophy. But the aim of Badiou's philosophical project is not that of rescuing meaning against sophistry, as in the tradition, anything but, the crucial point is the insistence on the fundamental status of matheme, obvious in his notorious stance that

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19 Badiou & Cassin 2017, p.2

20 Ibid. p.185

'mathematics is ontology'.²¹ *Matheme* is *hors-sens*, outside of sense, and even more, *ab-sens*, ab-sense. There is again the question of choice. In his book on Parmenides, e. g., he proposes a choice when confronting this beginning of philosophy, to oppose the fickleness of discursivity by the stringency of *matheme*: "Poetry and predominant language, or *matheme* and formalism? The readers are called upon to choose ..."²² He too subscribes, if implicitly, that there is a choice to be made ultimately between what Lacan called *matheme* and what he called *lalangue*. *Matheme* may seem to be a better candidate for a conveyor of philosophy in its quest for truth, not entangled in the 'linguistic turn' and the endless quirks of language. No division into *langue* and *parole*, no puns and slides, and furthermore no voice, since the mathematical-logical terms that can only be written. If speech is duplicitous and masks as much as it reveals, then *matheme* purports to wear no mask – or does it? As opposed to Lacan's occasional identification with the sophist, one can invoke his resolute insistence on *mathemes* as what can be integrally transmitted and insistence on mathematical formalization as 'our goal, our ideal'.²³ There is the endless poetics, effusiveness, proliferation of *lalangue* that has to be brought to the austerity and asceticism of the *matheme*. And one can invoke Lacan's mechanism of *la passe*, the end of analysis, as the necessary trajectory from the one to the other, since *la passe* ultimately involves the production of transmissible knowledge epitomized by *matheme*.

Is there indeed a matter of choice? We seem to be confronting a strange situation where Badiou and Cassin have made a different choice on the basis of the 'same' Lacanian tenets, one opting ultimately for the *matheme* and standing up for philosophy, the other opting for *lalangue* with all its homonymy and puns, opting for the sophistry inscribed into language as its structural effect. Cassin, sidestepping the issue somewhat, says at some point: "Why not *matheme*, among other things? – would I gladly say, just as the sophist says apropos of truth."²⁴ So why not truth, among other things, but not as the ultimate issue, focusing philosophy on the (fateful?) path of the absolute. She seems to be saying 'I gladly (*volontiers*) concede truth, and *matheme*, but only among other things, *entre autres*.' Badiou, for his part, can only be horrified by this kind

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21 For the present purpose we can set aside the differences between mathematics, set theory, traditional and mathematical logic.

22 Badiou 2014, p.12

23 For Badiou the sophist's choice, the choice of anti-philosophy, can be ultimately reduced to the thesis that 'there is no truth'. Thus for him Lacan represents a paradoxical anti-philosopher who resolutely insists on truth, an anti-sophist anti-philosopher. For Cassin, the sophist "doesn't aim at truth, but at discourse: being, and truth if you wish [!], is an effect of saying." (2012, p. 76) Thus not the abandonment of truth, but truth that has the makings of another 'sophistic effect', among many.

24 Cassin 2012, p. 184

of offhand talk, he adamantly insists on holding on to truth in its eternity (beyond the temporal dialectic that psychoanalysis is bound with, cf. Badiou 2017, p. 61), and holding on to truth that is not constituted by the act of saying (beyond any kind of linguistic turn – and *matheme* is the best vehicle to oppose the linguistic turn). It is as though each of the two, Badiou and Cassin, would take one part of Lacan, and both things are definitely part of the Lacanian doctrine, make their choice and ultimately play the one against the other.

I would rather like to argue that one should refuse or circumvent the terms of this choice. There is no choice to be made between the two, both point into a radical direction of the real that is at the core of psychoanalysis, and it is precisely in their mutual co-dependence and co-implication that one can get to this real. Lacan's insistence on both has to be taken seriously. The centrality of reflections on language made his early fame: "The function and field of language and speech in psychoanalysis" was the title of his essential manifesto, the notorious 'Rome discourse' in 1953; "the unconscious structured as a language" was the canonical formula, and this all seemed to entail the prevalence of the symbolic, massively present in his teaching in the fifties. But 'language' was then pushed into two opposite directions, that of *lalangue*, the capacity of language for homophony and punning, and that of *matheme*, the formalization and the letter. Both presented language under the auspices of something that internally exceeds its anchorage in the symbolic, two ways in which the symbolic cannot be considered in its separation and autonomy, sustained merely by the signifier. Two ways in which the signifier cannot be considered in its 'purity and independence', which was the great dream, the fundamental fantasy of structuralism.

One could say, at the risk of simplification, that language was traditionally considered through its two manifestations, the vocal and the written, the voice and the letter. The Saussurean revolution, the introduction of the logic of the signifier, sidestepped this division altogether and proposed a completely abstract logic of differentiability as the key to language, an immaterial logic disregarding its two material manifestations, or regarding them as secondary and derivative. Considering our problem in this light, it is as if *lalangue* reintroduced the dimension of 'the voice in the signifier' (homonymy, echoes, sound similarities etc.) and the *matheme* reintroduced the dimension of 'the letter in the signifier' (voiceless, senseless, something that can only be written etc.). But this 'reintroduction' was not like going back to the traditional division, it operated on the basis of the symbolic, presenting its own internal twists, 'excrescences' of their inherent materialization – and there is no pure signifier without its 'becoming material' (or rather 'becoming object of the signifier'). What they both have in common is that they don't abide by the pure differentiability which defined the symbolic order in its autonomy, yet they are not introduced as something

heterogeneous or alien to the symbolic, they inhere in it and inhabit it as its own inner 'slides'. But this may then put into question the stark division into the three dimensions of the symbolic, the imaginary and the real which was the foundation of Lacan's teaching throughout, the three dimension to be knotted together on the basis of their being irreducible to each other (and indeed the introduction of *sinthome* in later Lacan can well be seen as a symptom of it – not without a pun).

But presenting *lalangue* and *matheme* as derivative of the symbolic, as its slides and excrescences, is perhaps a misguided way of rendering what is at stake. Maybe there is a more radical change of perspective in the balance, which puts into question the precedence of the symbolic altogether. There is a radical difference in envisaging language via the symbolic or through the lens of *lalangue*. As Milner lucidly put it:

La langue [language] is entirely reducible to negative relations; each linguistic sign exists only as opposed to another; its elements have no positivity by themselves; their sensorial qualities are of no consequence. [...] Homophony, on the contrary, depends on the *qualia*. *Lalangue* is integrally positive and affirmative.²⁵

But if they are of cut of a different stuff, then the question of precedence is blurred and may be overturned. Which comes first? One can make a simple observation that when first learning a language the child actually enters its domain through babbling, experimenting with sounds and their repetitions, in one word, through *lalangue*, which is only subsequently regulated by the symbolic. The advent of the symbolic thus structurally involves a repression of homophony.²⁶ *Lalangue* would then appear to be the fundamental given, in its positivity, and the signifying logic would rather involve a 'dematerialization', or immaterialization, or negativization of this positivity, its repression. What appears as an additional 'ornament' actually comes first. Furthermore, this reversal of perspective would entail that *lalangue* can no longer be seen as the realm of mere chance encounters – it can only appear so if we consider it from the standpoint of the symbolic and its necessity (necessity following from its purely negative nature). Lacan says that much: the fact that there is homophony (like between *deux* and *d'eux* in French, to take his often used example) is not to be attributed to mere contingency: "It is neither mere chance nor arbitrariness, as Saussure says."²⁷ But if it's no contingent, it

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25 Milner 2017, p.88

26 This would account for the privilege of the mother tongue: it is the only language where *lalangue* precedes the acquisition of *la langue*. With all other languages one learns the sequence is reversed.

27 Lacan, "La troisième", quoted in Milner 2017, p. 82.

doesn't follow that it is necessary, it rather pertains to a realm which is neutral between chance and necessity²⁸, beyond both, indifferent to both.

If *lalangue* can thus be seen as something primary in relation to *la langue* and the symbolic, then *matheme* presents a different problem and temporality. It is based on an intricate 'artificial' invention and construction designed to counteract the insufficiencies of the symbolic, its impasses and slides, most prominently its constant contamination with *lalangue*. *Matheme* is the anti-*lalangue*. It should purge the language of contingency (stemming from the persistent return of the repressed *lalangue*, hence the 'sophistic effect'). Its weapon is the sturdiness of the letter, but a letter which is divorced from the phonematic nature of language, from its function to literalize the phonemes, the apparent first purpose of alphabetical writing.²⁹ It is the dimension of the letter precisely irreducible to the symbolic (and its purely negative differentiability).

There is another kind of inversion at stake: if in the whole tradition of what Derrida has called phonocentrism writing was seen as secondary, derivative, supplementary, accessory etc. in relation to the primacy of the pure self-presence of the voice (the notorious 'metaphysics of presence'), hence dangerous and disruptive, then with the *matheme* and the whole enterprise of formalization it is precisely this secondary auxiliary addition that gains the stature of the savior, the steadfast weapon against the vagaries of chance encounters of voices and sounds. It purports to be the rampart of necessity against the tides of linguistic chance – but the point of its Lacanian use is rather to pinpoint its utter ambiguity (and to push it a bit, perhaps to render it too 'neutral between necessity and chance').

From this perspective *lalangue* and *matheme* would thus present the dimensions of what comes 'before' and 'after' the symbolic, and their strange short-circuit, if there is one, would consequently lead to Lacan's abandonment of the precedence of the symbolic altogether.³⁰

I will limit myself to two points. Lacan doesn't address the relation between the two strands directly, but nevertheless gives some cursory indications. The *mathemes*, he says, "are integrally transmitted. We haven't the slightest idea what they mean, but they are transmitted."³¹ They are capable of integral transmission at the price of meaning and

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28 Milner 2017, p.86

29 Freud frequently uses the analogy with hieroglyphs and rebuses when speaking of the language of the unconscious. Couldn't one see there, in analogy with the repression of *lalangue*, the 'return of the repressed' in the realm of writing, of what was repressed and relegated to a mythical past by the invention of the alphabet?

30 To complicate matters even further, Badiou, from his philosophical standpoint, would not agree with this description and would insist on the precedence of the mathematical ontology – but this 'precedence', if this is the word, is in line with the eternal nature of truth in philosophy, disregarding the temporality of its emergence. But this is a matter of another development.

31 Lacan 1998, p.110

understanding. But this comes with a warning: “Nevertheless, they are not transmitted without the help of language, and that’s what makes the whole thing shaky.”³² And more pointedly:

Mathematical formalization is our goal, our ideal. Why? Because it alone is *matheme*, in other words, it alone is capable of being integrally transmitted. Mathematical formalization consists of what is written, but it only subsists if I employ, in presenting it, the language I make use of. Therein lies the objection: no formalization of language is transmissible without the use of language itself. It is in the very act of speaking that I make this formalization, this ideal meta-language, *ex-sist*.³³

Furthermore, there is the famous “The analytical thing will not be mathematical. [*Le truc analytique ne sera pas mathématique.*] This is why the discourse of analysis differs from the scientific discourse.”³⁴ There is the first important point: the formalization of *matheme* is not to be conceived as a meta-language in relation to the ordinary language and its *lalangue*. But not only because we always have to use language as a vehicle and the framing of formalization, but more importantly because there is no meta-language in relation to the real, and this holds for both *lalangue* and *matheme*. There is no meta-relation between the two because they both touch upon a real, rather than designating it or trying to spell it out as something external to them. The real is not some dimension out there that they would try to pin down, but it emerges precisely in the paradoxes and impasses of their deployment, and there is no other way of getting to it. Regarding the relation between the two the point is not that the *matheme* has the capacity to be rid of equivocity, ambiguities and slides of language (epitomized by *lalangue*), so that we could then hold on to the letter and formalization in its univocity as the best way to tackle the real. The point is rather that formalization, in its effort to cure the impasses of language, itself runs into its own impasses. Both sides in their seeming opposition are rather held together by their shared impasse, although it may appear under very different guises in the one and the other, and it is by their shared impasse that they pertain to the real.

Thus formalization is not a way out of the trickery, ambiguity and homonymy of language, but rather a way of formalizing it, seizing it, yet not through the neutrality and stability of logical form: the history of

.....
32 Ibid

33 Ibid., p.119

34 Ibid., p. 117

logic is the history of tackling paradoxes produced by its initial gesture itself, the impasse that formalization itself has always entailed. Just as “a language [...] is nothing else but the sum total of equivocations that its history has allowed to persist there”,³⁵ so the logic is nothing but the sum total of paradoxes it had to tackle since its inception (starting with the liar paradox even before, which extended its long shadow to Russell’s critique of Frege): “I will just recall that no logical elaboration, starting from before Socrates and also elsewhere than in our tradition, has ever proceeded but through a kernel of paradoxes – to use the term that is acceptable everywhere.”³⁶ Logic may not be a matter of punning and slides, it was invented precisely to thwart them, yet this invention itself cannot escape the re-inscription of the very impasse it was trying to avoid and to cure. But this is not to be seen as its failure and deficiency: the fact that it necessarily leads to impasses is the way that it holds to the real. The logic, the *matheme*, is not a happy way of how to disentangle oneself from a mess, but how to run into another mess by trying to avoid the first one. The formalization always turns out to be the formalization of the impasse of formalization.³⁷

This is also why proposing *matheme* as masculine and the *jouissance* of *lalangue* as feminine is a questionable way of conceiving it, for, first, the paradoxes of the impossibility of inscribing or defining the sexual difference pertain to both sides, and the logical way of circumscribing the feminine position is the very point of the formulas of sexuation – they inscribe precisely the impossibility of its inscription (inscribing the impossibility of writing what “doesn’t stop not being written”³⁸ – *matheme* as such is not a ‘male’ way of inscribing the exceeding feminine impossibility and thus bringing it to the letter, an attempt to bound the unbounded). To make it quick, ‘Gödel’, at the simplest, may be taken as an index of the non-whole, non-totalizable nature of logic itself, the impossibility of its simple placement on the masculine side. Another way of putting it, the speaking errant truth of sophistry (‘I am the sophist who always speaks the truth’) and the *matheme* don’t relate to each other as truth and knowledge: *matheme* is precisely not the knowledge spelling out the errant truth in no uncertain logical-mathematical terms, it is itself another way of presenting the errant truth and its impasses, not in any meta-position in relation to it.³⁹

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35 Lacan 2001, p.490

36 Ibid., p.482

37 For all this cf. the striking analysis of Zupančič 2017, pp. 66-70.

38 Lacan 1998, p.94

39 Badiou argues quite rightly and at length that there is a Lacanian triad truth-knowledge-real where none of the terms can be put in meta-relation to others. Cf. Badiou & Cassin 2017, pp. 49 ff.

If the aim of analysis is the production of transmissible knowledge, hence the procedure of *la passe*, this entails a reduction of the proliferation of sense (propelled by free associations, interpretation etc.), cutting it short, producing a break, a cut not merely of non-sense, but of ab-sense.⁴⁰ As Lacan put it:

“[Interpretation] is directed not so much at the meaning as towards reducing it to the non-meaning of the signifiers, so that we may rediscover the determinants of the subject’s entire behavior [...] not in its signifiatory dependence, but precisely in its irreducible and senseless character *qua* chain of signifiers.”⁴¹

So there is a fundamental imperative of formalization, the reduction of the signifiers to the senseless letter, yet this shouldn’t be too quickly translated into a choice between *lalangue* and matheme. To put it bluntly and most economically: “All Lacanian word plays are mathemes.”⁴² They condense the endless punning into formulas that, despite their seeming demeanor of witticisms, present the radical direction of ab-sense, a break. The proliferation of punning can be cut short by a pun – if it’s a proper one, i. e. if it can function as a matheme. This is what makes the difference of ‘Lacanian puns’, with their capacity to become formulas, to the vast propensity to punning at large.

There is another way of approaching the problem, already started above, and this is my second point. One can say that there are two conditions for the unconscious: first, no unconscious without homonymy, the contingent encounter of sounds, the echoes, the re-con-sonances, the realm of chance beyond the differential logic of the signifier and its necessity; and second, no unconscious without the letter, and one can sense this already in Freud’s constant use of ‘metaphors’ of cypher, deciphering, of rebus and hieroglyphs when speaking of the unconscious, based on the implicit analogy with writing. This becomes explicit with Lacan: one of his most famous texts bears the title “The instance of the letter in the unconscious” (1957), where the implied difference between

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40 Cassin argues that Freud’s enterprise could be largely put under the heading of looking for “sense in the nonsense”, as the general thrust of his interpretations, which for Cassin qualifies “the entire Freudian project as submitted to Aristotelianism” (Cassin 2012, pp. 135-136), an expanded salvaging of sense, reaching even to the remotest corners of nonsense. Whereas Lacan’s endeavor ultimately aims at “nonsense in the sense” (p. 138), abandoning altogether the Aristotelian “decision of sense”. Hence ab-sense beyond the opposition sense/nonsense and also beyond *hors-sens* (cf. pp. 180-181), a point that Badiou concurs with.

41 Lacan 1979, p.212

42 Milner 2017, p.88

the signifier and the letter looms large.⁴³ Not just the instance of the signifier, but the letter and its inscription. It was only much later that he could fully spell this out with his theory of the matheme. Thus we have on the one hand the voice value of sound encounters in homophony, and on the other the senseless letter deprived of voice value, both based on ‘materialization’ rather than on the purely negative nature of the symbolic, on ‘becoming voice’ and ‘becoming letter’ of the signifier. Both voice and letter are that in the signifier that doesn’t contribute to making sense. But they seem to be opposed and unrelated, with no common measure, the volatility of the passing voice vs. the fixity of the letter.

There is a long tradition that imposed a ‘spontaneous’ view that in this opposition the voice is conceived as feminine, evoking the boundless feminine *jouissance*, whereas the letter is regarded as masculine (the letter of the law, logos, logic etc.). In my book on the voice I spent a long time scrutinizing the long and inveterate ‘metaphysical’ tradition of combatting the seductive, intoxicating and threatening powers of the feminine voice (the emblematic instance are the Sirens), the constant source of danger and decay, by the means of logos, the anchorage in the word, the letter, the unity of sense, the submission to the law.⁴⁴ The Lacanian point is simply that one shouldn’t give in to this spontaneous hang, this quasi-natural tendency, that one should insist not simply on their co-belonging, but on their speculative unity, as it were. This is where the Hegelian infinite judgment is perhaps the conceptual device that needs to be put to its full use: that the voice can ultimately be epitomized by the letter of the matheme, and that the letter in its seeming fixity ‘equals’ the vacillation and fleetingness of the voice. As in Hegel, the infinite judgment acknowledges the full discordance and incommensurability, the cleft, the non-totalizable nature of the two entities, yet their co-belonging through this very cleft. The spirit of *lalangue* (pertaining to what is in French most appropriately called *mot d’esprit*), the bone of the letter? *Même combat*.

If there is no choice to be made between the two, this then opens up the field of many stark and arduous choices and decisions concerning the truth, the knowledge and the real.

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43 One can further recall the reading of Poe’s “The purloined letter” in early Lacan, where the ambiguity letter/letter is intended and put to use. Implicitly it’s not merely the question of the signifier but of the letter.

44 Dolar 2006, pp.42-52

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The Forgetfulness of Ontology and the Metaphysical Tendencies of Contemporary Lacanism

Christian Ingo Lenz
Dunker

Abstract: In this article we start from the hypothesis that the psychoanalysis of Lacan constitutes a discourse that takes the critical exercise of ontology as a defense against metaphysics, both in Science and in philosophy. Forgetting this position the later tendencies in lacanian studies bring us back to metaphysics. These tendencies evolve the consideration of the Real out of time, the idealists perspective about the concept of signifier, the naturalization of the notion of jouissance, the positive of the concept of being and the fetishisation of the practice of transmission in psychoanalysis.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, critics, science, anti-philosophy

1. Ontology as critique of metaphysics

Against the tradition which associates philosophy with metaphysics and metaphysics with poetic irrationality and poetry with anti-scientific attitude, Lacan seems to have been interested, from beginning to the end, in realizing the criticism of metaphysics that psychoanalysis involuntarily or unknowingly consumed.

Such criticism begins with the refusal of atomism, psychologism and the dualism of substance, regent in the psychiatry of 1930s, mobilizing for authors such as Politzer¹ and Meyerson². It extends into the refusal of the empiricist model of history, drawn from Hegel and Heidegger and to the foundations of science, first based on Koyre³, then Frege⁴ and finally assimilating Althusser⁵. But the fourth and most important Lacanian critique of metaphysics will be located in his theses on sexuation, where relations between universality and particularity will be questioned, and its very own concept will be put to the test⁶.

This program, thus summarized, has the same generic plan of questioning metaphysics as a resumption of what it would have excluded, at every moment, to be constituted as such. This has been demonstrated by Lacan commentators dedicated to this matter. For example, Cassin⁷ suggests that Lacan is an anti-Aristotelian, and by extension non-Eleatic, because his Philosophy of language rescues the sophists and their disjunction between being and speaking and she says it precisely

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1 Politzer 1932.

2 Meyerson 1908.

3 Koyré 1998.

4 Frege 1867.

5 Althusser 1973

6 Lana and Ambra 2016.

7 Cassin 2012.

based on the theory of sexualization. Bass⁸ showed that recovery from exclusion of the Cartesian subject and of the truth (foreclosure) is ultimately a resumption of the problem of the origin of modern philosophy. Žižek⁹ has carried out the Althusserian program, with the support of the Lacanian theory, showing how science and part of the contemporary philosophy moves upon metaphysical presuppositions that constitute the force of their ideological action. Badiou¹⁰ explicitly aligns himself with the project of Lacanian formalization in order to propose his ontology expressed in mathematical language. Parker¹¹ has renewed Marxist theory and has a critique of psychology supported by the Lacanian critique. Amongst us, Safatle¹² showed how the Lacanian program of an ontology of negativity allows to reconfigure the criticism of Frankfurt School lineage and to found a new theory of recognition. I tried¹³ to articulate a psychoanalytic psychopathology based on the re-reading of clinical structures from the non-All logic, articulated by Lacan as a critique of metaphysics and its most elementary presuppositions: identity, unity and not contradiction.

In a text on metaphysics in psychoanalysis Ricardo Goldenberg¹⁴ argues that what makes psychoanalysis a worldview is the loss of its unity, a kind of corruption of its field, whether considered in practical or theoretical terms. My argument, on the contrary, is that what makes psychoanalysis an ideology or a worldview is not a treason of the unity of the psychoanalytic field¹⁵, but the suspension of the critical exercise of its metaphysics, which there includes the metaphysics of the unity of the psychoanalytic field. Its main effect is production of a substance called "the analytic" subjected to a grammar of recognition similar to that of the phlogiston. In fact, the conflict that inhabits it historically may not be done only about the controversy over authority and rigor, but also in accordance with the more important ontological concept in psychoanalysis, that is, the concept of conflict.

When Freud states that psychoanalysis integrates a worldview

8 Balmés 2008.

9 Žižek 2012.

10 Badiou 1996.

11 Parker 2012.

12 Safatle 2005.

13 Dunker 2015.

14 Goldenberg 2016

15 "The problem is that by disregarding the course of the field from which we should take the floor, we make psychoanalysis something that should not be: an ideology. It is very convenient to quote Freud saying that his science is not a Weltanschauung - worldview, and then treats it as if it were," Goldenberg 2016

proper to science¹⁶, this suits to confirm the presence of a certain metaphysics, perhaps Newtonian, perhaps derived from the science Freud learned back in his day. Let's remember the three Kantian metaphysical themes: *world*, soul and God. The critique to the psychoanalysts who opinionated about the world, then shows itself to be a metaphysical fallacy, both because it despises the method of criticism as a common practice with antiphilosophy, or because it reifies the notion of psychoanalytic field, in a linguistically naive concept of discourse as the unit of theses and also, because without a concept of psychoanalyst, that resists to the logical or topological analysis, "psychoanalyst" is an empty term or a useless empirical description.

Is from this combination of misunderstandings that it results the confusion between giving opinions about the world and to participate in a public debate. Let us remember that a public debate is formed by the space and of the public interests. In a public debate it is expected the public use of reason and not just a defense of private interests. In there politics and science combine, art and education and so on. To imagine that psychoanalysis would have only originated a reprinted version of a certain kind of social specialist, who talks about his affairs with guaranteed authority, is exactly to ignore the ideological marriage between the university discourse and the master's discourse.

An ideology, as Laclau¹⁷ has shown, does not lie in the pertinence or impertinence of what is enunciated to a field or to its specialists, but in the enunciation that articulates them. Nothing is more ideological than to presume that the psychoanalytic field is, in itself, safe from ideology or that metaphysics comes from external impurities, of philosophical nature, or from internal impurities resulting from the poor understanding of the psychoanalysts, of the lack of rigor or of losses of this field. Here the critical tradition will repeatedly agree that, the greatest aspiration of ideology, its *shiboleth*, is to present itself as non-metaphysical and non-ideological, but neutral, exempt or indifferent.

Although it develops in its own way and with a very different scope than we find in philosophy this program of criticism of metaphysics is nourished by a common diagnosis originally formulated by Heidegger. For the author of *Being and Time*¹⁸, the task of philosophy is to deconstruct formations of meaning or discourses that naturalize or essentialise being. The metaphysics of presence, its belief in the a-historicity of

16 "I think psychoanalysis is incapable of creating a particular worldview. You do not need it; she forms part of science and can adhere to the scientific world view. But this one deserves this grandiloquent name, because it does not contemplate the whole, is too incomplete, does not intend absolutism at all, nor form a system," Freud 1932.

17 Laclau 2015.

18 Heidegger 1988.

the forms of language and thinking, the assumption of the autonomous subject, the perceptive faith are current topics in the matter. The Heideggerian diagnosis is as simple as it is powerful: metaphysics makes us forget the fundamental question of being. Metaphysics makes us forget about ontology.

There is at the beginning of the history of Western philosophy, he [Heidegger] thinks a work of colonization of being through the idea, as a result that the concept of being (*étant*, in French), the ["what is being" - translation from Greek *ti to eon*) would have subjugated the "being" to the *to eon*: participle noun derived from the verb to be and henceforth the topic [*sujet*] of ontology. The Platonic idea would be the philosophical imposition of thought of the one¹⁹.

Lacan shares Heidegger's²⁰ diagnosis although not his treatment. The program of the analysis of existence can be putted in parallel with other attempts to reposition ontological problems against their metaphysical solutions, such as the regional ontology in Husserl's phenomenology, the social ontology in neo-Marxism²¹, and the ontology of language in analytic philosophy from the progeny of Wittgenstein²². In general terms, ontological problems are unavoidable either for ethics, for epistemology or for logic, but even more so when it comes to politics and the critique of ideology. They infiltrate the simplest and most indisputable premises of any discourse. Therefore, it is not a matter of eliminating ontology by decree, which is something that the worst metaphysics do, e.g. naive positivism, but of knowing which ontology for psychoanalysis.

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19 Goldenberg 2016

20 Note in the Lacan Translation of the article "Logos" by Martin Heidegger "Let us deviate from the path if and before [going through] any deep metaphysical interpretation, we think the Logos as it is, and if, in thinking it, we take seriously by this that, in reading what is elicited, what comes together to come forward, what can be nothing else than the essence of to unite, who divides everything into the omnitude of the mere presence? The question of what the Logos may be, it has only a consistent answer. We seize it as thus conceived: It lets appear before us what is together. What? In a retouch from Mr. Martin Heidegger apportionment to the text of the provisions of the *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, [Lectures and Essays] one reads: It is the correction of the only traditional election: that one understands in the sense of: it is wise to know that everything is One. The conjecture is in accordance with the instructions. Yet we leave aside the two verbs. By what right? And etc'. which words means, Heraclitus tells us immediately and without is that at the beginning of the word "If all things, (i.e.) what is in the presence ...". Lacan, J. (1956) Traduction of «logos» by Martin Heidegger Author's Note: All references in French are taken from *Association Lacanienne Internationale* (2016) Pas-Tout Lacan. <http://ecole-lacanienne.net/bibliolacan/pas-tout-lacan/>, when it comes to texts, articles and letters, or the Staferla repository (2016) <https://www.google.com/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=staferla>, for references to the Seminars.

21 Badiou 2009.

22 Vidal 2007.

That Lacan opposes Aristotle's ontology, which was transformed into fundamental metaphysics for ancient theology and for modern philosophy, this does not mean at all that he disqualifies the importance of ontological questions in general. In articles such as *The Dream of Aristotle*²³ and in the innumerable allusions to *connerie* or philosophical *boucherie*, Lacan disdains the metaphysical confidence in ontology, by taking seriously its entities and the substantiation of the effects of language. This is the *honte-logie* (the ontological shame), especially because Lacan knows that there is nothing more ontological than to decree the end of ontology. By derogating the necessity of being in its identity and essence, this does not imply affirming the impossibility of being. I therefore advocate that there is in Lacan a negative ontology, not an absence of ontology. To this extent he is not all alone, as Cassin wants. The entire Nietzschean project of reversing Platonism until Foucault, Derrida and Deleuze, seek for a solution to the identity ontology in an ontology of difference. Badiou's program²⁴, of understanding the mathematical language as the only possible ontology, is another solution for Heidegger's diagnosis, in this sense he is living proof that mathematics is not, necessarily anti-ontological. The critical tradition which inherited from the German idealism from Kant to Hegel, through Horkheimer and Benjamin, seeks for a solution to the ontology of positivity in an ontology of negativity, for example, Adorno:

If men no longer had to equate themselves with things, they would need neither a superstructure of things nor an invariant picture of themselves, after the model of things. The doctrine of invariants perpetuates how little has changed; its positivity perpetuates what is bad about it. This is why the ontological need is wrong. It is probably not until after the invariants have fallen that metaphysics would dawn on the horizon²⁵.

The Amerindian perspectivism developed by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro²⁶ and that I have tried to bring to psychoanalysis²⁷, notably to read the theses on sexuation, seeks for a solution to the identitarian and positive ontology. I broadly agree with Andrade²⁸ that perhaps Lacan's interest in Chinese language and thought, has in its horizon the search for an Eastern

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23 Lacan 1978.

24 Badiou 2001.

25 Adorno 2009, p. 89.

26 Viveiro de Castro 2015.

27 Dunker 2015.

28 Andrade 2015.

alternative to Western metaphysics. Also accompanying Safatle²⁹ and Badiou on the idea that the Lacanian ontology is not a discussion about being, but about negativity and universality:

"(...) there is in Lacanian psychoanalysis an access to ontology, since the unconscious is this being that subverts the metaphysical opposition of being and non-being (Badiou, 1982). 'The unconscious of the drives, the it, is this being that is only thinkable with an ontology founded on the negative and that is what Lacan has in mind when he says that the unconscious 'brings to being an entity despite its non-advent'."³⁰

Metaphysical solutions sooner or later begin to present difficulties, exerting effects of power and of blockage to critique. What keeps Lacan's thought alive and relevant to contemporary philosophy is precisely the peculiarity of his critique of the subject's metaphysics, his deconstruction of essentialism in psychopathology, his instabilization of the homo-economical-psychological, his opposition to the practices of alienation, adaptation and conformity, justified by naturalistic and realistic models.

But on the other hand, the intra-Lacanian debate develops on a very slowly pace and with a small capacity to create new problems precisely because of the suspension of criticism. A moment of institutional consolidation and formation of the Lacanian doxa, faces the ontological questions raised in the exegesis of his teaching, making it more and more clear his objections to Freud when it comes to metaphysics. With this, the fundamental work can not only be based on the explanation and comment of text, nor on the segmentation of interpretative units, or in the establishment of theses in simple contraposition, as if those who perceive the problematic of Lacan's ontology were only and simply only ill-informed, "possessed" by the university discourse or "taken" by some nefarious political passion.

Some counter-examples that apparently reverse Lacan's critical disposition can be found in what we call the process of conceptual naturalization of *jouissance*, but also in the idealist reading of the signifier, in the sociological absorption of the father function, in the moral critique of capitalism, in the aestheticization of the end of analysis, in the logical formalism devoid of semantics or semiology, and mainly, in the metaphysical use of the notion of Real (the supreme and first ontological question). The criticism of language in Lacan is at the same time his critique to metaphysics³¹. All these problems of usage and reading of

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29 Safatle 2007.

30 Safatle 2005, p. 321.

31 In other words, if I have tried to elaborate something, it is not a metaphysics but a theory of inter-

Lacan, his discussion about being and un-being, about existence and non-existence, seem to be agglutinated in the theory of sexuation and it is for other reasons that it has been the point of maximum disparity and variance of readings among its commentators.

With that being said, I can not agree with how my friend Ricardo Goldenberg seems to characterize metaphysics exclusively as Greek metaphysics, originating in Parmenides, with its principle of identity, and organized by the Platonic-Aristotelian legacy³² and subsequently as a discourse of positive belief in being. Once and for all: philosophy is not metaphysics, but also its critique. Metaphysics is not reduced to Aristotle, but also to all other variants of ideology. Finally, metaphysics is not ontology, because this last one, discusses the problem of fundamentals in general, this includes foundations of science, culture, logic, language, and so on.

The discussions about essence and appearance, about the nature (*physis* or *arquê*) of being and the principles of its transformation, the theory of causes, as well as the various meanings of substance (*ousia*) did in fact consecrate a certain vocabulary in the matter. However, there are numerous other forms of metaphysics: medieval theological metaphysics, modern metaphysics of the subject, the metaphysics of history, the metaphysics of science, the metaphysics contained in ideology and and so on. The history of philosophy is to a great extent the history of metaphysics, but not only that. Goldenberg seems to forget that philosophy is also the terrain of the critique of metaphysics. Metaphysics has a history and without it, we can not perceive its true ontological problem. Based on Lacan's generic statements about philosophy, the master's discourse, the muzzy philosopher and other compliments are as decisive for the argument as the Freudian image of the philosopher on the torned robe, revolving around the holes of the world was effective in preventing psychoanalysis from becoming a relevant object for philosophy³³.

The strategy of defining fields is highly problematic when it comes to metaphysics. Separating what is philosophy and what is psychoanalysis ignores that what characterizes ontological questions is that which they reintroduce transversely between the disciplines, areas, fields and

subjectivity. Lacan J. (1957) Interview à l'express.

32 "That there are people, very strong people, who come to face what our master Heidegger calls the unsurpassable, absolute and last condition, which is precisely this being-for-death, it seems to me like something that, for the person who today has spoken with the most emphasis, there is only the end of the end, if not the end of the end of an experience that may not be ineffable, - because I do not believe that this is how Heidegger presents it - but something terminal, very at the end of the human night, close to a mutation of being, at least for us contemporaries all engaged in the fatal consequences of Aristotelian metaphysics and other ones." Lacan, J. (1957) *La psychanalyse et son enseignement* [Psychoanalysis and its teachings].

33 Assoun 1995.

practices. This is why there is a philosophical critique of modern science. And also, why we can perceive and criticize psychological or sociological infiltrations in psychoanalysis. This is why Lacan can import notions and concepts that are not originally from psychoanalysis, such as truth and knowledge, subject and repetition, existence and alienation.

Clarifying ontological commitments puts us right back in the debate with science, not because it makes us immediately more scientific, but because it raises questions whose relevance inspires universality, and whose public explanation, in common language, allows for the appreciation from different positions. To disregard foundational issues, attaching to a vocabulary of exclusive usage, or to "areas of practice", supported by a system of justification with emphasis on textual authority, are historical characteristics of the worst kind of metaphysics. This is why it is so important to go back to the problems of ontology in Lacanian psychoanalysis. It is not to transform psychoanalysis into philosophy, but for it to be even more psychoanalysis.

Regardless of our ability to make explicit or to become aware of our ontological commitments, these are being made in the progress of our discourse, following the historical drift of signifiers, concepts and notions, participating in discursive alliances and oppositions that transcend our epistemological and ethical condominiums. I shall list below the main points of post-Lacanian a-criticism, derived from naivete while dealing with the metaphysical thing.

Perhaps it was from the intuition of this articulated set of problems that Lacan perceived the decisive usefulness of an author such as Georg Friedrich Hegel. Not so much for his theses about the purpose of history or his insights on the reconciliation of philosophy and natural science, Lacan perceived in Hegel the solution to a problem that psychoanalysts were not in a position to face, namely: *what is the metaphysics that psychoanalysis needs to criticize in itself?*

2. The Real Out of Time

We think that time is real because change is real. Its events should be predicated on an ordered series of events in the past, present and future, every each containing a moment of truth. It happens that both the past or the future can not be themselves a property of the present event. Therefore, the representation of time is made possible by the exclusion of real time. We can escape such paradox considering time only from the connections between succession and simultaneity. In this case we can argue for the existence of constant temporalities, even if we do not have a representation of them. Here time exists, but its real representation is impossible³⁴.

.....
34 McTaggart 2010.

Let us now observe how the logic of the signifier presumes a temporality of the type B, formed by diachronic or synchronous positions, turns and repetitions. The real, on the contrary, involves a temporality of type A, with constant movements between the infinite present and the possible pasts and futures that it engenders. The temporality of type A is historical and dialectical, the temporality of type B is logical and structural. The two coexist and conflate in the definition of the real in Lacan. This is way the real is the impossible (in B series), but also the contingent (in series A). Let us now briefly remember that, like all definitions that Lacan offers of real are linked to the problem of time, more so than to the theme of space or its representation: the real returns to the same place, the real is the impossible repetition, the real is the time between the thing and its reencounter, the real is lawless. However, the notion of real develops in Lacan as a critique of the immanenism of time. The real is rational and the rational is real, because both of them are united in the improbable and paradoxical temporal contradiction presented above. The real is a register and every register is a form of being and of retain time. However, the real represents the failure of the register as memory and symbolization. It is a problem in the very own function of registering (if we use writing as a reference), or counting (if we use the number as reference), which is why the real will be presented as that "which never ceases to not write itself." The real is the name of a paradox of time, not an enjoyment substance (jouissance) to be realized in the space of individualized bodies.

Remembering that the Real, Symbolic and Imaginary triad was born along with the acts or processes of symbolization, imagery and realization³⁵. The registers comprise a relationship in the Hegelian sense of time of the concept and thus, when thought outside temporality they constitute a typical metaphysical effect. To think the Real only with logic or topology, without facing its connection with time, is the most manifested indication of Lacanian metaphysics. Alan Juranville³⁶, one of the first philosophers to systematically examine Lacan's psychoanalysis clearly perceived this simple and original intuition in his work: Real is the time.

The central problem that separates classical metaphysics from ontology is the problem of time. So when Lacan responds to Miller, saying that his unconscious is not ontic, but ethical and that he "*intends to sieve it in a temporal structure*" he is clearly pointed and committed at a kind of ontology, not to a metaphysics. This is why it does not suffices to say that:

.....
35 Lacan 2014.

36 Juranville 1988.

Ontology and metaphysics are almost synonymous. That's when the word metaphysics is not simply used to say "philosophy" (...) psychology is today the danger of the psychoanalyst. The psychologist, coming from the ranks of philosophy and religion, full of love and meaning to give. Why religion? Because sense is always religious, since it does allow the being to consist³⁷.

Metaphysics is not ontology. The association between being and meaning presumes that there is only one metaphysics and that it involves a positive consideration of being and meaning. Not even the history of religion can agree with this once it includes, for example, the apophatic tradition, or negative theology, which deals with the lack of meaning and inaccessibility of the divine, a tradition that Lacan cites from top to bottom in his work on Angelus Silesius to Jacob Bohème and the Rhenanian mystics of the twelfth century. Psychoanalysis does not resume itself neither to this criticism of meaning nor to the refusal of psychological or philosophical hermeneutics. The discourse on the little of sense or on the little of reality is first and foremost a discourse, producer and inductor of sense.

It is important not to confuse the critique of Aristotle's metaphysics with a refusal of ontology. The program of "*emptying the being*" presumes an ontology, even if it is not the Eleatic ontology. Lacan speaks of the being of the subject, of the unfathomable decision of being (the decision of neurosis), the being of enjoyment, the being of man (which can not be understood without his madness), the being of language (which makes it man), the passions of being, not to speak of the grammar of oppositions between *not being* and *not thinking* (which characterizes the psychoanalytic act). Not to mention the "ontological moment of anxiety". There are many things presumed in the expression "*consistency of being*". Its inverse may imply its non-necessity (contingency), its lack of unity (division), its non-identity (multiplicity) its loss or absence (alienation) and finally its non-particularity or universality (singular).

Safatle³⁸ called this underlying program of Lacan's attitude toward metaphysics of negative ontology. If there is "*no patient who is not a student of Aristotle*"³⁹ this should lead us to think that psychoanalysis is a kind of cure for the metaphysics of identity that we usually locate in the stagirite, and not that it does not have any ontology. If there is something which sets it apart, is the presence of a critique of temporality, consequently of the causality and positivity of being.

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37 Goldenberg 2016, p. 24.

38 Ibid.

39 Lacan 1973.

Opposing to this program which we call, the metaphysical tendencies of the contemporary Lacanism, practices exactly the opposite in its "aesthetic" and "logical" praise of the real. A real out of time, positive and indifferent to significant coincidence.

3. The Idealism of the Significant

A second Lacanian metaphysical tendency proposes a kind of return to Lacan, insisting on the logical or linguistic foundation that would have gone through his theorization from Lévi-Strauss' anthropology to the linguistics of Saussure to Jacobson and later on, to the topological formalizations. For them:

Lacanian metaphysics would work with the idea that there is no other being but those produced by meanings from the signifiers, and this being has no consistency outside the world of word and speech. The being would be imaginary and produced by the symbolic⁴⁰.

The opposition, here presumed, between the true being of the signifier-signified and the false being of the imaginary-in-the-world, is a well-known case of idealistic metaphysics, retaking the misconception of false opposition between transcendental idealism and naive realism. What is "inside language" is opposed to what is "outside language" in an analogous way to what belongs to reason and what is out of reason, what belongs to being (*logos*) and what is outside it. On one side being, on the other nothing.

Against this, we must remember Lacan's hegelianism when affirming that the real is rational and the rational is real, thus, there is a speculative identity between the exterior and the interior and this identity is given in time. It is therefore crucial not to reduce Lacanism to a Kantian criticism of empiricism:

The ethics of the psychoanalyst consists in (...) eliminating all consistency of content of the speeches, suspend the referent for the benefit of thinking sense as an effect of the pure play of signifiers. Because signifiers may have no body, but are perfectly materials⁴¹.

It is absolutely not a question of suspending the reference, but of realizing that Lacan introduces a negative reference: the zero, emptiness, lack, nothingness. This negative reference has a crucial in Lacan's thought

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40 Goldenberg 2016, p.11

41 ibid. 14.

concerning acting as a function of cause, cut, or overdetermination. This is at the core of his ontology and so he starts from a critique of the modal concept of necessity (*ne-cessaire, ne-cesse pas*), as a surrogate for the affirmative universal proposition (the being necessarily is) and culminates in ontological aphorisms such as: "*the woman does not exist*", "there is no sexual relation" and "the Other does not exist". The confusion between the criticism of the reference and negative reference brings psychoanalysis closer to idealism, recalling Berkeley's argument:

(...) there is nothing easier than to imagine trees, for example, in a park or books in a library, and nobody to notice them. But what is this, I ask, if not to form in the mind certain ideas that books or trees and, at the same time, omit formulating an idea of someone to perceive them?⁴²

With this argument, Bishop Berkeley wanted to convince us that all that exists are representations. Nothing making us being able to know how the world is, and we can only conform with a world shaped by our solipsistic dreams. Just as Freud spoke of representations, Lacan will lead us to think about these simpler units of signifiers. But contrary to Freud who spoke about external reality, absolute quantity (Qn) and principle of reality, a certain idealistic render of the signifier forgets the ontological implications surrounding the thesis of the *materialisme* of language enunciated by Lacan.

The problem with such position is that it forbides to state that its opposite is wrong, that is, one who affirms that there is something outside, beyond or short of speech, as for example, the Real can never really be mistaken because deep down we equate language with thought and this with being (logos). If you forbid yourself of saying that the *being exists*, you equally prevents yourself from saying that it *does not exist*. Here we have a case of self-annulling argument. A flip a coin scenario, heads I win, tails you lose. It is an unverifiable truism, even by the simplest Popperean argument, to examine this problem by means of propositional comparison. This is precisely why the theory of sexuation in Lacan is at the same time, a critique of the limits of the propositionality in its relation with the truth and the real. As any radical idealist position, it involves formulating statements about situations that itself has forbidden to think about. If in fact there is nothing other than the being of the signifier-signified, the being of significance, there is neither why nor how to question those who affirm that there is something beyond or below the signifier and the signified. They talk about nothing, about empty about what does not exist, just as Aristotle refers to the sophists in the book gamma of metaphysics. The affirmation of being, whatever its materiality

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42 Berkeley 1988

or form, does not authorize any thesis about non-being. It happens that the non-being and his numerous figures are part of the Lacanian ontology:

The un-being would be the result of taking to the last consequences the theoretical assumption that sustains the fundamental rule of free-association: to the effects of an analysis everything is in the discourse; there is nothing outside of it. There is no body outside the discourse; neither father, nor mother, nor boyfriend outside of discourse. Well noticed, you yourself is not outside the discourse. And this statement, I said, would not be metaphysical but psychoanalytic⁴³.

If, indeed, there is only signifier, the critique of metaphysics exceeds its limits by affirming the non-existence of the extensional universe, of the body and of the subject (after all, it is not that they do not exist, they are only signifiers). This confuses epistemological determination, regarding what we can know and operate, with an ontological claim, over the plane of existence and its universality.

We are obviously affected by processes of which we have no science at all about. There are things which we do not know that we know, but there are also things we do not know that we do not know. Things that do not belong to any discourse, but that affect us nonetheless. In Lacan this is the work of truth, which has not yet been accomplished, in any form of knowledge, which is the basic form of discourse⁴⁴. We are affected by a kind of negativity called *object a*, and by the gap that it indicates. The function of causality, the structure of encounter of the *object a*, as well as the structure of the truth to come exist, even if they do not take place in the signifying articulation. Notice here the reason for so many misconceptions from those who insist on thinking the Real without the time. That I can not know this before the signifier, is an epistemological problem or a logical paradox, but not an ontological assertion. For Lacan the non-being, that which is not yet, is not only characterized as an inert form or as an anodyne indetermination, but as ontological figures of negativity.

To assert that signifier and signified are only ideological illusions would imply to assume that there would be nothing real in the symptom, this is not the case. Illusions are a part of the psychic reality, as Freud said, and we are affected by the Real even though it is impossible to name it and even that this affectation passes through the signifier, the

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43 Goldenberg 2016, p.15

44 Ibid., p. 38, "there is no unconscious, what actually is there is a set of signifiers articulated which Lacan calls 'knowledge'"

letter or by *lalangue*. The notion of real as impossible does not aim to deontologize psychoanalysis, but to establish its ontology as a critique of the metaphysics of identity.

In short, it is not enough to exclude the "*being of signification*" to eliminate the production of identity. Subtracting the "*being of signified*", reducing the "*sense*" or curing someone of his or hers compulsion for "*being understood*" is not to cure him or her of their "*onthologie*" [*honte*, shame]. Ontology is not a synonymous for metaphysics, much less for psychology, just as metaphysics is not a synonymous with philosophy, not even in Lacan. The allusion here is that Freud coined the term metapsychology [*Metapshichologie*] from the term metaphysics [*Methaphisik*] and he was always ashamed of it.

4. The Naturalization of Gozo

Signifying idealism finds its metaphysical pair in the realism of enjoyment. Authors as Miller⁴⁵ and Pommier have concur with a widespread appreciation of the theme of the body, of the Real and of the notion of enjoyment in psychoanalysis. A second group of theorists, such as Melman and Lebrun mobilize themselves to understand the social transformations and the historical movements of the practice and theory of psychoanalytic, seeking alliances ranging from Marxism to comprehensive sociology. In both cases we find unfoldings of the Lacanian affirmation that psychoanalysis contains a single substance, and that such substance is enjoyment. In fact, the economy of pleasure and displeasure, the modalizations of anguish, as well as the vicissitudes of satisfaction and pain which are difficult to reduce to the intuitive functioning of language.

Here I follow the work of Eidelstein⁴⁶ by showing a tendency to think the final of analysis as a reconciliation to being, for example for Colette Soler, where is indicative of a return of the metaphysics of being in reconciliation with itself.

Well, this metaphysical fragility always presents itself by a sort of inversion of method. In Lacan the registers, the orders, the torus, the *heresie*, Real, Symbolic and Imaginary are registers of what? Or, to enunciate the problem by the philosophy of language: "What are the referents of such (ontological) expressions? The registers are registers of the human experience, registers of the speaking being, torus or reality knots, but never "registers of language". Sometimes, language appears identified with the symbolic register, but to say that we only have "access" to something in language does not imply that what exists, exists in language. They always appear and derive from anthropological

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45 Miller 1998.

46 Eilesztein 2015.

linguistic categories, never the opposite. There is the Lacanian metaphysics: start with the registers, to take them as our first philosophy, to subalternate the signifier to the registers.

The operation and naturalization of enjoyment operates by reversing this rule. First there is the enjoyment, the real, excess, then it is paired or deflected in relation to the signifier. But here it is

important not to confuse the argument: it is not because the signifier is the condition of accessibility, the basic materiality, coming from Lacan's Kantian scheme, that "speaking", "thinking" or "writing" the Real and the enjoyment, can only occur from the signifier. As good as it may be, this is an epistemological argument, which deals with the possibility of knowing, not about the possibilities of existence (or consistency, or ex-sistence). Therefore, to start from the exclusion of time and idealism of the signifier is not enough to make a radical critique of the naturalization of enjoyment. In the same way, it seems more critical to apply the topological method of Lacan starting from the logical articulation of the signifier⁴⁷ and from there, deduce the real, the symbolic and imaginary, as well as enjoyment as a Real-Symbolic (phallic) notion, or a real-Imaginary (not-all) notion, or a discursive (surplus enjoyment) notion.

To deduce the entire work of enjoyment from the notion of signifier, without observing this difference between epistemology and ontology, seems to be exactly the case described by Grünbaum of an argument by correspondence (*tally argument*), once the concept of signifier is distended in such ways, supplemented with properties so far from what it would be structurally pertinent to it, that nothing could conter it from then on.

Against this monism of the signifier, the naturalization of enjoyment and its incorporation into a classical ontological system arises. There is one, a fixed substance, although inaccessible. This is not nature, but enjoyment. On the other side of the particle-wave dualism, lies the signifier, which translates positions, points of view, and perspectives on enjoyment, how form shapes matter, how categories seize the experience. The excess of enjoyment matches therefore a deficit of signifier, as the intrusion of the real must be faced by symbolic processes. There is a single substance and multiple points of visit, values or cultures (signifiers-signified) about it. Ontology is fixed, epistemology is variable.

However, I want to believe that this is a metaphysical inversion of the Lacanian proposal. Perhaps this is better expressed by a variable ontology, due to its primary negative characteristic. This can be well perceived when we think about the non-identitarian properties of enjoyment, starting with the fact that this is not an experience of the one.

In Lacan, particularly in his theory of sexuation, the disparity of enjoyments depends of a confrontation between the logical notions

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47 Rona 2012.

of universality and existence. This derives from one more turn in the critique of the metaphysics of identity. Identity usually comprises three properties: reflexivity, transitivity and symmetry. The concept of "non-existence" should not be read as only non-existence or nothing, but as an undecidable corruption of the relation of these properties, which we usually invoke to move from the *identity* of being to the *unity* of being, two historically different problems.

When Lacan speaks of sexual difference he does so in three different ways (1) as un-reflectivity between the semblances or the *shifters* "man" and "woman", (2) as absence of transitivity between the enjoyment of the man side (phallic) and the enjoyment of the woman side (non-phallic) and, as well as (3) dissymmetry between the woman taken as object a and symptom in the masculine phantom and to the man taken as devastation and as the phallus in feminine mythics. This critique of identity causes a disturbance of the traditional metaphysical understanding of unity: it is not about two substances (*ousia*, substance or essence), but about non-being in a double way: not-being-one (to less-than-one) and not being Other (non-one-that do not).

Just as there is a critique of the concept of concept, there is also a critique of the concept of set when applied to sex. This is an ontological question: the passage from one to multiple. Lacan takes it up again, but in negative key, as failure of the one and failure of the Other.

Being can not be one and multiple at the same time. The Greek difficulty with the two is therefore the following: how can it be possible that a number, which is one thing - be composed of two or more things? How can one thing be, at the same time one and multiple. (...) this failure designates the real of sex, this has nothing to do with the difference of the sexes, which is imaginary or, if it wants empirical, instead of logical⁴⁸.

Well, the Lacanian answer corrupts the Aristotelian recommendation of employing the particular proposition always as the minimal (*there is at least one*) and never as the maximum particular (understanding the case *there is none*). But this does not make the actual failure something empirical, even less makes the empirical something that would not be logical. The empirical is as logical as the conceptual, this is a central point of the Lacanian critique of metaphysics. The difference of the sexes is not imaginary but symbolic. The difference, which after all is the most general law of the signifiers, organizes all possible empirisms, allowing them to acquire meanings and the most diverse cultural and particular valencies. But will it be that the bi-dimensional subject does not belong to this three-dimensional world nor does it receives affectation by it,

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48 Goldenberg 2016., p.27

as Eidelsztein argues? Then, how to read what seems to be the central hypothesis of Seminar XX:

My hypothesis is that the individual who is affected by unconscious is the same that constitutes what I call the subject of a signifier⁴⁹.

It is thus perceived that signifier idealism is easily reversed into realism of enjoyment. To consider the body as unity and "being as being of significance"⁵⁰ we introduce a dualism of substance (jouissance-signifier) losing the originality of the Lacanian ontology represented by the temporal movement of non-being or of the un-being. To separate One from Being, is in fact an anti-philosophical operation, but not a very original one, since it presents itself in several metaphysics of multiplicity, for example, in the empiricists, the skeptics, the anti-philosophers, in pre-Socratics like Heraclitus. It is therefore entirely unjustified to say that the temptation philosophical is the temptation or the breath for the One⁵¹, the "inspection of being by the One". As if there was a philosophical consensus that the being is one and not multiple.

The Lacanian novelty is more in the separation between the multiple and the un-being⁵² than in the critique of the unity of being. This happens because the theory of jouissance is a setting of score with two figures of infinity, infinity deduced and understood in the finite, between zero and one for example, and infinity able to create a new form of time. This second figure of real infinity is referred to by the thesis of "y a de l'un" (*Hálgoum*).

Therefore, there is a critique of the imaginary unity represented by love (*Verliebtheit*) and the passions of being (love, hate and ignorance). Here the problem of enjoyment shifts from the ontological question of woman's enjoyment to the epistemological thesis that a woman can enjoy without knowing. Then we have the second critique which is based on the symbolic unity of sexual difference and on the unary trait at the level of the subject's identity. Finally, there is a critique of the Real as the One of Being according to the idea that the "*unconscious is only a metaphorical term to designate the knowledge that only sustains presenting itself as impossible, so that from this time it gets confirmed as real.*"⁵³ That is, if the real is demonstrated, if it does not belong to nature, if it is not

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49 Lacan 1988, p. 179.

50 Ibid.

51 Goldenberg 2016, p.36

52 Following the 'subtractive position of Being' mentioned by Badiou.

53 Lacan 1973, p. 450.

empirically knowable, it does not allow for it to be defined as a unit nor as a multiplicity.

The naturalization of enjoyment does not mistakes in introducing the notion of nature or empiricism connected to the body that would betray the signifying logic, but by leaving unquestioned this concept of nature, thus reintroducing a Real without time and an opposition with an idealistic concept of signifier.

5. The Positivity of Being

It takes an excessively dogmatic and nominalist attitude, if not defensive, not to recognize that a psychoanalysis which appeals to notions such as *truth* and *ignorance*, for the concepts of *subject* and *existence*, for an active interlocution with authors such as Heidegger and Descartes, for details of the ancient philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, for the Western and Eastern mystics such as Lao-Tzé, for almost every logical tradition from Aristotle and Frege to Gödel and Cantor, for the history of the science from Galileo to Maxwell, is not, in any way, in a dialogue with what is conventionally called metaphysics. Yes, to think against it is to think critically, but it is this critique that defines and then proves the affinity between philosophy and psychoanalysis.

It is highly naive, if not inconsequential, to say that a psychoanalysis that faces the problem of the Real and the One, is not in any way questioning the classical ontological figures of universality and necessity. Eidelsztein⁵⁴ showed that Lacan employs 21 equivocations concerning the notion of being, involving neological and discursive developments concentrated in two periods of densification:

(1) Seminar on Identification: *manque à letre* (lack in being), *êntrepensant* (being-thinking), *quelquêtre* (anybody or somebody), *pensêtrer* (thought-being), *tantd'etre* (there-being), D(être)itus (being-said, to be said), *être-male*, *être-femelle* (being male, being macho, being female, being female) in 1967. *Désêtre* (un-being) (1967-1972).

(2) Seminars *...Encore* and *Le Non Dupe errant: Parêtre* (appear-to-be) in 1972-1977. *Pén-être* (penetrate-being) in 1972. *L'être-haine* (being-hate), *êtrenel* (being-eternal), *être-angel* (being-angel, strange), *êtrinitê* (being-eternity) in 1973.

(3) Finally, there are the more sporadic incidence of the terms *mêtre* (master-being) in 1970. *Parlêtre* (speaking-being) in 1975-1980 and *psirlêtre* (psi-being) in 1977.

There is an insistence on Lacan's neological strategy of agglutinating and producing from reuniting the being with its adjective or noun in a single expression employing the method described by Freud, in *Jokes and their relations with the Unconscious*, which is the unification

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54 Ibid.

of words⁵⁵. Here metaphysics is criticized through a practice of language, the practice of the letter, which avoids the metaphysical contours of the worst. According to Freud: a closed system in itself refractory to any common reality and inaccessible to the uninitiated in the repetition of their concepts. It's only criteria of truth is conceptual coherence. Paradoxically, this is what can be called, in the bad sense, of philosophy, also in Lacan. A philosophy in which language practice, unbalance of the concept of concept and formal expression of notions walk together.

When the consequences of such teaching reverberate outside of our field, like in the political philosophy of Badiou, Žižek or Laclau, this receives the reprobation intended for usurpers, popularizers and massifiers. When their discursive practices reaches feminist theory, Marxism or *queer* theory, this is perceived as a deviation from purpose and not as an effect of the radicality and virulence from Lacan's proposals. However, the really unforgivable movement takes place when new developments in logic, sciences of language and anthropology are deflected or rejected in favor of Lacan's claims about what was available concerning these areas back in the 1960s. Here, the letter of Lacan is called to deny the revolutionary spirit of his teaching, to the best taste of metaphysical studies and its characteristic reverence for the sacred text. Here the mimicry of his style is employed to cover up the verticality of his discussion with science and philosophy. It is fundamental to face the metaphysics and to adjust the score with what our critics realized before us: that psychoanalysis entails a metaphysics, by the way, just like science. Suffices to know which would it be.

Finally, I present my thesis: *Lacanian epistemology has aged and has not been well succeeded, but its ontology was.*

The Lacanian epistemology has two moments, well described by Milner⁵⁶, in the first moment Lacan is a reader of Koyré and Hegel, so he understands that modern science is a matter of writing and of the invention of concepts. For similar reasons, psychoanalysis depends on the Christianity, modern individualism and the paradoxes of citizenship stemming from the French Revolution. The struggle between the master and the slave is the Hegelian allegory of the historical process of individualization, as well as the sociological figures of the family and the position father occupies in it. Such considerations, according to Goldenberg's argument, would be weird to the field of psychoanalysis, although they define the epistemological cut that defines its appearance and the historical conditions of its apparition as practice.

In the second moment, Lacan is a reader of Frege and Joyce. Here he seeks to question the concept of concept, the limits of language

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55 Freud 1988.

56 Milner 1996.

and the stability of the classic figures of the metaphysics: substance, time and space, difference and identity. If in the first period Lacan is reading again Freud's metapsychology based on the epistemic tripartism between structural model, dynamic and economic, after the 1960s he introduced a new anthropology and another philosophy of history, based on another conception and language, represented, respectively, by the theory of the four discourses and by the formulas of sexualization. That which some authors call the third or last Lacan, after 1973, concerns nothing but an attempt to bring together these two distinct and to some extent contradictory, aspects of his work. This does not have anything to do with a clinical novelty, but with a metapsychological effort to integrate concepts while comparing anthropological structures with ontological assumptions. Between the signifier and the Real, the problem is not only epistemological, but ontological.

I say that Lacan's epistemology failed because Frege's philosophy took another turn inspiring analytical philosophy. Chomsky's syntactic structures and not a "*philosophy of the language inhabited by the subject*", as Lacan wanted, made the progress of the science of language. After a promising start with Pecheaux and Greimas they abandoned the Lacanian category complexity, at the same extent that psychoanalysts stopped reading linguistics.

Frege, Cantor, Dedekind and topology are today a part of the kind of science and understanding of logics that no Lacanian is willing to admit. The logic is now married to neuroscience⁵⁷, and the philosophy of the mind⁵⁸ and not with a "practice of the letter." No progress was made neither in logics, nor in mathematics, even less in topology thanks to Lacan.

On the contrary, many consequences of his teaching have been observed in social critique, literature, aesthetics, political philosophy and even ontology. On anthropology, psychoanalysis is a chapter of its archeology, although several Lacanian ideas could be reincorporated into their contemporary debate. It seems that we are more concerned with transmitting psychoanalysis to psychoanalysts in its own area of existence and to its internal circulation field, than to continue the spirit of invention and criticism of the metaphysics, present in both Freud and Lacan.

Having said this, the Lacanian critique of the Aristotelian metaphysics can be understood as a criticism of the positivity of being, of "*being qua being*." This is not false, but that says little about the power of the negative ontology in Lacan.

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57 Pinker 1998.

58 Searle 1997.

6. The Fetish of Transmission

Only a few have looked over the fact that Lacan gradually changes his very own definition of what comes to be psychoanalysis. Realizing how psychoanalysis infiltrated Western culture, taking part in their most decisive processes of individualization, such as education, work, the arts and the modalities of love, Lacan expands the definition of psychoanalysis from its Freudian definition as a method of treatment and investigation, that is, a branch of medicine or science, for the thesis that it is an ethics (*práxis*) and a discourse (*logos*). In doing so, Lacan in a Foucauldian way acknowledges that psychoanalysis has gone out of control of psychoanalysts. The epistemological frontier does not guarantee metaphysical immunity.

The argument that the psychoanalytic field refers to the experience of psychoanalysts and to the exercise of such method in what concerns this area or discipline brings a last inconvenience. Analysts do not write, do not publish, declare nothing in the public sphere. They act as psychoanalysts with their patients and that is all. Even Lacan said that in his seminars he placed himself as an analyzand. So, what do they do when they write complete works, proffer seminars, or write essays on the metaphysics of psychoanalysis? The answer is that they transmit psychoanalysis, which is a contradiction in terms.

What exactly is the difference between transmitting psychoanalysis and a teacher who transmit concepts? What exactly is the difference, since studies of concepts or mathemes in psychoanalysis do not, in themselves, accuse the presence of a *psychoanalyst* (a psychoanalyst without analyzands?). Or would we be shrouded in the mystique that only one analyst is up to the task of recognizing another analyst? Well, the hypertrophy of the notion of transmission, as well as the style, is one of the most salient features of Lacanian metaphysics. Here we return to the first metaphysical myth, which is, the unity of psychoanalysis.

What would be analytical about how someone writes books or compiles essays? Are the themes that she or he tackles it or the peculiar shape of her or his style? It works by self-declaration or by the effectiveness of the reception?

It is not the identity of the writer, nor his or her professional adhesion to the field of psychoanalysis, much less his or her curriculum Lattes that makes a psychoanalyst interrogate his or her problems as a scientist, to critically discuss its premises as a philosopher or to give testimony of its practice as a clinician. In other words, if Goldenberg's thesis is correct, and we can classify cases in their respective fields, between philosophy and psychoanalysis, he is wrong to present it. He is mistaken by his own arguments, which have made us have to admit that the only being is to being of the signifier, not that of the concept, or that of the empirical set of psychoanalysts and their social ontology. Or would there be some magical property, not yet described, that would

allow to distinguish the text of a psychoanalyst from the writing of a non-psychoanalyst? Here again, one can see the compromise between metaphysics and politics. If we borrow such "analytic" substance that can be lost or gained, possessed or changed, but whose being is absent and non-existent, who could say where the "analytic" actually is? This is how the "analytical" syndics appear, their guardians, their tacit and often oppressive rules in terms of the logic of recognition. For those who did not have access to the "analytic", it only rests to trust those who have the prerogative to recognize, according to their own personalism, where "the analytic" is and where it is not. By this I do not just advocate a mere dispersion, multiplicity or plurality of the psychoanalytic field, but I hold that "A" psychoanalysis does not exist, because psychoanalysis is not-all.

Let us recall that when Lacan uses the expression *Lacanian field*, an equivalent of Maxwell's⁵⁹ the theory of fields, this is an allusion to the fact that Maxwell's equations allow to unify the forces that make up the universe of physics⁶⁰. Here, at the same moment, he plays with his metaphysics, saying that if he had to choose one, this would be the metaphysics of light. This is an apparent allusion to the particle-wave dualism, but also, in a metaphor for the tradition of the lights, that is, of the Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) and of the criticism which he inscribed in his *Ecrits*.

Lacan's omnivorous attitude made any theory, concept or author, usable by the psychoanalysis. And with this, dissolving the classical separations between theory and practice, author and work, concept and experience, disciplines and areas. The very concept of *theory*, is replaced by speech, teaching, style or ethics. This is also the problem of the replacement of the Freudian concept of formation (*Bildung*) by the Lacanian notion of transmission (*transmission*). In the last five decisive times that Lacan employs this notion, in none of them a metapsychological development can be found.

Philosophy in its historical function is, this traction, which presses the knowledge of the slave to obtain his *transmission in knowing of master*⁶¹.

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59 Lacan 2004.

60 Maxwell (1865) formulations unify around twenty equations of twenty variables, including (1) Ampère Law corrected, a three-component equation (2) Gauss Law for charge, described by an equation (3) the relationship between the total current density and displacement, described by three equations (4) the relationship between magnetic field and the potential vector, described by a three-component equation (5) between the electric field and the scalar and vector potentials, described by equations of three components which implied in Faraday's Law (6) the relation between electric and displacement fields, described by equations of three components (7), the Ohm's Law, which relates intensity of current and electric field, described by equations of three components and (8) the equation of continuity, which relates the current intensity and density of a charge.

61 Lacan 2004.

In other words, philosophy as metaphysics that stands in the place of the hole of politics, between the master and slave. This is not our metaphysics, nor should it be the metaphysics to subsidize our formation proposals.

So it is about making it sensible how the *transmission of a letter* has something to do with something essential, fundamental, in the organization of speech, whatever the knowledge of enjoyment⁶².

Letter is a concept that alludes to a program of criticism of the meaning and of the rarefied meaning. It is inserted yet, as another chapter of the Lacanian critique of the concept, as the core of his anti-philosophy.

She [the child] receives the thing, not knowing that this is why it receives it in the very early childhood, and this is the very frequent case of the *transmission of the desire to know*, but it is something totally acquired in a totally secondary manner. (...) This desire to know, insofar as it takes substance, takes substance of the social group⁶³.

A blatant example of the use of a metaphysical notion (substance) in the context of the symbolic transmission, in other words, the social usage of the word, such as:

It is essentially in this way that, it is a transmission manifestly symbolic, that Freud refers to regarding this idea of castration.^{64 65}

Another time in which the last Lacan reaffirms the bond between castration and desire with the transmission symbolic.

There is one thing that allows to force this autism which is a matter of common language. It is there that I'm able to make myself understandable for everyone here. This is the guarantee - this which where I've putted in the order of the day in the Freudian School concerning the transmission of

.....
62 Lacan 2009.

63 Lacan, J. (1973-1974) Seminar XXI *Le Non-Dupe Errant*. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar (*not translated in English*) (Translator's note).

64 Lacan 2008a.

65 There is "a transmission of the name-of-the-father, that is, what is referred to the transmission of castration, in Lacan 2008b.

psychoanalysis - the guarantee that *psychoanalysis does not irreducibly fit into an autism for two*.⁶⁶

Once again, the notion of transmission appears connected to the passage and sharing of knowledge, without explicitly defining anything about the theory or the way of knowing proper to psychoanalysis. Nothing about forming psychoanalysts. Nothing about the formalization dimension or mathemes, only and only so it submits the appeal to the *common language*.

I am not like one of those who recoil in front of the topic of the subject of certainty; what allowed to break with what was frozen in Freud's practice in a *tradition that clearly prevented its transmission*⁶⁷.

A statement that seems to converge to the idea defended here, that what Lacan seeks in philosophy is his critical method, and its usefulness is to separate itself from metaphysics and from its group effects, its closure and its conceptual reification. Here I'd like to add the consideration of Ambra that:

"The central role of the *elevation of formalization to the dignity of the Thing* in Lacanian metaphysics leads to a sort of thoughtless idealization of the topological-'mathematical' formalization. Which, by the way, rather quickly becomes synonymous of formalization *tout court*, eradicating the possibility of thinking about other forms of formalization. It is here that we observe the attack on any modality of narrative, regarding the clinical case. This is only possible because this reading of the notion of formalization ideologically parasites almost the totality of the discussions: whether a text has no mathemas, or non-whole logic or topological discussions, it automatically gets considered as non-Lacanian. Evidently, it is not a question of criticizing formalization itself, but rather of asking why any Moebian transit between narrative and mathemes is usually attacked in the name of a formal purity which is, in reality, quite anti-Freudian?⁶⁸"

66 Lacan, J. (1977-1978) *Seminar XXIV L'Insu que sait de l'une-bévue s'aile à mourre*. ----- 2008a (*not yet translated in English*)(Translator's note).

67 Lacan 1979.

68 Ambra, Pedro (personal communication)

It is neither explained nor posed as a revolution for the formation of psychoanalysts, but in general, it aims at the insertion of psychoanalysis in the debate of science (the as integral matheme of transmission). His appropriation by post-Lacanian as a kind of fetish to justify prerogatives of use and abuse of the knowledge at stake in psychoanalysis is a clear ideological effect, whose metaphysics is yet to be undone.

In this context the Lacanian thesis that "*metaphysics obturates [bouche] the whole of politics*"⁶⁹ is becoming more and more a useful idea. It is the revenge of the philosopher with the holed bathrobe, plugging the holes of the world building. But now, he has come out of the dark room, illuminating the holes of the political world with its anti-philosophy and anti-metaphysics. Lacan raised the notion of hole to the dignity of a symbolic consistency, as well as of ex-sistence to the dimension of real. Therefore, it would be crucial for Lacanism to abandon the identification between metaphysics and Aristotelian philosophy, as well as its understanding of being, could be the eight attributes of the substance, which Benveniste⁷⁰ well perceived how associates with the eight grammatical categories of Greek language, either as a set of four categories, or as a historical necessity of truth. What Lacan inherits from Heidegger is crystalline: the true philosophy to come is the critique of the metaphysics of presence, the historical revision of Parmenides' triumph and its adherence to the principle of identity out of time.

Translated by Rodrigo Gonsalves

69 Lacan 2003.

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The Argentinean Exception Proves the Rule

Patricia Gherovici

Abstract: Given the huge popularity of psychoanalysis in Argentina, one can wonder whether it has replaced politics. Could psychoanalysis have come to inhabit a space where politics is reduced to its cultural aspect? Or has it substituted religion? Rejecting these two theses, I argue that psychoanalysis is important because of its foundational link to the Law. To show this, I will discuss two recent Argentine films: *La Fuga* (The Escape, 2001, Eduardo Mignona) and *El secreto de sus ojos* (The Secrets of their Eyes, 2009, Juan Jose Campanella). They will allow me to explore the complex rapport of Argentinean society with the Law as I suggest that psychoanalysis' popularity is due to it being a symptom of the Law's void.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis in Argentina, politics, state terror, state of exception, Law

When one thinks of Argentina, psychoanalysis comes to mind as a national symbol as representative as soccer, tango, the disappeared, and the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. One remarkable feature of Argentina is that this system created by Freud managed to develop and flourish under conditions of severely restricted political freedom. Psychoanalysis had an early but limited reception in the beginning of the twentieth century, but later became a serious profession that experienced exponential growth after 1955 as part of a rapid cultural modernization.

By the 1960s, a psychoanalytic culture had been solidly established in Argentina. Psychoanalysis was a common language across social classes that appeared in magazines and television shows.¹ In the clinical practice, psychoanalysis was increasingly seen as a tool for social change, and Freud was read along with Marx. Psychoanalysis was not only practiced in private offices but also in public hospitals as part of the program for *salud mental* (mental health) that put into action a socially progressive psychoanalytic practice. Some psychoanalysts saw patients in shantytowns while also maintaining their private practices. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Lacanian thought took over the thriving psychoanalytic field, and Freud was now read by way of Althusser and Lacan. Argentines considered psychoanalysis as a political praxis against oppression, as legitimized by the Left.

During the 1976-1983 military dictatorship responsible for the secret arrest and murder of thousands of “*desaparecidos*” (disappeared people), Lacanism prospered despite the violence of the regime. The junta closed the National Congress, imposed censorship, banned trade unions, and brought state and municipal government under military control. A bloody campaign against suspected dissidents was initiated

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¹ Plotkin 2001, p. 71

and hundreds of clandestine detention camps set up, where 30,000 thousand people were jailed and tortured.

During those brutal years, many psychoanalysts who had been engaged in radical political activism moved away from their militancy to focus on the emerging Lacanian movement. Some critics, like Hugo Vezzetti, claim that this development separated the practice from any political involvement:² “Lacanian psychoanalysis substituted for political militancy rather than complemented it.”³ Whether or not this is the case, it is true that under a repressive regime of state-sponsored terror, Lacanian psychoanalysis was disseminated and popularized at unprecedented levels.

Besides being a center for psychoanalysis, it is also a great center for Lacanism: today there are more Lacanians in Buenos Aires than in Paris. The expansion of psychoanalysis during repressive political systems may seem paradoxical. Elisabeth Roudinesco,⁴ among others, has argued that psychoanalysis cannot flourish under authoritarian conditions. The case of Argentina would offer an example of a place where psychoanalysis experienced great expansion under an oppressive military regime, though this evolution was not without contradictions and paradoxes.

The military dictatorship that began in 1976 was one of the most brutal regimes in Latin America, and it disapproved of this revolutionary, Marxist psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysts became one of the main targets for state persecution. For the military junta, Marx provided ideology to the “subversives” and psychoanalysis was seen as its cultural strategy.⁵ In an infamous 1977 speech, Admiral Emilio Massera, the junta orator, denounced Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, and Albert Einstein as the greatest enemies of Western civilization. Military ideologues believed that psychoanalysis could destroy the Christian concept of the family.

Lacanian psychoanalysis, which had started in the mid 1960s, however, continued to be disseminated in discrete networks of *grupos de estudio*, small, private reading groups where Freud and Lacan continued to be taught. As Mariano Plotkin and Joy Damousi⁶ observe, psychoanalysts were persecuted for their political activism, and not for their adherence to psychoanalysis itself. In fact, the dictators, in the name of the “Christian West” wanted to eliminate the Freudianism and Marxism that “corrupted” and “degenerated” society—one general

2 See Plotkin 2002, Vezzetti 2016.

3 Plotkin 2002, p. 210.

4 Roudinesco 1994.

5 Finchelstein 2014, p.147

6 Damousi and Plotkin 2012, p. xxiv

called Marx and Freud “intellectual criminals.” But so ingrained was psychoanalysis in everyday life that they could eradicate it. In a sort of Pyrrhic victory, the armed forces appropriated discourse generated by the meteoric expansion of psychoanalytic culture and used its social legitimacy for propaganda purposes. For example, in 1997 as part of one speech to apologize for the crimes committed by the army during the so-called Dirty War, a general and former army chief of staff talked about the “collective unconscious” and advised the population to “work through mourning.”⁷

This highly politicized situation sharply contrasts with a democratic society like that of the United States where psychoanalysis became what Lacan calls an “orthopedics of the unconscious.” Far from exploring its potential as a liberating process, in the United States psychoanalysis has mostly developed as a practice for the well-to-do, a narrow and very lucrative⁸ medical sub-specialty⁹ completely divorced from politics and seemingly impermeable to the pressures of history.

Perhaps this was a consequence of Americans reading Freud along with Pavlov and not Marx. In the United States, psychoanalysis was separated from politics—it was a science, and as such, supposedly neutral. Peter Gay, reflecting the American attitude, suggests that Freud was apolitical, “Freud became a liberal because a liberal world view was congenial to him and because, as the saying goes, it was good for the Jews”¹⁰ but that his liberal position was far from revolutionary, as “Freud was a man of the center.”¹¹ Gay’s comment seems to echo Phillip Rieff’s¹² assessment of Freud decades earlier as a “conservative” whose only radical theory concerned the area of sexuality.

Even though one may claim that the radical political potential of the Freudian spirit was lost in translation, in the United States, the capacity of Freud to elicit unrest remains undiminished. The antagonism and controversy elicited by an infamous U.S. Library of Congress exhibit in his honor is a prime example of his contentiousness.

Early in the planning stage, Freud’s exhibit raised a heated controversy among opposing intellectual groups. As a result, it was postponed for a few years, finally opening in Washington D.C. in October of 1998, under the title: “Sigmund Freud: Conflict and Culture.” The show traveled internationally, from the United States

7 General Martín Balza quoted in Plotkin 1997, p. 45 and Plotkin 2001, pp. 226-7.

8 Hale, 1995.

9Turkle 1992

10 Quoted in Damousi and Plotkin 2012; see Gay 1989, p. 17

11 Gay 1989, p. 387

12 Rieff 1989.

to Brazil and Austria, closing in Israel in September of 2002. To erase the initial uneasiness and aroused passions, the exhibition became a compromise formation—flaunting its culturalist ideology, it exhibited the very symptom of what American culture represses and magnifies in the Americanization of the unconscious.

The Library of Congress exhibit contained various objects, such as fragments of film, cartoons, and TV shows, each one supporting the only claim the organizers could safely make: Freud has been and will continue to be part of American culture, even though many disagree with his ideas. The exhibit effectively reduced Freud to a cultural phenomenon; he became an idol, comparable to Andy Warhol or John F. Kennedy. However, conflict crept back into the items exhibited, subtly and silently, at least through displays of quotes from followers and detractors. Their comments, spread over the walls, appeared to have been chosen for their timidity rather than for brash condemnations or lavish praise.

In this context, it was a surprise to discover in the exhibit Lacan's famous last phrase, from the 1980 Caracas conference, a little more than a year before his death: "*C'est à vous d'être lacanien, moi je suis freudien*" ("It is up to you to be Lacanian, I myself am Freudian.") The quote might even be apocryphal. Diana Rabinovich, the organizer of that conference, swears that she never heard Lacan say that famous phrase and could not find it in the recordings of the event.¹³ Among the exhibit's misfires and parapraxes, one reads after Lacan's quote, ominously: "no date." In the eternal present of a symptomatic suspension, Lacan's presence was acknowledged but left outside history.

The exhibit appears as a symptomatic compromise formation and therefore must provide the keys to its own solution, as a symptom does during a psychoanalytic treatment. Any solution must be found in "culture" and in the possibilities of transformation within psychoanalysis itself. Whether brought about by Lacan or by an internal logical evolution, this was a way of suggesting that psychoanalysis reflects and challenges its own cultural environment. The evolution of psychoanalysis in the United States, as Dagmar Herzog shows¹⁴, is quite removed from Freud's initial project. As Elisabeth Danto amply documents, Freud was not only a political man--he was an activist. The depolitization of psychoanalysis in the United States has been amply documented by historians such as

.....
13 Personal communication

14 Herzog, 2017.

Nathan Hale¹⁵, Russell Jacoby¹⁶, and Philip Cushman¹⁷. Eli Zaretsky's¹⁸ fascinating exploration reframes this general attitude as the political conformity of American psychoanalysis.

Not just in Argentina, but in the rest of the Americas, psychoanalysis had a very different development that it did in the United States. It was considered eminently political. Psychoanalysts were often radicalized and the psychoanalytic discourse as a whole was embraced by left-wing intellectuals as a tool for social transformation. In many Latin American countries, psychoanalytic clinical work is practiced with populations of all social strata, including those located in the socio-economic margins.

In the 21st century, psychoanalysis continues to be extremely popular in Argentina, the world capital of psychoanalysis. Just as a point of comparison, there are five times more psychologists in Argentina than in the United States, yet for a population ten times smaller; the number of psychologists in France in 2011 was 40,000, and for psychoanalysts, 6,000. In Argentina to say psychologist means to say psychoanalyst, and more often than not, Lacanian. In the city of Buenos Aires alone there are 25,000 psychoanalysts, that is, one psychoanalyst every 200 people. Alejandro Dafgal has studied this phenomenon, showing that Lacan is more alive in Argentina than in France¹⁹. Dafgal analyzes the "Argentine exception" -- a term to which I will return, but in another sense.

The proliferation of psychoanalysis in Argentina is so remarkable that it deserves some discussion. In the country of tango, in 2009, 32% of the population had consulted a psychoanalyst, whereas this figure was only 26% in 2006. Unlike the USA, nobody is ashamed to have been in analysis. In fact, rather than carrying a stigma, it is a matter of pride, as people mention it in their CVs. Most psychoanalysts are concentrated in the main city, Buenos Aires, which has a large neighborhood mainly populated by analysts and analysands that is called, with less irony than affection, "Villa Freud."

In Argentina, psychoanalysis is everywhere: politicians, hairdressers, and taxi drivers have all been on the couch. A confirmation of this visibility was given in 2012 by President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner who, with her chief of staff, personally received at the Casa Rosada (the presidential house), the daughter and son-in-law of Lacan who were in Buenos Aires participating in the congress of the World Association of Psychoanalysis.

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15 Hale 1995.

16 Jacoby 1983.

17 Cushman 1995.

18 Zaretsky 2005 and 2015

19 Dafgal 2009

Cartoons in newspapers represent an intellectual as someone carrying Lacan's *Écrits* under the arm. A woman may be approached at a bar by dropping the famous Lacanian dictum "woman does not exist" followed by some complimentary comment about the purported mysteries of feminine sexuality. Any comments referring to hysteria are taken as a praise, since hysteria is commonly considered as a mode of social link that puts desire in motion. There is even a neologism "histeriquear" (to hysterize) which means "to flirt". Lacan is not far from Freud in terms of popularity. Recently, to broaden its readership, *La Nación*, one of the main newspapers, came up with a very successful marketing plan. Every Friday, during twenty-six weeks, they offered a gift with the newspaper copy--a volume of the complete works of Freud.

The introduction of psychoanalysis into universities, specially the University of Buenos Aires, played an important role in the expansion of psychoanalytic culture in Argentina. Since the 1960s, psychoanalysis was taught in psychology programs at various universities, and the career-based education of psychologists was transformed into an academic one rooted in psychoanalysis. In my personal experience at the University of Buenos Aires, I experienced firsthand the prevalence of Lacan in psychology programs. I graduated as a psychologist after obtaining the equivalent of a Master's degree in psychology from the University of Buenos Aires in 1988. My five years as a graduate student were almost exclusively spent on Lacanian psychoanalysis. Even in courses with strictly psychological subjects like statistics or projective techniques, texts by Lacan were included. This felt like a sort of disclaimer to justify the deviation from pure psychoanalysis imposed by the demands of a program that was supposed to be in psychology.

How do we account for this phenomenon? The strong Freudian tradition dating back to the beginning of the twentieth century does not fully explain the level of popularity and cultural presence that psychoanalysis enjoys. It is true that in Argentina, Freudian thought developed independently of the medical field and took an early independent role in culture.²⁰ Mariano Plotkin has put forward the thesis that psychoanalysis has replaced politics, thus reducing politics to culture. Indeed, the 1976-1983 dictatorship did not stop the development of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Nevertheless, a large majority of the students who were tortured and killed as "desaparecidos" were from the university of psychology. The dictatorship eradicated most Freudo-Marxists and openly leftist psychoanalysts—they were either killed or were forced to go on exile. What is curious is that in the vacuum produced by state terror and persecution, the Lacanian movement managed to progress almost exponentially.

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20 For a history of psychoanalysis in Argentina, see Balán 1991, Vezzetti 1996, García 1978 and 2005, and Plotkin 2002.

Let us note that Lacanian thought started to develop in Argentina in the mid 1960s, in the context of a strong psychoanalytic movement, described by Elisabeth Roudinesco as very pluralist, and never aligned with one doctrine in particular. Its eclectic spirit allowed for its inscription in a wide social and political frame—be it Marxist, socialist or reformist. Whereas Lacan had already been mentioned in 1936 in an article by Argentine psychiatrist Emilio Pizarro Crespo, it was only thirty years later that Lacan was truly introduced. This happened in 1964 thanks to Oscar Massotta, a young autodidact philosopher and art critic with a Sartrean orientation whose intellectual influence was undeniable.²¹

Argentina was not indifferent to the French events of the spring of 1968 and the local reverberations of student revolts affected the very structure of the IPA institutions and radically transformed the training by opening psychoanalysis to social issues. By the 1970s, Latin America was already the most powerful Freudian continent in the world, its numbers rivaling the United States' American Psychoanalytic Association (APSA). Perhaps as a response, around this time the International Psychoanalytic Association divided the world in a very bizarre manner:

- 1) North of the Mexican frontier
- 2) South of the Mexican frontier
- 3) The rest of the world.

Jacques Derrida would denounce this geopolitical division in a text of 1981²² in an opening address to and propose a fourth zone, the Latin America of psychoanalysis in which psychoanalysis could coexist with torture and other human rights violations.

At the IPA congress in New York in 1979, the Australian IPA psychoanalysts denounced repressive Argentinean practices: the disappearances, torture, and murders committed during the dictatorship. They compiled a list of psychoanalysts and family members who were among the "desaparecidos." But as Roudinesco notes, the North American IPA section was more conservative. The then-president of the IPA, Edward Joseph, expressed doubts, saying that this report was based on mere "rumors". Some argued that the IPA timid response was not because they were just separating psychoanalysis from politics; they simply wanted to protect their colleagues from further violence. It is possible that they did not want the Argentinean government to see psychoanalysts as activists, thus, as potential "subversive" agents (terrorists) and targets for state terror.

How has Lacanian thought managed to survive and flourish in such an unfavorable context? Did Lacanism owe its survival to the esoteric aspect of its formulations, with its mathematics, its formulas, and its

.....
21 Massotta 1969.

22 The original publication in French dates of 1981; see the English version Derrida 1991.

opaque jargon? State terrorism, however, censored the teaching of geography and history in schools, as well as modern mathematics, which included set theory. The idea was that modern mathematics were not axiomatic, and therefore stimulated critical thinking.

Let us not forget that Lacan was a prominent counter-culture figure, a so-called intellectual hero who played an active role in the events of May '68 in France but kept a healthy dose of skepticism facing the student revolts. Lacan was politically active, but his influence cannot simply be reduced to politics.

The importance of the psychoanalytic Lacanian movement in Latin America was not ignored by Lacan. In 1980 he traveled to Venezuela to meet hundreds of Latin American followers, whom he named "LacanoAmericans." Unlike the French psychoanalysts, nobody among the LacanoAmericans had been attending his popular seminars in person; they were readers of Lacan. The Caracas seminar was Lacan's last public appearance before his death in 1981.

With the return of democracy to Argentina in 1983, psychoanalysis, and Lacanism in particular, expanded even more. Freud and Lacan became the reference to everyone who wanted to get involved in clinical practice. Currently there are over 100 Lacanian psychoanalytic groups and associations in Argentina.

Lacan's provocative thesis that "[t]he unconscious is structured like a language" means that the psychoanalytic subject is immersed in a universe ruled by desire and determined by a social order ushered in by language acquisition. If the formation of symptoms results from the unique structure of the subject's individual and cultural history, Lacanian psychoanalysis is then concerned with what meaning is betrayed by signs that stem from social structure. In other words, by making symptoms readable, psychoanalysis deciphers the message of symptoms both at a subjective and societal level. It offers an integration of the social and psychological realms.

Against Plotkin's thesis that psychoanalysis has replaced politics, I would like to suggest that Lacanian psychoanalysis developed in a symptomatic way in Argentina because it managed to integrate the social by rendering the unconscious political. This is what makes psychoanalysis so popular and pertinent in Latin America and it is exactly the opposite of what happened in the United States where the psychoanalytic practice, conceived as medical, was neutral and apolitical, and finally dissociated itself from the social context.

As we have seen, in Argentina Lacan had a strong impact, mirrored in other Latin American countries, such as Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Peru. This dissemination was due in part to the fact that many Argentinian psychoanalysts were forced into exile. As with the case of Nestor Braunstein and Diana Rabinovich among others, the exiled psychoanalysts developed psychoanalysis

in the countries where they settled. But above all, the dissemination of psychoanalysis in precarious democracies is due to the fact that Lacanian psychoanalysis puts the Law at the heart of psychoanalytic practice.

One of the most complex legacies of colonialism is a twisted relationship to the Law. This feature is expressed, for instance, in the systematic extermination of indigenous peoples - especially in Argentina where a "desert campaign" was conceived as a crusade under the slogan of "civilization or barbarism," which translated into a genocide of the native population, combined with the local idea of the "*viveza criolla*" (native wit or cunning, the art of being resourceful at the expense of another person.) All these elements are condensed in a very particular relationship to the Law. We could even speak of a deficiency of the Law. In Argentina, everyone cuts corners and bribes without remorse. Those who pay their taxes are universally regarded as stupid (because everyone knows that tax contributions will end up in the pockets of corrupt politicians, and everyone feels justified in breaking the broken law).

In this context, Lacanian psychoanalysis, without becoming a religious discourse as was the case of the psychoanalysis of the IPA, and as we see in the United States, offers a space of speech in which the subject is confronted with the Law. State violence and rampant corruption in Latin America expose the precariousness of the Law. During the cure, each analysand renounces the tyranny of *jouissance* to choose the law of desire. Two recent films will allow me to explore the complex relationship that the Argentinean subject has with the Law, suggesting that the popularity of psychoanalysis in Argentina is a symptom of a void of the Law.

I will rapidly discuss two recent Argentine films: *La Fuga* (2001, Eduardo Mignona) and *El secreto de sus ojos* (2009, Juan Jose Campanella). *La Fuga* (The Escape) is set in 1928, on a spring day when seven inmates escape from a Buenos Aires national prison. They dig a tunnel, but their calculations fail and they come out on the other side of the street inside a coal and timber shop run by a couple of elderly Spaniards. In shock, seeing seven prisoners suddenly popping up from the ground, the old woman has a heart attack and dies. The prisoners flee. Through flashbacks, the film follows each runaway's story, explaining why they were jailed. They all have different ethical codes: the narrator, Laureano Irala is a sentimental crook; there is a Spanish anarchist; a professional poker player and con; a loving gay couple of kidnappers who murdered one of their victims; a bookie who killed his wife's lover; a mournful airplane pilot falsely accused of being an anarchist.

The film is based on a novel *La Fuga* (1999) written by the film's director. In the novel version one can see quite clearly that all seven prisoners face a completely corrupt police force and a flawed justice system. Violence is justified in the eyes of the police to enforce order,

by all means. In the film, we perceive the injustice of the state forces-- the police assassinate the whole family of the pilot suspected of being an anarchist. His wife and children are violently gunned down with machine guns, whereas he survives by chance, his only wrongdoing being unknowingly transporting in his plane an anarchist who later set off a bomb.

To gain some historical context, let us recall that this is the great era of anarchism in the United States with the death sentence of Sacco and Vanzetti in 1927. Anarchism was also present in Argentina, where a military coup in 1930 had put Jose Felix Uriburu at the head of the government. Uriburu was a neo-fascist, and his government led to persecution of "subversives." There were more than 2,000 illegal executions of communists and anarchists in the years following his arrival to power. Subsequently, in Argentina between 1930 and 1983, whenever a democratic government was elected, it was almost immediately overthrown by a military coup. During six decades, no Argentine democratic government completed its term—all were interrupted by violent military coups.

The Escape thus takes place at a precise moment in Argentine history where we see the decomposition of democracy, an evolution that announces the later arrival of the repression of the so-called Dirty War of the 1976-1983. All escapees appear apolitical. The only real anarchist in the group of prisoners is the Spaniard Camilo Vallejo, who eventually learns the plight of the pilot, Tomás Opitti. After escaping, Vallejo takes part in another attack but he chooses to die crying out "Long live anarchy" and lies with his body over the exploding bomb rather than wounding or killing the innocent people who surround him.

This paradoxical exercise in justice and righteousness, brings me to the second film, *El secreto de sus ojos* (The Secret in their Eyes), which, like the first film, won the 2010 Goya Prize for Best Foreign Language Film in Spanish. It was also awarded an Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film. This film by Juan José Campanella (who directed several US television shows including *Law and Order*) was the second Argentinean film to win an Oscar after *The Official History*, a film also dealing with state repression and its long-term consequences. The film deals with the impunity of the most recent military dictatorship. It tells the story of a retired court employee, Benjamín Espósito, and is set in Buenos Aires in 1999. Espósito decides to write a novel about an unresolved homicide he had investigated twenty-five years earlier and that still haunts him: the brutal rape and murder in June of 1974 of Liliana Coloto, a young, beautiful, newly-married woman.

In preparation for writing the book, he meets with his superior at the time, judge Irene Menéndez Hastings, to discuss the investigation he conducted in 1974 and 1975 with his assistant and close friend, Pablo Sandoval. Both men were moved by the love that the widower of the victim, Ricardo Morales, expressed to them. They shared the determination to find the culprit and promised to Morales that they were going to obtain a life

sentence for the criminal. Fighting the corruption of a superior, Espósito and Sandoval refused to end the investigation when the case is closed, and disobeying orders, they continue working on the case. They dismissed the false confessions extracted by beating of two innocent workers who happened to be near the couple's apartment.

In the flashback to the original investigation, we see that Espósito discovered a clue to find the assassin by looking at photographs from the victim, the beautiful Liliana Coloto. They often showed a man named Isidoro Gómez, who is seen looking at her intently. Espósito speculates that the key to the case is in "the secret of his eyes." Gómez was secretly in love with the victim. After a few plot twists, Sandoval and Espósito orchestrate the capture of Gómez, who finally confesses to the crime.

But a just year later, the killer is seen by chance on television by the widower. He is one of the plain-clothes security guards of the then-president, Isabel Perón. In June of 1973 Juan D. Peron returned from exile to Argentina and to power, and named his third wife, Maria Estela, known as Isabelita, vice-president. He died soon after in July of 1974 and Isabel Peron became the first female President in the hemisphere. During the presidency she would sign the creation of the triple A, (Argentine Anticommunist Alliance) an organization dedicated to the killing of leftist militants and sympathizers. During those tumultuous years, Gómez had been recruited for his "talents"; he had been illegally released from prison to join Isabel's para-military repressive forces.

As the writing of the novel progresses, Espósito continues trying to put together the pieces of the puzzle. He eventually finds the widower Ricardo Morales, who is now a middle age man living alone in a secluded rural area. Acting on a hunch, Espósito discovers that Morales has built a prison in his house and that he has kept all those years his wife's murderer as his prisoner in a makeshift cell.

This is the plot twist of the film -- the revelation that the killer has been punished in a paradoxical manner. The heartbroken husband of the assassinated woman had kidnapped the killer. Morales had taken it upon himself to ensure that Gómez would be serving a sentence "for life" (which should have been served had Gómez not been released from prison to serve as a henchman to Isabel Peron's special forces). Espósito discovers that this mournful man has dedicated his life to exacting his revenge, but has also become a prisoner of his own retaliation plan. It is clear that Morales (whose last name means morals!) is taking justice in his own hands, an action which is of course, against the law.

What bothers me fundamentally in this film is the supposedly happy ending depicting the villain being punished. It disturbs me because it comes back to the idea that you have to take the law into your own hands when the law fails. This logic evokes the arguments used by the repressive state forces during the dark 1976-1983 years against anyone supposed to be left-wing—the so-called "subversives." The military government argued

that "subversives" did not deserve a fair trial, they had to be kidnapped, tortured and killed because the country was experiencing an exceptional situation. The course of law was suspended and during the so-called "Dirty War" other rules, those of war were followed. Because of this state of affairs, everything was permitted. There was state of exception in course (*estado de sitio*), the constitutional rights and laws they supported were suspended.

This calls up the concept of "state of emergency" developed by Carl Schmitt in 1922 and revisited by Giorgio Agamben in *The State of Exception* in 2002. This is a concept between politics and law, and refers to the moment when the sovereign has the right to suspend the laws in the name of the public good. The state of exception supposedly protects rights, but has the paradoxical effect of transforming democracies in authoritarian regimes. With the detention of the Guantanamo prisoners, we saw that the law suspended constitutional rights. In fact, the state of exception exposes a space of void in the law.

It is void in the law as revealed by in the state of expectation that I see the link between the two films, because we can see how in the name of protecting the law, the law itself is consumed. In *The Secrets in their Eyes*, the assassin Isidoro Gómez, who was initially sent to prison, is secretly released to become a torturer and killer working for the state repression. He finds himself in the private prison that the widower Morales built for him in the remote countryside. Morales' punishment is to keep Gómez alive but never talk to him—he dehumanizes him.

The void in the law not only leaves Morales and Gómez at a loss. Espósito is forced to leave Buenos Aires after the investigation, and must hide in a remote province in the north of the country, protected by the connections of the Judge Irene who belongs to the powerful, bourgeois, and almost feudal Meléndez Hastings family. His zealous investigation caused the assassination of his partner Sandoval, who was mistaken for Espósito by his killers; having interfered with the para-military forces, Espósito had written his death sentence. Hiding for two decades in the anonymity of the distant inland provinces, he managed to avoid getting killed.

As the film ends, Espósito does not seem to be planning to report Morales to the police. Morales had committed a crime in his revenge; he is responsible for kidnapping a man for twenty-four years. One guesses that Espósito will never press charges, probably having only limited confidence in the legal institutions of his country. Yet this discovery frees him from his fear and he finally becomes aware that he is in love with Judge Irene and seems ready to act according to his desire, choosing the Law of desire instead of the jouissance of inaction.

Irene, in a previous scene, had told Espósito that as a judge, she does not practice "Justice" but only "justice". This passage of the film confirms my intuition concerning the state of exception as dependent on

a void in the Law. Justice with capital letters cannot be exercised because the Law does not exist in Argentina. Even when the laws seem restored, they are not fully exercised or trusted, and democracy has failed to fully revive justice. Here is what I think explains the prevalence of psychoanalysis as a symptom of this state of affairs. In a country where there is no trust in the law, psychoanalysis insistently recalls that there is something like the Law. Unlike in *The Escape*, the fugitive is not a prisoner, but justice itself.

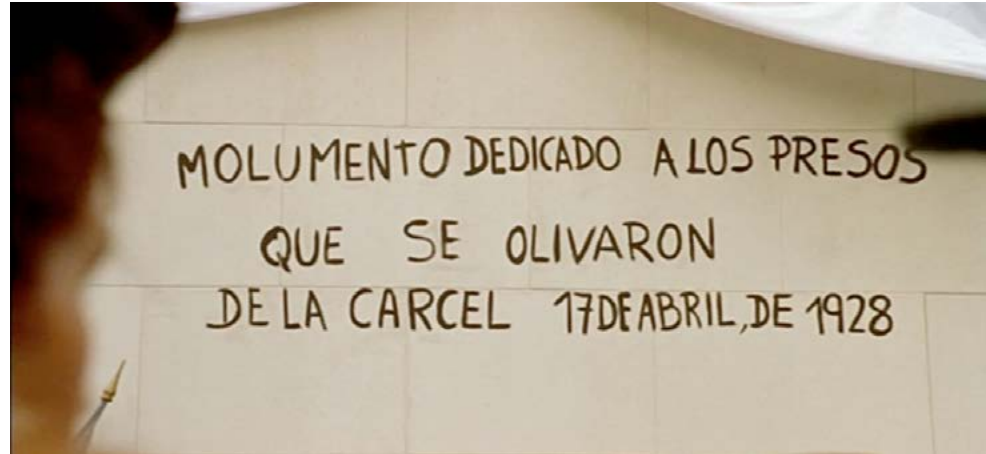
Admittedly, according to Derrida, the Law does not directly correspond to the concept of Justice, and, certainly, psychoanalysis uses the concept of Law in a specific sense that revolves around the phallus and castration, as an inexorable destiny that marks the subject. One could say that in Argentina, all subjects position themselves according to a logic that corresponds to the left side of Lacan's table of formulas of sexuation. They do so not to be subjected to the Law of castration, which marks the masculine desire, but positioned as the mythical father of the primal horde, which would not have been castrated.

This exception, which should retain its mythical character to bring the symbolic Law to the scheme, is nevertheless experienced as a reality where the access to forbidden jouissance is possible. I will not develop this idea here, but only point out that in the sexuation graph, we also find the formula on the right-hand side that gives access to feminine jouissance and indicates an inevitable inscription of the Law, with no exceptions. Let us recall that Lacan proposes that the analyst's function in the treatment is to incarnate the object *a*, that lost object that insofar as it is unattainable, causes desire. This special psychical object commemorates loss but is not the end point of desire: it is its primal mover. From that position, the analyst functions a representative of the inconsistency and failure of the big Other, and as such grants the analysand a space to separate from this inexistent guarantee.

That is why I would like to conclude by quoting the last scene of the film *La Fuga*. We are at the official inauguration of the iconic obelisk, the symbol of Buenos Aires still standing today at the intersection of Avenues 9 de Julio and Corrientes.



The unveiling ceremony was in 23 May 1936, presided by Agustín Pedro Justo, the far-right president elected following a huge electoral fraud. In the film, when they remove the sheet that covered the monument, we discover a graffiti. The words are written by hand, in capital letters: MOLUMENTO DEDICADO A LOS PRESOS QUE OLIVARON DE LA CARCEL 17 DE ABRIL DE 1928 (MOLUMENT DEDICATED TO THE PRISONERS WHO HAVE ESCAPED THE PRISON, APRIL 17, 1928).



Two of the fugitive prisoners are seen attending this ceremony. When the graffiti is unveiled, they look at each other and laugh. Then, they look around and imagine that all the other runaway inmates, even those who are dead, are present at the ceremony and they join in the laughter. The shared laughter challenges the official power. Their mirth is in stark contrast with the forced seriousness that the dignitaries are trying to maintain during the ceremony. We know that in the mythology of *porteños*, the obelisk represents an official phallus. Through the bursts of laughter, we verify that the phallus is only revealed in a comedic context. In Argentina too, history repeats itself, first as a tragedy, then as a phallic joke: in 2005, a gigantic pink condom covered the obelisk for five days as part of a campaign for HIV prevention.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Condom_on_Obelisk,_Buenos_Aires.jpg

But the laughter that the phallus almost always evokes, in this case reveals a hidden story. This is a story marked by spelling errors ("Molument"), written as a graffiti hastily scrawled on the official monuments. Its misspellings both subvert and allegorize the letter of the Law according to an unconscious logic that calls inevitably for psychoanalytic interpretation.

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The Logic of Lacan's Not-All

Dominiek Hoens

Abstract: This article offers an analysis of Lacan's notorious formulae of sexuation. Lacan develops these formulae on the basis of the classical Aristotelian square of opposition. Nonetheless, attempts to localize the formulae within such a square, lead to all sorts of logical inconsistencies. Therefore, the first conclusion of this text is that these formulae cannot be placed on the four, relationally-determined corners of a square. A second thesis starts with the simple observation that Lacan's formulae consist of two pairs of two equivalent propositions, as a result of which there is, at first sight, no difference between the two, so-called masculine and feminine sides of Lacan's diagram. The difference, however, does not concern a negation (e.g., p and $\neg p$), but a difference in use of the quantifiers. This goes for both the universal, \forall , and existential quantifier, \exists ; in this article only the former is discussed. Derived from a critical examination of works by Peirce, Frege, and Blanché, Lacan introduces a distinction between the extensional and intensional interpretation of a universal quantifier. This distinction allows to interpret \forall in ' $\forall x \Phi x$ ' extensionally (Φx applies to all x) or intensionally (x is essentially Φ). This distinction implies that there may be no exception to $\forall x \Phi x$, but also that one cannot exclude that there is an x to which Φ does not apply as an identifying feature. Moreover, it divides the all into an all and a *not-all*, where the latter does not negate the former, but reveals the illusion that 'all' subjects are defined necessarily by the function Φ .

Keywords: Formulae of sexuation, Aristotle, square of opposition, Peirce, object a , extension, intension

I learnt very early on that logic is capable of incurring the world's odium.¹

Introduction

Although Lacan's formulae of sexuation have often been discussed before, commentaries on the logic pertaining to them are rather rare.² The reason for this, unsurprisingly, has to do with Lacan's undidactic presentation of them. Simply put, there is no single *écrit* or part of the

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¹ Lacan 2017, 86.

² Inspirational were Copjec 1994, Fink 1995, Verhaeghe 1996, Žižek 1991, 1993 and 2012, and Zupančič 2017; for the logical aspect in particular, see Loparic 1991, Badiou 1992, Cathelineau 1998, Cejvan 2014, Grigg 2008, Le Gaufey 2006 and Chiesa 2016. I wish to thank Adrian Johnston and Dany Nobus for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this text, and Lorenz Demey for his patient and illuminating answers to questions regarding the 'maximal' interpretation of particular propositions and its effect on the square of opposition (see below).

Seminar that summarizes in an accessible way what is at stake in them. For a discussion of the formulae, many readers have recourse to Seminar XX, but this seminar³ is actually the last one in a series starting with the unpublished Seminar XV (1967-1968) – with, as we shall see, antecedents dating back to at least the early sixties –, during which the logical square is being constructed, detours included. Therefore, in order to articulate what is at stake in the formulae one needs to consider the seminars preceding Seminar XX. Which is not an easy task, for the formulae do not concern just one aspect of psychoanalytic theory – sexuality – but are related to most if not all of Lacan's fundamental ideas regarding psychoanalysis: its relation to science, its ethics, discourse theory, the question of desire, enjoyment and love, the difference between speech and writing, etcetera. Therefore, this article's aim cannot be but a modest one, that is to situate the formulae within the broader context of Lacan's work and to detail their *logic*.

No 'relation'?

The problem that the formulae tackle can be put in fairly simple terms: if there is sexual difference, and if this difference is of such a nature that it does not allow for a relation (*rappor*t) between the two sexes, how to conceptualize this difference? In what way do the feminine and the masculine differ from each other, so to make absent any sexual relation between them? Given the everyday experience of love and desire between the two sexes, leading to all sorts of phenomena that can hardly be named other than *relational*, how to make sense of Lacan's famous *dictum* 'il n'y pas de rapport sexuel'?⁴ Does such a statement amount to more than a presumably profound, pessimistic wisdom regarding the inevitable difficulties, not to mention the solitude, human beings encounter in the realm of sexuality? And more generally, how to assess such a statement within a theoretical framework within which and at its most fundamental level, 'relations' play a pivotal role?

A simple reminder of the canonical definition of the signifier as "what represents the subject for another signifier"⁵ teaches us that the signifier does not exist on its own, but only in *relation* to another signifier. More precisely, as Lacan reminds his audience during the same lesson, a signifier is nothing but what differentiates it from other signifiers and therefore only 'is' what other signifiers are not.⁶ There is only a signifier to

3 Lacan 1998 [1972-1973].

4 The first literal occurrence of this statement can be found in Lacan 2006b [1968-1969], 226, although there are precursors such as "Le sexe, dans son essence de différence radicale [...]", cf. Lacan 1964-1965, 19 May 1965.

5 Lacan 1961-1962, 6 December 1961.

6 Cf. Ferdinand de Saussure 1966, 120: "[I]n language there are only differences without positive

the extent that it occupies a place within a relation to other signifiers; a relation, moreover, that precedes it.

Besides this, the so-called 'mathemes' Lacan provides his readership with, are not unlike mathematical formulae in using letters (instead of words open to diverging interpretations), but also share with them the quality of establishing *relations* between those letters.⁷

And, finally, the grid onto which the formulae of sexuation are inscribed, derives from Aristotle's logic, which, again, consists of *relations* between different formulae. This becomes clear if we take a look at the Aristotelian square of opposition, containing four formulas. In themselves they express already a relation between a subject (S) and a predicate (P) – differing qua *quantity* (all or some) and/or *quality* (affirmative or negative), allowing for four possible combinations, A (all +), E (all -), I (some +) and O (some -) – but they become logically even more relevant through the relations they entertain with one another. These relations facilitate simple derivations – from "All men are mortal" (A), one can conclude that "Some men are mortal" (I); if "Some men are mortal" is true, then "No men are mortal" (E) is definitely false, etcetera – but also more complex forms of syllogistic arguments.⁸

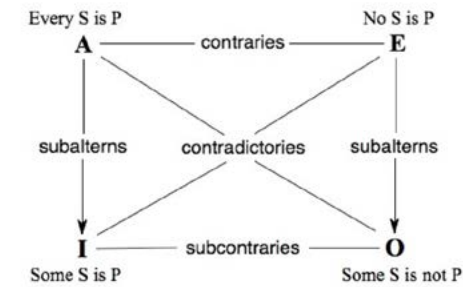


FIGURE 1: Aristotle's square of opposition⁹

terms."

7 See Burgoyne 2003 and Corfield 2002 for a critical examination of these mathemes.

8 Kneale and Kneale 1962, 67ff.

9 Parsons 2017. It should be noted that one will not find this 'square of opposition' in Aristotle's works, the diagram was constructed by the 2nd century philosopher Apuleius, based on his reading of Aristotle's *Organon*. Although the square fell into disuse in the twentieth century – due to the introduction of the formal logic developed by Frege, Russell, and many others – it continued to be discussed in the writings of Jacoby 1950, Blanché 1957, 1966 and others, eventually leading to a complete research programme on logical geometry; see <http://logicalgeometry.org>. Jean-Yves Béziau wrote an accessible and entertaining article on issues related to the square and its more recent transformation into a hexagon. Here, one paragraph is worth quoting at length: "The problem of the O-corner is quite different from the problem of the I-corner. The question is not a wrong-name problem but a no-name problem. This has been pointed out especially for the case of the quantificational square: it seems that there are no natural languages in which there is a primitive name for 'not all'. In such situation, linguists speak about 'non-lexicalization'. A radical view would be to argue that if there

The relations between the formulae can be defined as follows: “Two propositions are *contradictory* iff [= if and only if] they cannot both be true and they cannot both be false. Two propositions are *contraries* iff they cannot both be true but can both be false. Two propositions are *subcontraries* iff they cannot both be false but can both be true. A proposition is a *subaltern* of another iff it must be true if its superaltern is true, and the superaltern must be false if the subaltern is false.”¹⁰ So, at first sight, the logical square of opposition seems to be a rather unfortunate choice for any possible explanation of the thesis according to which there is no sexual *relation*. This becomes even more problematic if one takes the appearance of Lacan’s version of the square into account.

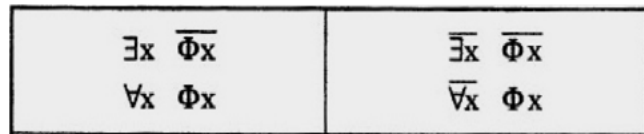


FIGURE 2: Lacan’s formulae of sexuation¹¹

One discerns two sides, a left and a right one, textually clearly identified, respectively, as the male and female side.¹² So, in addition to the relationality inherent in the square of opposition, Lacan’s re-elaboration of it seems to involve the most classical of binarisms: the one and its other, separated into two distinct, juxtaposed halves.

This not only runs counter to what seems to be at stake in the formulae – a non-relational difference – but should also be situated against the background of a more general problematic. First of all, a constant theme within Lacan’s work concerns the object-pole of the subject-object relation, and more in particular that this object should not be understood as the thing that would make one complete. Surely, the object *a* is often considered as a lost object, entailing the idea that it could be found again or somehow recuperated. Yet, the proper Lacanian

are no names for something, it does not exist, or that the notion has no meaning.” Béziau 2012, 7. The author is referring to the O-corner of the square and the fact that all (or most?) natural languages have words for A, E and I, but not for O. E.g. ‘always’ (A), ‘never’ (E) and ‘sometimes’ (I) form a useful triangle of three contrary propositions. Enlarging this triangle into a square of opposition implies the addition of a fourth proposition, O, for which adequate words seem to lack, which compels to the detour of adding a negation to the A-corner – in our example this would be ‘not always’. Because of its connection with Lacan’s not-all, in the closing paragraphs of this chapter we will return to this issue.

10 Parsons 2017, my italics.

11 As noted above, it took Lacan several years to construct this square and hence there are different, incompatible versions of it. Here, the one discussed is the final version, included in Lacan 2018 [1971-1972], 95, 118, 178, 183 and Lacan 1998 [1972-1973], 78.

12 Lacan 1998 [1972-1973], 79-80.

additional qualification of this lost object is that it is *structurally* lost and that the classical Freudian idea of a paternal castration threat forbidding access to the incestuous maternal object, is nothing but a prohibition of what is anyway *impossible* qua object of desire. In that respect, the Lacanian approach of desire is at odds with a long, dominant Western ontological, ethical and political tradition – from Aristophanes’ myth about human beings as divided into two halves desperately searching one another in order to reconstitute a whole, up to a certain *das Wahre ist das Ganze* – which reserves an important place for what one may call ‘plenitude’ or ‘wholeness’. The issue, however, is to conceptualize this structural incompleteness both against and within a tradition that advocates one or the other version of ‘wholeness’. One can state and repeat that the object is structurally lost, proclaim the subject to be a divided subject etcetera, but the challenge remains to *argue* for this in a theoretically solid way.

With the formulae, the issue can be put as follows: how to conceptualize a difference that makes any universalization impossible, a difference as radical that it is not based upon a common ground or is played out against the background of a *unifying* domain? This problem seems to have preoccupied Lacan from the very beginning up and until the last phase of his work. In the imaginary, the basic operation is (mirroring) identification, through which all are equal. Sexual difference on this level, formalized as $-\varphi$, is about having or not having a penis and suggests a potential complementarity between those who have and the have-nots.¹³ Within the symbolic, difference is the operational principle, yet this difference is ultimately guaranteed by one specific signifier, the phallus. As the signifier of lack – the negation at work within the symbolic system – the phallus both establishes the link with the signified or (sexual) meaning *and* bars any definite access to it. Put differently, in Lacan’s structuralist account of the unconscious the Saussurean sign becomes stripped of its unity, relocating the signifier and the signified to two separate realms, kept apart by a bar. This function of the bar, i.e. to prevent the two realms from blending into one, is taken up by the phallus. Although this allows for a take on the subject as lack or as marked by the bar of castration – hence the notation $\$$ for the barred subject –, within this frame of thought, sexual difference seems to be a mere symbolic issue of a division into two positions. Regarding the phallus different (symbolic) positions are possible¹⁴, but that does not change the basic conception of the subject

13 Women, according to Lacan, are not sexually desirable for a man because of their genitalia, but because of their motherly physical characteristics, breasts and hips; see Lacan 1998 [1972-1973], 7 and 35.

14 Cf. Lacan’s earlier work, according to which masculinity and femininity are different *with respect to each other* (i.e. in a *relational* way), in the sense that the one and the other involve, respectively, having the phallus (on the basis of initially not having it and of possibly losing it) and being it.

qua subject of the phallic law. As a subject of the symbolic, the subject may be thoroughly sexual, but this sexuality is inscribed into the symbolic and is nothing but a series of possibilities to situate oneself with regard to the phallus, based on a primordial affirmation of a symbolic order organized by the phallic law.

In Lacan's later work phallic determination remains the basic idea when it comes to conceptualizing desire and enjoyment.¹⁵ Figure 2, the table of the formulae of sexualization, includes one (and only one) function, the phallic function . Therefore, if one is looking for 'a jouissance beyond the phallus'¹⁶, a supposedly exclusively feminine enjoyment, one wonders where to look for this in a (logical) universe made up of *one* function () and *one* variable (x).

The real difference

Influenced by Alexandre Koyré¹⁷ on this point, Lacan considers mathematics to be the defining characteristic of modern science's *modernity* and does not refrain from introducing it into his theoretical apparatus. However, it is only logic that provides a basis for mathematics, examining its method and its proofs, including inferences such as 'if... then...' and connectives such as 'and' and 'or'. It is at this point that one can situate a domain, shared by both psychoanalysis and modern science, namely logic. As Lacan put it early on: "[...] all what psychoanalysis is about, is of the order of language, that is, in the end, a logic."¹⁸ At a later stage of his teaching, and most clearly within the context of the formulae, logic is considered as providing an access to the real, for "[...] it is only because of logic that there is an access to the real."¹⁹ This may sound surprising, for wouldn't one expect the 'real' – certainly if one distinguishes it from 'reality' – to be something outside and different than the manipulation and connection of symbolic notations, such as $p \rightarrow q$? This

15 Lacan 1998 [1972-1973], 79-80.

16 Ibid., 74.

17 See: "[...] ce stupéfiant effort pour expliquer le réel par l'impossible – ou, ce qui revient au même – pour expliquer l'être réel par l'être mathématique parce que, comme je l'ai déjà dit, ces corps qui se meuvent en lignes droites dans un espace vide infini ne sont pas des corps *réels* se déplaçant dans un espace *réel*, mais des corps *mathématiques* se déplaçant dans un espace *mathématique*." Koyré 1966, 185-186 and 199. The 'impossible' Koyré refers to here, concerns counter-intuitive notions such as 'empty space' and 'inertia' (of moving objects): one does not experience these, yet they are needed in order to explain scientifically empirical phenomena (an apple falling from a tree, for instance).

18 Lacan 2005 [1953], 59. From an early stage onwards, Lacan is quite serious about logic; and 'logic' here means logic in its most technical and austere sense. Hence his lukewarm response to people referring to his logical investigations (and not only his topology) as 'an elastic logic' and his repeated criticism of fellow psychoanalysts who think they can do without logic, because Freud stated that the unconscious is *Widerspruchlos*, that it does not know negation or contradiction. Lacan 1961-1962: 21 February 1962, Lacan 1967-1968: 24 January 1968.

19 Lacan 1978, 23.

becomes more intelligible if one adds that Lacan equates the real with the impossible. A passage in Seminar XVII is unambiguously clear about this: "[...] the real is the impossible. Not in the name of a simple obstacle we hit our heads up against, but in the name of the logical obstacle of what, in the symbolic, declares itself to be impossible."²⁰ In brief, the real is the impossible and one encounters it as a 'logical obstacle' in the symbolic at its purest, that is, logic. As he puts it in Seminar XIX: "[...] the real I've been speaking about is accessed via the symbolic. We access this real in and through the impossible that is defined only by the symbolic."²¹ This may provide some answer, but also shifts our question to: what is this 'logical obstacle', this impossible *real* within the symbolic, qualified as an impasse of formalization?²²

'Obstacle' is not a novelty in Lacan's work. As Jacques Derrida's pupils point out in their *The Title of the Letter*²³ – a work praised and repeatedly referred to in *Encore* – the notion of 'instance' in Lacan's early text, 'The Instance of the Letter'²⁴, should be related to the Aristotelian notion of *enstasis*, meaning 'objection' or 'counter-argument'.²⁵ In 'The Instance of the Letter' (and elsewhere), this objection is clearly a phallic objection or obstacle, in the sense that the field of desire is characterized by a structural and constitutive lack, symbolically incarnated by the phallic signifier. The subject is not 'one' and fundamentally lacking, despite all the (psychoanalytic) myths about love as fusion or about, conversely, the birth trauma as the painful undoing of a unity with the maternal body. The phallus is, as noted above, the obstacle to any oneness, to any obliteration of difference (i.e. the endless metonymy of the signifier), or to any erasure of the bar separating signifier from signified. As Lacan reminds his public in *Encore*: "[...] the function of the bar is not unrelated to the phallus."²⁶ Despite its de-unifying function, the phallus is a bad candidate to incarnate the 'logical obstacle' Lacan is looking for. On the one hand,

20 Lacan 2007 [1969-1970], 123. Many other passages could be quoted in support of this identification of the real with the impossible, to which only logic provides access. E.g. "[...] the impossible that turns out to be the real, because it can only be founded within logic." Lacan 2001, 439; or "For a long time now I've been asserting fairly clearly, for it to be enough to recall it here, that the real [...] is affirmed in the impasses of logic." Lacan 2018 [1971-1972], 29. For a discussion of the place and import of (logical) formalization in Lacan, see Cutrofello 2002 and Livingston 2017.

21 Lacan 2018, 121-122.

22 Lacan 1998 [1972-1973], 93.

23 Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe 1996 [1972], 24.

24 Lacan 2006a [1966], 412-441.

25 For more about the context and reception of Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's book, see Rabaté 2011; for *enstasis* in particular, see Chaitin 1996, 111, 144f, and Cejvan 2014.

26 Lacan 1998 [1972-1973], 39. In the context of a discussion of *enstasis*, Lacan refers to courtly love, which is a sublimation in the sense that it keeps the object of desire at a distance – it raises an 'obstacle' to any fulfillment of desire – and finds (phallic) enjoyment in encircling it. Ibid., 69.

because it is considered to be a function – which is not an obstacle, but on the contrary, a fundamental operator within a logical universe – and on the other hand, because the phallus may install lack and undo unity, but it does not seem to entail an exception to its universality. So, if there is an ‘other jouissance’, a feminine exception to the universality of the phallic function, and given Lacan’s avoidance of simply stating that women are not subjected to the phallic function – which would run counter to his fundamental definition of *any* subject as a subject of the signifier – what sort of exception are we dealing with? The latter is definitely not a simple negation, but rather an obstacle.²⁷ And can we find this feminine jouissance beyond the phallus *qua* obstacle within logic, as Lacan seems to be convinced of?²⁸ Lacan’s contention is that this obstacle is a symbolic obstacle, not in the sense of the phallus as a detotalizing function, but as a logical impasse. Lacan identifies two of these impasses, namely the ‘not-all’ and the ‘at-least-one’ (*hommoinsun*).²⁹ Before going into a discussion of these impasses, we first need to acquaint ourselves with the domain within which these impasses occur, i.e. logic.

Peirce’s quadrant and Frege’s judgement

As mentioned above, Lacan’s formulae of sexuation are constructed in a dialogue with the Aristotelian logic and square of opposition. This logic was dominant from ancient Greek times until the end of the nineteenth century. Despite this dominance, most philosophers struggled with several issues pertaining to the square. The most notorious one concerns the so-called existential import of logical statements. If one states that ‘all men are mortal’ does this imply that ‘men’ exist? If so, how about ‘all unicorns have one horn’? The former statement is obviously true – it is, what Kant would call, an analytical statement, in the sense that the notion of ‘unicorn’ necessarily implies ‘one horn’ – but one may be reluctant to conclude that unicorns exist. The example of the unicorns may lead one to conclude that statements of the form ‘All S are P’ have no existential commitment.³⁰ Yet, that does not solve the problem within the Aristotelian square, for as we have seen above, there is a relation of subalternation

27 “[...] it is not at all a matter of making one the negation of the other, but on the contrary of one standing as the *obstacle* to the other.” Lacan 2018 [1971-1972], 86; my italics.

28 “[...] the jouissance that people call by whatever name they can find, the other one, precisely, the one that I am trying to get you to approach by a logical pathway, because, as things currently stand, there is no other [than a logical pathway].” Lacan 1998 [1972-1973], 75.

29 Cf. Lacan 2001: 479: “Recourir au *pastout*, à l’*hommoinsun*, soit aux impasses de la logique.” Throughout this article *pastout* is rendered as *pastout* and not as *pas-tout* or as *pas tous*. This is in accordance with the former quote and stresses the unity of the negation and the quantifier ‘tout’. Surely, Lacan uses variations such as *pas toute*, but his first aim is to introduce a new quantifier, *pastout*, and not so much to state that ‘not all [two words] x...’ or that x is ‘not-whole’.

30 Which is certainly not Aristotle’s position on this issue, as his logic is clearly an onto-logic, i.e. statements of the form ‘all S’ imply the existence of at least one S.

between the A- and I-corners. This means that if “All S are P” is true, then “Some S is P” is also true. The latter formula – the I-corner – explicitly suggests that there is an S (e.g. ‘unicorn’) if one holds ‘Some S is P’ to be true. In brief, it seems that Aristotle’s logic forces one to hold certain statements to be true, although one might not want to do so.

The problem of existential import was eventually solved elegantly by Charles Sanders Peirce. In his chapter of *Elements of Logic* dealing with the square, Peirce proposes the following division of the four basic propositions, A, E, I and O.³¹

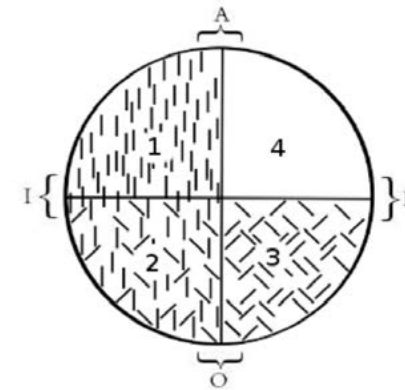


FIGURE 3: Peirce’s diagram

In the example Peirce uses, the subject is ‘line’ and the predicate is ‘vertical’. Remarkable here, is that the empty quadrant 4 of the diagram, is shared by both the A and E propositions. This means that universal statements, either positive (A) or negative (E), do not necessarily entail the existence of the subject term (in this case, ‘line’). They are both trivially true if their subject does not exist. Only propositions of the I and O form imply the existence of their subject term.

Peirce’s diagram may solve the issue of existential commitment, yet the price one pays for it is that the Aristotelian relations between the propositions disappear. Whereas Aristotle considered A and E to be contrary (cannot both be true, but can both be false), Peirce names them “incongruous or disparate”³², for they are different, yet they can both be true (cf. quadrant 4) and both be false (cf. quadrant 2). Subalternation is no longer a valid inference (from A to I, or from E to O); I and O can no longer be called ‘subcontraries’. The only surviving relation is the one of contradiction (both cannot be true, yet one must be) between, respectively, A and E, and O and I.

31 Peirce 1933 [1893].

32 Ibid., 459.

For our purposes it is worth noting that Lacan uses this diagram throughout his Seminar, starting from the ninth, that is *L'identification* (1961-1962).³³ In those sessions the repeated take on Peirce's diagram consists in pointing out how the affirmative universal (A) is valid both when all S are P (quadrant 1) and when there is no S at all (quadrant 4). This leads to a reformulation of A into 'there is no line which is not vertical'. This double negation makes explicit the operation required to actually arrive at a subject: either there is none, or one needs two determinations (or negations), namely two predicates, 'line' and 'vertical'. The subject, 'line', only becomes identifiable if one adds a second predicate, 'vertical'. Were one to isolate the pure subject (line), stripped of its verticality, then the subject is lost, and one shifts to quadrant 4: if there is no verticality, there is also no line. Interestingly, here the 'impossible' occurs for the first time: if the subject belonging to quadrant 1 were to ask 'is there a line without being vertical?', the answer it gets from quadrant 4 is 'not possible'.³⁴ In brief, the imagined exception (the 'not possible') of quadrant 4 not only confirms the rule of quadrant 1, but *creates* the rule of quadrant 1: the general identification of the subject 'line' with the predicate 'vertical' is only possible by *excluding* the possibility of the *absence* of the predicate 'vertical' (quadrant 4).³⁵

This 'no line which is not vertical' is true when there are either only vertical lines, or no lines at all. This basic structure of the A proposition – which defines the subject, for it says what it is and how one can recognize it – is approached in a different way by Gottlob Frege. Although Lacan's emphases are similar to the ones regarding Peirce's diagram, from the brief overview below we will gain one additional and crucial element that makes the formulae of sexuation readable.

33 In this seminar Lacan discusses Peirce's diagram in the lessons of 17 January, 7 March and 27 June 1962 (mentioning Peirce's name not even once!). Other occasions include Lacan 1967-1968, 7 February, 28 February and 6 March 1968 and Lacan 2006c [1971], 69.

34 Lacan 1961-1961, 7 March 1962. See also: "Little Hans, who is as much of a logician as Aristotle, postulates the equation *All animate beings have a phallus*. I assume I'm addressing people who followed my commentary on the analysis of Little Hans, and who also remember what I took care to accentuate last year [that is in the Seminar on Identification, 1961-1962] concerning the proposition known as the universal affirmative, namely, that the universal affirmative is only meaningful in defining the real on the basis of the impossible. It's impossible for an animate being not to have a phallus." Lacan 2014 [1962-1963], 78.

35 On a formal level this argument is analogous to Jacques-Alain Miller's reading of Frege's theory of number: one only arrives at one (1), at something countable, by excluding an impossible concept *and* including it as an empty set, that is zero (0). See Miller 1966 and also Lacan's notion of alienation: subjectivity is based upon a forced choice for one (vertical) out of two options, vertical or non-vertical. If it were to choose non-verticality, there would also be no subject. In that sense, the neurotic subject is a reply from the real (Lacan 2001, 459), for its symbolic subjectivity is based upon an excluded impossibility (the real), yet this exclusion needs to be reckoned with as *cause* if one wants to understand *neurotic* subjectivity, i.e. a subjectivity not fully coinciding with its symbolic identifications (or logical predicates); see also Lacan 1961-1962, 21 March 1962.

The introduction of Frege's logic in the fifteenth Seminar, *L'acte psychanalytique* occurs rather abruptly but is also no surprise.³⁶ In the preceding lessons, logic already appeared, in particular the distinction between the classical, Aristotelian logic and the modern one, initiated by Frege, amongst others.³⁷ The ambition of Frege's *Begriffsschrift* consists in purifying logic of any trace of natural language or what he calls the *Sprache des Lebens*.³⁸ This attempt at stripping language of any ambiguous meaning effect or 'content', in order to solely preoccupy oneself with its form, is not a novel one. Already in Aristotle's work – the *Analytica Priora* – the initial impetus to formalization is present, yet the application of (meaningless) letters remains rooted in the Greek language, with all sorts of odd and obscuring effects. Frege's intention, however, does not consist in formalizing language to such an extreme that one would be left with a totally 'empty' formal language. He rather wants to develop a new language, apt for pure thought. In this new language concepts (*Begriffe*) are expressed, but only as a writing of logically well-formed sentences and of their interrelations. In this respect, his logic resembles mathematics, but as a *method* it is situated at the more fundamental level of elementary notions such as 'and', 'if', 'not' and so on. In general, the aim is to arrive at a *Lückenlosigkeit der Schlusskette*, that is to create a language that allows for a watertight connection between logical sentences.³⁹ In order to do so, only two connectives are required, negation (*Verneinung*) and implication (*Bedingtheit*, the conditionality of "if ... then ..." clauses), added to the general form of assertions:



FIGURE 4: the basic form of an assertion⁴⁰

36 Lacan 1967-1968, 13 March 1968.

37 Frege's theory of number was already alluded to in Seminars IV and IX; see Lacan 1994 [1956-1957], 237 and Lacan 1961-1962, 28 February 1962.

38 Frege 2014, xi.

39 Ibid., x. Lacan reminds his audience of the contemporaneity of Freud's psychoanalysis and Frege's foundation of modern logic; cf. Lacan 2018 [1971-1972], 41. It is tempting here to connect Frege's desire for a language without gaps (*lückenlos*) to Freud's development of psychoanalysis, based on a taking into account of the gaps (*Lücken*) in the continuity of conscious mental activity. See, e.g., 'Manuskript K' (1896), which deals with hysteria and its primary symptom, i.e. the *Schreckäusserung bei Psychischer Lücke*; Freud 1986, 177.

40 Ibid., 24.

An assertion consists of a horizontal line (the *Inhaltsstrich*, content stroke), preceded by a small vertical one (which indicates that the sentence is an *Urteil*, a judgement, meaning that one holds the assertion to be true). At the end of the sentence Frege places the function which applies to the argument (or variable) for which a concavity (*Höhlung*) is reserved in the middle of the horizontal line. This concavity is the place for what one traditionally called the subject. However, Frege's reformulation of the subject-predicate logic into a logic involving functions and arguments has the advantage that no existential commitment whatsoever is made. Sticking to our initial example of 'all lines are vertical', 'vertical' and 'line' become, respectively, function and argument. If there are no lines, the concavity remains empty, which does not change the proposition's truth. Moreover, and more clearly than is the case with Peirce's diagram, there is no essential relation between argument and function. The function 'vertical' can be applied to any x that is vertical. In that respect, Frege's logic is a purely *extensional* one: the proposition is true for any object that may happen to be vertical. A function does not tell us anything about the 'essential' characteristics of the argument ('subject'), it simply creates a set (an extension) consisting of all elements that satisfy the function.

It seems that Lacan makes the effort to introduce his audience to Frege's logic – not without reassuring them that this is tied up closely with the psychoanalytic clinic – to illustrate his definition of the subject as that what a signifier (S_1) represents for another signifier (S_2). In Frege's rearticulation of Aristotle's logic the bond between argument (S_1) and function (S_2) is loosened to the point that together they may form a valid logical proposition, but there is no longer any essential bond expressed between them. 'Line' (S_1) may be the argument of the function 'vertical' (S_2), but nothing prevents any other S_1 to take up the place of the argument. This is well made visible by the concavity in Frege's assertions: it is a void waiting to be filled by one or the other argument.

Despite this resemblance between Frege's propositions and Lacan's take on the subject, it is precisely when pointing this out, that Lacan focuses on a difficulty, already present in Aristotle, which Frege does not touch upon, let alone solve. His logic may be purely extensional, the question is how something comes to occupy the place of the argument (= the concavity in the assertion). For this to happen one always already needs 'something' one is talking about, or the existence of what logicians call 'a domain'. Propositions like 'All lines are vertical' imply that potentially there is an x which can be identified as 'line', and more generally, that it is 'lines' we are talking about. This may raise the question what a line is, to which the answer can only be put in a logical proposition of the form "All lines are ...", suggesting an infinite regress – any proposition seems to require another one. That is why Lacan wonders whether the subject (= argument) does not appear as a first predicate

(= function), since the x of a logical proposition already seems to imply a well-defined collection of such x's.⁴¹ Within the context of the formulae of sexuation, this fundamental question is repeated when Lacan is commenting on the formula $\forall x$ x: "What is this x? I have said that it is defined as though by a domain. Even so, does this mean we know what this is? Do we know what a man is when we say *all men are mortal*? We learn something about him from the fact of saying that he is mortal, and precisely from the knowledge that this is true for all men. However, before introducing this *all men*, we only know the most approximate features, which can be defined in the most variable fashion."⁴²

This observation, of course, does not impair Frege's logic, but touches upon a more general issue which, as we will see, proves to be crucial for Lacan's construction of the formulae of sexuation.

On why the square is not a square

Before presenting our reading of the formulae, we need to discuss one more logical aspect. Apart from Frege and Peirce, Lacan⁴³ also pays tribute to Jacques Brunschwig, who published a technical article on Aristotle's logic in the last issue of *Cahiers pour l'analyse* (1969), a journal founded by Jacques-Alain Miller, amongst others.⁴⁴ In this article, Brunschwig points out an ambiguity in Aristotle's use of 'some'. 'Some' may mean 'some, perhaps all' – this is its so-called minimal interpretation, allowing for subalternation between A and I – or rather 'some, but not all'. The latter, 'maximal' interpretation corresponds to the ordinary usage of the word 'some', but logically it has quite a dramatic effect on the square of opposition. If one opts for the maximal interpretation of 'some' – 'some, but not all' – then subalternation between the universal and the particular is no longer possible. Instead of being able to derive the particular from the universal, A and I entertain a relation of contrariness (both can be false, but not true together). The relation between the two particulars, I and O, changes as well, from subcontrariness into equivalence, for if, e.g., one states that 'some birds are black' (I) – and here, 'some' means 'some, but not all' – then one implies that 'some birds are *not* black' (O), and *vice versa*.

There seem to be good reasons to relate Lacan's *pastout* – i.e. one of the 'logical impassés' referred to above – to this maximal interpretation

41 Lacan 1967-1968, 13 March 1968; see also Lacan 1961-1962, 17 January 1962.

42 Lacan 2018 [1971-1972]: 32-33 and 6.

43 Ibid., 90; see also Lacan 2016 [1975-1976], 6, and 184-185 for Jacques-Alain Miller's clarifying note, including more references.

44 For a summary of Brunschwig's article, alongside translations and comments on many of the other articles included in *Cahiers pour l'analyse*, see the resourceful website <http://cahiers.kingston.ac.uk> put together by Peter Hallward, Knox Peden *et al.*

of 'some'. First of all, it forms an obstacle or objection to the universal proposition including the same subject and predicate; and what we are looking for is, as noted above, an *obstacle* to universality. Secondly, in most contexts the first meaning of this some is 'not-all'; if one states that 'some flowers are red' one may first and foremost intend to state that 'not all flowers are red'. So, isn't Lacan's (feminine) *pastout* a direct application of Brunschwig's insightful distinction between, on one hand, the *minimal* 'some', privileged by Aristotle, allowing for the traditional square of opposition, and, on the other hand, a *maximal* 'some' objecting to universal propositions and saying 'no' to 'all', which sounds exactly like the de-universalizing proposition one may want to attribute to the feminine op-position to the universality of the phallic function? This is Guy Le Gaufey's guiding thesis in his detailed analysis of the formulae, which will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Le Gaufey's logical approach to the formulae eventually results in this square of opposition:

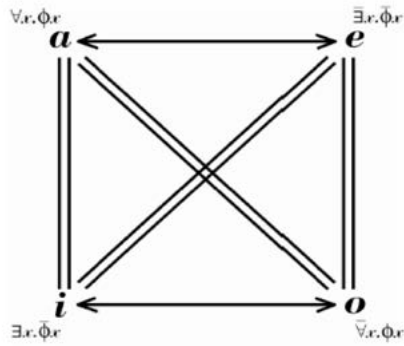


FIGURE 5: Le Gaufey's version of Lacan's square⁴⁵

The reader immediately notices the differences with Lacan's presentation of the formulae (see Figure 2). First of all, the formulae are identified according to the Aristotelian distinction between A, I, E and O; secondly, relations are added between the formulae, namely = (contradiction) and \leftrightarrow (equivalence), and thirdly, the formula $\forall x \Phi x$ has switched places from the bottom right to the top right of the square. The advantage is obvious, for it provides – as the title of Le Gaufey's book promises – a logical consistency to Lacan's formulae. Although all three alterations deserve a critical examination – and, in my opinion, should be rejected – as they are based on Le Gaufey's initial decision to read Lacan's formulae as a square of opposition in which the particulars, I and O, are interpreted in a maximal way, the discussion will be limited to this.

⁴⁵ Le Gaufey 2006, 87.

For his decision, Le Gaufey finds inspiration in the aforementioned article by Brunschwig, who constructs the following diagram:

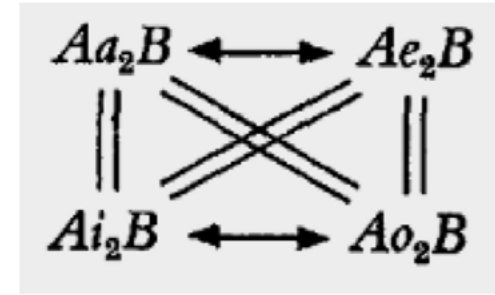


FIGURE 6: square of opposition with maximal I and O⁴⁶

Despite the differing symbolic notation – e.g. 'Aa₂B' instead of "All A are B" – this square is indeed identical to the one including Lacan's formulae, as Le Gaufey presents it. That we are dealing with a maximal particular is made clear by the subscript '2' included in each formula, which is intended to differentiate it from the more common minimal interpretation and use of the square. The point not to overlook, however, is that Brunschwig presents this diagram in a conditional mode: "if one wants the couples a-o and e-i to remain contradictory, [...]"⁴⁷ As we have seen, in the Aristotelean square the universals A and E are contradictory with, respectively, the particulars I and O. If we interpret the latter in a maximal way, then these – I₂ and O₂ – are not only contradictory to their diagonally opposed universals – E₂ and A₂ – but also to the universals on the same side. This logically results in the equivalence of A₂ and E₂. At first sight, there are some problems with this reasoning. If we start at the bottom of the diagram, the equivalence of I₂ and O₂ is logically sound: if one defines 'some' as 'some, but not all', then 'some A are B' is equivalent with 'some A are not B', as both propositions mutually imply each other. If we now move to the relations between, respectively, A₂ and I₂, and E₂ and O₂, then it is less clear why one would call them contradictory. Contradictory means that both propositions can be neither true, nor false together – simply put, it is either the one or the other. Yet, an example makes us doubt this idea immediately: if I₂ is 'some trees are blue', then A₂ is 'all trees are blue', which makes it not too hard to imagine that *both* propositions can be false, i.e. when 'no trees are blue' (E₂). If both propositions can be false, then they are not contradictory but contrary. And if A₂ and I₂ are contrary, and if – as we have seen – I₂ and E₂ are contradictory, then A₂ and E₂ cannot be equivalent, for they entertain

⁴⁶ Brunschwig 1969, 7.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

different relations (contrariness and contradiction) to the equivalent I_2 and O_2 . In brief, Brunschwig's diagram looks like a forced and an altogether false construction of a 'maximal' square. Yet, this is too hasty a conclusion, for Brunschwig was careful enough to start the presentation of his 'maximal' square with a conditional *if* and to conclude it by pointing out the *paradoxical* nature of this square. Moreover, in the subsequent paragraph and in a clarifying footnote, makes clear that A_2 and E_2 are *both* defined as 'all are or all are not', which simply means that A_2 and E_2 are not so much equivalent, but rather identical. The same holds for the particulars I_2 and O_2 , for the maximal 'some' means in both cases 'some are and some are not'. This leads Brunschwig to conclude that, given the identity of A_2 and E_2 , and of I_2 and O_2 the maximal square is not a square of opposition but "a segment of opposition" involving two instead of four propositions.⁴⁸

When extension and intension do not coincide

Brunschwig's remark about the 'maximal' square of opposition serves as a good starting point for this concluding section on Lacan's formulae of sexuation. For, indeed, many commentators mention the fact that from a classical logical point of view Lacan's four formulae can easily be reduced to two.⁴⁹

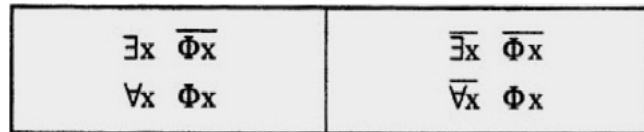


FIGURE 2: Lacan's formulae of sexuation

In this diagram, $\forall x \Phi x$ and $\overline{\exists x \overline{\Phi x}}$ are equivalent, as are $\overline{\forall x \Phi x}$ and $\exists x \overline{\Phi x}$. Stating that 'all x are subjected to Φ ' ($\forall x \Phi x$) means exactly the same thing as stating that 'there is no x which is not subjected to Φ ' ($\overline{\exists x \overline{\Phi x}}$), and the same conclusion applies to $\overline{\forall x \Phi x}$ and $\exists x \overline{\Phi x}$.⁵⁰ So, why would one complexify things, using two pairs of equivalent formulae contradicting each other, instead of two contradictory ones? Or, put differently, why state *one* thing *twice*, i.e. $\forall x \Phi x$ and $\overline{\exists x \overline{\Phi x}}$, $\overline{\forall x \Phi x}$ and $\exists x \overline{\Phi x}$?

⁴⁸ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁹ Yet, to my knowledge, none of them considers this awkward fact to be the key to 'unlock' the formulae. The apparent equivalence between the formulae is not a difficult yet secondary characteristic of Lacan's formulae (that one can ignore or should explain away), their equivalence is precisely the point of Lacan's logical argument.

⁵⁰ Lacan puts the negation stroke above the quantifiers \forall and \exists and the function Φ . As we will see, this is done for a specific reason.

The first thing to observe here, is that if Lacan is logically articulating a difference it is definitely not a binary opposition; there is no opposition whatsoever between the 'two' sides, as both express (logically) one and the same opposition between a formula containing an existential (or particular) quantifier, \exists , and a formula containing a universal one, \forall . If there is any difference at stake, it can only be found in the interpretation of the quantifiers, in particular the \forall .⁵¹

On the left side, we find an unambiguous assertion according to which 'all x are subjected to Φ ' ($\forall x \Phi x$). This proposition is contradicted by the one above it, stating that 'there is an x that is not subjected to Φ ' ($\exists x \overline{\Phi x}$). As already mentioned before, here we can locate the *real* of the symbolic universe whose subjects are all subjected to the phallic function. This universe, as Lacan argues, is only possible on the basis of the exclusion of the *impossible*, namely that there would be one who is not subject to the phallic law. The more technical point here, concerns the issue we encountered during our discussion of Frege, namely the constitution of a domain of x's. How do we know what belongs to this domain, or, how do we single out x's who serve as arguments satisfying function Φ ? In many commentaries of the left, so-called 'masculine' side of Lacan's diagram, the x is identified as 'the male (subject)'.⁵² Even if one adds that this x could just as well be a biological woman – for sex is not to be reduced to natural characteristics – this seems to be missing the point of Lacan's *logical formalization* of subjectivity and sexuality. The formulae on the left side express nothing more (or less) than that subjectivity – what one is dealing with in the psychoanalytic clinic – is defined by its being subjected to the phallic function. In order to constitute this domain of subjects, one needs to define it and here the impossible exception plays its role of providing the essential predicate, phallic castration, to be able to single out x's belonging to the domain. In pseudo-mathematical language one could state that the exception draws the circle around the elements that belong to the class defined by $\forall x \Phi x$. As Lacan puts it in one of the earlier seminars, any class presupposes a 'classing' (*classement*) and this does not happen through including elements to a pre-constituted class, but first of all by creating a class based on considering the absence of a certain trait as impossible.⁵³ This, moreover, makes evident the proximity and difference between

⁵¹ That is another reason not to follow Le Gaufey's presentation of the square: a logical square is based on the difference between two sides, whereas Lacan's 'square' may be not a square at all, but rather a one-sided 'universe' within which two formulas are repeated, *with a small difference*. This difference is indicated by the vertical line separating the two pairs of formulas, equivalent along a diagonal axis. The vertical line, therefore, should not be considered as a clear-cut division into two, but rather as the virtual line separating inside from outside on a Moebius strip.

⁵² See, e.g., Fink 1995, 104-125.

⁵³ Lacan 1961-1962, 7 March 1962.

logic and psychoanalysis. Both deal with the subject (the argument ‘x’ in assertions); and what this subject is, its essence, as Lacan puts it, “situates itself essentially in logic. It is a pure statement [*énoncé*] of discourse.”⁵⁴ The difference, however, is that logicians usually take the domain (or the universe) to which their propositions apply for granted, and if, as Lacan argues, the constitution of a domain requires an impossible proposition, then this impossibility, this ‘impasse’ is – for sound reasons – left out of the discussion. The *neurotic* subject is in that sense not a logical subject, for it entertains a complex relation – Oedipal, Freudians would argue – to this excluded impossibility or the *hommoinsun*.⁵⁵

Moving to the right side, we have to address the difficulty that its two formulae are seemingly equivalent to the ones discussed above. This impression, however, is immediately contradicted by the divergent translations of one of Lacan’s crucial notions pertaining to the right, ‘feminine’ side of the diagram. This notion is *pastout*, and one can find at least three different translations in English of it: not-whole, not-all and notany.⁵⁶ As the latter is a mere suggestion, the more interesting alternatives are not-whole and not-all, especially because they appear in officially translated volumes of Lacan’s Seminar. The first option, not-whole, is the one chosen by Bruce Fink in his translation of *Encore*; the second one, of more recent date, is Adrian Price’s choice, in his translation of *... or Worse*, for ‘not-all’ as the English equivalent for *pastout*. In a translator’s footnote, Price qualifies Fink’s argument in support of his ‘not-whole’ “as flimsy as it is unprecedented”.⁵⁷ There is indeed no immediate reason to render Lacan’s *pastout* into ‘not-whole’, for it seems to be a mere, although oddly written, negation of the classical, Aristotelean ‘all’. Yet, without going into the details of Fink’s argument, it is also clear that Lacan does not conceive of his *pastout* as a negation of ‘all’, i.e. a ‘not every’. If one reads *pastout* as ‘not every’, one can only interpret Φx as ‘not every x is subjected to the phallic function’, which is equivalent with the aforementioned $\exists x$ and turns Φx into a mere redundancy. Therefore, one can argue in favour of Fink’s choice to avoid the quantitative ‘not-all’ (or ‘not-every’), although the major disadvantage of ‘not-whole’ is its tempting suggestion to interpret the proposition as ‘x

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54 Lacan 2006c [1971], 109. Here we touch upon a topic also present in Lacan’s later seminars, that is the difference between the said (*dit*) and the saying (*dire*). One can relate this to the issue of universality and its constitutive exception, in the sense that what is said (the universal) relies on a primordial saying (the exception) that provides a symbolic being (an essence) to any x (or the subject) belonging to the domain.

55 Lacan 2001, 479.

56 See Lacan 1998 [1972-1973], Lacan 2018 [1971-1972] and Gallagher 2008, respectively.

57 Lacan 2016 [1975-1976], 229. It should be noted that Fink’s translation of *pastout* as ‘not-whole’ runs into trouble immediately after its first occurrence in *Encore*, obliging the translator to an expression of surprise: “Curiously enough, he [Lacan] says *pas-tout* here instead of *pas-toute*.” Lacan 1998 [1972-1973], 7. See above, footnote 29.

is not-wholly subjected to the phallic function’, leading to (or inspired by) the ubiquitous commentaries on Lacan’s feminine as a subject that is not wholly castrated or, as a subject including a part that subtracts itself from castration.⁵⁸

The obvious retort to this sort of reading is that one does not need logic to state, let alone argue, that men and women, with respect to the phallic function, are different. This may be a clinical observation, but this also amounts to considering sexual difference as a fact. While, as we have seen, sexual difference may be empirical or clinically observed, its ‘reality’ can *only* be approached via logic. In brief, if we follow Lacan’s torturous ways through the complexities of classical and modern logic, one should provide *logical* arguments for the basic intuition that any sexuality is hetero-sexuality, that is dividing the asexual unity of the domain, to which *all* subjects belong, into two.

The logical argument for the *real* of sexual difference is indeed related to Lacan’s introduction of the *pastout*, one of two ‘impasses’ mentioned above. Again, it is fruitful not to limit one’s reading to *Encore*, but to also pay attention to the first more or less sustained discussion of *pas tout*. This occurs in the last session of Seminar IX, *L’identification*.⁵⁹ There, Lacan makes use of the well-known saying ‘all that glitters is not gold’ (*tout ce qui brille n’est pas or*). This saying is a rather odd one, for one should not take its formulation literally to mean that all that glitters is not gold, but rather as *not all* that glitters is gold.⁶⁰ Lacan mentions that he is not the first to discuss the phrase, but keeps his audience ignorant about who else may have shed some light on this negation of a universal statement. There is no conclusive evidence for this, but one can guess that Lacan is referring to Robert Blanché’s article on negation and opposition, for in that text it is argued that there are two ways to the negate the affirmative universal, namely to deny either universally, or universality.⁶¹ The author remarks that it is difficult to render this difference into French and therefore expresses it in Latin, *omnis non* and *non omnis*. He explains this in the following way: “We have recourse to Latin in order to avoid the equivoques of French, which usually does not put a negation in front of a complete proposition [that is *non omnis*]. Thus, *Tout ce qui brille n’est pas d’or* appears as a negative universal [...] although the meaning is obviously

.....
58 Despite Lacan’s statement that: “She [a woman] is there [in the phallic function] in full (*à plein*).” Lacan 1998 [1972-1973], 74.

59 Lacan 1961-1962, 27 June 1962; anticipated in the lesson of 17 January 1962.

60 One could relate this to the O-corner’s difficulty discussed in footnote 9: it would be easier to state that ‘some glittering things are not gold’, but if one wants to emphasize that it is definitely *not* all of them, there is no immediate word available, hence the addition of a negation in front a proposition that starts with ‘all’ (and which may explain this negation’s capacity to move from its proper place, in front, to a less logically precise position in the sentence).

61 Blanché 1957, 190-191.

a particular one, negating universality. It is a pity [...], if one wants to avoid any possible equivocal, to be forced to compensate for this via detours such as *il n'est pas vrai que...* (or, in English: *it is not case that...*)⁶² So, if the problem revolves around the absence for a word that expresses directly 'it is not the case that all ...' – cf. the O-corner discussed above – Lacan's *pastout* can be considered as filling this gap in the French language, albeit with a specific twist.

In his comments on the French saying, *Tout ce qui brille ...*, Lacan indicates that it would be missing its point to simply understand 'gold' as a subset of 'glittering', implying that all what is gold glitters, but not the other way around. It is rather that there is something about gold that makes it glitter – "what gives to an object its desirable and fascinating colour" – yet, the saying makes us doubt not just anything that glitters, but gold itself. If gold is the cause of our desire for anything glittering, if 'glitter' only interests us to the extent that one supposes it to be gold, then if not all that glitters is gold, this puts into question gold. In that case, one does not doubt the existence of gold, but wonders what recognizable (i.e. desirable) feature it has beyond its glittering quality. Simply put, if not all that glitters is gold, what is gold then? Is there a way to tell false from true gold, if only 'glittering' is available as a discriminating feature? And if gold is the cause of glitter, the reason why we are fascinated by glitter in the first place, should we actually trust this cause, knowing that as cause of (our desire for) glitter it is able to produce glitter which is not gold? As Lacan puts it with a pun, the saying hints at the not-gold (*le point d'orage*) of gold.

This saying and the questions it elicits on Lacan's behalf, should be related to the paragraphs right before them, one of many passages in which Lacan discusses the Aristotelian 'all' and the question whether it establishes between subject and predicate a relation of *having* or rather *being*. This difference is known in logic as the difference between *extension* and *intension*, or, as Lacan prefers to name them, *étendue* and *compréhension*.⁶³ In most cases Lacan seems to reject the distinction or, at least to doubt whether it is of any use to consider a proposition as referring to objects that satisfy the function (*extension*; they possess the required predicate) and/or as expressing a meaning (*intension*; they are what the proposition expresses about them).⁶⁴ This reluctance to embrace

62 Ibid., 190-191.

63 He quotes this couple of notions from the Jansenist treatise on logic, *La logique ou l'art de penser*, published in the year of Pascal's death; Arnauld and Nicole 1992 [1662], 51-52. See also Kneale and Kneale 1962, 318 and Blanché 1970, 184. Note: Lacan connects *compréhension* to the 'time for comprehending' introduced his 1946 text on 'logical time'; Lacan 1964-1965, 13 January 1965. In an e-mail exchange (30 Sept. 2018), Dany Nobus pointed out that both *compréhension* and comprehending involve a question about *being*.

64 Lacan 1961-1962, 17 January 1962; Lacan 2018 [1971-1972], 101.

the distinction between extension and intension, should not surprise us, for 'comprehension' (i.e. intension) is precisely what Lacan considers secondary to and often irrelevant for his approach of the subject as a subject of signifiers (barred from their signified). If one states, e.g., that all human beings are mortal, "what does one understand then? [...] What is there to understand?", Lacan asks rhetorically. However, this does not mean that Lacan will simply leave this distinction aside. On the contrary, it is one of the themes most constantly returned to throughout the construction of the formulae. The crucial issue here, concerns the problem we already discussed before: how does a domain – or a 'universe of discourse' as Lacan sometimes calls it as well, borrowing this terminology from the logicians Augustus de Morgan and George Boole – gets constituted, in order for objects to be(come) elements of it, and, conversely, how does one single out objects in order for a domain to get constituted? Regarding the so-called 'male' side, we have argued that this is done by a constitutive exception, allowing for the universality of 'All x is subjected to the phallic function'. This means that the domain consists of x's that satisfy the function Φ . Therefore, in this case, the *extension* and *intension* (the '*compréhension*' or 'meaning' referred to above) of $\forall x \Phi x$ mutually imply each other. Its extension is all the x's belonging to the domain, its intension concerns the definition of x, what this x is, or in less logical terms, what allows us to recognize such an x as an x belonging to the domain – which is, in this case, 'being subjected to the phallic function'. There is no other trait, characteristic, attribute or predicate (*intension*) that allows us to count an x as an x belonging to the domain (*extension*). This is, of course, in conformity with the basic axiom of Lacanian psychoanalysis: a subject is a subject of castration, and there is no other definition available or any other predicate that would give an x 'access' to the domain.

This distinction was already known to Aristotle, for he differentiates between three different meanings of the universal 'all': 1. *kata pantos*, 2. *kath'auto* and 3. *katholou*.⁶⁵ The first use is identical to what is currently named extension; the second one refers to intension – the predicate expresses something essential about, a 'defining' aspect of the subject – and the third use expresses what one calls a 'commensurate universal', relating a predicate to all subjects (*extension*), in an essential way (*intension*), establishing co-extensivity between the subject and its predicate.⁶⁶ The latter criterion simply means what we have been describing above regarding the Lacanian subject: all subjects are castrated and all what is castrated is a subject. One could also describe it as the case where subject and predicate are indistinguishable, not

65 Aydede 1998, 24.

66 Ibid., 28.

even allowing for questions about the possible difference between the extension and intension of $\forall x \Phi x$.

This, however, is precisely what the 'feminine' side of Lacan's diagram does: seemingly, it is a mere repetition of the 'masculine' side, yet it drives a wedge between the extension and the intension of $\forall x \Phi x$. This reading is corroborated by several passages in which Lacan refers to the difference between *pan(tês)* and *holon*, or, in Latin, between *omnis* and *totus*, or, in modern logical language, between *extension* and *intension*.⁶⁷ The *pastout* read in a classical way, may lead one to conclude that it is equivalent with $\exists x$.⁶⁸ Yet, as we have seen, the *pastout* is not a straightforward denial of affirmative universality – it definitely does not mean $\exists x$ or $\forall x$ – it means that 'all x are subjected to the phallic function' *extensionally* but not in any *intensional* way.⁶⁹ The quantifier *pastout*⁷⁰ – invented by Lacan in response to Blanché and other logicians dealing with the problem of ex- and intensionality, and rendered as a negation not in front, but above the $\forall (\Phi x)$, *pastout* in one word and not *pas tout* or *pas tous* – indicates that all x are subjected to the phallic function (*extension*), but do not constitute an 'all', that is a class or a domain defined by this particular function (*intension*). All the elements of the *set* defined by Φx do not constitute a *class*. In a way analogous to the example discussed above, 'not all that glitters is gold', the *pastout* puts the function (gold or, in this case, phallus) into question: if the phallus determines subjectivity – turns *all x* into a subject – then the *not-all* introduces doubt whether the phallus suffices to do so. This does not mean that one can use any other function than the phallic one to identify the Lacanian subject or, conversely, that there are subjects who are not subjects of the phallic function. The mere difference between $\forall x \Phi x$ and Φx resides therein, that the latter proposition allows for subjects of the phallic function who are not *essentially* characterized as such. If one were to identify those as 'women', one can state that they do have an *existence*, yet no *essence* as subjects of the phallic function. The latter idea is expressed in many different ways by Lacan, from the famous *La femme n'existe pas* – there is no *the* woman, for this would imply the possession of an essential trait⁷¹ – to more oblique formulations such as for women the phallus does not function as *cause* (i.e., it does not determine them as subjects), they are

67 Lacan 1961-1962, 17 January and 27 June 1962; Lacan 1967-1968, 13 March 1968.

68 Lacan 1998 [1972-1973], 102: "In other words, this not-all, in classical logic, seems to imply the existence of the One that constitutes (*fait*) an exception." (translation modified)

69 Ibid. 103: "[...] it is no longer from the perspective of *extension* that we must take up the not-whole." (my italics)

70 Ibid., 72: "[...] a never before seen function in which the negation is placed on the quantifier".

71 Ibid.

not linked to castration essentially⁷² or the *pastout* is "an all outside of 'universe'" (*un tout d'hors univers*), that is not the negation of 'all', but an 'all' that negates its own capacity to constitute a universe (or domain).⁷³

Conclusion

Whether there is a non-binary difference between men and women, was the guiding question in our step-by-step reconstruction of the formulae. Now, we can locate this difference in the *pastout*, which is "an objection to the universal".⁷⁴ This universal, Φ , concerns both men and women as subject; they may relate differently to it, but that does not alter their status as subjects of the phallic function. The difference, therefore, is not a mere negation of the function Φ , for, on the contrary, this function has as its argument *all x*. The difference or 'logical impasse' concerns the constitution of the domain to which *all x* belong. On the 'masculine' side of the formulae, there is a short-circuit between what the subject is and what it has qua discriminating feature, i.e. phallic castration. This side is not contradicted by the other, 'feminine' one, but simply opened up by a formula that says 'yes, all are subjected the phallic function, but no, that is not what we are.' Or, put differently, men's existence coincides with their essence (= symbolic being), whereas women, as the other sex, suggest the possibility of an existence without an essence.

How is this related then to the absence of sexual relation? Paradoxically enough, sexuality is the field where the partner appears as the *a*-sexual object of desire. A sexual relation would imply that it is based upon or produces a common ground between two different positions. Yet, as we have seen there is no difference, only an obstacle dissolving any (shared) universality. Here we encounter the two dimensions of the object *a*. On the one hand, it is the ir-rational object, the part without a whole, the thing that exists without having a being (i.e. a symbolic essence), and as such the incarnation of the obstacle to universality of the symbolic. On the other hand, it is a phantasmatic object, creating the illusion of a possible completeness. Sexuality may be *not all*, the object *a* occupies the place of and veils the *notall* in the phantasm.⁷⁵

72 Lacan 2018 [1971-1972], 35.

73 Lacan 2001, 466. This is 'confirmed' by the other 'feminine' formula, , which is equivalent with $\forall x \Phi x$, but also denies that there is a constitutive exception to the universality of $\forall x \Phi x$. All women are subjected to the phallic function, but there is no universe (*intensionally* speaking) of 'woman'.

74 Lacan 1998 [1972-1973], 102.

75 Lacan 1967-1968, 28 February and 20 March 1968. This allows for an interpretation of Lacan's seemingly offhand allusion to Pascal's well-known *pensée*: "[...] anyone trying to act the angel acts the beast." Lacan 1998 [1972-1973], 20; Pascal 1966, 242; see also 60. In sexuality the other appears as an *a*, with whom one performs an 'angelic', sexless act, only to (re-)produce the mute (*bête*) signifier that governs the subject as a subject of the signifier. This universal coincidence of angelism and animality, however, is supplemented by a contingent *not-all*.

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Lacan's Endgame: Philosophy, Science, and Religion in the Final Seminars

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Abstract: In this intervention, I argue for drawing a sharp distinction between the late Lacan and the final Lacan. Specifically, I defend a reading of Lacan's twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth seminars (*L'insu que sait de l'une-bévue, s'aile à mourre* [1976-1977] and *Le moment de conclure* [1977-1978]) according to which this very last Lacan self-critically abandons much of what he pursued during the later period of his teaching from the 1960s through the mid-1970s. In particular, I contend that, starting in 1976, Lacan puts an end to the reign of the *matheme*, namely, the pursuit of an analysis purged of meaning through mathematical-style formalizations bearing upon a senseless Real. He does so motivated by a combination of methodological/pedagogical and ontological/metaphysical reasons. As I see it, the final Lacan opts instead for an anti-reductive treatment of *sens* avowedly inspired by Marxian materialism. The meanings of Imaginary-Symbolic reality arise from, but thereafter become relatively autonomous in relation to, a meaningless Real that itself in turn comes to be affected and perturbed by these same meanings. My reconstruction of the final Lacan undermines narratives suggesting an uninterrupted continuity in the later Lacan's trajectory from the start of the 1960s right up until his death in 1981. Moreover, I show how and why Lacan, in his last years, significantly reconfigures the interrelations he posits between psychoanalysis, philosophy, science, and religion.

Keywords: Lacan, *Seminar XXIV*, *Seminar XXV*, Philosophy, Science, Religion, *Matheme*, Materialism

§1 A Conclusive Materialism: Awakening from the Formalist Dream

Jacques-Alain Miller contends that Jacques Lacan's *Seminar* actually ends in 1978, just under three years prior to his death. This contention surfaces during a 2007 session of Miller's annual course given in the 2006-2007 academic year. The March 2006 Champ freudien edition of *Seminar XVI (D'un Autre à l'autre* [1968-1969]) still lists *La topologie et le temps* as *Seminar XXVI* (1978-1979). But, the October 2006 edition of *Seminar XVIII (D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant* [1971]) deletes it from the list of seminars. The evidence suggests that, sometime between March and October 2006, Miller decided to strip *Topology and Time* of its status as the final installment of *le Séminaire*.

Miller's 2006 decision goes against those who count as belonging to Lacan's *Seminar* not only the meetings of 1978-1979, but also the declarations surrounding the "dissolution" of l'École freudienne de Paris at the start of the 1980s. By Miller's reckoning, the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth seminars (*L'insu que sait de l'une-bévue, s'aile à mourre* [1976-1977] and *Le moment de conclure* [1977-1978]) should be counted

as Lacan's last two strictly speaking.¹ Arguably, the very title of *Seminar XXV, Time to Conclude*, signals as much.²

Without pronouncing for or against Miller's cutting off of *le Séminaire* with the twenty-fifth, I would wager that anyone who scrutinizes the sessions of *La topologie et le temps* will find precious little of substance or clarity. These sessions' title and a handful of brief suggestive moments (ones I have dealt with elsewhere³) are all that an exhausted Lacan, largely silent and often ceding the floor to younger others, leaves his audience.⁴ Counting in Miller's favor, *Seminars XXIV* and *XXV* contain, by comparison, more sustained lines of serious and followable reflection on Lacan's part. During the two academic years of 1976-1977 and 1977-1978, Lacan indeed attempts to bring his intellectual journey to a close by retrospectively taking stock of the fundamental axioms and big-picture implications of his version of psychoanalysis.

Yet, there is no consensus even amongst Lacanians about the importance, or lack thereof, of his final seminars. Some are skeptical or dismissive of his topologically-inflected discourse of the mid-to-late 1970s. Alain Lemosof depicts Lacan, starting in *Seminar XXIV*, as old, tired, and desperate to address before dying doctrinal and practical problems generated within the École freudienne.⁵ Even Miller himself admits as much.⁶ Nonetheless, Lemosof still finds many things of value in his parsing of the twenty-fourth seminar itself (as does Miller in his seminar on *The Very Last Lacan* of 1976-1978). By contrast, Marcelle Marini, in her summaries of *Seminars XXIV* and *XXV*, finds little of worth. She writes of "the repetition of by-now hackneyed themes"⁷ and sees "Nothing... really new"⁸ in these final years of *le Séminaire*. Similarly, Élisabeth Roudinesco, in her 1993 biography of Lacan, somewhat derisively refers to this last stretch of Lacan's trajectory as time lost on "planet Borromeo."⁹

I do not share the more negative assessments of the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth *Seminars* specifically. I hope that my intervention on this occasion will show, among other things, that there in fact is much that

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1 Miller 2006-2007, session of May 2, 2007.

2 Dorgeuille 1981, p. 18; Miller 2006-2007, session of May 2, 2007.

3 Johnston 2005, pp. 47-57.

4 Dorgeuille 1981, p. 18; Marini 1992, p. 136.

5 Lemosof 2005a, pp. 397-398.

6 Miller 2006-2007, session of May 9, 2007.

7 Marini 1992, p. 246.

8 Ibid., p. 247.

9 Roudinesco 1997, pp. 366-367, 377, 379, 397, 416, 435.

is important and novel in this very late period of Lacan's meditations. Nevertheless, I by no means intend to elevate the concluding moments of *le Séminaire* to forming the definitive "final words" on the entirety of the Lacanian corpus. I would be loathe to encourage a ridiculous chronological fetishism according to which what a thinker thinks last is somehow more true, revealing, profound, or decisive in relation to preceding periods of his/her thought. What comes at the end is not automatically somehow or other superior to what came before. This is as much the case with Lacan as with other figures.

What interests me most about *Seminars XXIV* and *XXV*, what I find most striking in them, is Lacan's repositioning therein of the four fields of psychoanalysis, philosophy, science, and religion with respect to one another. These two academic years contain some surprises—even, and perhaps especially, for those who believe themselves already to know how Lacan configures these four spheres in a set constellation based on acquaintance with Lacan's more familiar and famous texts from the first half of the 1970s. Moreover, even just within and between the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth seminars, Lacan vacillates, rapidly changing his mind on certain key points.

Two well-known features of the later era of Lacan's teachings are revisited by Lacan between 1976 and 1978 in ways pivotal for me in the present context: first, his flirtations with historical and dialectical materialism; and, second, his statements regarding philosophy and so-called "anti-philosophy." Along with various others, I have addressed these two features in previous work. I take myself to have demonstrated on these prior occasions both: one, that Lacan does not categorically repudiate any and all philosophy despite the two instances of him describing himself as an "anti-philosopher"¹⁰; as well as, two, that Lacan, particularly starting in the mid-1960s, evinces commitments to a Marxism-indebted materialism as a philosophical position.¹¹ I will assume these demonstrations to be adequate as I move forward into a treatment of Lacan's final seminars.

During the twenty-fourth seminar, Lacan twice avows at least dabbling in philosophy.¹² One of these times, he admits that, "I do not believe myself to do philosophy, but one always does it more than one believes."¹³ Then, in the twenty-fifth seminar, he describes himself as moving with the current of "the philosophy of Freud."¹⁴ Immediately on

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10 Johnston 2014, pp. 248-273.

11 Ibid., pp. 65-107.

12 Lacan 1976-1977, sessions of January 11, 1977, February 8, 1977.

13 Ibid., session of January 11, 1977.

14 Lacan 1977-1978, session of December 20, 1977; Balmès 2004, p. 68.

the heels of this description, Lacan presents his labors concerning “the stuff which constitutes thought” (*l'étoffe qui constitue la pensée*) as “nothing other than to say things in exactly the same fashion” as Karl Marx *qua* historical materialist.¹⁵ Lacan's self-presentation dovetails with earlier sincere admissions by him of strong sympathies towards Marx's materialism¹⁶ (for instance, in *Seminars XVI*¹⁷ and *XVIII*¹⁸—Lemosof notes several continuities between the eighteenth and twenty-fourth seminars,¹⁹ to which I would add that of the endorsement of Marxian materialism).

Lacan situates his late speculations about a Real unconscious composed of the material signifiers (or “letters”) of *lalangue* and *jouis-sens*—these speculations remain central in *Seminars XXIV* and *XXV*²⁰—under the banner of historical materialism. In the same gesture, Lacan, insofar as he identifies Marx's theoretical framework as itself a philosophy of sorts, also places his (along with Sigmund Freud's) form of psychoanalysis at least partly within the discipline of philosophy. The philosophy against which Lacan occasionally rebels as an “anti-philosopher” arguably does not include Marx's materialism starting in 1845.²¹

Herein, I will defend the claim that the final Lacan, at least between 1976 and 1978, brings his teaching to a close with a hitherto-underappreciated radical repositioning of psychoanalysis *vis-à-vis* philosophy, science, and religion. The radicality of this shift is particularly palpable against the immediately preceding background of the pursuit of analytic scientificity during the 1960s and early 1970s. This pursuit, inspired and guided by a combination of French neo-rationalist epistemology and anti-humanist structuralism, is oriented by the paradigm of the “matheme,” by the drive towards mathematical-style formalization.

Such formalization seeks, among other aims, to render Lacanian doctrine thoroughly transmissible (*à la* the ancient Greek sense of *ta mathēmata*²²) by screening out the distorting interferences of quotidian

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15 Lacan 1977-1978, session of December 20, 1977.

16 Birman 2013, pp. 98-99, 103.

17 Lacan 2006e, pp. 279-293.

18 Lacan 2006f, p. 28.

19 Lemosof 2005a, p. 411.

20 Lacan 1976-1977, sessions of December 14, 1976, January 11, 1977; Lacan 1977-1978, session of April 11, 1978; Lemosof 2005a, pp. 395, 416; Vandermersch 2005a, p. 427.

21 Lacan 1980, p. 17; Landman 2013, p. 27.

22 Lacan 2018, pp. 17, 126; Lacan 1971-1972, session of May 4, 1972; Lacan 1990a, p. 38; Lacan 1978, p. 54.

meanings bringing with them spontaneous, often-implicit worldviews, philosophies, and religions. Indeed, meaning (*sens*) itself *tout court* is portrayed by the later Lacan of the 1960s and early 1970s as nothing but interference, as a veil covering over the meaningless Real of an unconscious (in)consisting of nonsensical fragments of *lalangue*.²³ This Lacan reprimands both philosophy and religion for misattributing meaning (along with unity and direction) to the senseless contingencies of the *Ur-Real* of being *qua* being.²⁴

Yet, even at the height of the reign of the paradigm of the matheme, Lacan has doubts about this formalist program. His reservations, which eventually win out over mathematicism in *Seminars XXIV* and *XXV*, already are on display in *Seminar XX: Encore* (1972-1973). In the May 8, 1973 session of that seminar, Lacan remarks apropos meaningless and, hence, fully transmissible mathemes that, “Nevertheless, they are not transmitted without the help of language (*langage*), and that's what makes the whole thing shaky.”²⁵ Near the beginning of the following week's session (on May 15, 1973), he reiterates this concern:

Mathematical formalization is our goal (*but*), our ideal. Why? Because it alone is matheme, in other words, it alone is capable of being integrally transmitted... Therein lies the objection: no formalization of language (*la langue*) is transmissible without the use of language itself (*la langue elle-même*).²⁶

In-between these two expressions of hesitation about mathemes, Lacan concludes the session of May 8, 1973 by stating that, “The analytic thing (*Le truc analytique*) will not be mathematical. That is why the discourse of analysis differs from scientific discourse.”²⁷

The final Lacan of the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth seminars ultimately judges his formalism to be shaken to pieces by precisely these doubts voiced in *Encore* (doubts reinforced by other considerations I will address subsequently). The combined syntax of the Symbolic (as *le langage*) and semantics of the Imaginary (as *la langue*), a combination constituting the reality of meaning, cannot be entirely set aside in favor of a strictly isolated Real (as *lalangue*) that is beyond, behind, or beneath all meaning and that can be transmitted in its purity via mathemes as

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23 Lacan 1977-1978, session of November 15, 1977.

24 Lacan 1998, pp. 30-31; Lacan 1973-1974, session of May 21, 1974; Lacan 1978, pp. 44-45; Lacan 1975b, p. 202; Lacan 1990b, p. 130; Johnston 2014, pp. 248-273.

25 Lacan 1975d, p. 100; Lacan 1998, p. 110.

26 Lacan 1975d, p. 108; Lacan 1998, p. 119.

27 Lacan 1975d, p. 105; Lacan 1998, p. 117.

senseless pure signifiers without any accompanying significance. Even if the later Lacan fairly can be characterized as wholly obsessed with a formalized science of a meaningless Real, the final Lacan cannot be so characterized.²⁸

When all is said and done, the final Lacan denies psychoanalysis the possibility of being scientific (insofar as scientificity is equated, as per Alexandre Koyré and company, with Galilean-style mathematization²⁹). He correspondingly appears to resign himself to the inevitability of ineliminable philosophical and religious residues within both the theory and practice of analysis. However, I will contend that this Lacan's manner of repositioning the Freudian field with respect to the triad of science, philosophy, and religion is consistent with the permutations of Marxian materialism informing Lacan's periodic endorsements of this theoretical orientation. The manners of reworking the infrastructure-superstructure and nature-society distinctions on the parts of certain twentieth-century Marxists can be seen to be reflected in moves made by Lacan in *Seminars XXIV* and *XXV*. In particular, his handlings during these two academic years of the relations and interactions between a meaningless Real and meaningful reality exhibit isomorphisms with anti-reductive variants of historical and dialectical materialism in the Marxist tradition.

Early on in the second session (December 14, 1976) of the twenty-fourth seminar, Lacan goes so far as to maintain that materialism is the only honest position.³⁰ He alleges that, "Everything that is not founded on matter is a fraud (*une escroquerie*)."³¹ Lacan promptly punctuates this point with another of his neologisms: "*matériel-ne-ment*," matter does not lie (as roughly homophonous with "materially" [*matériellement*]).³² He identifies the Real preoccupying him at this late juncture in his thought as equivalent to matter.³³ As seen above, this matter would be material signifiers as composing the *jouissance*-saturated *lalangue* of the Real unconscious of the *parlêtre*.³⁴

Lacan's endorsements of historical/dialectical materialism during the late 1960s and early 1970s are in the proximate background of this December 14, 1976 session of *Seminar XXIV*. And, as I noted earlier, he later overtly embraces Marx's historical materialism in the twenty-

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28 Landman 2013, pp. 27-28.

29 Balmès 2004, pp. 62-63.

30 Miller 2006-2007, sessions of March 7, 2007, May 16, 2007.

31 Lacan 1976-1977, session of December 14, 1976.

32 Ibid.

33 Lacan 1976-1977, session of January 11, 1977; Lacan 1976b, pp. 38, 40-41.

34 Lacan 1977-1978, session of January 10, 1978; Lemosof 2005a, pp. 406-407; Lacan 1975b, pp. 193-194.

fifth seminar. What is more, Lacan, just a few paragraphs after this 1976 affirmation of materialism as the one true stance, invokes the distinction between use-value and exchange-value,³⁵ thus further signaling that the materialism he has in mind is specifically Marxist in nature.

If I am correct about the role of Marxian materialism in the last installments of *le Séminaire*, this has critical implications especially for understandings of the trajectory of Lacan's thinking based on certain fashions of periodizing his work. I have various reservations about the too-neat-and-clean segmenting of this trajectory into stages in which each of the three categories of Lacanian register theory is granted pride of place, with there purportedly being the three phases of the primacy of the Imaginary (1930s-1940s), Symbolic (1950s), and Real (1960s-1981).³⁶ However, Alain Badiou's³⁷ and Miller's now-entrenched differentiation between the Lacan of the Symbolic (i.e., of the 1950s Saussurian "return to Freud") and the Lacan of the Real (who first comes forward at the very end of the 1950s in *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* [1959-1960]) is not without its virtues and utility.

Nonetheless, reading and appreciating the Lacan of 1976-1978 as a Marxian materialist of a certain sort presents a challenge to the still-prevailing picture of the late Lacan of the Real. This picture tends to treat the entire period of Lacan's career from the 1960s until his death as dominated by the agenda to reduce away all meaning (*sens*) from analysis in favor of a formalized Real disclosed via mathematical-style senseless signifiers. But, one of my core theses in this present contribution is that the final Lacan of *Seminars XXIV* and *XXV* is to be sharply distinguished from the late Lacan of the 1960s and early-to-mid 1970s. This final Lacan abandons the late Lacan's formalist mathematicism and, in so doing, re-admits sense (and, with it, Imaginary-Symbolic reality in general³⁸) as an irreducible dimension of psychoanalytic experience. The twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth seminars display a still little-known Lacan on the other side of peak formalism.

§2 Making Real Progress: Psychoanalysis Against Science

In both *Seminars XXIV* and *XXV*, Lacan utterly and unambiguously renounces the possibility of rendering psychoanalysis scientific. For the final Lacan, analysis definitely is not, and cannot become, a science.³⁹ Instead, as the title given to the individually-published opening session

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35 Lacan 1976-1977, session of December 14, 1976.

36 Miller 2006-2007, session of May 9, 2007.

37 Badiou 2009, pp.132-133.

38 Miller 2006-2007, session of March 28, 2007.

39 Lacan 1976-1977, sessions of January 5, 1977, January 11, 1977; Lacan 1981, p. 6; Balmès 2004, pp. 58, 67; Miller 2006-2007, session of May 9, 2007.

of the twenty-fifth seminar has it, analysis is, rather, “a babbling practice” (*une pratique de bavardage*).⁴⁰ Already in 1975, Lacan concedes that, although structural linguistics allegedly permits analysis to remain in contact with the scientific (as per his program of Freud *avec* Saussure going back to the 1950s), analysis is a “practice” rather than a science proper.⁴¹

With the program of the matheme in the immediate background of these two seminars of 1976-1977 and 1977-1978, Lacan’s renunciation of the very possibility of analytic scientificity is especially conspicuous, even jarring.⁴² In 1975, for instance, he is still willing to state that psychoanalysis and “scientific discourse” share the “same nature.”⁴³ Moreover, not only is the final Lacan’s decoupling of psychoanalysis and science a break with his teachings of the mid-1960s through the mid-1970s—this closing gesture at the end of his life is tantamount to a recantation of a career-long pursuit going back to the 1930s. Indeed, the paradigm of the matheme hardly emerges out of thin air in the intellectual itinerary of the Lacan of the 1960s. The 1938 notion of the “complex” and the recourses to game-theoretic models in the 1940s already foreshadow much later efforts at neo-rationalist-style formalization.⁴⁴ And, of course, the classic, middle-period Lacan’s appropriations of Saussurean structuralism during the 1950s, inspired particularly by Claude Lévi-Strauss’s 1949 *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, involve formalist ambitions. Obviously, the neologism “matheme” refers to the Lévi-Straussian “mytheme,”⁴⁵ in addition to the Greek “*ta mathēmata*.”

Lacan, in his final seminars, does not rest content merely with abandoning the quest for scientific status. He engages in an analytic critique of science itself, of the very concept or ideal of scientificity. Insofar as this critique, like the doctrine of the matheme it rejects, has deep roots in Lacan’s protracted prior labors, I would maintain that it is not simply a case of sour grapes on his part.

In *Seminar XXIV*, Lacan asserts that science depends upon the idea of God.⁴⁶ This assertion too, taken on its own, is nothing new. From Lacan’s earliest seminars onwards, he draws attention again and again to the covert, underlying reliance on the notion of a certain divine-like

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40 Lacan 1977-1978, session of November 15, 1977; Lacan 1981, p. 7; Vandermersch 2005a, p. 421.

41 Lacan 1976c, p. 53.

42 Balmès 2004, p. 52.

43 Lacan 1975a.

44 Lacan 2001a, pp. 27-30; Lacan 2001b, pp. 85-99; Lacan 2006b, pp. 161-175.

45 Lévi-Strauss 1963, pp. 210-211; Lacan 1971-1972, session of February 3, 1972; Lacan 2007a, p. 103; Lacan 1975b, pp. 180-181; Evans 1996, p. 108; Roudinesco and Plon 2011, pp. 977-978.

46 Lacan 1976-1977, session of May 17, 1977.

guarantee of universal law and order by the apparently secular natural sciences of modernity. Lacan usually makes this point with reference to the role of God as guaranteeing the knowability of reality in classical Cartesian metaphysics.

However, in the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth seminars, the sciences’ surreptitious dependence on a presupposed God seems to be turned into an overt liability by Lacan. In *Seminar XXV*, he declares that, “science itself is nothing but a fantasy and... the idea of an awakening is properly speaking unthinkable.”⁴⁷ The “awakening” (*réveil*) in question on this occasion would be an entrance into the realm of a knowably organized and self-consistent Real beyond Imaginary-Symbolic reality’s veil of appearances. But, such a Beyond is, for this very last Lacan, the Cartesian deity as nothing more than a fantasmatic mirage immanently arising out of Imaginary-Symbolic reality itself.

A couple of sessions later in the twenty-fifth seminar, Lacan returns to this line of science-skeptical argumentation.⁴⁸ In both these sessions of *Seminar XXV* (November 15 and December 20, 1977), formal as well as empirical sciences are identified as tethered to a certain “fantasmatic core” (*noyau fantasmatique*).⁴⁹ Geometry, an avatar of scientificity for thinkers from Plato through at least Immanuel Kant, is said to be “woven of fantasies”⁵⁰ (with traditional, Euclidean geometry being devoted to exploring, in Lacan’s eyes, idealizations abstracted from the register of the Imaginary and its forms of embodiment⁵¹). Likewise, Lacan, at this same moment, denies the existence of a “world of mathematics” (*monde des mathématiques*).⁵² Insofar as, one, the formal languages of mathematics constitute a symbolic order; and, two, such orders are inconsistent, conflict-ridden barred big Others (according to a long-standing Lacanian thesis Lacan continues to hold at the conclusion of his itinerary⁵³): The proliferating diversity of mathematical systems and sub-systems cannot be anchored or contained by any single, unifying foundation or framework (i.e., a unique, all-encompassing “world”). Relatedly, during the 1978-1979 academic year, topology, the by-then last remaining bastion of Lacanian formalist mathematicism, is declared by Lacan to be Imaginary, metaphorical, and even “an abuse of

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47 Lacan 1977-1978, session of November 15, 1977.

48 Ibid., session of December 20, 1977.

49 Ibid., session of December 20, 1977.

50 Ibid., session of December 20, 1977.

51 Lacan 1973-1974, session of January 15, 1974; Lacan 1974-1975, session of February 18, 1975; Lacan 2016, p. 18; Lacan 1981, p. 6.

52 Miller 2006-2007, session of May 16, 2007.

53 Lacan 1976-1977, session of January 11, 1977.

metaphor.”⁵⁴ In a 1978 talk, he downgrades his mathematical rendition of the unconscious to being “nothing but a presentation.”⁵⁵

As for empirical sciences, the November 15, 1977 session of the twenty-fifth seminar contains a passing swipe at biology and evolutionary theory. As I examine and criticize on a previous occasion, Lacan, going back to his earlier recourse to structuralism, prohibits phylogenetic inquiries into human prehistory for a shifting mixture of epistemological, ontological, clinical, and metapsychological reasons.⁵⁶ Dovetailing with this long-standing prohibition of his, the Lacan of *Seminar XXV*, somewhat scandalously, places creationist and evolutionary narratives on the same level, both being said by him to be mere “hypotheses.”⁵⁷ Both the fervent Christian fundamentalist and the hard-nosed Darwinian naturalist purportedly are equally constrained to do nothing more than confabulate about the origins of humanity.

Similarly, in a March 8, 1977 session of the twenty-fourth seminar, Lacan subtly echoes his better-known claims from the seventh seminar according to which the apparently theistic notion of creation *ex nihilo* is actually essential to any and every atheism.⁵⁸ In *Seminar XXIV*, he contends that a theory of spontaneous generation at odds with a doctrine of evolution as uninterrupted development over time (i.e., a divine-like “great chain of being”) goes against the posited existence of God, permits getting rid of an overarching creative Power or Substance.⁵⁹ Perhaps the hypothesis (or maybe fantasy) of abrupt, discontinuous emergences out of nothing is preferable, at least for a psychoanalytic atheist, to that of the gradual, continuous flowerings of a unified *natura naturans*.

In *Seminar XXV*, promptly after characterizing science, including the formal sciences of mathematics, as entangled with fantasies, Lacan puts forward a now-familiar thesis: “Science is related especially to what one calls ‘death drive.’”⁶⁰ The standard interpretation of this statement is that, like the *Todestrieb*, the sciences, in their relentless pursuits of their goals, disregard human concerns regarding happiness, gratification, well-being,

54 Lacan 1978-1979, sessions of November 21, 1978, December 19, 1978, January 9, 1979; Vandermersch 2005b, p. 437.

55 Lacan 1984, p. 3.

56 Johnston 2013, pp. 59-77.

57 Lacan 1977-1978, session of November 15, 1977.

58 Lacan 1992, pp. 213-214, 260-261.

59 Lacan 1976-1977, session of March 8, 1977.

60 Lacan 1977-1978, session of December 20, 1977.

and so on.⁶¹ The categorical imperative of the sciences, a Sadean-style mirroring inversion of the Kantian one, is “You must because you can!” Even if a proposed particle physics experiment in a super-collider brings with it a statistically non-negligible risk of accidentally creating a black hole that would devour the earth almost instantaneously, the experiment has to be run for the sake of science, in the name of yet-more knowledge, consequences be damned.⁶² For this sort of reason, Lacan considers scientists to be “crazy” (*fou*).⁶³ Something similar is suggested in an anonymous report in the journal *Scilicet* on biologist Jacques Monod’s 1967 inaugural lecture at the Collège de France.⁶⁴

Indeed, when Lacan equates science with death drive on December 20, 1977, he represents life as indifferent to science. Distinguishing between scientific *savoir* and technological *savoir faire*, he indicates that the former has an impact on people only insofar as it manifests itself partially and through a glass darkly in the guise of the latter.⁶⁵ On this occasion, he uses television, with its screen for the projection of fantasies, as an example of technology *qua* a distorted reflection of science⁶⁶ (with television as a “lathouse” as per *Seminar XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* [1969-1970], a techno-gadget toy incarnating the function of *objet petit a*⁶⁷).

Furthermore, as Lacan here puts it, “It’s a fact that life continues thanks to the fact of reproduction related to fantasy.”⁶⁸ Subjects’ bodies perpetuate the species *homo sapiens* as a biological side-effect of a more-than-natural sexuality organized by non-natural fantasmatic schemas and formations unconcerned with the organic phenomena of concern to the life sciences. Psychoanalysis, as distinct from science, has things to say about denaturalized somas and psyches.

However, to return to the link between science and the *Todestrieb*, there is another aspect to this connection that its established interpretation misses. When Lacan makes this connection, he also simultaneously portrays science as “futile.”⁶⁹ To condense quite a bit from both Freud and Lacan, all drives (*Triebe*) are instances of the death

61 Miller 1999, p. 89.

62 Lacan 1974.

63 Ibid.

64 Anonymous 1968, p. 191.

65 Lacan 1977-1978, session of December 20, 1977.

66 Lacan 1975b, pp. 202-203.

67 Lacan 2007b, p. 162.

68 Lacan 1977-1978, session of December 20, 1977.

69 Ibid.

drive in that they are compelled to repeat, as their goal, failing to reach their supposed aims. The *Todestrieb* has to do with futility as well as with indifference to human pleasure, satisfaction, and the like. In line with this, Lacan here seems to be hinting that the sciences perseverate to no end.

Lacan's depiction of scientific futility in *Seminar XXV* should be construed as resonating with remarks to be found in *Seminar XXIV*. In the twenty-fourth seminar, Lacan denies that science makes progress. Instead, the sciences turn in circles. Like both the shape of the torus and the incessant rotation of deathly drives around an impossible Real,⁷⁰ scientific theories and practices orbit around impasses, repeating a basic pattern of movement.⁷¹ Likewise, in the same session of *Seminar XXIV* (December 14, 1976), Lacan reiterates his long-standing opposition to the very notion of the progressive,⁷² rubbishing the idea of human progress writ large.⁷³

I strongly suspect that this anti-progressivism apropos the sciences is Lacan's translation of a Bachelardian philosophy of science, a philosophy he knew directly and also indirectly absorbed further through the influence of both Louis Althusser as well as Althusser's young students (including, of course, Miller). Additionally, although Lacan makes no mention of Thomas Kuhn, there are resonances with Kuhn's 1962 classic *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. What a Lacanian might add regarding Kuhn's title is that "revolution" in the celestial sense is at least as appropriate a meaning here as "revolution" in the political sense.⁷⁴ In a Hegelian-style convergence of opposites, "revolution" can signify simultaneously both the repetition of the old (i.e., one more turn around the same set path) and the rupture of the new (i.e., the overturning of established order).

However, another session of the twenty-fourth seminar, that of March 8, 1977, implies that psychoanalysis, and perhaps even a science disabused of its theosophical (and unconscious-fantasmatic) presuppositions about being *qua* being, actually might be able to make some progress in terms of grasping a fragmentary, disharmonious Real. In *Seminar XXIV*, Lacan, redeploing a couple of neologisms from 1972's "*L'étourdit*,"⁷⁵ speaks of being (*être*) sowing itself (*s'emblaver*,

70 Lacan 2016, pp. 105-106.

71 Lacan 1976-1977, session of December 14, 1976.

72 Lacan 1988b, pp. 24, 79, 86, 326; Lacan 1993, p. 243; Lacan 1992, pp. 208-209; Lacan 1964-1965, session of April 7, 1965; Lacan 2006e, pp. 173-174; Lacan 2007b, p. 106; Lacan 1973-1974, session of March 12, 1974; Lacan 2016, pp. 105-106.

73 Lacan 1976-1977, session of December 14, 1976.

74 Lacan 2006e, p. 238; Lacan 2007b, p. 55; Lacan 1978, p. 47.

75 Lacan 2001d, pp. 467, 488, 491.

s'ensemencer) as the phenomenal emblem (i.e., appearance, avatar, representation, etc.) of itself—this is what the neologistic reflexive verb "*s'emblé*" conveys—so as to become "*parêtre*."⁷⁶ The latter neologism receives further clarification on the heels of "*L'étourdit*" in the January 16, 1973 session of *Seminar XX*:

What we must get used to is substituting the 'para-being' (*par-être*)—the being 'para,' being beside—for the being that would take flight (*cet être qui fuirait*). I say the 'para-being' (*par-être*), and not the appearing' (*paraître*), as the phenomenon has always been called—that beyond which there is supposedly that thing, the noumenon. The latter has, in effect, led us, led us to all sorts of opacifications that can be referred to precisely as obscurantism... We should learn to conjugate that appropriately: I par-am, you par-are, he par-is, we par-are, and so on and so forth.⁷⁷

As Bruce Fink helpfully remarks in one of his translator's footnotes, "*Fuir* (to take flight) also means 'to leak.'"⁷⁸ Hence, "the being that would take flight" indicates, in another instance of a Hegelian-type coincidence of opposites, that being *qua* being withdraws itself while, at the same time, oozing out in the guise of its phenomenal manifestations. This likely also is an intended gesture in the direction of Heideggerian Being as simultaneously concealing and revealing itself.

Furthermore, Lacan here, however consciously or not, echoes post-Kantian German idealist critiques of Kant's thing-in-itself (*Ding an sich*). In particular, his remarks on this occasion in the twentieth seminar reverberate with G.W.F. Hegel's discussion of "*appearance qua appearance*" from the chapter on "Force and the Understanding" in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.⁷⁹ Lacan, like Hegel before him, proposes that there is nothing but the immanence of the lone plane of disparate, unsynchronized appearances—with this plane internally generating fantasies of an elusive substantial transcendence, an Other that would synthesize and unify a merely apparent disorder ("beyond... there is supposedly that thing, the noumenon"). In line with both Hegelianism and materialism, Lacan condemns such fantasies as opacifying "obscurantism." Instead, being, in all its possible "conjugations," is (in) essentially *par-être* (para-being). As such, being is nothing but its own

76 Lacan 1976-1977, session of March 8, 1977.

77 Lacan 1975d, p. 44; Lacan 1998, pp. 44-45.

78 Lacan 1998, p. 44.

79 Hegel 1977b, p. 89; Johnston 2018b, pp. 25-28.

paraître (appearing), its own “semblance” (*à la “s’embler”*).⁸⁰ Or, in the Kantian terms also employed by Lacan, noumena are nothing other than residues immanently secreted by phenomena insofar as the latter are traversed by splits and antagonisms. In short, being is always beside itself (“the being *‘para,’* being beside”).

Returning to the March 8, 1977 session of *Seminar XXIV*, Lacan glosses his register of the Real therein right on the heels of redeploying his talk of “*s’embler*” and “*parêtre*.” He characterizes the Real as an incoherent structure.⁸¹ As such, it lacks unity while nevertheless not being an amorphous blob or ineffable negativity (or, as Hegel would put it, a “formless lump”⁸²). This Real minimally coheres to “constitute... a universe” solely in and through reality, namely, the two other registers of the Imaginary and the Symbolic.⁸³ In the roughly contemporaneous “*La troisième*,” Lacan emphasizes the Real’s fragmentation into disparate ensembles.⁸⁴ On its own, the Real forms no universe *qua* world, being an “*immonde*” instead.⁸⁵ This same Lacan, in a move that would be pleasing to Slavoj Žižek, appeals to quantum mechanics in divorcing the Real from the world (*qua* a comprehensible, coherent reality co-constituted by the registers of the Imaginary and the Symbolic).⁸⁶

As seen, *Seminars XXIV* and *XXV* continue to link the Real with the matter of a certain materialism. Furthermore, and in line with Lacan’s just-mentioned 1974 reference to quantum physics, the material Real of the final Lacan also gets associated with nature. I already have done much work on Lacan’s heavily-qualified naturalism, including that to be found in the last years of his teaching.⁸⁷ I will not repeat these labors in the present context.

Suffice it on this occasion to note the two sides of Lacan’s reflections on nature in the twenty-fourth seminar. On the one hand, as Lacan articulates it on April 19, 1977, “Nature... is an excessively vague notion. Counter-nature is in truth much clearer than the natural.”⁸⁸ The natural sciences, prior to a psychoanalytic-style traversal of fantasies

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80 Lacan 1975b, p. 182.

81 Lacan 1976-1977, session of March 8, 1977.

82 Hegel 1977a, pp. 76-77.

83 Lacan 1976-1977, session of March 8, 1977; Lemosof 2005a, p. 417.

84 Lacan 1975b, p. 184.

85 Lacan 1975b, pp. 184, 198; Lacan 1975a.

86 Lacan 1975b, p. 184.

87 Johnston 2008, pp. 271-273; Johnston 2013, pp. 13-58; Johnston 2014, pp. 83-85, 99; Johnston 2018a, pp. 75-77; Johnston 2020.

88 Lacan 1976-1977, session of April 19, 1977.

about Nature-with-a-capital-N as a self-consistent One-All, take for granted and are steered by a hazy, under-examined vision of an omnipervasive wholeness or totality. Analysis, by contrast, deals with “*anti-phasis*” as incarnated by humans *qua* denaturalized speaking beings, creatures of “*contre-nature*”⁸⁹ (with Lacan pointing to the super-ego⁹⁰ and the neuroses,⁹¹ both central to the analytic clinic, as examples of anti/counter-nature).

By Lacan’s lights, the denaturalized is evidently much less fuzzy in its exceptional status *vis-à-vis* the natural than the vast swathes of everything pre- and non-human in existence. In this, analysis has an advantage over the natural sciences. This will remain so at least unless and until the sciences, by including analysis and its subjects within naturalism as a truly fundamental ontology, register that the barring of the big Other applies to the natural Real as well as the non-natural Symbolic.

On the other hand of the final Lacan’s two-sided reflections on nature, in the May 17, 1977 session of *Seminar XXIV*, he remarks, citing Edgar Morin on “the nature of nature,”⁹² that, “nature is not so natural as all that.”⁹³ This same remark is to be found in, among other prior places, the twenty-first seminar.⁹⁴ When Lacan says this, he is thinking of a (natural) science with an accompanying naturalism that includes within itself psychoanalysis. The nature at the base of an exhaustively universal naturalist metaphysics, with its materialist immanentism, would have to be such as to generate out of and contain within itself counter-nature. In other words, this would have to be a *phasis* giving birth to *anti-phasis*, with the latter remaining within but becoming irreducible to the former as a self-denaturalizing nature. As Lorenzo Chiesa convincingly argues, the later Lacan’s account of sexual difference as Real sexuation *circa* the early 1970s epitomizes the issues involved in his quasi-naturalist materialism.⁹⁵

This Lacanian variant of dialectical materialism asks and answers the question: What must nature be so as to eventuate in the distinctively dysfunctional entities that are the sexed human subjects of psychoanalysis? So long as the natural sciences fail to confront such queries, a gulf will persist between science and psychoanalysis.

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89 Lacan 2006c, p. 461; Lacan 2006d, p. 514; Lacan 1975c, p. 171; Lacan 1988a, p. 149.

90 Lacan 1976-1977, session of February 8, 1977.

91 Lacan 1977-1978, session of November 15, 1977.

92 Morin 1977, pp. 17-19, 27.

93 Lacan 1976-1977, session of May 17, 1977.

94 Lacan 1973-1974, session of May 21, 1974.

95 Chiesa 2016, pp. 27, 37, 89-90; Lacan 1976-1977, session of February 15, 1977.

But, if and when the sciences come to suspect that their nature is, to repeat Lacan, “not so natural as all that,” then the rapport between the analytic and the scientific can and should be reconsidered, perhaps quite dramatically.

§3 Away from a New Signifier: Lies and Jokes, Intended and Unintended

As I highlighted earlier, there are doubts that lead the later Lacan to his eventual final abandonment of the program of the matheme as a failure.⁹⁶ I focused attention on vacillations apropos the agenda of formalization to be found in *Seminar XX*. Therein, as seen, Lacan indicates that the pure, meaningless signifiers of the formal language of mathemes require for transmission via teaching accompanying explanations couched in the impure, meaningful signs of natural language. This amounts to a methodological/pedagogical obstacle to the pursuit of mathematicist formalization.

However, the final Lacan folds on formalization not only due to considerations related to method and pedagogy. Perhaps more importantly, he comes to realize that there are foundational ontological/metaphysical issues problematizing the paradigm of mathematicism. For this very last Lacan, not only is *sens* irreducible—it bleeds into the senseless Real, becoming a non-epiphenomenal factor incapable of quarantining within an entirely separate Imaginary-Symbolic reality. It seems as though, at the conclusion of his teaching and life, Lacan belatedly heeds the warnings about mathemes uttered by his long-time follower and colleague Serge Leclaire. In Leclaire’s eyes, “the psychoanalytic act is an ‘affair of speech’ (*parole*), and in relation to this speech, the mathemes, important though they might be, are best seen as ‘graffiti.’ They are traces, testimonies, but still *written* expressions of an essentially *verbal* act of rage or passion or pain or pleasure.”⁹⁷

For the later, but not the final, Lacan, meaning marks a border partitioning, on one side, philosophy and religion from, on the other side, psychoanalysis and science. Whereas philosophy and religion idealistically ascribe an essential meaningfulness to being in and of itself, psychoanalysis and science materialistically confront the rock-bottom meaninglessness of the incarnate Real. Yet, in the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth seminars, the tetrad of psychoanalysis, science, philosophy, and religion gets significantly reconfigured. For ontological/metaphysical as well as methodological/pedagogical reasons, the analytic and the scientific diverge. Analysis continues to intermingle with philosophy (or, at a minimum, certain philosophies). With sense as

96 Balmès 2004, p. 63.

97Turkle 1981, p. 182; Chemama 1981, pp. 110-111; Dorgeuille 1981, p. 163.

irreducible for analysis, its distinctiveness *vis-à-vis* both the philosophical and the religious is cast into doubt. The place of psychoanalysis amongst human concerns is, in *Seminars XXIV* and *XXV*, put back into serious question, to say the least.

What does Lacan’s sweeping re-interrogation of the position of analysis in 1976-1978 actually look like in terms of its devilish details? In the March 8, 1977 session of the twenty-fourth seminar, Lacan posits that there can be no *parlêtre* without a psychical being, no speaking without thinking.⁹⁸ That is to say, insofar as the unconscious is a speaking being, there is an ineliminable intentionality, hence meaning, involved with this being. A few moments later in this same seminar session, Lacan avers:

In effect, uncorking the idea that there is only the Real that excludes all species of sense (*sens*) is exactly the contrary of our practice, because our practice swims in the idea that not only names, but simply words (*les mots*), have a purport. I do not see how to explain that. If the *nomina* do not hold onto things (*choses*) in whatever fashion, how is psychoanalysis possible? Psychoanalysis would be in a certain fashion a sham, I mean a semblance (*du semblant*).⁹⁹

In Lacan’s contemporaneous lecture in Brussels, he states something similar:

The Real is at the opposite extreme of our practice. It’s an idea, a limit-idea of that which does not make sense (*une idée limite de ce qui n’a pas de sens*). Sense is that by which we operate in our practice: interpretation. The Real is this vanishing point as the object of science (and not of the knowledge that is more than criticizable), the Real is the object of science.¹⁰⁰

Shortly after this, in the same lecture, he adds—“the unconscious has a body only of words.”¹⁰¹ *Seminar XXV* likewise depicts the word as the material embodiment of the idea.¹⁰² In conjunction with the immediately preceding, this would seem to entail that speech’s words are the vehicles for thought’s ideas, whether the latter be the contents of unconscious/primary-process or conscious/secondary-process mentation.

98 Lacan 1976-1977, session of March 8, 1977.

99 Ibid.

100 Lacan 1981, p. 5.

101 Ibid., p. 6.

102 Lacan 1977-1978, session of November 15, 1977.

At the very start of the twenty-fifth seminar, Lacan, although repudiating the identification of psychoanalysis with science, insists that analysis nonetheless must be taken seriously. Just because *la pratique de bavardage* is not scientific per se does not mean that it is frivolous, unimportant, and without weight. Saying indeed has consequences.¹⁰³ Babbled words are not epiphenomenal despite their causal powers not being (fully) included hitherto within the explanatory jurisdictions of the empirical, experimental sciences of nature.

Yet, in *Seminar XXIV*, Lacan famously speaks of moving “towards a new signifier.”¹⁰⁴ This would be something entirely apart from meaning, a pure senselessness. However, as even Miller himself admits, Lacan’s hoped-for new signifier does not arrive.¹⁰⁵ Why not? Why does the final Lacan, despite continuing to gesture in the direction of forms purged of all *sens*, conclude that such purging is not possible, perhaps also not desirable?¹⁰⁶

In Miller’s 2006-2007 seminar on *The Very Last Lacan*, he observes that the final Lacan acknowledges the impossibility of a total and complete exclusion of meaning from the Real.¹⁰⁷ Miller muses about a sense that would not be a semblance (in an echo of the title of the eighteenth seminar) and would rejoin the Real.¹⁰⁸ By contrast, I do not think, as regards the topic of *sens* in the final seminars, that the issue for Lacan is one of finding a non-dissembling meaning that, as non-dissembling, is fit for reconnecting with a Real from which meaning normally is divorced.

Instead, I believe that the final Lacan alights upon a dialectical materialist portrayal of the interrelations between the meaningless Real (with its material signifiers of *lalangue, jouis-sens*, etc.) and the meanings of Imaginary-Symbolic reality. Like various permutations of dialectical materialism within the Marxist tradition, Lacan’s too takes its lead from anti-reductive, non-economistic versions of the complex multiplicity of back-and-forth influences between infrastructures and superstructures as per historical materialism (recall that, as late as *Seminar XXV*, Lacan affirms his proximity to Marx’s historical materialism). In particular, the positioning and interactions between the senseless Real and the senses of reality are, for the final Lacan, analogous to those between

103 Lacan 1977-1978, session of November 15, 1977; Balmès 2004, pp. 51-52; Vandermersch 2005a, p. 421; Lemosof 2005b, p. 444; Miller 2006-2007, session of May 2, 2007.

104 Lacan 1976-1977, session of May 17, 1977.

105 Miller 2006-2007, session of March 14, 2007; Vandermersch 2005a, p. 422.

106 Lemosof 2005a, pp. 414-415.

107 Miller 2006-2007, session of March 21, 2007.

108 Ibid.

infrastructure and superstructure respectively. How so?

Two types of example readily illustrate Lacan’s Marxism-inspired restructuring of his register theory and its treatment of *sens*. The first is used by Lacan himself. In the twenty-fourth seminar, he refers several times to lying. Of course, there are ordinary lies as instances of false statements intended to mislead. This quotidian understanding of lying relies upon a distinction between false and true utterances.

But, the final Lacan wishes to entertain the idea that all meaningful statements, as instances of Imaginary-Symbolic reality in general, are, in a certain manner, lies.¹⁰⁹ He goes so far as to depict reality apart from the Real as a tissue of dreams, falsehoods, fantasies, fictions, illusions, semblances, and the like. As he puts it in the February 15, 1977 session of *Seminar XXIV*, “The Symbolic... says nothing but lies when it speaks; and it speaks a lot.”¹¹⁰ Similarly, in the opening session of *Seminar XXV*, Lacan comments that, “The unconscious is precisely the hypothesis that one does not dream only when one sleeps.”¹¹¹ In other words, waking reality, co-constituted through the registers of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, is no more Real than a dream.

Yet, lies, whether as a sub-set of the symbolic order or as this order *überhaupt*, are not mere epiphenomena. Any and every lie obviously involves meaning. Lies are not senseless. Rather, they obviously are animated by an intention to deceive that itself depends upon communicating (misleading) meaning in order to achieve the intended deception.

A lie, in its falsity, refers to a non-existent state of affairs. If the lie fulfills its purpose, this non-existent state of affairs, as the virtual reality of a (dis)semblance, nonetheless affects existent things. Arguably, this is what Lacan is getting at when, in *Seminar XXIV*, he portrays lies as phenomena in which the Symbolic gets included in the Real.¹¹² Or, to paraphrase a couple of Lacan’s earlier formulations anticipating this process of the becoming-Real of the Symbolic, lies are examples of the Symbolic having “formative effects”¹¹³ on the Real or of the Symbolic “falling into”¹¹⁴ the Real.¹¹⁵

Lacan also brings up Freudian *Verneinung* in connection with

109 Lemosof 2005a, p. 408.

110 Lacan 1976-1977, session of February 15, 1977.

111 Lacan 1977-1978, session of November 15, 1977.

112 Lacan 1976-1977, sessions of February 15, 1977, March 15, 1977.

113 Lacan 2006a, p. 77.

114 Lacan 1993, pp. 258-270.

115 Johnston 2014, pp. 65-107.

lying.¹¹⁶ As per Freud's foundational 1925 account of this mechanism, certain unconscious truths can be uttered only if they are negated by conscious speech¹¹⁷—with the negation of a truth being a lie, something false. This leads Lacan to an inversion of his notion of lying in the guise of truth: Freudian *Verneinung* amounts to telling the truth in the guise of lying.¹¹⁸

Finally, the Lacan of the twenty-fourth seminar insists that falsities are not always lies.¹¹⁹ I take this to mean two things. First, and apropos instances of the mechanism of negation specifically, the person uttering an instance of *Verneinung* does not lie insofar as he/she does not consciously intend to deceive. He/she states something false as a conscious negation of an unconscious truth. But, this falsification is not an act of lying. It is, instead, a revealed truth couched in the guise of a falsehood. Or, as Lacan phrases this in his 1976 “Preface to the English-Language Edition” of *Seminar XI (The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* [1964]), “There is no truth that, in passing through awareness (*J'attention*), does not lie.”¹²⁰

Second, and more generally, Lacan's differentiation of falsities from lies is an implicit reminder of an absolutely fundamental feature of Freudian psychoanalysis. Starting with Freud's 1897 revision of his seduction theory announced in his correspondence with Wilhelm Fliess,¹²¹ a psychical reality essentially, primordially indifferent to correctness, *qua* truth corresponding to states of affairs in external reality, comes to the fore and into its own. For the Freudian psyche, fantasies, fictions, and so on, as “false,” can be just as, if not sometimes more, significant than anything “true” *qua* factual, objective, and the like. Even if these semblances of the psyche's virtual reality are falsities measured by certain standards of veracity, they definitely are not lies as mere untruths devoid of real weight. Indeed, Lacan, in his preface to the English translation of the eleventh seminar, equates the “psych-” of psychoanalysis with “fiction,” indicating that analysis really is about such unreality.¹²² In a 1974 interview, he similarly confesses that, “For me, the only true, serious science to follow is science fiction.”¹²³

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116 Lacan 1976-1977, session of February 15, 1977; Lemosof 2005a, p. 408.

117 SE 19: 233-239.

118 Lacan 1976-1977, sessions of January 5, 1977, March 15, 1977.

119 Ibid., session of February 15, 1977.

120 Lacan 2001e, p. 571; Lacan 1977, p. vii.

121 SE 1: 259-260.

122 Lacan 1977, p. vii.

123 Lacan 1974.

Another category of example by which to illustrate the final Lacan's anti-reductive recasting of the place of *sens* in his framework is that of jokes. The Lacan of 1976-1978 does not have sustained recourse to jokes in the same way he does to lies. However, in *Seminar XXIV*, Lacan voices his dislike for Freud's second topography¹²⁴ (i.e., the “structural model” favored by his primarily Anglo-American psychoanalytic enemies, especially the ego psychologists). By direct implication, he prefers the Freud of the first topography—particularly the early Freud of the first years of the twentieth century. This Freud, to whom Lacan never stops returning, is the author of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), and *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905). This third early-Freudian masterpiece of 1905 indeed contains material helpful for appreciating the final Lacan's reworking of his register theory as regards the topic of meaning.

Freud's study of jokes and other forms of humor contains some of the clearest sources of inspiration for the Lacanian doctrine of the materiality of the signifier, including such interrelated concepts as *lalangue*, letters, and *jouis-sens*. In particular, the wordplay of jokes exemplifies, for Freud, the primary-process thinking characteristic of the unconscious in its distinctiveness *vis-à-vis* secondary-process conscious cognition. Such play puts to work and echoes the primary process disregard for the strictures of logic, reason, syntax, semantics, and considerations of social communicability and intersubjectively recognizable significance.¹²⁵ In *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud describes a sort of *jouis-non-sens*, namely, what he labels a “pleasure in nonsense” (*Lust am Unsinn*)¹²⁶ in which “the nonsense in a joke is an end in itself” (*der Unsinn im Witz Selbstzweck ist*).¹²⁷ This wallowing in the idiotic enjoyment of the meaningless material side of language, with its acoustic, graphic, sonorous, rhythmic, etc. features, becomes central for Lacan, up to and including the final Lacan.

Given my present purposes, there is a passage in Freud's *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* that warrants examination here. At one point in this 1905 book, Freud observes:

...jokes do not, like dreams, create compromises; they do not evade the inhibition, but they insist on maintaining play with words or with nonsense unaltered. They restrict (*beschränkt*) themselves, however, to a choice of occasions in which this play or this nonsense can at the same time appear allowable

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124 Lacan 1976-1977, session of January 11, 1977; Lacan 1986, pp. 83-84.

125 SE 8: 125-126.

126 GW 6: 141, 195, 200; SE 8: 126, 171, 176.

127 GW 6: 200; SE 8: 176.

(in jests [*Scherz*]) or sensible (in jokes [*Witz*]), thanks to the ambiguity of words and the multiplicity of conceptual relations (*Denkrelationen*). Nothing distinguishes jokes more clearly from all other psychical structures than this double-sidedness and this duplicity (*seine Doppelseitigkeit und Doppelzüngigkeit*) in speech. From this point of view at least the authorities come closest to an understanding of the nature of jokes when they lay stress on 'sense in nonsense' (*Sinnes im Unsinn*).¹²⁸

The final Lacan, in his Marx-inspired materialist revamping of his register-theoretic handling of sense, tacitly circumnavigates back to this particular Freud. Herein, Freud's analytic account of humor is appropriately as "double-sided" as the jokes for which he is accounting. On the one side, humorous phenomena ultimately originate from an ontogenetically primary proto-linguistic field of nonsense (in Lacanian terms, from the Real of the meaningless material signifiers of *lalangue* with its *jouis-sens*). Humor is a sublimation in which repressed *Unsinn* returns.

On the other side, these same humorous phenomena, as fully arisen, cannot straightforwardly be collapsed down into their ontogenetic origins. In other words, the sublimation is (at least partially) irreducible to what it sublimates. As Freud stresses, jokes are "sense in nonsense," rather than pure and simple nonsense. It is no accident that very young children are incapable of pulling off proper jokes. In their under-development, they lack mastery of "the ambiguity of words and the multiplicity of conceptual relations (*Denkrelationen*)" necessary for achieving specific varieties of humor. Without such cognitively, linguistically, and socially sophisticated artifices as exquisite comic timing, sensitivity to cultural context, and extremely clever exploitation of the ideational and associative polyvalence of words and thoughts, successful instances of the comedic are not possible.

All of these instances involve, in Lacan's terms, the meaningful socio-symbolic signs and recognitions of Imaginary-Symbolic reality. Jokes and the like violate the rules of this reality. But, they do so through determinate negations and immanent transgressions, rather than via wholesale cancellations (i.e., indeterminate negations) and absolute ruptures (i.e., transcendent transgressions). Without this reality, there are no jokes. In Lacanian parlance, there can be the Real of the *jouis-sens* of *lalangue* for the symbolically castrated speaking subject only in and through the reality of the *plaisir* of *la langue*. The same could be said of the literary *à la* the James Joyce dear to the Lacan of *Seminar XXIII* and accompanying texts.

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128 *GW* 6: 196-197; *SE* 8: 172.

I believe that the final Lacan appreciates the larger point implicit in the Freud I have just now spent some time unpacking. For this Lacan, the meanings, lies, and jokes of reality—this also holds for the very field of *sens tout court* co-constituted by the Imaginary and the Symbolic as itself one giant lie or joke—continually impact and merge with the Real. In a 1978 lecture, Lacan portrays the Symbolic unconscious as impressing itself upon and shaping the Real.¹²⁹ As seen, the final Lacan goes so far as to claim that, without words holding onto things (as signifiers falling into signifieds), there can be no psychoanalysis whatsoever.

Hence, although Lacan remains steadfast to the bitter end in maintaining the fundamental senselessness of the *Ur-Real* of (material) being in its brute ultimate contingency and opacity, this Real, however narrowly or shallowly, is marked and remarked by the significations of Imaginary-Symbolic reality. The latter therefore are species of the Marxian genus of "real abstractions"¹³⁰ (or what Žižek and Alenka Zupančič baptize "the Real of an illusion"¹³¹). Just as Marx's real abstractions sometimes involve the downward causation of superstructures reacting back on their underlying infrastructures, so too do senses of Lacan's reality react back on his Real.

Thus, the final Lacan signals his conversion to something along the lines of the adamantly anti-reductive materialism of the Marxist tradition. In line with this, the problem with the later Lacan's mathemes—this is perhaps a problem even for the final Lacan himself—is not that they are a joke (as various critics of Lacan's formalisms have it, up to and including Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont). If anything, they are not enough like jokes as per the Freudian theory of humor.

Admittedly, *Seminars XXIV* and *XXV* contain multiple moments in which Lacan takes his distance from Freud.¹³² He admits that his topological explorations are not to be found in the Freudian corpus.¹³³ Freud's conceptions of the unconscious, the endogenous, and analytic scientificity all are called into question in these final years of *le Séminaire*.¹³⁴ It might seem as though, just before he dies, Lacan looks to take a last step beyond Freud himself.

Yet, despite certain isolated disagreements with Freud, the final Lacan remains fundamentally faithful to the founder of psychoanalysis.

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129 Lacan 1984, p. 3-4.

130 Marx 1975, p. 161; Marx 1973, pp. 85, 88, 100-102, 104-105, 142-146, 157, 164, 331, 449-450, 831-832; Marx 1976, pp. 739, 909; Marx 1978, p. 185; Marx 1981, pp. 275, 596-597, 603.

131 Žižek 2012, pp. 721-722; Zupančič 2001, pp. 141-142; Zupančič 2008, p. 17.

132 Lacan 1986, pp. 82-84.

133 Lacan 1981, p. 7.

134 Lacan 1976-1977, session of November 16, 1976; Lacan 1987, p. 32; Lacan 1986, pp. 82-84.

On my interpretation of the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth seminars, he carries out one last return to Freud by reinstalling a dialectical interplay between reality and the Real, sense and senselessness, as well as the natural and the more-than-natural. Furthermore, Lacan, near the end of his life, publicly reaffirms his unwavering fidelity to the father of analysis in the course of a speech given in Caracas and addressed to an assembled group of his disciples—"It is up to you to be Lacanians, if you wish. Me, I am Freudian."¹³⁵ One could say that Lacan perseveres in his Freudianism to his very last breath.

§4 Being Severe Towards the Persevering Father: Better to Curse the Darkness

As late as a 1974 interview in Rome (entitled "Freud Forever"), Lacan persists in associating psychoanalysis with science and correspondingly dissociating it from both philosophy and religion.¹³⁶ The analytic and the scientific formalistically treat a meaningless material Real.¹³⁷ The philosophical and the religious mistake meaningful Imaginary-Symbolic reality for the Real of ultimate being. This is the constellating of the tetrad of psychoanalysis, science, philosophy, and religion characteristic of the late Lacan. But, the final Lacan rearranges this constellation.

In this same 1974 interview, Lacan describes stubbornly-persisting religion as a "devouring monster."¹³⁸ By the latter half of *Seminar XXV*, and consistent with lines of reflection running throughout his last seminars, he appears to perceive this monster as so all-devouring as to swallow up both science and psychoanalysis too. In the session of April 11, 1978, he wonders aloud whether all human beings, Freud himself included, inevitably fall into the clutches of religiosity one way or another.¹³⁹ Implicitly referring to Freud's hypothesis that the unconscious is ignorant of mortality due to its ignorance of both time and negation,¹⁴⁰ the Lacan of *Seminar XXIV* claims that, "it is necessary to make an effort not to believe one is immortal."¹⁴¹ With the immortality of the soul being a belief epitomizing a type of religious faith, Lacan's claim indicates the existence of a powerful default tendency towards religiosity. Of course,

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135 Lacan 1986, p. 82.

136 Lacan 1974.

137 Lacan 1976a, p. 26.

138 Lacan 1974.

139 Lacan 1977-1978, session of April 11, 1978; Vandermersch 2005a, p. 429.

140 *SE* 14: 289, 296-297.

141 Lacan 1976-1977, session of January 5, 1977.

by this point, Lacan already has warned of "the triumph of religion"¹⁴² and asserted the inevitability of "the God hypothesis"¹⁴³ for all speaking beings.

Taking into consideration everything that I have laid out thus far in reconstructing the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth seminars, it would seem that, for the final Lacan's version of psychoanalysis, science is unattainable, with philosophy and religion being unavoidable. What is worse, even the meaning-dissolving mathemes succumb to the impulse of religiosity, as Lemosof, among others, observes.¹⁴⁴ This Lacan is himself concerned about modern science degenerating into a new religious obscurantism.¹⁴⁵ Ironically, his own formalisms gave rise to, and continue to support, pockets of (pseudo-)Lacanian mysticisms of the matheme, contemporary parodies of Pythagorean mystery cults. Another, parallel irony is that the late Lacan's mathematicism, pushed to extremes, becomes just as reductive as the most reductive scientific naturalisms opposed by partisans of this same mathematicism. Evidence indicates that Lacan shuts down l'École freudienne de Paris in part so as to disrupt these tendencies amongst his own adherents.

Lemosof, writing about the dissolution of l'École freudienne, states, "Lacan considers that the psychoanalyst, if not becoming religious, should assume and support the misunderstanding that *cannot be dispelled*."¹⁴⁶ In the parlance of *Seminar XXIII*, one could say that religiosity's hypothetical deity is the *sinthome* of the *parlêtre* as such. And, in *Seminar XXV*, Lacan muses that clinical analysis makes some progress, however little, by revealing how and why the speaking analysand has his/her defining characteristic *sinthome*.¹⁴⁷

In the twenty-third seminar, Lacan stipulates that a *sinthome* is a symptom upon which the very being of its subjective bearer depends.¹⁴⁸ Were the subject to be "cured" of his/her *sinthome*, he/she would cease to exist, would dissipate along with this *point de capiton* of his/her subjectivity itself. Hence, the therapeutic gain brought about by analysis, according to the Lacan of the twenty-fifth seminar, hinges not on eliminating the *sinthome*, but on making it transition from being an "in itself" to a "for itself" (to resort to a bit of Hegelese not foreign to Lacan). In so doing, the subject goes from being unconsciously in the grip of his/

.....
142 Lacan 2013, p. 64.

143 Lacan 1998, p. 45.

144 Lemosof 2005b, p. 442.

145 Lacan 1974.

146 Lemosof 2005b, p. 443.

147 Lacan 1977-1978, session of January 10, 1978.

148 Lacan 2016, pp. 11, 13, 30, 41-42, 77.

her *sinthome* to having a margin of conscious distance from it, after the achievement of which he/she may even come to identify with it (or at least be comfortable enough living with it). This might be as much self-transparent freedom and contentment as analysis can afford.

Similarly, apropos invincible religion's triumphant God hypothesis as the *sinthome* of socio-symbolic subjectivity, perhaps there is no "cure" for religiosity. Maybe the irreducible meanings enshrined in both religion and philosophy are indeed incurable. However, if this sort of *sens* is handled as a *sinthome*, then although an immediate, first-order atheism might not be possible for speaking subjects, a mediated, second-order one is a potential option. Both desire *à la* Lacan¹⁴⁹ and belief too are inherently self-reflexive. Hence, one can come not to desire one's desire for the divine, not to believe in one's (first-order) belief. A second-order atheism therefore would be attainable despite the impossibility of a first-order one. This would be a position somewhat akin to the Kantian doctrine of transcendental illusion.

The same might also hold for Lacan's "insurgence" against philosophy. Putting together some of his above-cited remarks, Lacanian anti-philosophy could be described as a second-order rebellion against unavoidable first-order philosophizing. One cannot help but lapse into philosophical indulgences. But, one also can struggle against these lapses. As an anti-philosopher, Lacan might be redescribed as an uncomfortable and reluctant philosopher. Analogously, as an atheist, Lacan perhaps is an unsettled, discontent Catholic.

Lacan's January 5, 1980 "Letter of Dissolution" is worth revisiting in light of the preceding. At the end of his teaching, at the end of his School, and near the end of his life, he declares:

...my École would be an Institution, the effect of a consolidated group, at the expense of the discursive effect (*l'effet de discours*) expected from an experiment, when it is Freudian. One knows what price was paid for Freud's having permitted the psychoanalytic group to win out over discourse, becoming a Church.

The International, since such is its name, is no more than the symptom of what Freud expected of it. But *it* is not what weighs in the balance. It's the Church, the true one, which supports Marxism insofar as it gives the Church new blood... of renewed meaning (*sens*). Why not psychoanalysis, when it veers toward meaning? I am not saying that out of vain banter (*persiflage*). The stability of religion stems from the fact that meaning is always religious.

Whence my obstinacy on the path of mathemes—which

149 Lacan 1992, p. 14.

doesn't stop a thing, but bears witness to what would be needed to bring the analyst to the heel of his function. If I persevere [*père-sévère*: severe-father], it is because the experiment completed calls for a compensatory counter-experiment.¹⁵⁰

With a sigh of resignation inspired primarily by an assessment of institutionalized psychoanalysis in light of Freud's 1921 *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Lacan disbands his École freudienne. However, what he resigns himself to is not so much outright failure as repeated failure along the lines of Samuel Beckett's "Try again. Fail again. Fail better." Or, one could conceive of this as an analytic version of Thomas Jefferson's political vision according to which, "The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants."

That is to say, for Lacan, institutional parties inevitably form, and form their fixed meanings. These organizations ossify the senses (or ossify into sense) of even the most radical of founding revolutions. In Jeffersonian, or even Trotskyist-Maoist, fashion, Lacan foresees for a psychoanalysis staving off its own death a recurrent see-sawing between institutional stabilization (i.e., group consolidation as an "experiment") and renewing dissolution (hence Lacan's disbanding of his School as a "counter-experiment"). Without perpetually recurring revolution, psychoanalysis will die—or, what amounts to the same fate, become yet another established Church *à la* the International Psychoanalytic Association.

On the one hand, Lacan self-consciously is the "father" (*père*) of l'École freudienne de Paris. On the other hand, this Lacan of 1980 is a "severe-father" (*père-sévère*) in his harsh gesture of dissolution. Another severity is his "obstinacy on the path of mathemes," with its severity towards *sens*.

Yet, by Lacan's own admission, this latter severity "doesn't stop a thing." Specifically, it does not dissolve the irreducible dimension of meaning supporting and sustaining religiosity (and countless philosophies as well). At most, the mathematicist emphasis on formalizable senseless material signifiers (i.e., "the path of mathemes") is a salutary reminder to analysts that they must continually remember to listen to their analysands' associations for things other than readily recognizable meanings. The mathemes thereby help "bring the analyst to the heel of his function." But, they cannot, do not, and arguably should not bypass or nullify *sens* altogether.¹⁵¹

150 Lacan 2001c, p. 318; Lacan 1990b, p. 130.

151 Lemosof 2005a, p. 413.

The verb “awaken” (*réveiller*) surfaces a number of times in the pronouncements of the final Lacan. Stressing Lacan’s pessimism about even psychoanalysis itself in his last seminars, Miller contends that, for this thinker facing his own imminent demise, there is no awakening ever from meaning, reality, religion, philosophy, and so on.¹⁵² Miller, in the same session of his seminar on *The Very Last Lacan*, compares the conclusion of Lacan’s teaching to T.S. Eliot’s “This is how the world ends, Not with a bang, but a whimper.”¹⁵³

However, Lacan, in 1974’s “*La troisième*,” invokes awakening in a manner that pulls for a portrayal of his final years different from that offered by Miller. Therein, Lacan, speaking of his own dreams, proclaims, “contrary to those of Freud, they are not inspired by the desire to sleep; it is, rather, the desire to awaken that agitates me.”¹⁵⁴ Even if such awakening is impossible for the final Lacan, lucid dreaming is not. Such lucidity remains desirable for him.

Instead of T.S. Eliot’s “The Wasteland,” the final Lacan calls to my mind Dylan Thomas’s “Do not go gentle into that good night.” With a *Todestrieb*-like compulsion to continue trying to articulate a properly psychoanalytic teaching, even after the desire to teach leaves him,¹⁵⁵ this physically exhausted figure still fights and strives with an agitation “in him more than himself.” Lacan, while his light is dying, rages admirably against the eternal darkness. Although the darkness perhaps cannot be dispelled, it is not nothing to curse it.

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152 Miller 2006-2007, session of May 2, 2007.

153 Ibid.

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155 Lacan 1976-1977, session of January 11, 1977; Lacan 1978-1979, session of November 10, 1978.

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Spectral Psychoanalysis: the Nabokov Effect

Sigi Jöttkandt

Abstract: “The truth only progresses from a structure of fiction,” Lacan maintains, yet which “truth” can we say is emerging from the prevailing fictitiousness of reality in this era of the “new Real”? In today’s “post-truth” environment, where everything becomes language games, psychoanalysis returns to the problem of interpretation. In this essay, I suggest some Nabokovian pointers for a spectral reading praxis in the era of climate change and its “worse Real.”

Key words: Psychoanalysis, post-truth, post-interpretation, the Real, reading, the letter, discourse, revolution, cinema, memory, materiality, spectrality

“...I definitely felt my family name began with an N and bore an odious resemblance to the surname or pseudonym of a presumably notorious (Notorov? No) Bulgarian, or Babylonian, or, maybe, Betelgeusian writer with whom scatterbrained emigres from some other galaxy constantly confused me.” – Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins*

“The truth only progresses from a structure of fiction,” Lacan maintains, yet which “truth” can we say is emerging from this era of the “new Real”?¹ What this century is increasingly understood by is a ‘fracturing’ in the Symbolic order, its sham, flammable cladding now tragically going up in smoke on the towers of former certainties around the world. From the vantage point of a post- or perhaps ‘spectral’ psychoanalysis, such fissures are becoming legible in what one now calls the “post-truth” public sphere. The signifier’s original basis in deception, its first nature as semblance, arrives as the unconscious truth of the capitalist discourse. And as climate change tips the Earth headlong into a “worse Real,” evacuated of the sureties with which a certain “Nature” by “returning to the same place” once comforted us, it seems timely to revisit this fictional structure that moves truth along. Miller, following the lead of Lacan’s *Seminar XXVII*, has identified this as the “moment to conclude.” “The age of interpretation is behind us.”² But following this declaration, the question facing us is how to get one’s bearings in the new praxis Miller calls “post-interpretation,” – particularly if one is, like Jean-Claude Milner,³ left a little “cold” by the Joycean *sinthome* with which Lacan left off in his late teachings.

1 Lacan, 1971, lesson of 19.5.71; Miller 2014a.

2 Miller 2007, p. 4.

3 Jean-Claude Milner, comment made during the Melbourne School of Continental Philosophy Colloquium, Melbourne, Australia, 3-4 July, 2017.

Before suggesting some possible directions, we can note the phrase the “climate change unconscious” as the articulation of the way the Western world is failing to come to terms “Symbolically” with the ecological catastrophe unfolding “before our lying eyes” – as the Marx brothers once quipped. Anthropogenic climate change still remains effectively barred from public discourse, even to the extent of deleting its references on official sites (although this may be changing as its phenomenal effects are now being dramatically felt around the world). However, psychoanalysis is nothing if not uniquely equipped to attend to the message contained in the unsaid, enabling one to chart a structural path through what is emerging as an exorbitant new shamelessness, emboldened by Trump and his administration, of course, but which really only supplements other, longer-standing histories just a few of which might be mentioned here: the ideological rescinding of many forms of regulation in the years leading up to the 2008 Global Financial Crisis; the “new narcissism” of the social media revolution, whose impacts include a complete redefinition of what it means to be a private citizen; the take-the-money-and-run mentality of the Silicon Valley elites currently building multi-million dollar “survival condos” in remote places, and plotting escapes from the Anthropocene to Mars, together with their gene-edited children; the consolidation of autocratic rule over those left behind, and the deterioration of what now rings quaintly as “human rights” from another era, etc. These and many other features of 21st century life seem to reflect another relation to jouissance, one no longer tethered to the castrative cut and its repression that dominated an earlier period of psychoanalysis. A text-book example of Lacan’s adage that what is foreclosed in the Symbolic returns in the Real, we witness today a frenzied hyper-jouissance, one that, infiltrating much of public and private life, suggests a closer reading as unconscious “climate panic.”⁴

On this basis, one might assess such symptomatic formations of 21st century psychic life as reflections of what Miller identifies as the “mutation” in today’s Symbolic, one that has overseen broad redefinitions of categories of truth and falsity. Miller comments,

The traditional categories that organize existence have passed over to the rank of mere social constructions that are destined to come apart. It is not only that the semblants are vacillating, they are being recognized as semblants.⁵

.....
4 In making these observations, I am deeply indebted to recent work by Tom Cohen whose terms “climate change unconscious” and “climate panic” I am using. See for example Cohen, Colebrook, Miller 2016.

5 Miller 2014b, n.p.

In a “post-truth” environment where everything becomes language games, truth abdicates; it disappears back into “misty abysses,”⁶ putting new agents in charge of deciding which hallucinatory version of reality prevails. Perfectly justified too, then, is Miller’s admonition that psychoanalysis must take its bearings today not from the structure of neurosis and its hysterical symptom but from psychosis, the elementary phenomenon and the delusion. As the Name-of-the-Father is unmasked as the originary fiction, one might turn to Vladimir Nabokov, the 20th century’s most prodigious figure of literary deception, disguise and dupery. Nabokov, who for too long has been read either as a postmodern destroyer of ontological certainties, or as an all-powerful Auteur winking at us in the direction of Romantic and humanist paradigms, seems finally to have discovered his critical moment. As we find ourselves living under the hard sign of extinction, with the irreversibility of ecological system change now upon us, “Nabokov,” as a signifier for the refusal of linear logics and, especially, of the inevitability of death, appears to us now as if he had been lying in wait in advance for this, having been here the entire time...

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He is sitting on a circular seat, posing (rather unconvincingly) as a dejected old man reading a foreign newspaper⁷. But a more faithful likeness emerges in the sun-blinding splinters that greet our literary train, exploding like a bullet from its tunnel of memory, conduit of his official aesthetic program. We catch him next seeking shelter in the optical illusion of a portrait that, examined more closely, is composed of tiny letters, depicting an entire novel (*Master and Man*) in the contours of Tolstoy’s profile.⁸ Now he lies dormant, a latent time bomb in a ticking clock whose numbers flit mechanically sideways like black and white letters, pausing briefly the way “commercial stills did on the old cinema screen.”⁹ But startling us from our torpor with the crash of a spilled tea tray at a Cambridge tutor’s feet, an electrifying shock rockets us to our feet in the middle of one of his tales.¹⁰ With his cuffed hand, cunningly shaped from wood, he beckons treacherously in the direction of a slow subdued thumping, easily mistaken for wholesome German “bandstand music” but flowing *en verité* from ancient fabulous forests.¹¹ The sonorous rustling of their ancient lime leaves drowns out the siren songs of

.....
6 Nabokov 1996, p. 283.

7 Nabokov 1996a, p. 626.

8 Nabokov 1996a, p. 491.

9 Nabokov 1996a, p. 514.

10 Nabokov 1996a, p. 592.

11 Nabokov 1996a, p. 617.

“Mnemosyne’s monologue.” His favorite gambit of all of course is to assume the name “Vladimir Nabokov,” much as an earlier, similarly “not harmless” Nabokov (the author’s father), adopted “the mimetic disguise of a doctor without changing his name.”¹²

Who or what is this signature that circulates throughout the novels of Vladimir Nabokov as an assortment of letteral signs and symbols? Presenting as a seemingly harmless after-dinner parlour game, an expert’s puzzle, are these the marks of another signifying network that secretly piggybacks on the authorizing, narrating, memorializing textual systems of one of the twentieth century’s greatest literary auteurs? A parasitic cipher for some other representational aim, this ‘alt’ Nabokov silently consumes its host languages from the inside, much like the English that secretly but indelibly imposes its own formal patterns on the unsuspecting young would-be poet’s Russian rhymes. “It would have horrified me at the time,” recounts Nabokov in *Speak Memory*, “to discover what I see so clearly now, the direct influence upon my Russian structures of various contemporaneous (“Georgian”) English verse patterns that were running about my room and all over me like tame mice.”¹³

Can we read Nabokov as an advance guard of “post-interpretation”? As is well known, like Alfred Hitchcock, a certain “Vladimir Nabokov” makes numerous cameo appearances in his novels, whether as a self-parodying character named Van Veen, McNab, or simply “V,” or again in the various anagrammatic games that he plays with the letters of his name across his oeuvre – as Vivian Darkbloom, Blavdak Vinomori, Ivor Black, Badlook, Baron Klim Avidov, Adam von Librikov, and so on. While a long tradition in Nabokov criticism has been to regard these walk-on parts as ironic expressions of Nabokov’s supreme narratorial power and control – the self-citations of an extra-diegetic author figure demonstrating to us his “God-like” status – the sheer textuality of these letteral foldings and re-foldings now strike one as engaging another relation to the I. Like the Joycean *sinthome*, the concertinaed encryptions of Nabokov’s proper name as it zig-zags through his writing suggest an enjoyment that seems in excess of any authorial gag.

If, as I have suggested, Nabokov seems to have anticipated – even projected – the changed relation to speech and writing Miller observes taking place in the era of the “new real,” it is as a ‘cinematic’ take-down of the literary and its desiring tropes by one whose investment in the materiality of language accelerates what analysts are starting to recognize as a significant semiotic shift in the 21st century. In Nabokov, literature seems continually in league with some unknown principle

.....
12 Nabokov 1996a, p. 569.

13 Nabokov 1996a, p. 587.

of textual interference, a “bend sinister” in language that curves linear systems. Resisting the pull of narrative resolution, cross-wiring literature’s plot engines, this “Nabokov effect” appears as a calculated assault on all teleological models.

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A post-interpretive reading practice might begin by tracking instances where authorship gives way to another principle of literary production. As if spawned by the ink blots and boggy puddles that besplatter Nabokov’s characters, one would quickly find other textual figures or, perhaps, non-figures clamoring for our distracted attention: a mysterious “left-slanted” handwriting that interleaves a diary entry’s “factual or more or less fictional” reports in *Look at the Harlequins*,¹⁴ exercise books that dissolve into a “chaos of smudges and scriggles,”¹⁵ the unerased try-outs of a writer’s opening paragraphs whose over-written repetitions bleed into the garbled semblance of full sentences in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (“As he a heavy A heavy sleeper, Roger Rogerson, old Rogerson bought old Rogers bought [...]”).¹⁶ In the short story, “The Visit to the Museum,” a cataloging error in the archive triggers an assault on the structures of historical memory. In “Ultima Thule,” a “chance combination” (of letters? words? numbers? We never find out) kills a man. An accidental typo in the poem *Pale Fire* assures John Shade of a “life everlasting based on a misprint”¹⁷; in *Ada*, a type-setting conceit transforms prose’s grammar into a mine-field of temporal dislocations. In Nabokov, it is invariably a question of a certain over-flow, a technical spillage occurring in the mechanics of writing. This spillage is linked to a cinematic figure summoned from the underworld, what Lacan in Seminar XVIII calls “the function of the shadow” as it wells up from the act of inscription.¹⁸

If this shadow function at times attaches itself, like a gum-shoe, to the Imaginary register, trying on the masks of Nabokovian characters – John *Shade*, Dolores *Haze*, *Hazel*, Van *Veen* (literally “from or of the bog”) Sebastian *Knight*, Ivor and Iris *Black*, or the serial noir of *Humbert Humbert* – it merely makes use of that register’s spatial dimensions to let us glimpse something else through the body’s “torpid smoke.”¹⁹ In fact, it just as often sheds such ploys to feed directly from the formal marks that spawn it – geometrical shapes such the circle referenced in the Russian

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14 Nabokov 1996c, p. 579.

15 Nabokov 1996c, p. 624.

16 Nabokov 1996a, p. 30.

17 Nabokov 1996b, p. 479.

18 Lacan 1971, lesson of 19.5.71.

19 Nabokov 1996d, p. 396.

“Krug” in *Bend Sinister*. Here, too, one must mention the alphabetical forms caressing Nabokov’s female characters: Nina in “Spring in Fialta,” whose name manifests a side-ways configuration of her signature sprawl: “She was sitting in the corner of a couch, her feet pulled up, her small comfortable body folded in the form of a Z”²⁰; or Lolita, whose sequence of blackened bars reflects the “skeleton glow” of the Venetian blinds between whose “intercrossed rays” her unhappy tale unfolds.²¹

As the hypnagogic patterns of readerly identification become exposed, X-ray-like, to language’s technical operations, this is accompanied by a revision of the specular model that configures, mimetically, the mirage of the ego or I as Imaginarily constituted. In Nabokov, the Imaginary register never seems to secure the idea of a “self” but is, rather, the site of infinitely complicated foldings. From Imago to fragilized image, reflection to refraction, dialectic to dehiscence, the mirror’s signature reversal neglects to assemble a totalized image, instead precipitating an “enfilade” of “nightmare mirrors with reflections overflowing in messy pools on the floor.”²² What the image amounts to in Nabokov is thus a vastly different affair than the “orthopedic” totality of the mirror stage’s drama with its “donned armor of an alienating identity.”²³ While an image is a slippery, shape-shifting object at the best of times, in Nabokov it assumes its properly topological properties: constitutively fragmented, the image pokes holes in representation’s smooth reflective surfaces, as for example in the following passage from Nabokov’s autobiography, *Speak, Memory*. The presumed “original” of the scene we have just witnessed from *Look at the Harlequins!*, Nabokov’s “fake,” reversed mirror of his life-story (its kaleidoscopic patterns of refraction already visited in the shimmering, overlapping rings of biographical “truth” and “fiction” in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*), here Nabokov recalls his early poetic endeavors. Spellbound by rhyme, the young Nabokov overleaps space and time, teleporting from the “cold, musty, little-used room” where, with one arm dangling from the leathern couch, he grazes the “floral figures of the carpet,” to find himself “prostate on the edge of a rickety wharf, and the water lilies I touched were real”:

the undulating plump shadows of alder foliage on the water – apotheosized inkblots, oversized amoebas – were rhythmically palpitating, extending and drawing in dark pseudopods, which, when contracted, would break at their rounded margins into

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20 Nabokov 1996d, p. 418.

21 ris: 1981, p. 18; footnote?? the the extra 2 kgany like. Nabokov 1996b, p. 120.

22 Nabokov 1996d, p. 283; 1996c, p. 570.

23 Lacan 2006, p. 78.

elusive and fluid macules, and these would come together again to reshape the groping terminals.²⁴

A liquifying reduction of the semblable, an inky pool which, in spreading, laps at the limits of the lyrical I, bleeds through the phantasmal narcissal scene of identification. It is not the polished mirror of poetic language that more or less faithfully reflects “life” in the Nabokovian poetics. Instead, “life” seems embodied as strange shadowy “pseudopods” – literally, fake feet – that grope and poke at the world from beneath the screen-like surface of the water. In this alternative, ‘cinematic’ account of apperception, representation does not so much reflect as absorb and resorb. Another representational ontology takes over, of language as a sightless, denaturalizing, “original” or first “fake” life masquerading as the negative or obverse of figure but, left to its own devices, reverts back to prefigural blotches.

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In Nabokov, the Symbolic suffers an ignoble fate. In the psychoanalytic schema, knowledge’s S₂ supports the master signifier of the paternal metaphor. But in Nabokov, understanding appears as a dubious transmission that spirals through a network of proxy paternal figures in the form of (maternal) grandfathers, uncles and, in particular, tutors. It seems that knowledge has always been a matter of impersonation, imitation, and invention. Among the early instructors who make their appearances in *Speak, Memory* are an expert ventriloquist, remarkable for his impressions of a figure who famously put words into others’ mouths, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, “mouthing every line most lusciously and changing his voice from flute to bassoon, according to the characters he mimed.”²⁵ Another is “Lenski,” a “very pure, very decent human being, whose private principles were as strict as his grammar,”²⁶ but whose garbled literary knowledge – “he casually informed me that Dickens had written *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*” – is more than compensated for by his scriptive beauty, having an “unforgettable handwriting, all thorns and bristles.”²⁷

This ‘cinematic’ tutor Lenski, dragging a faintly “etherish” smell behind him (from film developing chemicals, one wonders?), makes his chief appearance in *Speak, Memory* as the director of a mortifying series of “instructive readings” that accompany his Educational Magic-Lantern

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24 Nabokov 1996a, p. 550.

25 Nabokov 1996a, p. 504.

26 Nabokov 1996a, p. 506.

27 Nabokov 1996a, p. 504.

Projections put on for the edification of the children.²⁸ With his penchant for outlandish modern inventions, he thus discloses his credentials as an agent of a certain *techné* and *savoir faire*. These include a “new type of pavement he was responsible for [...] composed of (so far as I can make out that strange gleam through the dimness of time) a weird weave of metallic strips.”²⁹ However this is no Scheherazadean flying carpet woven by the threads of literary invention. Whatever ‘ground’ the metallic footpath proffers unfolds as a treacherous path of silver webbing, each reticule more hazardous than the rest and, needless to say, “the outcome was a puncture.”³⁰

Metaphorical vehicles for imaginative ‘flight’ are similarly self-impeding: an “electroplane” with “voltaic motor,” flew “only in [Lenski’s] dreams and mine.”³¹ Another invention to which Lenski claimed what the narrator calls a “natural fatherhood” was designed to accelerate the speed of ordinary horse-power with a “miracle horse food in the form of galette-like flat cakes (he would nibble some himself and offer bites to friends).”³² What constitutes Lenski’s claim to these inventions, it turns out, is simply “an emotional attitude on his part with no facts in support and no fraud in view.”³³ His would be a non-biological paternity that suspends the “natural” with another right: of self-assembly, auto-production, fabrication and contrivance.

If “knowing” has always been doubled by its innate propensity to swerve in transmittal, dead-ending in ironic self-annulment, the S_2 ’s *duplicity* now spreads even to the master signifier, S_1 . The paternal star in whose light the young Vladimir triumphantly struts at the beginning of *Speak, Memory*, was always already counterfeited. Nabokov senior’s glittering trappings of power – his military outfit with its “smooth golden swell of cuirass burning upon [his] chest and back [which] came out like the sun”³⁴ – turns out to be a “festive joke,” assumed in jest by the narrator’s father in self-parody. Simultaneously blinding and a double-blind, the master signifier in Nabokov is preprogrammed as a comedic routine.

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28 Nabokov 1996a, pp. 501-2.

29 Nabokov 1996a, p. 505.

30 Nabokov 1996a, p. 505.

31 Nabokov 1996a, p. 505.

32 Nabokov 1996a, p. 505.

33 Nabokov 1996a, p. 505.

34 Nabokov 1996a, p. 371.

“The sight of his handwriting fascinates him; the chaos on the page is to him order, the blots are pictures, the marginal jottings are wings.”³⁵ The written word in Nabokov is a complex figure – possessing not only textual but irremediably visual dimensions. Entering discourse iconically, it constructs mental images in flight from linear models of meaning. A visual system thus seeps through Nabokov’s textual fabric, manifesting as a cross-sensory switchboard jumping on double meanings, cross-lingual puns and homophonies. In the novel, *Transparent Things*, this trans-scriptivity encounters the object world as an encrypted network through which matter and memory, or memory-as-matter, is transported.

In this work thematizing Nabokov’s material mnemonics, we are introduced to the idea of objects as “transparent things” whose interactions are laid open to dispersion effects unmistakably allied with textual dissemination. In chapter 3, an old desk disgorges a pale lilac pencil which returns a spectral memory of its making. After a brief recount of its immediate provenance as the possession of the carpenter who, ten years ago, mislaid it while failing to fix the old desk, the pencil in the narrator’s hands writes its own way back to its “sweetly” “whittled” shavings which are now scattered, “reduced to atoms of dust.” Objects, it seems, carry a “memory” of their previous histories, rendering the present “transparent” to the past into whose layers they constantly threaten to sink. For the present, as the narrator explains in the novel’s opening passage, is merely “a thin veneer of immediate reality” that is “spread over natural and artificial matter, and whoever wishes to remain in the now, with the now, on the now, should please not break its tension film.”³⁶

Yet, despite this translucency, objects nevertheless remain traversed by the inflexible law of time’s unfolding and the inexorability of entropic systems, shared by all living and dead things. All, that is, except the metallic-grey atoms, which, emanating from the pencil-object in silvery trails, have the ability to revolve in all directions – in reverse as well as fast-forwarding into the future. These granules of black lead, *plumbum*, recover their “complicated fate” by writing out the pathways of their dispersion, an act the narrator calls “panic catching its breath” but “one gets used to it fairly soon (there are worse terrors).”³⁷

Going back a number of seasons (not as far as Shakespeare’s birth year when pencil lead was discovered), and then picking up the thing’s story again in the ‘now’ direction, we see

.....
35 Nabokov 1996c, p. 500.

36 Nabokov 1996c, p. 489.

37 Nabokov 1996c, p. 492.

graphite, ground very fine, being mixed with moist clay by young girls and old men. This mass, this pressed caviar, is placed in a metal cylinder which has a blue eye, a sapphire with a hole drilled in it, and through this the caviar is forced. It issues in one continuous appetizing rodlet (watch for our little friend!), which looks as if it retained the shape of an earthworm's digestive tract.³⁸

In this, writing's 'primal scene,' graphite, a metamorphic rock predating the Solar System, pierces ocularcentrism's "blue eye," boring through the latter's tunnels of interiority with the 'memory' of an archaic, molten, intercalating arch-conductivity. Coiled within the written word is a materiality that intervenes temporally, overwriting time's arrow with a different interface of space-time. A hexagonal form of matter which the bisecting tropes of solarly definitionally fail to penetrate, this non-transparent *l'achose* ("a-thing") resists chunking by time and space.

Curiously, the figure Nabokov suggests for accessing this material memory is not a word but a number, 313, which should be imagined, as Hugh tells Armande, "as three little figures in profile, a prisoner passing by with one guard in front of him and another behind."³⁹ Here the 3s in this little sequence "guard" the entry and exit of life and death, marching to time's inexorable forward beat. But the 1 – an "I" formed through another process than identification – slips from their grasp by making a quarter turn in another direction. It briefly faces us, readers now trained in Nabokov's graphematics, before slipping through "some secret outlet" that deposits one outside the "prison of time."⁴⁰

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Transparent Things ends in one of Nabokov's trademark conflagrations. As the final pages of the novel combust in a "torrent of rubies,"⁴¹ they reduce to ashes any last lingering hope that the subject of enunciation – a hapless proof-reader called Hugh ("You") Person – can be kept separate from the enunciating subject, a certain "touchy, unpleasant" "Mr. R," a thinly-veiled Nabokov hiding behind a mirrored image of the Cyrillic Я, ("ya" meaning "I," or "I am"). Like the strongly opinionated Nabokov, Mr. R, also an author, demonstrates a streak of "nasty inventiveness," fighting "on his own ground with his own weapons for the right to use

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38 Nabokov 1996c, pp. 492-3.

39 Nabokov 1996c, p. 555.

40 Nabokov 1996a, p. 370.

41 Nabokov 1996c, p. 561.

an unorthodox punctuation corresponding to singular thought."⁴² A Möbial structure, the orders of writing and reading slide irreparably into one another: is the manuscript of R's that Hugh has been correcting throughout the novel, it finally dawns on us to ask, the very the book we have been reading as the tragic story of Hugh's unintentional murder of his wife, Armande in his sleep, a re-tracing of the steps of his desiring history in the Chorb-like hope of undoing time,⁴³ and the repetition of the dream of a fire, which has in the meantime become "reality"?

Rings of blurred colors circled around him, reminding him briefly of a childhood picture in a frightening book about triumphant vegetables whirling faster and faster around a nightshirted boy trying desperately to awake from the iridescent dizziness of dreamlife.⁴⁴

It was by interpreting his patients' dreams that Freud came to the idea of the symptom as an unconscious message that presents itself for interpretation. Yet the father's dream of the burning child famously presented Freud with a conundrum, of a "Real" that breaks through the otherwise ubiquitous dream-structure of the pleasure principle. If Nabokov, similarly, pierces the bar isolating the primary or original text from its secondary or "meta"-level interpretation, with him we also reach the end of a certain analytic praxis, and the collapse of the "narcissism" of the reader as decipherer of the symptom's hidden messages. In Nabokov, interpretation is never "stratified" in relation to the unconscious⁴⁵ – but is inscribed in the same register. The text, to rephrase Miller slightly, *is* its own interpretation.

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Nabokov tosses his book into the fire at the close of *Transparent Things*. The dying Hugh's "ultimate vision was the incandescence of a book or a box grown completely transparent and hollow. This is, I believe, *it*: not the crude anguish of physical death but the incomparable pangs of the mysterious mental maneuver needed to pass from one state of being to another."⁴⁶ Radiantly aglow, this empty "book or box" sucks into its vacuum the orders of metaphor and metonymy, together with their implied futurity

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42 Nabokov 1996c, p. 504.

43 In the short story, "The Return of Chorb." the titular figure tries to undo the events leading up to his wife's death by repeating them. The quest ends in Chorb's "meaningless smile" and the story ends with the lackey's stunned whisper, "They don't speak" (Nabokov 1996c, pp. 153-4).

44 Nabokov 1996c, p. 562.

45 Miller 2007, p. 4.

46 Nabokov 1996c, p. 562.

as the promise of another meaning, laid over or horizontally deferred until the “last word.” It thereby dismantles every reading it pretends to invite in the name of some Truth that exceeds what “can be settled by a yes or a no.”⁴⁷

As it defies figuration, blinding sight, silencing speech, autosarcophagically consuming its own words, this “transparent and hollow” book, or box, unwrites the order of the literary as *metaphorein*. “Tralatitios,” the much-contested title of R’s book, in addition to its standard definition as “metaphor,” also has the meaning of what can be acquired by direct contact: “passed along as from hand to hand, mouth to mouth, or from generation to generation.”⁴⁸ What can be passed on “from hand to hand, mouth to mouth”? At this point the figure of reading returns, not as the superadded layers of secondary meaning but as the “tralatitious” work of the letter in the act of integral transmission.

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When a certain power exits, its exhausted routines finally played out, it pivots on the sole aspect of language that “might not be a semblance.” A “frail,” “weak,” “harmless looking” logic,⁴⁹ the letter unleashes the only true revolution that psychoanalysis recognizes: a shift in discourse. Lacan comments, “It is a matter of making tangible how the transmission of a letter has a relationship with something essential, fundamental in the organization of discourse, whatever it may be, namely, enjoyment.”⁵⁰ How does one initiate such a shift in discourse? Back in the middle of the 20th century, Lacan circumspectly offered that while psychoanalysis might accompany one to the point “where the cipher of [one’s] mortal destiny is revealed,” it is not in the analyst’s power “to bring him to the point where the true journey begins.”⁵¹ However in his presentation of the theme of the 2016 Congress of the World Association of Psychoanalysis, Miller indicated a possible pathway through the totalizing semblances wraithing the “new Real.” “The only path that opens up beyond” the delusional structure which has surpassed the hysterical symptom, he claims, “is for the *parlêtre* to make himself the dupe of a real, that is, to assemble a discourse in which the semblants clasp a real.” “To be the dupe of a real – which is what I’m extolling – is the sole lucidity that is open to the speaking being by which he may orient himself.”⁵²

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47 Lacan 1971, lesson of 13.1.71.

48 Merriam-Webster Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tralatitious>

49 Lacan 1971, lesson of 12.5.71.

50 Lacan 1971, lesson of 12.5.71.

51 Lacan 2006, p. 81.

52 Miller 2016, n.p.

Nabokov, whose “transparent and hollow” books seem the pure definition of semblance, nonetheless encrypts an “*immortal* destiny” of a book, or box, in the Real letters of his name. An impossible book-*bok*-box without sides (recall *bok*, the Russian for “side”), Nabokov entraps in this open, turning, continually self-inverting ‘structure’ the sheer excess of the signifier. Jettisoning the logic of inside and outside, rippling mimetic orderings, the book or box without sides reverses temporal logics.

Can one think of the Nabokovian ‘*cinemathomme*,’ then, as the rhetorical “duping” of the Real into doubling itself in the Symbolic? Lacan states,

The psychoanalyst is a rhetor (rhêteur): to continue equivocating I would say that he ‘rhetifies’ (rhêtifie), which implies that he rectifies. The analyst is a rhetor, namely, that ‘rectus’, a Latin word, equivocates with ‘rhêtification’. One tries to say the truth. One tries to say the truth, but that is not easy because there are great obstacles to saying the truth, even if only because one makes mistakes in the choice of words. The Truth has to do with the Real and the Real is doubled, as one might say, by the Symbolic.⁵³

The Truth the “Nabokov effect” unleashes straddles both the Symbolic and Real. It electrifies literature’s semantic complex with a continually expanding network of formalization without pauses, borders or ends. Differently than punctuation, which as Miller points out “still belongs to the system of signification,” is “still semantic,” and still “produces a quilting point,”⁵⁴ Nabokov’s cinematic post-interpretation reverses the signifier, and turns a now spectralized psychoanalysis to its archaic origins in the “montage” of the partial drives.⁵⁵ Castration’s ‘cut’ unfolds as a hole turning on a non-Euclidean graphematics of knots and weaves, light and shade, a toric glove that reduplicates what it interlaces.

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53 Lacan 1970, lesson of 20.5.70.

54 Miller 2007, p. 8.

55 In Seminar 18, Lacan tells an amusing story about the “birth” of the signifier as it materializes from the fragmented body: one’s arm which, trespassing on a neighbour’s enjoyment, gets repeatedly thrown back. Out of the chance patterns derived from the accumulations of this projection a schema arises from which the signifier as semblant materializes. (Lacan 1971, lesson of 13.1.71).

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The Lust for Power and the Logic of Enjoyment

Todd McGowan

Abstract: Politics today seems to revolve around power. Uncovering the working of power in politics was the main task of both Marx and Nietzsche. But the crucial psychoanalytic intervention into the question of politics is its introduction of enjoyment as the driving force in all our political acts. In this way, psychoanalytic theory represents a fundamental challenge to Marxist or Nietzschean conceptions of politics. In contrast to theories that focus on the good or on power, psychoanalytic theory explains our proclivity for acting against our self-interest as a clear product of the drive to enjoy. In a psychoanalytic conception of politics, one must leave a space for enjoyment, but one cannot consciously organize a political structure around it, since enjoyment cannot be our conscious aim.

Key Words: Enjoyment, Freud, Lacan, Power, Politics

From Good To Power

Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud all shattered political illusions, but they didn't shatter illusions in the same way. Given their basic political conservatism relative to Marx, it makes sense to group Nietzsche and Freud together, to see their attack on political illusions as fundamentally different than Marx's. Marx undermines illusions not to enlighten individuals but in order to help bring about a communist revolution that would change the political terrain altogether. Neither Nietzsche nor Freud has any such aim. If they envision political change at all, it is certainly not the egalitarian revolution that Marx proposes.

But if we look closely at the critique of political illusions advanced by Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, it turns out that Marx and Nietzsche have much more in common with each other than either does with Freud. Despite Nietzsche's abhorrence for socialism (which he pejoratively labels "*latent Christianity*"), he actually echoes Marx's interpretation of politics as a struggle for power.¹ Whereas Marx identifies all political history as the struggle between classes for power over each other, Nietzsche sees politics as the means that individuals or groups use to assert their power. There is a family resemblance between Marx and Nietzsche when it comes to analyzing the role that political illusions have for us. What's going on in politics for both is really a power struggle. Freud, in contrast, sees libido or enjoyment as the basis for all political organizations. He shatters political illusions by revealing that they secretly express forms of enjoyment. This hasn't been completely clear simply because Freud seldom discusses politics as directly as Marx and (to a lesser extent) Nietzsche do.

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¹ Nietzsche 2003, p. 172.

Placing enjoyment at the heart of politics is the most significant contribution of psychoanalysis to political theorizing. Although neither Freud nor Jacques Lacan do much direct political theorizing, the psychoanalytic project that they undertake provides the arsenal for revising completely how we think about politics. Thinking about politics in terms of enjoyment first and foremost enables us to make sense of what seems counterintuitive through any other form of analysis—the phenomenon of individuals acting politically against their own self-interest, acting in ways that do them harm rather than benefiting them. If the aim of our political activity is to discover a way of organizing and distributing enjoyment, then actions that violate our self-interest lose their anomalous status and become the rule rather than the exception, since enjoyment occurs through the destruction rather than the advancement of our self-interest.² We enjoy through forms of self-sacrifice, and in politics we enjoy the sacrifice of our own good.

Historically, thinkers have thought about politics in terms of the good of all. While individuals each pursue only their own good, the aim of political organization is the good of the collective. This idea remains constant from Aristotle to John Locke to Hannah Arendt to John Rawls.³ It is Aristotle who establishes the good as the object of politics, which Locke, Arendt, and Rawls later take up. In the *Politics*, he analyzes different forms of government in terms of their ability to achieve the good. He begins this work by proclaiming, “Every state is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good; for everyone always acts in order to obtain that which they think good.”⁴ Here, Aristotle translates the individual’s pursuit of the good to the political community’s same pursuit, which runs in parallel. Although what the good is differs from thinker to thinker, most of the major thinkers of the Western tradition share a rough consensus concerning the good as the aim of politics.

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2 Jacques Lacan suggests this inverse relationship between enjoyment and self-interest when he notes that “Freud’s use of the good can be summed up in the notion that it keeps us a long way from our *jouissance*.” Lacan 1992, p. 185. Our self-interest or our good protects us from enjoyment, but it is in sacrificing this self-interest that we enjoy, a dynamic made clearest when it comes to what we eat. We enjoy most those foods, like candy and cake, that damage our self-interest by impairing our health, while we find the least enjoyment in those foods that most contribute to maintaining us physically, like celery or spinach. Although it is possible to take pleasure in eating the latter, the fact that they are good for us makes it difficult to enjoy eating them.

3 Arendt’s critique of Marx is that his attempt to shatter political illusions takes the focus of politics off the good and places it on bare survival. In short, Marx transforms politics into a branch of economy and thereby eliminates politics as such, which Arendt sees as what is fundamental to human existence. See Arendt 1998.

4 Aristotle 1984, p. 1:1. For his part, Locke contends, “The end of Government is the good of Mankind.” Locke 1988, p. 417. At this closing point of the famous *Second Treatise of Government*, Locke uses the pursuit of the good as the basis for an argument against tyrannical authority, which has the effect of impairing this pursuit.

There is a clear logic to this conception of politics. It makes sense that people come together in order to defend themselves against possible harm and to ensure their own good. Otherwise, they would simply stay separated from each other in what Locke and others call a state of nature. The drive to form a political community suggests that its aim must be the good of those in the community.

One could see this idea of the good of the whole informing political actions in China today. President Xi Jinping promotes the development of capitalism under the organizing control of the Communist Party. He continues Deng Xiaoping’s transformation of China from a communist economy to a capitalist one, which lifts many Chinese workers out of poverty and enables savvy capitalists to live lives as prosperous as those in the West. While Xi’s policies have been politically repressive, they have been economically liberal and enabled the Chinese people an access to material comforts that they had hitherto not had. His adjustment of the Chinese economy could be said to have advanced the good of all. Despite Xi’s nominal investment in communism, one could easily interpret his leadership, especially the implementation of the New Economic Policy, according to Aristotle’s conception of the good, as with the leadership of almost any nation.⁵

Both Marx and Nietzsche recognize an obvious complication with this political privileging of the good in the analysis of politics. But rather than challenging directly the notion that politics is organized around the good, they simply raise the question—the good of whom? This is a decisive step. Once one introduces a division into the good that politics pursues, the idea that politics might be organized around the good of all quickly collapses. No political leader pursues the good of the whole but of a portion of the whole that has a privilege within the society. It becomes evident that political struggle is the struggle for power (or the expression of such a struggle)—either of a class or of a group or of an individual.

On this issue, despite their vast political disagreements, Marx and Nietzsche are proximate to each other.⁶ While Marx would analyze the French Revolution as the victory of an emerging bourgeoisie in its struggle with the landed aristocracy, Nietzsche would see the rise of Robespierre and the Reign of Terror as the embodiment of Christian slave morality in its modern manifestation.⁷ Marx sees this event as the

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5 Even a tyrannical government, like that of Kim Jong-un in North Korea, operates with a conception of the good. But according to Aristotle, the problem with tyranny—why it is tyranny—is that it enacts the greatest separation between public good and private good. Under tyranny, the private good of the leader or of a ruling cadre trumps the public good.

6 Perhaps it is this agreement about power that enables so many Marxist-oriented thinkers of the late 20th century to embrace Nietzsche’s philosophy, despite his open conservatism. Gilles Deleuze is the paradigmatic figure of this embrace.

7 See, for instance, Marx 2010 and Nietzsche 1997.

crucial progressive moment of modernity, and Nietzsche sees it as the culmination of the modern catastrophe. Although their analyses and value judgments differ widely, the basic interpretive move is the same: to discover the power dynamic hidden within the political structure and to understand politics in terms of power.

The basic difference is that Marx roots power in the economy and thus interprets history according to economic struggles, while Nietzsche locates power or the will to power in the psyche. Power, for Nietzsche, cannot be reduced to an economic causality. Although Nietzsche is critical of capitalism as much as (if not more than) Marx, he is critical of it for the opposite reason: he attacks capitalism for introducing the principle of equality into history, not for its production of vast inequalities. Furthermore, Marx envisions the future elimination of power through the withering away of the state under communism. In communist society, class struggle—the struggle for power—will come to end. Nietzsche’s vision of the future is diametrically opposed to this. His future *Übermensch* beyond good and evil will be a figure of ultimate power, not of its absence. But these differences do not obfuscate Marx and Nietzsche’s shared critique of politics centered on the good.

In taking up this position, Marx and Nietzsche introduce what appears as a fundamental break with Aristotle and with the entire tradition of political theorizing that he begins. By stripping away the illusion of the good and exposing politics as a power struggle, they seem to usher in a new, more honest era of political theorizing. Rather than messing around with the ideal of the good that really governs no one’s political activity, we can cut to the chase and talk directly about power.

But the good and power are not as opposed as they seem. Marx and Nietzsche believe that they are revolutionizing how we think about politics, but their revolution actually leaves the former structure almost entirely intact. It is a revolution in name only, and it requires Freud, despite his refusal to involve himself in political projects, to bring about a substantive change.

In his *Seminar VII on The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Jacques Lacan shows the connection between the good and power. The good is simply the form that power takes. As he points out, “The domain of the good is the birth of power.”⁸ The good is not an abstract political ideal but what we have power over and can make use of. In this way, Lacan connects the good as a political ideal with the various goods that we possess. By doing so, he makes it clear that we use the good, just like we use goods, to keep us at a distance from the trauma of enjoyment. Lacan continues in *Seminar VII*, “what is meant by defending one’s goods is one and the same

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8 Lacan 1992, p. 229.

thing as forbidding oneself from enjoying them.”⁹ Eliding the difference between the good and goods enables Lacan to see that the good represents what we cannot enjoy, which is why no political organization has ever pursued it.

The same dynamic holds for power as well. Like the good, power represents an attempt to protect ourselves from enjoyment. Power is power over enjoyment. We look to gain power in order to avoid encountering the enjoyment that threatens to upend our everyday existence. When they attain power, people use it to isolate themselves from the others’ enjoyment: they buy vast tracts of land, build fences, install alarms, and hire security guards, all so that they can avoid the disturbance that the other’s enjoyment would introduce through playing loud music, producing strange smells, and even intruding on their property. Power is appealing because enjoyment is threatening. It promises to undermine our psychic equilibrium. By keeping the other’s enjoyment at bay, one keeps one’s own enjoyment at bay as well, which is in fact the point of creating distance from the other.

Like the good, power provides an opportunity for enjoyment only in the negative sense. When one enjoys power, one enjoys giving it up. No one just intelligently holds on to power. As power becomes secure, leaders put it at risk in wars or with actions that can only lead to failure. All leaders constantly work toward their own downfall because work in this direction is the only way to enjoy the power of leadership. When we look at the catastrophic decisions of political leaders in modern world history—Robespierre’s turn against Danton, Lincoln’s policy of appeasement with the white South, Lenin’s appointment of Stalin as General Secretary, or Hitler’s invasion of the Soviet Union, just to name a few—it becomes clear that those in power do not enjoy retaining their power. Of course, there are countless actions that leaders take to hold on to power, but there is nothing enjoyable in this. Even those leaders who retain power for life find ways to create jeopardy for their rule and themselves. The only way to enjoy power is to push it to the point where one loses it, which is why Napoleon ends his days on St. Helena.

For psychoanalysis, both the good and power serve as lures to obscure the role that enjoyment plays in politics. We take refuge in the idea of the good or the idea of power in order to avoid confronting how we derive enjoyment, which takes something from us rather than giving us anything. We attain the good or accumulate power, but we enjoy through what we lose. Just as the good and power provide respite from the disturbance of enjoyment, political theories focused on the good and on power offer the same respite. Psychoanalysis marks a radical break with the logic of the good articulated by Aristotle and the logic of power articulated by Marx and Nietzsche. No political organization can pursue

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9 Lacan 1992, p. 230.

the good because the good doesn't exist, not just because it is merely a guise for power but because we erect the good as a good only in order to enjoy its sacrifice. When we pursue the good or power, we are doing so because they provide fuel for our mode of enjoying, not because they are desirable or enjoyable in themselves. Rather than enjoying the good, we enjoy its sacrifice.¹⁰

Conscious Vs. Unconscious

When we look at the controversy that Marx's economic interpretation of history and Nietzsche's power analysis stirred up, it certainly seems that they hit a nerve. But their theoretical contributions provided a disturbance that could be assimilated into prevailing political thought in a way that the psychoanalytic emphasis on enjoyment could not. This is due to the difference between consciousness and the unconscious. Despite its unpleasantness, the will to power is not unconscious.

It is true that some find it difficult to avow their lust for power. They couch their attempts to seize power, for instance, in terms of equality and justice for all. While campaigning for universal justice, they manage to empower themselves and, what's more important, their form of morality. This is what the Right finds so infuriating about what they call "limousine liberals," the political figures who proclaim their concern for equality while managing to make a fortune for themselves. Equality here functions as a guise for a project self-enrichment.

This is what Nietzsche hates about Christianity, which he sees as a version of slave morality. Slave morality, according to Nietzsche, is the dominant morality of modernity. He does not object to the fact that slave morality rules since he finds the will to power perfectly natural—some type of morality must be in power—but he disdains the prevarication that underlies it. At the same time that Christian slave morality argues for the downtrodden, it aims at political dominance. It contends that we should identify with the outcasts of society, but it turns this identification into a privileged position within society. This basic dishonesty of modern political morality (following Christianity's model) leads Nietzsche to go on a consciousness raising campaign against supposed warriors for justice. He wants do-gooders to become aware that fighting for equality and justice is really a fight for power. No one escapes the will to power, least of all the egalitarian do-gooder.

For those who believe themselves acting according to certain political ideals, encountering Nietzsche for the first time can be a disheartening experience. In *The Genealogy of Morals*, for instance, he shows that the history of morality is actually a history of the struggle for power rather than an attempt to arrive at the good. Christian

¹⁰ As Joan Copjec puts it, "The psychoanalytic subject, in short, being subject to a principle *beyond* pleasure, is *not driven to seek his own good*." Copjec 1994, p. 87.

morality and its modern secular equivalent emerge not out of a faith in God or a desire for justice but from the spirit of what Nietzsche calls *ressentiment*—the resentment of the weak for the strength of the powerful. The desire for equality is the product of a profound hatred of the elevated status of the powerful, which is why Christian-based morality is always the morality of the slave, according to Nietzsche. Slave morality is fundamentally reactive, always responding to the activity of the strong and powerful individuals that it wants to bring down a notch, in contrast to the active master morality that it supersedes in human history.¹¹

There is surely something disturbing about confronting the will to power lying beneath one's striving for justice. No Christians would feel comfortable admitting that their Christianity is nothing but a project for secret dominance, nor would socialists freely avow that their socialism is an attempt to seize power for those like them, which is what Nietzsche charges. Nietzsche sees how difficult his message is to receive, which is why he calls himself an untimely thinker, one who has come perhaps a hundred years too soon. He recognizes that the harshness of his message of annihilating the value of traditional values will rub most readers the wrong way.¹² It is, he believes, inassimilable to consciousness except in the case of the courageous few—the *Übermensch*.

But in the end, no matter how disturbing the revelations of the will to power are, they are not traumatic. We actually can assimilate, with more or less difficulty, our lust for power into consciousness. This is because the status of this lust is not unconscious but preconscious. It is because the lust for power is not like sexual lust. We might not be aware of it, but with sufficient prompting, we can bring it into consciousness. It may lead to an unflattering self-conception, but it will not force our consciousness to confront something foreign to it.

In this sense, it is significant that when Nietzsche describes the role that power plays in the psyche, his recurring term for it is the "will to power."¹³ While most of us in modernity do not avow the will to power, it is nonetheless tied to our conscious will rather than our unconscious desire. The will to power is not, for Nietzsche, the unconscious desire

¹¹ See Nietzsche 1989.

¹² Nietzsche repeats the idea of his untimeliness many times, but perhaps its greatest expression occurs in *Ecce Homo*, where he proclaims, "The time has not come for me either. Some people are born posthumously." Nietzsche 2005, p. 100.

¹³ Although the book entitled *The Will To Power* was a posthumous compilation of Nietzsche's notes put together haphazardly and tendentiously by his sister, the idea of a will to power suffuses his philosophical work. This makes this title for his notebooks understandable, even if it was constructed with the worst of intentions by a future Nazi (Elisabeth-Förster Nietzsche) who would eventually befriend Adolf Hitler and thereby propagate a terrible misunderstanding of his thought. See (or not) Nietzsche 1968.

for power. This is why the uncovering of the will to power can be brought to consciousness. Although it may be unpleasant to admit one's will to power to oneself, it can be done.

With unconscious desire and the enjoyment it produces, the case is altogether different. How we enjoy cannot become conscious because it follows a logic that the structure of consciousness cannot integrate. Desire is not just unpleasant or unflattering for our conscious self but upends the teleological bent of consciousness, which is why Aristotle could not have discovered the priority of enjoyment himself without first having discovered the unconscious. The unconscious is the site of enjoyment. One must conceptualize the unconscious and its alternate logic before one is able to see how enjoyment drives our activity.

We cannot achieve enjoyment by accomplishing our desire as if it were a task that we set for ourselves. This is what makes it unassimilable to consciousness, in contrast to power. Enjoyment is not the result of the successful attainment of an aim, which is the only way that consciousness can operate. Our conscious projects aim at successfully achieving a goal. This structure is not how enjoyment occurs. Instead, we enjoy the barrier to the desire's accomplishment or realization. It works only as a task thwarted, but one cannot consciously try to thwart a task without making the thwarting of the task the goal to accomplish. Consciousness cannot escape teleology, but enjoyment cannot be reduced to it. This is why it defies any assimilation to consciousness, in contrast to Nietzsche's will to power.

The great example of these competing logics in human history is the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution. The conscious goal of the Committee for Public Safety was advancing the revolution and ensuring the survival of the republic. The committee saw the Terror as a way pursuing this aim. But the enjoyment of the violence of the Terror ended up undermining the committee itself, leading to the Thermidorian reaction that resulted in the death of Robespierre, Saint-Just, and their allies. Ultimately, the Terror paved the way for Napoleon's empire, which was the definitive end of the committee's hopes for the republic.

Robespierre would have never been able to articulate his enjoyment of the Terror, and yet this violence, precisely because it violated his own inherent revulsion at the death penalty, ended up driving him to eliminate even his own former close friends and allies, like Camille Desmoulins. The enjoyment of the Terror becomes a sacrifice that provides an intoxicating enjoyment for the partisans of the revolution. Even if one interprets Robespierre cynically, as someone striving for power rather than for universal equality, it is still the case that enjoyment subverted his conscious will to power.¹⁴ The enjoyment of the Terror constantly

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¹⁴ Just to be clear, there is no real historical warrant in the cynical interpretation of Robespierre. There is no evidence that he was not a true believer in the revolutionary project.

threatened his power and eventually brought it to an end.

At the height of the Terror in early 1794, Robespierre proclaims the conscious aim of its use. In a discourse before the National Convention, he states, "We must suffocate the interior and exterior enemies of the Republic, or perish with them; however, in this situation, the first maxim of our politics must be that we lead the people with reason, and the enemies of the people with terror."¹⁵ Consciously, Robespierre views the Terror as a tool for the preservation of the Republic. Without recourse to it for the enemies of the Republic, he believes that the revolution would fail. But what ultimately undermines the revolution is this very tool that Robespierre believed would save it.

This is a clear case where the conscious intention of the political leader fell victim to his unconscious enjoyment. Far from being a just a tool in the prosecution of the revolution and the establishment of the Republic, the Terror became an end in itself. The enjoyment of the violence overcame the revolution, just it did later in the Soviet Union. No leader could avow this enjoyment as an end in itself because it can be an end only unconsciously. For consciousness, it is never more than the byproduct of how we fail to realize our conscious wishes. We cannot make enjoyment our conscious goal, but we can take stock consciously of its priority in the psyche and in politics. To do so, we must see just how enjoyment works in relationship to pleasure.

The Enjoyment of Not Obtaining Pleasure

Enjoyment and pleasure exist in a dialectical relationship. Enjoyment is the privileged term in this relationship, as it drives the subject unconsciously. The subject acts for the sake of its enjoyment, even though enjoyment can never become the subject's conscious goal. Pleasure, on the other hand, is the subject's conscious goal. By consciously striving for pleasure, the subject produces enjoyment, which occurs as an unconscious aim of the attempt to achieve pleasure. In this sense, pleasure is nothing but Freud's term for what Aristotle calls the good and what Nietzsche calls power.

Freud defines pleasure in a precise way that initially appears counterintuitive. He sees pleasure obtained through the lessening of the subject's excitation rather than through the increase of it. According to his conception of the pleasure principle formulated in the *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, "pleasure is *in some way* connected with the diminution, reduction or extinction of the amounts of stimulus prevailing in the mental apparatus, and that similarly unpleasure is connected with their increase."¹⁶ As he goes on to discuss, the proof that

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¹⁵ Robespierre 1967, p. 356.

¹⁶ Freud 1963, p. 356.

this conception must be right is the sexual act itself. Everything in the act moves toward its culmination in orgasm, which we experience as the greatest pleasure imaginable. Freud continues, “An examination of the most intense pleasure which is accessible to human beings, the pleasure of accomplishing the sexual act, leaves little doubt” about the validity of the pleasure principle.¹⁷ Although the discharge of excitation is more materially evident in the case of men than of women, the sexual conduct of both sexes nonetheless supports Freud’s theory. The conclusion of the sexual act is, for almost everyone, the highlight of the process—maybe even the highlight of life itself—because it marks the height of pleasure.¹⁸ When one thinks of it this way, the conception of the pleasure principle as the discharge rather than the accumulation of excitation makes much more sense and ceases to seem counterintuitive.

Pleasure is necessarily momentary because it is a culmination. One experiences pleasure with the diminution of excitation, and then the experience of pleasure is quickly over when there is no more excitation left to diminish. This leads Freud to lament that we are structured psychically so as to be incapable of sustained pleasure. While we might imagine a utopia of constant pleasure, the structure of our psyche makes living in such a utopia impossible. The best that we can hope for is rapid repetition of the pleasurable experience in which we discharge our excess excitation. But every build up of excitation involves us in unpleasure until we are able to discharge what we have built up, so this utopia would maximize unpleasure just as it maximized pleasure, which many would consider less than utopian.¹⁹

Given Freud’s conception of the pleasure principle, he explains the building up of excess excitation—in foreplay, for instance—as simply propaedeutic to the eventual release. One builds up tension or excitation just to give oneself something to discharge. There is no intrinsic value in the excitation itself. Becoming all hot and bothered is only important because it is the prelude to a future release that will be an end to this unpleasant state and produce pleasure. One must begin by creating the problem that the discharge of excitation through the pleasure principle will solve. The problem has value only insofar as one can solve it via the pleasure principle.

The pleasure principle, as Freud defines it, is compatible with

17 Freud 1963, p. 356.

18 Even the opponents of psychoanalysis tend to agree with Freud on this point. Michel Foucault fantasized about dying at the moment of orgasm because this is the moment of maximum pleasure. This unusual correlation confirms the commonsensical status of the pleasure principle.

19 Most utopias follow the reality principle rather than the pleasure principle. For instance, in his *Utopia*, Thomas More minimizes all potential ways of building up excitation: no one wears sexy clothes; no one eats different food than others; no one accumulates wealth; and so on. More’s theory, which almost all later utopians follow, is that adhering to the reality principle and keeping excitation to a minimum will produce a more stable and contented society.

Nietzsche’s will to power. The discharge of excitation in the pleasure principle is akin to the individual discharging its strength in the will to power. In fact, some of Nietzsche’s accounts of the will to power employ almost exactly the same terms that Freud uses in his description of the pleasure principle. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche proclaims, “Physiologists should think twice before positioning the drive for self-preservation as the cardinal drive of an organic being. Above all, a living thing wants to *discharge* its strength—life itself is will to power—: self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent *consequences* of this.”²⁰ Both the pleasure principle and the will to power involve getting rid of an excess and taking pleasure in this evacuation of what one has built up.

There does seem to be a crucial difference between the pleasure principle and the will to power. One can discharge excitation and receive pleasure (following the pleasure principle) without dominating others, but the will to power implies violence. This is only an apparent discrepancy, however. Nietzsche’s conception of the *Übermensch* is not a figure of ultraviolence but rather one of solitude and aloofness. To go beyond good and evil is to become so powerful that one no longer needs to dominate others but can exist on one’s own. This is Nietzsche’s moral ideal of how one might develop the will to power, and it offers a way of further reconciling it with the pleasure principle.²¹

Like power, pleasure can become a conscious aim. It might be disturbing to admit to myself that I want to experience an orgasm five times a day or that I want to destroy the life of my successful colleague at work, but these ideas are simply preconscious, not unconscious. I know that they are preconscious rather than unconscious precisely because I can uncover them on my own, by reflecting on what I want and what I do. I can read Freud or Nietzsche and recognize the role of the pleasure principle or the will to power in my everyday life. No matter how disturbing pleasure or power is, neither requires me to confront the barrier of the unconscious, which operates according to its own logic and does not allow its ideas to flow easily into consciousness. In contrast

20 Nietzsche 2002, p. 15. Here, Nietzsche sees a fundamental incompatibility between the Darwinian theory of natural selection, which posits a natural desire to survive, and his conception of the will to power. For his part, Freud does not see any necessary contradiction between the pleasure principle (or even the death drive) and Darwinian theory but imagines himself as accompanying Darwin, along with Copernicus, in displacing humanity from its central position in creation. It falls to Lacan to point out the incompatibility between psychoanalysis and natural selection, as he does in *Seminar VII*.

21 Nietzsche provides the most eloquent formulation of his ethical ideal and its absence of domination in *The Gay Science*. He states, “For one thing is needful: that a human being should *attain* satisfaction with himself—be it through this or that poetry or art; only then is a human being at all tolerable to behold! Whoever is dissatisfied with himself is continually prepared to avenge himself for this, and we others will be his victims if only by having to endure his sight. For the sight of something ugly makes one bad and gloomy.” Nietzsche 2001, p. 164. Moving beyond good and evil produces a self-satisfaction that has no need to do violence to others.

to the preconscious, the unconscious becomes accessible only through techniques that bypass the censorship of consciousness—dreams, slips, jokes, or the psychoanalytic session itself and its practice of free association.

Where pleasure is different from power, as Freud conceives it early on in his thinking, is that we cannot become conscious of the actual object that provides pleasure. Since the real object of our desire is always linked to an incestuous object, we repress it and construct our reality around this unconscious gap in the world of consciousness. Power is different insofar as we can know clearly what we want to dominate with our power. Power doesn't require any recourse to the unconscious. But that said, it is the homologous structure of pleasure and power that render both processes accessible to consciousness. Neither the act of obtaining pleasure nor the act of exercising power need be unconscious, even if there is something disagreeable about seeing oneself as a figure of pure lust or a brute. The disagreeable doesn't demand recourse to the unconscious.

If we recognize this homology between the pleasure principle and the will to power, the claim about Freud's debt to Nietzsche, despite his own claims to the contrary, seems more likely than not to be valid.²² While Freud did not plagiarize Nietzsche, it is safe to say that he thinks along the same lines when he theorizes the pleasure principle in the early part of his career. But everything changes—including Freud's theoretical debt to Nietzsche—when he discovers the death drive and the enjoyment that it produces when he writes *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in 1920. At this point, Freud goes where Nietzsche has not gone before. He articulates an alternative logic to that of the pleasure principle, one that trumps the primacy of the pleasure principle and even forces him to reconceive the unconscious (though he never makes this change explicit).

We experience pleasure through the diminution of excitation, but we experience enjoyment through creation of it. In contrast to pleasure, we derive enjoyment from what produces a disturbance in our psychic equilibrium. But we cannot simply create excitation by wishing it into existence. The psyche becomes excited through the emergence of a problem. What makes our existence enjoyable is the posing of questions, not the answering of them.

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²² On multiple occasions Freud denies extensive reading of Nietzsche's works because he saw the proximity to his own ideas and wanted to avoid amalgamating his own theory with Nietzsche's. For instance, in *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement*, he states, "In later years I have denied myself the very great pleasure of reading the works of Nietzsche, with the deliberate object of not being hampered in working out the impressions received in psycho-analysis by any sort of anticipatory ideas." Freud, p. 15-16. The problem with this formulation, as various critics of Freud have pointed out, is that he would have to already know Nietzsche's thought in order to know that it comes dangerously close to anticipating the discoveries of psychoanalysis. What's more, a glance in Freud's office preserved from his brief time in London at the end of his life reveals that Nietzsche's collected works are among the books that he brought with him while fleeing the Nazis. The parallel between the pleasure principle and the will to power is impossible to deny. But the pleasure principle is not the last word in the psychoanalytic project.

To put it in psychoanalytic terms, we become excited through the emergence of an object that arouses desire but remains always unattainable. Enjoyment requires a lost or absent object that can never become present and that exists only insofar as it is lost because objects that are just there, objects that are present, have no inherent value. Value emerges through what is missing. Loss creates the excess excitation that leads to enjoyment, which is why the subject must suffer its enjoyment rather than finding pleasure in it. The relationship between enjoyment and loss, a loss that produces excitation and gives the subject something for which to strive, represents the key to the politics of enjoyment.

Enjoyment is always a melancholy enjoyment. When an object is constantly present, we find ourselves unable to enjoy it. But when we lose it or it disappears, we experience it as truly enjoyable. This dynamic is most clearly visible in love relationships. When sex with the partner is an everyday possibility, it can turn into a mechanical duty or even something unpleasant. But when one knows that one's time with the partner is limited or when the partner has been away for a long time, the sexual encounter becomes reimbued with enjoyment. Most adages are risible, but the notion that "absence makes the heart grow fonder" does manage to hint at the logic of enjoyment. Because enjoyment involves an engagement with absence, suffering always accompanies it.

Since enjoyment necessarily involves suffering, any attempt to eliminate suffering will meet with intractable resistance. Eliminating suffering is eliminating enjoyment. In order to preserve their possibility for enjoyment, subjects will cling to loss and to the suffering that it entails. Utopian plans for a society organized around the elimination of suffering founder on the requisite role that suffering plays in our enjoyment. If we were to successfully get rid of suffering in a future society, we would simultaneously create an enjoyment-free society. Such a world is not only practically impossible but theoretically impossible as well. Unless utopia contains non-utopian elements, it can have nothing to make it enjoyable for us—and thus there is no way that we can desire to create it.²³

We can understand the contrast between pleasure and enjoyment by returning to the sexual act. According to Freud's conception of the pleasure principle, the culmination of the act—the discharge of excitation—is all. But once we focus on enjoyment rather than the pleasure principle, this vision of things undergoes a total transformation. Rather than seeing the initial flirting, passionate kissing, and intimate

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²³ What makes Fredric Jameson's recent utopia possible to desire are its obvious shortcomings rather than its perfections. In *American Utopia*, Jameson makes the outrageous argument that we should universalize the military and forge a utopia in this way, since support for the military is so strong and since it already functions like a socialist institution. This argument completely elides the fact that support for the military depends on the nationalistic violence that it perpetuates and that Jameson's utopia would eliminate. But this (fatal) flaw in the utopian vision makes it possible to imagine enjoying the world that Jameson envisions.

touching as merely preliminary to the main event of orgasm, one could interpret orgasm as the momentary pleasure that puts an end to the enjoyment of these preliminaries. The existence of the orgasm enables our consciousness to accept all the obstacles that intervene leading up to it—the flirting, the inconvenient pieces of clothing that must be removed, the fundamental barrier of the other's desire. These obstacles, not the big finish, make the sexual act enjoyable.

The barriers to the culmination of the sexual act are what make the act enjoyable, but no one, except a perverse subject, would be able to remain contented with the barriers alone and not take the process to its concluding point. We use the orgasm to smuggle our enjoyment of the obstacles to the sex act past the suspicions of consciousness. Even though he never fully articulates it, this is what Freud's discovery of enjoyment beyond the pleasure principle implies. The point ceases to be the final orgasm and becomes all the trouble that it takes to get there.

If the thrill of orgasm renders the sexual example of enjoyment too difficult to accept, one could think instead of the roller coaster ride at an amusement park (which the sexual act models itself on). The pleasure of the roller coaster occurs during the moments when one speeds down the steep slopes at a breathtaking pace. At these moments, one experiences one's excitation diminishing and feels pleasure. But the enjoyment of the roller coaster takes place elsewhere—as one heads slowly up the ramp to prepare for the burst of pleasure. One finds enjoyment in the build up of excitation or the encounter with an obstacle (the large hill) that occurs in the slow movement that does not provide pleasure. No one would ride a roller coaster that only went uphill and never provided any pleasure because the psyche must find a way to translate its drive for enjoyment into the consciousness of pleasure. But at the same time, no one would ride a roller coaster that only went downhill and provided nothing but pleasure. The interruption of the pleasure is the only site at which one can enjoy. We cannot just renounce pleasure altogether. If there were no pleasure, there would also be no enjoyment. But pleasure functions as an alibi for enjoyment. It is a payoff that the unconscious makes to consciousness in order to slip its enjoyment past the censorship of consciousness.

Enjoyment is inextricable from suffering. It occurs through some form of self-destruction, which is why it is absolutely irreducible to consciousness. The self-destructive form of enjoyment necessitates its unconscious status. Although one can consciously strive for pleasure, one cannot consciously strive to enjoy since enjoyment involves suffering and damage to the psyche. To attempt consciously to enjoy would inevitably transform the suffering into pleasure, just like trying to throw a game changes loss into a form of victory. If one actually loses the game, one succeeds in throwing it. If one tries consciously to suffer, one succeeds in suffering and perversely turns it into a pleasure. In this

sense, because enjoyment requires suffering, because one must suffer one's enjoyment, the pursuit of it must remain unconscious. There is no possibility for consciously resolving to enjoy oneself. Enjoyment can only be the result of one's unconscious desire, while one's conscious will aims to find pleasure.

Our inability to try to enjoy leaves psychoanalytic thought with limited political options. One cannot organize a society around enjoyment since it cannot be our conscious aim. Doing so would unleash the greatest erection of new forms of suffering that we can imagine. Enjoyment occurs through the encounter with the obstacle to pleasure, but one cannot make the obstacle into an object to achieve without altering its status as an obstacle. One cannot will to encounter obstacles without eliminating the enjoyment that they would provide. Confronted with this impossible situation, all that we can do is to recognize the primacy of enjoyment and allow for its intrusions into politics.

The Politics of Sacrifice

Foregrounding enjoyment in politics makes it possible to understand why people constantly act against their own good when they make political decisions. Enjoyment is not only distinct from the good but emerges only through its sacrifice. When we betray the good by acting against our self-interest, we create a path for our enjoyment. This fundamental psychoanalytic idea cuts against all our usual ways of thinking about politics.

Because the idea of power or economic interest so governs our way of thinking about political choices, we find it strange and require an explanation when subjects act politically against their own self-interest. When the impoverished vote for candidates who unabashedly promise to promote the interests of the wealthy, this defies contemporary common sense. There is, however, a commonsensical explanation for this challenge to common sense of ideology. Those who act politically against their own self-interest have fallen for some ideological manipulation, like the idea that they will benefit from trickle-down economics or that a horde of invading immigrants stand ready to take their low-paying jobs. Or, more fundamentally, capitalist ideology has convinced them that capitalism is not a socioeconomic system at all but simply human nature. Whatever the manipulation that has occurred, the fact that people act politically against their own interest testifies that some kind of ideological intervention has occurred.

Psychoanalytic theory in no way denies the existence of ideology but actually provides an essential ingredient for it. It is impossible to have a theory of ideology without the notion of an unconscious, which is why the primary Marxist theorists of ideology bring a psychoanalytic approach to their theorizing. This is certainly the case with Louis Althusser, who formulates the most compelling advance on the theory of ideology since

the time of Marx himself. His epochal contribution in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” relies theoretically on both Freud and Lacan.

According to Althusser, individuals become subject to ideological interpellation when they misrecognize themselves in the mirror reflection of the symbolic authority. This self-image is an imaginary deception that fools them into believing that they belong to this authority and that they have agency within the social order constituted by it. Ideology convinces individuals to take an image for the real. As Althusser famously puts, “Ideology represents the imaginary relationship to their real conditions of existence.”²⁴ In addition to referring to the individual’s misrecognition in the mirror that evokes Lacan’s essay on the mirror stage, Althusser employs two of Lacan’s signature categories—the imaginary and the real—in his description of how ideology functions.²⁵ We are ideologically duped when we unconsciously identify ourselves as active subjects and fail to see how the real historical relations of production make active subjectivity impossible. The theory of ideology depends on the psychoanalytic discovery of the unconscious.²⁶

But despite the important role that psychoanalysis plays in the theory of ideology, the fundamental contention of psychoanalysis is that ideology is not the most intractable barrier to subjects acting for their own good. Subjects are not simply duped into acting against their own self-interest. Their enjoyment depends on them not doing so. Ideology makes our betrayal of self-interest easier to rationalize, but it in no way drives this betrayal, since without it we would find ourselves bereft of what makes our lives worth living—our enjoyment. A theory of ideology is not central to a psychoanalytic conception of politics. Ideology shapes the form that our self-destructive enjoyment takes, but it does not create our propensity for self-destruction.

If we take into account the priority of enjoyment and necessity of sacrificing self-interest in order to enjoy, the problem of politics turns around completely. We don’t have to explain subjects who abandon their self-interest politically but rather those who manage to find a way to follow it. That is where the real anomaly lies. We use self-interest as

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24 Althusser 1984, p. 36.

25 Slavoj Žižek offers an even more psychoanalytically informed understanding of ideology than Althusser. He contends that ideology functions through an operation of subtraction: it takes the traumatic real out of the social reality in which it ensconces the subject, so that the subject can believe that this social reality operates without the activity of the subjects whose belief constitutes it. See Žižek 1989

26 If one does not accept the idea of the unconscious, a theory of ideology would make no sense. One would have to posit that individuals willingly allow themselves to be duped by ideology, if they cannot have an unconscious investment in it. This preposterous image of a theory of ideology without recourse to the unconscious is why Marxism, as its concern with ideology developed, became increasingly dependent on psychoanalytic thought in the 20th century.

a good to sacrifice in order to enjoy. This is why people support those officials who undermine their interests rather than advancing them. By simply providing an alibi for consciousness—like claiming that cutting taxes on the wealthy will spur economic growth for all—officials make it possible for individuals to sacrifice their own good and enjoy their support for such figures.

Because our enjoyment cannot be assimilated to consciousness, there is a limit to our ability to enjoy ourselves politically. We must be able to convince consciousness that our action will genuinely produce pleasure. If all we can see down the path laid out is unpleasure, we cannot psychically go in this direction. This is the case with conservative parties and immigrants or those not belonging to the dominant group. For instance, although voting Republican would offer a black American a great deal of enjoyment (through the extreme sacrifice of self-interest involved in supporting a party that makes openly racist appeals to white voters), the unpleasure that this would create is too evident to ignore for all but a tiny minority of black Americans. Thus, black support for the American conservative party hovers between 10% and 15%. If the Republican Party continues to reserve its pleasure for whites, this percentage will remain abysmal. Enjoyment in politics is the driving factor, but it cannot occur without any responsiveness to the problem of pleasure.

There is one case in politics where people seem to pursue their own interest with great vehemence. Rather than supporting candidates who would redistribute wealth and detract from their fortunes, the wealthy by and large give their money to those who promise to minimize government intervention and preserve class inequalities. Such officials actively defend the interests of the wealthy against any possible outbreaks of class warfare. This seems like a completely self-evident case of subjects pursuing pleasure (or power, to use Nietzsche’s term) to the detriment of their enjoyment.

But even here, in what appears as the clearest case of self-interested political activity, the subversion of self-interest is fully apparent. When members of the upper class endorse cuts in the social safety net and tax breaks to build their fortunes even larger, they wantonly destabilize these fortunes by exacerbating class antagonisms. The more desperate the lower class becomes, the more likely it will be to act out in a revolutionary way. And even if it doesn’t go this far, increased pauperization will produce an unlivable society, forcing the wealthy to retreat further and further behind their defensive walls, leaving them less capable of readily obtaining pleasure in society. In their desire for an ever increasing accumulation, they put everything that they have at risk. They produce a world in which they must live in constant fear of losing what they have all in order to gain a little bit more. But the pleasure of this little bit more exists only to justify the destruction of life in common that

their political practices enacts. This destruction—the sacrifice of both the public good and their own—fuels the political activity of much of the upper class.

Of course, there are those from the upper class who do attempt to moderate the violence of the capitalist system toward its lower rungs. These figures, like Bill Gates or George Soros, strive for both good of all and their own good by trying to produce a more equitable society. But at the same time, they don't give up their activity as ruthless capitalist subjects when they are not promoting the good. Despite all their political and charitable activities, they remain two of the richest people in the world. But unlike other ruthless capitalists, they attempt to separate the destructive enjoyment of capitalist accumulation from the pleasurable pursuit of the good when they help the downtrodden. The problem is that the destructive enjoyment is much more effective than their attempts to ameliorate its effects in their other activities. Their destructive accumulation always outstrips their concern for the good. In their activities oriented around the good, neither Gates nor Soros goes far enough to put the capitalist system itself at risk because they dare not upset their primary mode of enjoying. Despite all their acts of conspicuous philanthropy, they remain on the side of the destructive enjoyment that capitalist accumulation provides for them.

The arena where political enjoyment appears most openly on all sides is climate change. Those who disavow the obvious fact of human-generated global warming enjoy the continued destruction of the planet. What's striking is that they don't go to great lengths to hide this. From the chants of "drill baby drill" to the panegyrics to coal power, climate change deniers almost go so far as to make their enjoyment of global destruction—and thus their own self-destruction—explicit. While they do have recourse to economic concerns or jobs as a conscious alibi obscuring this unconscious enjoyment, they come very close to making enjoyment conscious, though this is ultimately impossible.

What's instructive about this issue is that those concerned with fighting climate change also lay bare the privilege of enjoyment in their position, even if it is not quite so clear cut. They argue, of course, that saving the planet is good, that it is in the self-interest of everyone. But at the same time, they fight climate change by clamoring for renunciation. We must give up cars and planes, meat and non-local produce. We must abandon the pleasure of cheap energy and lavish consumption, opting for a minimalist ascetic regime in order to preserve the earth. Here, the enjoyment of self-sacrifice counters the enjoyment of destroying the earth proffered by the climate change deniers. But it is one form of enjoyment versus another, not a contest of competing goods or a power struggle.

Across the political and economic spectrum, we can find no one able to pursue self-interest or the good. Enjoyment always gets in the way. It is the political stumbling block that makes political activity

desirable. When we find ourselves tempted to view politics cynically as the obscene terrain of the will to power, we should recognize this cynical interpretation as a lure that keeps us focused on consciousness rather than the unconscious. Power exists to obscure enjoyment. Nowhere is this more the case than in the world of politics. Rather than seeing power lurking beneath those striving for the good, we must see enjoyment hidden in the will to power.

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Untreatable: The Freudian Act and its Legacy

Tracy McNulty

Abstract: This essay takes up the problem of unconscious transmission in the Freudian clinic and in Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*, exploring the role of the body both in receiving and in transmitting the consequences of an act about which the subject knows nothing. My point of departure is the mechanism of the Pass, which Lacan introduced in 1967 as a means of tracking and accounting for action of the object *a*, the object-cause of desire that animates the analyst's act. The Pass is concerned not primarily with what the *passant* has managed to say about her analysis, but with something that exceeds the signifier, and that therefore passes through the body. This real object, transmitted by an act of the unconscious, is not an object of conscious observation or recording, but instead something that is at once *transmitted* by a body and *received* by a body, depositing itself in the bodies of the two *passeurs* without their knowledge. I argue that this bodily transmission allows us to think about the stakes of political and aesthetic transmission in Freud's two major pieces on Moses.

Keywords: Jacques Lacan, Sigmund Freud, transmission, object *a*, Moses and Monotheism, dream of Irma's injection, "The Moses of Michelangelo"

Jacques Lacan, in his seminar "The Analytic Act," suggests that the patient's act is not something the analyst can know, interpret, or anticipate, but something by which he is "struck" both psychically and in his body, where it leaves its traces or impressions. The act leaves effects in the real; it acts upon the body, and not upon the understanding alone. What "strikes" the analyst in the act—as distinct from the "acting out" that often characterizes the analysand's way of relating to the analyst, for example as an object of love or aggression—is what Lacan calls the object (*a*), the "object-cause of desire" that acts in and through the subject. Like a black hole—which cannot be perceived directly, but is known only by the way it warps space-time—the object of psychoanalysis is an object we know solely by its effects. Because the object-cause of desire is a purely mental object that does not properly speaking "exist," it cannot be perceived, sensed, or known empirically. Instead, it must create a path for itself in the world, through the subject's act.

Lucie Cantin argues that the [tracking of this act should be understood as the essence of the Freudian clinic. "From the moment when Freud first comes up against repetition and the resistance of the symptom in his clinical practice," she writes, he is "forced to acknowledge a beyond of the pleasure principle that acts within the subject."¹ As a result of this discovery the unconscious can no longer be conceived as the site of thoughts that are repressed because they are forbidden or socially

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¹ Cantin 2017, pp. 26-27.

inadmissible. In “Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through,” from 1914, Freud realizes that repetition is in fact the enactment of something that what was unable to be represented. He writes that “the patient does not *remember* anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but *acts* it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he *repeats* it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it.”² As a consequence, he adds, “we must treat his illness, not as an event of the past, but as a present-day force.” In the framework of the transference, Freud continues, this still active force *passes to the act*—which explains the often “unavoidable deterioration [of symptoms] during treatment.”³ The unconscious is now conceived as the site where what remains outside of language, unrepresented, continues to be repetitively staged and enacted and to work upon the body. It is this unconscious that interests the analyst, writes Cantin, because “it is the censured, the unnamed, that is the ‘still active force’ at work in the life of the patient, pushing her to act without regard for the wishes of the ego and seeking a path for itself through the symptom or acting-out—no matter what the consequences for the organism or the ego in the social link.”⁴

Given this description, it’s not surprising that we generally think of the act as something bad: a symptom, an impasse, something that may even be violent or destructive to others (as in the *passage à l’acte*). Psychoanalysis is not concerned with controlling this action or getting it to stop, however, but with *freeing what is acting*, allowing it to find another means of expression. One interesting consequence is that the act of desire, whose liberation is the aim of an analysis, is not unrelated to the symptom, to which it might logically seem to be opposed. This proximity, which may seem paradoxical, is what I wish to explore here: not only in the context of the clinic, but in social and political history.

I will begin by exploring the status of this object in relation to the procedure of the Pass, which Lacan introduced in 1967 as a means of communicating and confirming the results of an analysis. In the Pass, the analysand testifies to her own experience, and attempts to transmit something of her relation to the object that causes desire. But while this testimony might bear a superficial resemblance to the genre of the case presentation, which attempts to produce a logical construction accounting for the fantasy at work in the subject’s life, it is also fundamentally different. For unlike a case history, which concerns a third party who is not present, the testimony of the pass is delivered by the subject herself, and thus by the very body with which that testimony is concerned.

The Pass involves the *passant*, the candidate who addresses her

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2 Freud 1958, p. 150.

3 Freud 1958, pp. 151-152.

4 Cantin 2017, p. 28.

request to the School, and two *passeurs*, or witnesses, to whom the *passant* speaks about his analysis. These *passeurs* are in turn responsible for transmitting that testimony to a jury of analysts, who meet as a cartel and formulate a response: either nomination of the *passant* as an Analyst of the School, or no nomination. Yet the Pass is concerned not primarily with what the *passant* has managed to say about her analysis, but with something that exceeds the signifier, and that therefore passes through the body. This real object, transmitted by an act of the unconscious, is what Lacan calls the object a. It is not an object of conscious observation or recording, but instead something that is at once *transmitted* by a body and *received* by a body, depositing itself in the bodies of the two *passeurs* without their knowledge. If there is something “scientific” about the Pass, it is not its possible generalization or elucidation of a law. Rather, it is something that is actually not so far removed from the classic standard of falsifiability: the same object must be transmitted by both *passeurs*.

Head Trouble: An Experience of the Pass

I recently served as a *passeur* in such a procedure. As I listened to the *passant* speak about key episodes from her childhood, the repetitions that had marked her life, and the vicissitudes of her analysis, I began to feel increasingly preoccupied, even distracted, by the feeling that the analysis was not complete, that something still needed to be articulated or worked through. A sensation of impatience and even irritation began to overtake me as each of the four sessions came and went. There was too much “filler,” too few key signifiers and experiences, and as a result I began to feel a little oppressed, even annoyed.

There was a gap of six months between the hearing of the testimony and my transmission of that testimony to the cartel of the pass. When the cartel received me, I was asked a single question: “What remains?” Not surprisingly, my memory of those four hours of testimony was foggy at best. When I had more or less run out of things to say, I admitted to feeling disappointed that I didn’t have more to transmit, that the logic of the analysis and the subject’s traversal of its different logical phases was not more in evidence.

While giving my testimony, there were several occasions on which I leaned forward in my chair, my body almost parallel to the ground, and put my head in my hands: an attitude that felt very foreign to me, but which I nevertheless felt strangely compelled to adopt. It wasn’t something I thought about during the testimony, but only afterwards. Leaving the room, I was aware of having assumed this attitude at least three separate times during the testimony, and I wondered what it might mean: whether I was straining to recall some detail that had escaped me, or simply turning away from the eyes that were fixed on me while I spoke.

A few days after delivering my testimony, I had the occasion to talk with the other person who had served as *passeur* for the same individual.

He told me that in the days leading up to his meeting with the cartel, he had been afflicted with extreme dizziness and disorientation, and had arrived to meet the cartel with a terrible headache. Only as he was walking into the room to give his testimony did it occur to him that this head trouble must be precisely the object that he was carrying. As he was telling me this, I suddenly remembered that I too had had a terrible headache that evening: not *before* giving the testimony, as he had, but immediately *afterward*. I now recalled how I had taken my head in my hands during the testimony, and felt certain that something had been acting in me without my knowledge, compelling me to adopt this strange attitude. While I was giving my testimony to the cartel, the thought had in fact briefly passed through my mind that I ought to say something about what Lacan calls the “letters of the body,” the places where the traces of the subject’s encounter with the real had been inscribed in her body. I had been vaguely aware that this had something to do with the head, but couldn’t remember the *passant*’s exact words. I therefore allowed the thought to come and go in silence, almost without being conscious of it.

Somatic symptoms had not played a major role in the life of this individual, but she had described at one point an unsettling psychic experience, a moment of acute dissociation where she found herself in a large social gathering, but was suddenly unable to remember either her own identity or those of her companions. I had touched on this experience briefly during my testimony, describing it as a moment of extreme disorientation. I now remembered that the *passant* had related this experience to the *head*, by means of a formulation peculiar to her. She had also spoken about a certain personality trait, colloquially related to the head, which she had long viewed as a source of anxiety and dread: something that not only interfered with the fulfillment of her professional duties, but potentially disqualified her altogether from doing the work she does. In short, she had always viewed it as a trait to be kept under wraps, carefully controlled and managed, that she had hoped eventually to be cured of. It was this disturbing trait, in fact, that had led her to undertake analysis in the first place. In recent years, however, she testified to having “made her peace” with this trait, and accepting the way it acted in her—even if she couldn’t exactly be thrilled about it.

It now seemed to me that in putting my head in my hands, I was evoking through my body what was not spoken, something of the subject’s own relation to the head: or rather to the object that managed to find expression through it. Inasmuch as it related to a part of her testimony that I hadn’t fully developed, it seemed on one level to be reminding me of something important I had failed to convey. (Recall that I was afflicted by a headache that came *after* giving testimony, as if to stress that I hadn’t yet made my deposit.) At the same time, my head-holding—and especially my violent headache—attested to something having been deposited in my head, something weighing it down that was much more than just a

memory. I take this “something” to be a part of the subject’s experience that remained unsayable: something whose meaning could not be fully known, that resisted mastery, and that therefore acted in her in a way that she couldn’t control.

Another symptom occurred to me a week or two later. In the six months between hearing the *passant*’s testimony and coming before the cartel, I had experienced a sudden spike in blood sugar, serious enough to undergo testing for diabetes. The most conspicuous symptom of a blood sugar imbalance is a feeling of dizziness and mental confusion. It now seemed plausible to me that this transitory symptom, which attested to the malfunctioning or even failure of a regulatory apparatus—not incidentally an apparatus controlling *insulin*, and thus the body’s defense against something indigestible—was itself due to the effects of the *passant*’s testimony on my body. The impatience and even the irritation with which I listened to her words had to do precisely with the feeling that there was something she was not managing to say, something for which there was as yet no signifier.

I believe that this mental confusion or head trouble can be interpreted in at least two different ways. Inasmuch as it conveys the oppressive feeling of being confronted with something that is insufficiently ordered or articulated, it might be understood a resistance to the inadequacy of language, its inability to name or evoke what is at stake in the subject’s experience. From another perspective, though, it can actually be considered as a transmission of the object, which is not supported by speech. This is how I am inclined to read my own gesture of holding my head in my hands while giving testimony: as evidence that something more has been deposited in my head than I am able to say, something that weighs me down in a way that words alone are unable to prop up or sustain. What was unable to find its signifier passed through the letters of the body, taking up residence in my head.

The undesirable trait that the *passant* had linked to the head is clearly a symptom in her life, even a debilitating symptom. Nevertheless, it also gives expression to something more fundamental that the *passant* is no longer inclined to apologize for, that she no longer sees as a trait she should “work on” or try to “manage.” I think this is the meaning of the dizziness, headaches and crashing blood sugar with which the other *passeur* and I were afflicted prior to giving testimony. There is this kind of “storm in the head” that is not at all controllable—that is even, I have to say, extremely unpleasant—but that is obviously tied to who the *passant* is as a subject. She is aware that this object is acting within her in a way she doesn’t control, but she no longer fears that action or tries to make it stop. In fact, she is now certain that it is inseparable from the efficacy of her work, in this case her ability to work with patients as a clinician.

A first hypothesis about the object *a* is that, unlike the symptom, to which it is otherwise closely related, the object is “untreatable.” I take

the term from Willy Apollon, for whom the “untreatable” is the name for what is most fundamental to the subject, the manifestation of an unconscious “quest” from which it will not be derailed.⁵ It exceeds the treatment framework implied by illness, which presumes at the same time the possibility of a cure. “Untreatable” translates the French *intraitable*, which means not “incurable” (as in the case of a disease for which there is no cure), but rather “intractable, inflexible, uncompromising.” It is this untreatable object that Lucie Cantin has in mind when she suggests that the conclusion of the analytic experience articulates the *passant* to what constitutes his or her “signature in the social link,” the mark of the subject in its refusal of all concessions.⁶

The Dirty Syringe, or Freud’s Act

We’ve seen that the procedure of the Pass is concerned with the transmission of an object between bodies, or the capacity of the object in one body to produce effects in another. In the next part of this paper, I want to track this object in the act of one singular body, the body of Sigmund Freud himself. This act is central to the analysis of the “specimen dream” with which Freud opens the *Interpretation of Dreams*, the dream of Irma’s Injection. It shows that this untreatable object is what acts in the analyst, and that there can be no psychoanalysis without it.

It is commonplace to observe that this dream is about the origins of psychoanalysis itself. But in what precise sense? Here I would like to propose that the analysis of this dream can be considered as Freud’s “pass,” his transmission of his own object. It is concerned with the liberation of his act, which previously had been an object of ambivalence and even apprehension.

The dream interrogates a failed act or ethical equivocation on Freud’s part, which is related to the treatment of his hysterical patient, Irma. Freud explains that in the months leading up to the dream,

I had been giving psychoanalytic treatment to a young lady [which] had ended in a partial success; the patient was relieved of her hysterical anxiety but did not lose all of her somatic symptoms. At that time I was not yet quite clear in my mind as to the criteria indicating that a hysterical case history was finally closed, and I proposed a solution to the patient which she seemed unwilling to accept. While we were thus at variance, we had broken off the treatment for the summer vacation.—One day I had a visit from a junior colleague... who had been staying with my patient, Irma, and her family

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5 Apollon 2006.

6 Cantin 2014.

at their country resort. I asked him how he had found her and he answered, ‘She’s better, but not quite well.’ I was conscious that my friend Otto’s words, or the tone in which he spoke them, annoyed me. I fancied I detected a reproof in them, to the effect that I had promised the patient too much... However, my disagreeable impression was not clear to me and I gave no outward sign of it. The same evening I wrote out Irma’s case history, with the idea of giving it to Dr. M....to justify myself.⁷

That night, Freud has the following dream:

A large hall—numerous guests, whom we were receiving.— Among them was Irma. I at once took her on one side, as though to answer her letter and to reproach her for not having accepted my ‘solution’ yet. I said to her: ‘If you still get pains, it’s really only your fault.’ She replied: ‘If you only knew what pains I’ve got now in my throat and stomach and abdomen—it’s choking me’—I was alarmed and looked at her. She looked pale and puffy. I thought to myself that after all I must be missing some organic trouble. I took her to the window and looked down her throat, and she showed signs of recalcitrance, like women with artificial dentures. I thought to myself that there was really no need for her to do that.—She then opened her mouth properly and on the right I found a big white patch; at another place I saw extensive whitish grey scabs upon some remarkable curly structures which were evidently modeled on the turbinal bones of the nose.—I at once called in Dr. M., and he repeated the examination and confirmed it....Dr. M. looked quite different from usual; he was very pale, he walked with a limp and his chin was clean-shaven....My friend Otto was now standing beside her as well, and my friend Leopold was percussing her through her bodice and saying: ‘She has a dull area low down on the left.’ He also indicated that a portion of the skin on the left shoulder was infiltrated. (I noticed this, just as he did, in spite of her dress.)...M. said, ‘There’s no doubt it’s an infection, but no matter; dysentery will supervene and the toxin will be eliminated.’ ...We were directly aware, too, of the origin of her infection. Not long before, when she was feeling unwell, my friend Otto had given her an injection of a preparation of propyl, propyls...propionic acid...trimethylamin (and I saw before me the formula for this printed in heavy type)....Injections of that sort ought not to be made so thoughtlessly....And probably the syringe had not been clean.⁸

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7 Freud 1955, pp. 131–32.

8 Freud 1955, 131.

Driving the production of Freud's dream is the question: is he or is he not responsible for the persistence of the patient's symptoms? If it is a hysterical symptom, then why hasn't it been treated by the interpretation? Has he missed an organic illness? What is the source of the infection?

The first part of the dream deals with Freud's vexation at Irma's refusal to accept his "solution," and his attempts to get the hysteric to "open her mouth properly" and tell him what he needs to know. The dream dates from July of 1895, when Freud was involved precisely in getting the hysteric to "open her mouth." This is the year that Freud and Breuer published their *Studies on Hysteria*, in which Freud hypothesizes that the symptom is caused by an unspoken "secret": something the patient doesn't want to say or cannot face up to.⁹ From this perspective, resistance is a matter of the patient not wanting to express the thoughts that are in her mind, refusing to open her mouth and tell what she knows.

The flip side of this attitude is a belief in the treatment of the symptom by knowledge or interpretation, and therefore by the signifier. In the first part of the dream, Freud says to Irma: *'If you still get pains, it's your own fault.'* In his analysis, Freud writes: "It was my view at the time (though I have since recognized it as a wrong one) that my task was fulfilled when I had informed a patient of the hidden meaning of his symptoms: I considered that I was not responsible for whether he accepted the solution or not." This is what Freud will later refer to as "wild psychoanalysis": the assumption that knowledge, the signifier, can treat the symptom; that once the cause of the symptom is revealed, the symptom should disappear.¹⁰ (At the time Freud wrote up this dream analysis, he has already decided that his earlier view was not correct. But at the time he had the dream, he believed it was. It would therefore be interesting to consider whether this dream and the work of analyzing it actually marks the turning point from this "wild psychoanalysis" to another way of working.)¹¹

At this period, Freud is discovering for the first time that the patient is confronted with a real for which there is no name, about which she knows nothing, that is not an object of conscious knowledge. The assumption that the hysteric is to blame for the persistence of her

9 Alternately, he supposes that the hysteria is the result of a childhood sexual trauma, a real event that has been forgotten or repressed. The point then is to call up the memories, to allow them to become conscious.

10 Freud 1957, pp. 221–27.

11 We might be tempted to understand the dream analysis that follows as concerned with the transpositions of the signifier. Freud himself uses the dream to illustrate the mechanisms of the dream-work, or the condensations and displacements by means of which the latent dream thoughts are converted into the manifest content of the dream narrative. But the dream analysis is concerned more fundamentally with the *cause* of dreams, and therefore with an act that cannot be represented, but that manifests as a hole or tear within the fabric of the dream narrative. The preamble shows us how the events of the day before, the "day residues," have triggered the dream. This isn't just a matter of providing its themes or images, however. Instead, the dream interrogates a failed act on Freud's part.

symptoms is thus the "failed act" that gave rise to the dream, which was reactivated by Otto's news concerning Irma. The dream pinpoints what can only be described as an instance of counter-transference on Freud's part, in the form of a refusal of what comes from the unconscious. This part of the dream identifies a hole, a lack, something that escapes knowledge.

What follows is the famous "navel" of the dream¹², which confronts Freud with an unspeakable real that the signifier is unable to represent. When Irma "opens her mouth properly," what emerges is not a word or a discourse, something she might tell him, but terrifying, anxiety-inducing forms that lead to anguishing thoughts of illness and death. In Irma's throat, Freud sees a "big white patch" and "some remarkable curly structures" covered with "extensive whitish grey scabs" that appear to be modeled on the turbinal bones of the nose. Unlike everything else in the dream, this element cannot be related to recent events that have unfolded "in reality," that is, in the reality of the social or professional scene. These scab-covered forms lead Freud to associations that are concerned not with *Irma's* symptoms and their treatment, but with Freud's *own* severe nasal symptoms—the result of his overly zealous experimentation with cocaine. His own symptom is thus projected into the patient's throat, as a defiant limit to the knowable there where he had expected the words that would establish the symptom's causality.

The associations extend to further failed acts on Freud's part, in the form of grave mistakes and errors of judgment in his clinical practice. A few days before the dream, he learned that a woman patient who had used cocaine at his urging had developed an extensive necrosis of the nasal membrane, while a dear friend to whom Freud recommended the same drug died from an overdose following an injection. On another occasion, Freud produced a fatal toxic state by repeatedly prescribing what at the time was regarded as a harmless remedy. "It seemed," Freud writes, "as if I had been collecting all the occasions which I could bring up against myself as evidence of a lack of medical conscientiousness."

The second part of the dream shows Freud turning to medical colleagues for confirmation or guidance, as if unsure whether he ought to approach the case as a doctor, or as a psychoanalyst. Dr. M, a senior colleague to whom Freud regularly turns for advice, is represented as saying: *'There's no doubt it's an infection, but no matter; dysentery will supervene and the toxin will be eliminated.'* The associations lead to cases in which a patient's symptoms were misdiagnosed by doctors ignorant of hysteria. But they also call up occasions when Freud recognized that a patient's symptoms were hysterical, but nevertheless decided not to apply psychoanalytic treatment—much to the detriment of the patient. Both evoke the futile hope of the medical doctor that it might be possible to

12 In a footnote to this passage, Freud writes: "There is at least one spot in every dream at which it is unplumbable—a navel, as it were, that is its point of contact with the unknown." Freud 1955, p. 135n2.

“eliminate the toxin” after all, to treat hysteria as if it were a disease.

Here we see Freud hesitating between medicine and psychoanalysis, but also between the scientific ideal of the “community of peers”—where others can validate and confirm what he sees—and his own fundamental solitude. The scientific ideal is predicated upon observation, verification, and repeatability. The night before he had the dream, Freud tells us that he sat up late into the night writing Irma’s case history, which he intended to show to Dr. M. “in order to justify himself.” In the dream narrative, we find the words: “*Dr. M. repeated the examination and confirmed it.*” Against this wishful confirmation, the inadequacy of medical knowledge that is exposed by the associations emphasizes the total isolation in which Freud finds himself as the inventor of psychoanalysis. The cause of the hysteric’s symptoms cannot be isolated, observed, or verified experimentally under control conditions. Despite Freud’s efforts the night before to justify himself before Dr. M., the associations show that his senior colleague is not in agreement with the “solution.” Like other doctors, he is “taken in by hysteria” and misdiagnoses his own hysterical patient.¹³ Freud is thus faced by the failure of medical knowledge with respect to the real at work in the symptom.

Freud’s analysis concludes with a final series of associations that are concerned with the source of Irma’s infection, and by extension with symptoms and their causality. The dream narrative ends with the evocation of an unclean syringe, charged with having caused an infection in the patient: “*Injections of that sort ought not to be made so thoughtlessly... And probably the syringe had not been clean.*” In response to this dream element, Freud professes that unlike some of his more careless colleagues, *he* always makes sure that his syringe is clean: as a result, he has never caused a single infiltration. His associations have already undercut this claim, however, by pointing to numerous occasions on which Freud has either killed his patients with injections or induced potentially deadly toxic states: in part by sharing his own passion for cocaine.

On the one hand, it is significant that Freud harmed or killed those patients when he was acting as a doctor, and not as a psychoanalyst. In these instances, the patient’s brush with death is due to the limitations of medical knowledge, rather than to the failings of psychoanalysis. But on the other hand, and more importantly, Freud *as a psychoanalyst* is confronting his patients with death by upholding the work of the symptom. In psychoanalysis, unlike medicine, this isn’t just a matter of professional scrupulousness, of a risk that could be avoided through careful attention to protocol. Instead, the treatment confronts his patients with death at its very core.

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13 “This part of the dream was expressing derision at physicians who are ignorant of hysteria. And, as though to confirm this, a further idea crossed my mind: “Does Dr. M. realize that the symptoms in his patient (Irma’s friend)...have a hysterical basis? Has he spotted this hysteria? Or has he been taken in by it?” Dr. M., he concludes, “was just as little in agreement with my ‘solution’ as Irma herself.”

I see the dirty syringe as a figure of the act, in two senses. First, it figures the failed act or counter-transference. In the associations to the first part of the dream, Freud reproaches Irma for not accepting his “solution,” and tells her that if she still gets pains, it’s her fault. In an instance of “wild psychoanalysis,” Freud imposes on the patient the solution provided by the interpretation, but at the expense of silencing what is at work in the symptom. The German word translated as “solution,” *Lösung*, has two possible meanings, just as it does in English: the solution to a problem, and the solution one injects. It thus relates to the failed act that gave rise to the dream: Freud’s refusal of what is at work in the hysteric’s symptom, whose persistence he attributes to the patient’s lack of ethics. With the image of the unclean syringe, the dream seems to be offering a forceful indictment of this counter-transference on Freud’s part, his attempt to force or inject a solution rather than allowing the analysis to run its course.

Lacan makes such an interpretation in his own commentary of the dream: “In the first phase, then, we see Freud in his chase after Irma, reproaching her for not understanding what he wants to get her to understand. He was carrying on his relationships in exactly the same style as he did in real life, in the style of the passionate quest, too passionate we would say, and it is indeed one of the meanings of the dream to say that formally, since at the end that is what it comes down to—the syringe was dirty, the passion of the analyst, the ambition to succeed, were here too pressing, the counter-transference was itself the obstacle.”¹⁴

Second, however—and here I differ from Lacan—I think we can see the dirty syringe as a figure of the *true act*, the act of desire that makes him Freud: and thus the very act at stake in the procedure of the Pass. That is, the analyst’s desire to know triggers and reactivates the symptom in the patient’s body—and it cannot do otherwise! From this perspective, we can see the “dirty syringe” in a more affirmative light, as essential to the practice of analysis. In contrast with the inadvertently deadly act of the doctor providing lethal treatment, the analyst’s act necessarily confronts the human subject with death.

In professing that “his syringe was always clean,” Freud seems to be disclaiming his own act, and with it his role in triggering the patient’s symptoms. The fear that the syringe might not be clean is the fear of the medical doctor. It corresponds to the ideal of experiments under controlled conditions, where there must be no contamination from the subject. For the doctor, the “dirty syringe” is a failure and a breach of scientific protocol; for the psychoanalyst, it is a necessity. The psychoanalyst *must* infect: he must provoke symptoms in the patient’s body, reactivating a real that she will have a hard time managing. (This “infection” was central to my experience of the pass, in which the passant deposited something

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14 Lacan 1991, p. 164.

in our heads, injected her object into us, and left us to deal with the consequences.) Rather than conscientiously sterilizing his person in order to *avoid* transmitting something, the analyst acts with the object-cause of his own desire, thereby eliciting the work of the drive in the analysand. With the signifier of the “dirty syringe,” therefore, the dream simultaneously indicts a failed act on Freud’s part and offers a figuration of the act that founds psychoanalysis.¹⁵

If the doctors in the dream wonder how to eliminate the toxin, the answer of psychoanalysis is that the toxin cannot be eliminated, because it is inseparable from the subject. If the medical doctors are concerned with the possibility of treating or relieving the symptom, the psychoanalyst is concerned with the *untreatable*.

Willy Apollon says that in the symptom, the unconscious is struggling against something that is good for the individual. This is because the unconscious wants to go further, to go *beyond the pleasure principle*.¹⁶ This “too far” is key, and might even be considered the hallmark of the subject’s act. Far from corresponding to an ideal, the object is something that is manifestly *unacceptable*, both to the subject and to others. In Freud’s case, it is not unrelated to the deaths he has caused. What I love about this dream is that it also lays bare what is somewhat embarrassing about Freud, even for his disciples: namely, the fact that Freud himself is lead “beyond the pleasure principle” by his quest. He pushes his patients too hard, he kills people, he snorts cocaine, and he smokes like a true addict his whole life, a fact that no doubt contributed to the cancer from which he died.

Apollon observes that every analysand is sooner or later confronted with the disquieting realization that “the object of his quest [is at the same time] the object of all his misfortunes. He can neither rid himself of it nor require that it be healed, unless it is by the negation of his very existence as a subject.”¹⁷ Earlier I claimed that the dream analysis could be understood as Freud’s “pass”: not so much because he manages to construct and put into words an unconscious logic, but because he emerges from the dream analysis having accepted what is acting in him, as well as in his patients, rather than fearing or repudiating it. When Freud the dreamer peers into Irma’s throat to find his own symptoms staring back at him, what he encounters is not only his own relation to the untreatable, but more powerfully the agency of his own object within the body of his patient. After the turning point marked by this dream and its analysis, Freud doesn’t hesitate to inject his patients with his “dirty

15 In a response to this paper, Steven Miller asked whether “the act of the analyst, to the extent that its very agency resides in the object, [is] always in some sense a bungled action, whether psychoanalytic praxis is always structurally parapraxis?”

16 Apollon 2016.

17 Apollon 2006, p. 37.

syringe,” to retrigger the symptom or call forth the drive. It is thus the bodies of these patients that attest to the object that acts in Freud.

The Act and its Traces in Human History: Freud’s Moses

If the object figured by this dirty syringe is Freud’s “signature in the social link,” it is also closely related to what inspires resistance and even contempt in so many readers of his work. In the final section of this paper, I would like to suggest that the transmission of such an object, as well as its repression or refusal, is precisely what Freud explores in *Moses and Monotheism*. “How,” Freud asks of Moses, “did one single man come to stamp his people with its definite character and determine its fate for millennia to come?”¹⁸ “Stamp” implies a corporeal impression, a body that receives an imprint, mark, or blow. What, then, is involved in being “stamped” by the act, and how might it shed light on the stakes of the act for those who receive it?

Freud shows the Mosaic transmission to have two components: the doctrine of monotheism inherited from the pharaoh Akhenaton, but also the object of “the man Moses” that finds expression in this project or seeks to impose it, but is not reducible to that project itself: the passion of Moses, his “fire.” The theophany of the “burning bush” could be understood as the legendary figuration of what is at stake in this second transmission. Moses has an encounter with the real that is inscribed on his body in the form of a “radiance” that emanates from his face, which is at once a scar or wound and a sign of election: the mark of the fire that burns but does not consume. This radiance sets him apart from others, and makes his unveiled face unbearable to behold, just like God’s. Lacan, glossing the episode, declares the burning bush to be Moses’s “Thing,” and leaves it at that.¹⁹ Freud, of course, disdains the more “supernatural” elements of the biblical story, and passes over the miraculous fire in silence. But I believe this legendary episode nevertheless figures something that is essential to his reading, namely his attempt to track a transmission that exceeds the symbolic legacy of the Mosaic law. Something is transmitted symbolically, in language, while something else is transmitted “in the real,” by means of the body or the act.

Where, then, do we see the traces of this second transmission? Moses is famously depicted in the Bible as “slow of speech,” which is

18 Freud 1939, p. 136. The German verb translated as “stamp” is *prägen*, which can also mean to “shape, emboss, stamp, coin, mint, strike, imprint, mark, or mould.” It implies the marking or imprinting of a material substrate.

19 “Moses the Midianite seems to pose a problem of his own—I would know whom or what he faced on Sinai and on Horeb. But after all, since he couldn’t bear the brilliance of the face of him who said ‘I am what I am,’ we will simply say at this point that the burning bush was Moses’ Thing, and leave it there.” Lacan 1992, p. 174.

generally taken to mean that he stammers:²⁰ “O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue” (Exodus 4:10). I take this as a representation of the subject of the act as something other than a subject of discourse, someone who makes an argument or articulates a position. His power is not a rhetorical power. That is the role of the “priests,” the professional interpreters and the builders of party platforms.

Strikingly, then, there is no direct communication between Moses and those who will be “stamped” by his act, the Israelites who are the ultimate depositories of that transmission. Instead, his speech is relayed by an intermediary, his brother Aaron, in a very pass-like transmission. When Moses asks him to send someone else, God says: “What of your brother Aaron, the Levite? I know that he can speak fluently.... You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do. He indeed shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve as God for him” (Exodus 4:14-16). Moses does not merely *speak* through Aaron, however, but acts *through his body*, which is charged with actually carrying out the actions attributed to Moses: “The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, ‘When Pharaoh says to you, ‘Perform a wonder,’ then you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh, and it will become a snake’” (Exodus 7:8).

Aaron transmits something of the act of Moses, that part that becomes the basis of the legendary history. He founds the priesthood, which transmits the ethical program of Moses, the symbolic dimension of his legacy, that part that manages to find its signifier. The function of the priest is to create a symbolic structure charged with assuring and enshrining this transmission, and at the same time to *repress* whatever cannot be transmitted in this manner. One of its most important consequences in religious history is the gradual disappearance of the “real” dimensions of the God of Moses, in favor of a God who “is” the word, who gradually becomes collapsed with speech itself: a process that ultimately culminates in the kind of formulation we find in the Gospel of John: “In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God” (John 1:1). Here we are dealing with an

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20 Compare Freud’s observation in *Moses and Monotheism*: “Another trait imputed to him deserves our special interest. Moses was said to have been “slow of speech”—that is to say, he must have had a speech impediment or inhibition—so that he had to call on Aaron (who is called his brother) for assistance in his supposed discussions with Pharaoh. This again may be historical truth and would serve as a welcome addition to the endeavour to make the picture of this great man live. It may, however, have another and more important significance. The report may, in a slightly distorted way, recall the fact that Moses spoke another language and was not able to communicate with his Semitic Neo-Egyptians without the help of an interpreter—at least not at the beginning of their intercourse.” Freud 1939, pp. 37-38.

Other who is purely symbolic: and thus with the victory of repression, inasmuch as it entails the subordination of the real to the signifier.

Aaron is the one who puts everything into words, who is “eloquent of speech”: but perhaps a little *too* eloquent. For while he transmits something of Moses’s act, we might also understand him as blocking or refusing a part of what Moses transmitted in this very act of translation. In this sense he might offer an analogy for the *passeur* who is not up to the task, who is still too much implicated in the imaginary: of meaning, of the social relation (the demands others make on him) and even of his relation to the Other. It is surely not a coincidence that Aaron himself forges the golden calf at the demand of the Israelites, while Moses is still on the mountain. This particular transmission of Moses’ act and the “stamp” it left on his people is therefore inseparable from its violent repression and repudiation.

Aaron’s founding of the priesthood could in this sense be related to the institutional history of psychoanalysis, which is always at risk of becoming nothing more than a “priesthood” or a church, one that receives the “laws” of Freud’s transmission but not the object that drives him. In the same way, the monotheist doctrine is preserved by the Israelite priests as a program, a set of principles, that remained more or less intact. What is not transmitted by that tradition is the role of Moses himself, the *subject of the act*. Where do we find the traces of *that* transmission?

The Anger of Moses, the Signature of the Act

I believe this is what Freud has in mind when he claims to recognize the traits of the subject, the “man Moses,” in the anger and irascibility that are attributed to him:

The Biblical story itself lends Moses certain features in which one is inclined to believe. It describes him as choleric, hot-tempered—as when in his indignation he kills the brutal overseer who ill-treated a Jewish workman, or when in his resentment at the defection of his people he smashes the tables he has been given on Mount Sinai. Indeed, God himself punished him at long last for a deed of impatience—we are not told what it was. Since such a trait does not lend itself to glorification, it may very well be historical truth. Nor can we reject even the possibility that many character traits the Jews incorporated into their early conception of God when they made him jealous, stern, and implacable were taken essentially from their memory of Moses, for in truth it was not an invisible god, but the man Moses, who had led them out of Egypt.²¹

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21 Freud 1939, p. 37.

I think Freud's point is not just that anger is a *human* trait—one that shows Moses to be a man, and not a myth—but that anger is what I'm calling the "object" of Moses, his "signature in the social link": what compels him to initiate the Exodus and to found a new religion, but more fundamentally what drives him as a subject.²²

The treatment of this anger is central to Freud's reconstruction of the historical "compromise" whose traces he finds in the text of the Bible, in which the monotheist doctrine bestowed on the Israelites by the Egyptian Moses has been merged with an earlier cult dedicated to a fearsome volcano-god. More specifically, anger is the trait by which Freud claims to distinguish the Egyptian Moses from the Midianite priest of the same name, who he finds to be singularly lacking in the qualities needed for a grand undertaking:

Since the Moses people attached such great importance to their experience of the Exodus from Egypt, the deed of freeing them had to be ascribed to Jahve; it had to be adorned with features that proved the terrific grandeur of this volcano-god, such as, for example, the pillar of smoke which changed to one of fire by night, or the storm that parted the waters so that the pursuers were drowned by the returning floods of water. The Exodus and the founding of the new religion were thus brought close together in time, the long interval between them being denied. The bestowal of the Ten Commandments too was said to have taken place, not at Qades, but at the foot of the holy mountain amid the signs of a volcanic eruption.By [this] means a balance, so to speak, was established: Jahve was allowed to extend his reach to Egypt from his mountain in Midia, while the existence and activity of Moses were transferred to Qades and the country east of the Jordan. This is how he became one with the person who later established a religion, the son-in-law of the Midianite Jethro, the man to whom he lent his name Moses. We know nothing personal, however, about this other Moses—he is entirely obscured by the first, the Egyptian Moses—except possibly from clues provided by the contradictions to be found in the Bible and in the characterization of Moses. He is often enough described as masterful, hot-tempered, even violent, and yet it is also said of him that he was the most patient and "meek" of all men. It is clear that the latter qualities would have been of no use to the Egyptian Moses who planned such great and difficult

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22 "Probably they did not find it easy to separate the image of the man Moses from that of his God, and their instinct was right in this, since Moses might very well have incorporated into the character of his God some of his own traits, such as his irascibility and implacability." Freud 1939, pp. 140-141.

projects for his people. Perhaps they belonged to the other, the Midianite."²³

Anger and irascibility are not merely character traits or capacities, therefore, but the signature of the subject. Subsequent generations will attribute these traits to God himself, ascribing them to this Other whose act transforms the world.

It would be interesting to consider whether the two Moses figures of Freud's reconstruction are not so much distinct historical actors (the Egyptian and the Midianite), but rather representations of *two different dimensions of the subject's act*, symbolic and real: the part that can be assimilated to social or religious ideals, and the part that fails to find any such representation, but that nevertheless "strikes" or "stamps" its recipient. The act of the "angry" Moses is the one the tradition is ultimately unable to absorb and must therefore repress, first through its deification and displacement, and second through its repudiation and censorship. This is how Freud reads the biblical account of Moses angrily breaking the tables of the law, when he descends from the mountain to see his rebellious people worshipping the idol they have created in his absence (Exodus 32:19-20). This anger is directed first against the Israelites, who in their idolatry have shown themselves to be unworthy of the covenant with this invisible God. But inasmuch as the first object of his destructive wrath is not the golden calf, but the tablets of the law themselves, it is hard not to read that anger as an indictment not merely of idols and idol-worship, but of the inadequacy of those words themselves, or the way in which the object-cause of desire exceeds and overwhelms the framework of the signifier or law.

This extra-legal or even *illegal* dimension of Moses' act is precisely what the Israelites will repudiate and suppress. In Freud's reading, the destruction of the tablets cannot be attributed to "the man Moses" and his real legacy. Instead, he reads the biblical text as more or less akin to a dream: a text that offers only a distorted representation of a reality that it serves above all to repress: in this case, the peoples' condemnation of Moses and criminalization of his act. For Freud, the smashing of the tablets of the law must be understood symbolically: "*he* has broken the law," Moses himself is made guilty of the crime (57-58). If anger and irascibility convey the inevitable violence of the act, its way of forcing into the world something that is without precedent, then the illegality of the act is one way of depicting this: *the true actor is always a lawbreaker*. In what Freud calls "a case of acting instead of remembering,"²⁴ this criminalization of the act is what leads the Israelites to eventually repeat the primal murder on the person of Moses himself.

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23 Freud 1939, p. 48

24 Freud 1939, p. 113.

The biblical narrative further distorts and effaces this event by having God punish Moses for an act of infidelity, in a way that illustrates very well the tension between the signifier and the act. The Book of Numbers recounts that Moses was not permitted to enter the promised land with the Israelites because of a display of impatience that occurred at Meribah in the last year of the desert pilgrimage, when Moses brought water out of a rock to quench the peoples' thirst. Although God had commanded Moses to *speak* to the rock, he instead *struck it* twice with his staff, which was construed as displaying a lack of deference to the LORD.²⁵ I want to highlight here the opposition between speaking and "striking": if the first expresses a kind of fidelity to the signifier, the second is an act that can be understood both as an indictment of and as a compensation for the failings of the signifier. While this "deed of impatience," this sin, is a defiance of the *word* of God, it is at the same time a true act. Because of this rebellion, Moses is not allowed to enter the holy land (Numbers 27). After he dies he will be buried without a sepulchre, as if to stress that there is no signifier, no symbolic locus, for the subject of the act, whose place will be effaced from Jewish history.

Struck by the Act: Paul's Wound

The object of Moses' transmission must be distinguished both from the idealized hero of legend and from the ethical doctrine of monotheism; it cannot be found in a text, in an archeological artifact, or even in an oral tradition. It can be identified only by the traces it leaves in the bodies of those it "stamps," traces that Freud ultimately locates in the apostle Paul. Paul retains in his unconscious what entire generations have managed to repress: the truth of the primal murder, and its repetition on the person of Moses.

It would be interesting to consider whether Paul really is the *passeur* in whose body, more than in his testimony, Freud finds the traces of the act or object of Moses: not in its symbolic dimension, or even in its repudiation, but in its extra-legal, "real" dimension.

For Freud, Paul is important because he raises the repression surrounding the primal murder, which was repeated on Moses:

It seems that a growing feeling of guiltiness had seized the Jewish people...as a precursor of the return of the repressed

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²⁵The LORD said to Moses, "Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink." So Moses took the staff from the LORD's presence, just as he commanded him. He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank. But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them" (Numbers 20-7-12).

material.... Paul, a Roman Jew from Tarsus, seized upon this feeling of guilt and correctly traced it back to its primeval source. This he called original sin; it was a crime against God that could be expiated only through death. Death had come into the world through original sin. In reality this crime, deserving of death, had been the murder of the Father who later was deified. The murderous deed itself, however, was not remembered; in its place stood the phantasy of expiation, and that is why this phantasy could be welcomed in the form of a gospel of salvation (evangel). A Son of God, innocent himself, had sacrificed himself, and had thereby taken over the guilt of the word. It had to be a Son, for the sin had been murder of the Father.... The essence of [this gospel] seems to be Paul's own contribution. He was a man with a gift for religion, in the truest sense of the phrase. *Dark traces of the past lay in his soul, ready to break through into the regions of consciousness.*²⁶

But how should we understand this thesis, which Freud puts forward without any development? How exactly does Paul transmit what was repressed, and how does that transmission differ from what I have called the "symbolic" transmission, including those distortions and transpositions that allow a certain repressed to be reconstructed?

Although Freud provides no guidance here, I am tempted to look to the famous seventh chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, where he bemoans the sinfulness that is revived and enflamed by the prohibition:

Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? *We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. So then it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells in me.*

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then,

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²⁶Freud 1939, pp. 109-110.

I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. (Romans 7, my emphases)

Paul characterizes sin as something that dwells within the body, in the flesh. In context, of course, he is referring to the sin of covetousness, the illicit desire for the neighbor's wife. Reading with Freud, however, we might understand this passage as referring not only to fleshly or carnal desires, but to something inscribed in the body, that "dwells in its members." Paul speaks of the agency of sin as a kind of unconscious agency, something acting in the body that he does not understand, does not want, and cannot control. Under the name of "sin," therefore, Paul really discovers the *unconscious itself*—a force at work *in the body*, "in the flesh," that pushes us to act in ways that are unmotivated and unwilling. Perhaps it is precisely this insight that expresses in distorted form Paul's knowledge that Moses was murdered by the Israelites, a knowledge that Freud stresses is entirely unconscious.

But there is also a strange tension here. The "law of sin," at work in his members, pushes Paul to "do the thing [he] hates." This implies that the unwilling act is a source of horror for Paul, something he might wish to control in himself so as to better "serve the law of God with [his] mind." In other words, we could understand him as calling out for repression, bemoaning the extent to which he is unable to bring the unconscious to heel, to make it "serve his mind." Considered from this point of view, the problem with the law might be that it's *not strong enough*, not able to curb these unwelcome impulses.

This interpretation is directly contradicted by the first part of the chapter, however, where Paul claims that the very law that commands him *not* to sin, *not* to covet, actually "gives an opportunity" to sin, which uses the commandment to "deceive" him: "I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.'" I think we can hear in these words an indictment of *repression itself*, inasmuch as the effect of repression is to efface unconscious desire by offering up a substitute for it. In this sense it not only criminalizes desire, but fundamentally falsifies the nature of desire by making it desire for *this*, or desire for *that* (the neighbor's donkey, the neighbor's wife). It directs desire to a specific object, binding it to an object that was never wanted. In so doing, it also compromises desire itself, inasmuch as desire is never "desire for."

In other words, Paul's key insight is that the subject, the subject of the act, can only be a "criminal" with respect to the law. Prior to his conversion, Paul was himself a zealous enforcer of the Jewish law, which he applied mercilessly to the members of the Jesus-cult. On the road to Damascus, Paul is interpellated by a disembodied voice that is supposed to have cried out, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" After this experience he will no longer "persecute" Jesus with the Jewish law—with the threat of repression?—but will declare his fidelity to this real in the

form of a truth that is "beyond" the law. In other words, he reintroduces as essential the dimension of the real, and with it the act.

We generally think of Paul as displacing or even undermining the Mosaic legacy. Freud himself concludes that "Paul, by developing the Jewish religion further, became its destroyer." Paul emerges from this conversion experience to launch his polemic against the written law, to which he opposes the "living law" of faith. But that "destruction" of the law can also be heard in another way, as a liberation of the act.

As counter-intuitive as it may seem, I wonder now whether Paul's insight about the impossibility of fulfilling the law might be precisely what he "receives" from Moses. In this reading, Paul would represent not only the overturning or destruction of the Jewish tradition, but a certain development or continuation of the "quest" of Moses: that part that cannot be reconciled with the symbolic transmission. Like Moses, Paul encounters his god "in the real," in the form of the Voice that waylays him on the road to Damascus, in a kind of repetition of Moses' own experience. There is something of the burning bush in this encounter, not least because it results in "blinding," and so in the loss—however temporary, in this case—of the imaginary.

Paul, as *passeur*, transmits something very different than Aaron the High Priest. Slavoj Žižek distinguishes the priest or priestess from the saint on the ground that the former has a purely symbolic function, while the latter has a real function.²⁷ That real function invariably engages the *body*, in the form of the wound or stigmata the saint receives. I wonder whether it might be precisely the *blindness* of Paul—which is his wound, his letter—that transmits something of the real that passes through the testimony of Moses. If so, it might suggest that Paul is blinded not by what *he* sees on the road to Damascus (he sees nothing, but hears a voice), but by what *Moses* sees: the blinding fire of the burning bush, and thus the insistence of a real for which there is no name.

Anger Restrained: The Moses of Michelangelo

I want to conclude by returning to the anger of Moses, whose significance for Freud is heightened by his other, earlier text on Moses, an appraisal of the sculpture of Moses that Michelangelo created to adorn the tomb of Pope Julius II. In Freud's analysis, the subject of this sculpture is precisely the anger of Moses. In and of itself, of course, this interpretation is hardly surprising. In fact, Freud shows that previous commentators of the work are virtually unanimous in viewing the sculpture as a representation of the moment when Moses, having turned his head to see his faithless people engaged in idolatry, is just about to spring to his feet in anger and shatter the tables of the law. This view cannot be reconciled with the way Michelangelo has sculpted the body of the prophet, however,

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²⁷ Žižek 1989, pp. 116–17.

which Freud shows to have been described incorrectly by almost every scholar of the work—precisely because they have allowed their perceptions of the statue to be unduly influenced by the text of the Bible. To the contrary, Freud stresses how thoroughly Michelangelo’s depiction of Moses has departed from the biblical narrative. Instead of representing the moment *before* Moses smashes the tablets in his rage, Freud claims that the sculpture shows us what he calls an apocryphal Moses at the moment *after* he has overcome the urge to act upon his anger:

Michelangelo has placed a different Moses on the tomb of the Pope, one superior to the historical or traditional Moses. He has modified the theme of the broken Tables; he does not let Moses break them in his wrath, but makes him be influenced by the danger that they will be broken and makes him calm that wrath, or at any rate prevent it from becoming an act. In this way he has added something new and more than human to the figure of Moses; so that the giant frame with its tremendous physical power becomes only a concrete expression of the highest mental achievement that is possible in a man, that of struggling successfully against an inward passion for the sake of a cause to which he has devoted himself.²⁸

Steven Miller underscores that “for Freud, Moses does not overcome his anger—on the contrary—but only the impulse to act upon it. Accordingly, it is this restraint, what Mallarmé calls *action restreinte*, that becomes the very matter of Michelangelo’s sculpture, inseparable from its weight and physical stature, inseparable from the very decision to make this object the occasion for a sculpture rather than a painting or a poem.”²⁹

Freud describes how he himself was forced to modify his interpretation of the sculpture over the course of repeated visits to its site: “I can recollect my own disillusionment when...I used to sit down in front of the statue in the expectation that I should now see how it would start up on its raised foot, dash the Tables of the Law to the ground and let fly its wrath. Nothing of the kind happened. Instead, the stone image became more and more transfixed, an almost oppressively solemn calm emanated from it, and I was obliged to realize that something was represented here that could stay without change; that *this Moses would remain like this in his wrath forever*.”³⁰ This “forever” makes anger into a passion that is not reactive, but immanent and virtual: a wrath that will never be or dissipated or spent.

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28 Freud 1997, p. 145.

29 Miller 2016.

30 Freud 1997, p. 132. My emphases.

If this anger is the “object” of Moses, as I have suggested here, then it makes perfect sense that it would become the occasion for what Miller describes as “a mute form.” For sculpture, the art form for which Freud professes in this essay to have the greatest personal affinity, is concerned—perhaps more than any other—with the bodily transmission of the unsayable, of something that cannot be put into words. Indeed, Freud marvels at how often Michelangelo, in his sculpted creations, has “gone to the utmost limit of what is expressible in art,”³¹ precisely by refusing to subordinate the body to a narrative. Freud’s analysis is itself remarkable in being based solely upon the body: the sculpted body of Moses, but also the act that animates the body of Michelangelo himself as he carves its form.³²

The anger of Moses as Miller reads it might even illuminate something inherent to the position of the analyst. For as Freud’s dream demonstrates so well, there is “something intransigent and contestatory in the position of the analyst, perhaps even in his body of the analyst, something that forces the limits of the signifier, that is akin to anger.”³³ The analyst’s act has less in common with the explosive anger of the biblical Moses, however, than with the “restrained anger” of Michelangelo’s sculpted figure, which is a *revealing* rather than a destructive passion. Hannah Arendt, in her essay on Lessing from *Men in Dark Times*, finds anger to be an inherently political passion: “The Greek doctrine of passions...counted anger...among the pleasant emotions but reckoned hope along with fear among the evils....In hope, the soul overleaps reality, as in fear it shrinks back from it. But anger, and above all Lessing’s kind of anger, reveals and exposes the world.”³⁴ If we were to alter this account of anger in a psychoanalytic direction, Miller wonders, might we conclude that it is the passion that reveals and exposes the object?

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31 Freud 1997, p. 148.

32 Freud cites the following passage from Thode (1908), which accords quite well with his reading: “He creates the image of a passionate leader of mankind who, conscious of his divine mission as Lawgiver, meets the uncomprehending opposition of men. *The only means of representing a man of action of this kind was to accentuate the power of his will*, and this was done by a rending of movement pervading the whole of his apparent quiet, as we see in the turn of his head, the tension of his muscles and the position of his left foot....This general character of the figure is further heightened by laying stress on the conflict which is bound to arise between such a reforming genius and the rest of mankind. Emotions of anger, contempt and pain are typified in him. Without them it would not have been possible to portray the nature of a superman of this kind. *Michelangelo has created, not a historical figure, but a character-type, embodying an inexhaustible inner force which tames the recalcitrant world*; and he has given a form not only to the Biblical narrative of Moses, but to *his own inner experiences*.” Cited by Freud 1997, pp. 132-133.

33 Miller.

34 Cited by Miller.

Propping the Arm of Moses: The Community of the Pass

Maurice Blanchot, in a wonderful but little-known text, emphasizes the “weariness” of Moses, his extreme embodiment, which he finds to be encapsulated in the narrative of the Israelites’ war with Amalek (Exodus 17):

he is shown to be faltering, a poor speaker (heavy of mouth), weary to the point of ruining his own health by the excessive services he does for others.... He is weary too, when Amalek wages war on the Hebrews, just when they had barely left slavery in Egypt and are a motley band...made up mainly of women and children....Moses is not a warrior chief. Yet he is positioned on the top of a hill, as is the case with generals. But he has to be helped when he gives out apparently simple instructions: he holds up his hand to point to the sky and the Hebrews prevail—but precisely his hands are heavy and he has to be aided in order to carry out this gesture—otherwise his arm will fall to his side..., and Amalek wins the day.³⁵

In this evocation of the “heavy hands” of Moses, and the “aid” provided by those who help to hold them up, I am reminded of the procedure of the pass with which I began. I prop up the object of the *passant* by putting my—or rather *her*—heavy head in my hands, just as Moses, in his founding act, props up the object of Akhenaton’s desire. Finally, the act of Michelangelo’s body, in sculpting the marble, allows us to “see” the object of Moses, his restrained anger, by transmitting something not relayed by the biblical text or by religious tradition.³⁶ These acts of transmission would be impossible were it not for the aid provided by those who help to support—to bear and to prop up—that object that weighs the body down, hampers and oppresses it, but that also allows it to act in the world so that desire may prevail.

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35 Blanchot 1995, p. 322.

36 Blanchot asks, “is Moses a mediator? He is mediator to his people, and organizes it into a community and rages against it when it falters. Yet the people do not recognize themselves in him: ‘We did not know,’ the Hebrews tell Aaron, his own brother, ‘who it was leading us’” (Ibid, 322). They are led not by “someone,” someone they could recognize, but by “something.” This observation might apply to Freud, as well. He isn’t the leader of a movement in the sense that he is someone we could “recognize” or identify with; indeed, he isn’t “someone” at all, but a “something.” It is the object in Freud, the object that acts through him, that gives rise to psychoanalysis.

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Political Considerations About Lacan's Later Work

Jean-Claude Milner

Abstract: This paper discusses the late work of Jacques Lacan, and more precisely his work after the “Joycean turn”. This phase begins after the Seminar XX and has clear political consequences. In taking this as a starting point, this paper will examine politics in Lacan. At the end, it will discuss the possibilities of the bodies, or ‘what does it mean to have a body’?

Keywords: ‘Joycean turn’, politics, body, antiphilosophy, LOM, political minimalism

Lacan’s paper “Joyce le symptôme” was published in 1979.¹ It is based on a talk given in 1975. As indicated by the title, it belongs to the period that could be called “the Joycean turn”. After Seminar XX (1972-3), Lacan began to study closely Joyce’s work. His own art of writing was deeply influenced by *Finnegan’s Wake*. Among the various reasons that may explain this shift, the most important one is haste. As he explained in one of his earlier articles, “Le Temps logique et l’assertion de certitude anticipée”²; Lacan began to feel that his days were counted. Death could come at every moment. In *La Troisième*, a conference held in Rome in 1974, he evokes the possibility of his sudden death on the spot during the very talk he was giving.³

The importance of this remark should not be minimized. The imminence of death entails a consequence. Although Lacan’s art of writing had become more and more intricate, it remained linear for a long period; locally linear, at least, in the sense that, with a proper parsing, each segment of his expression had only one signification. In truth, that characteristic had been put into jeopardy in texts like *Liturerre* (1971) or *L’Etourdit* (1973), but this was a matter of choice. Now that time had become an issue, haste was a necessity rather than a choice; indeed the situation was different. If Lacan kept adhering to the principle of local linearity, he would never be able to deal with all the subjects that mattered to him. In order to overcome this material difficulty, he had to combine a multiplicity of significations in each minimal subpart of the sentence, like Joyce in *Finnegan’s Wake*. Hence the extended use of portmanteaus that included two, three, four or even more lines of decipherment. More generally all procedures that Joyce made use of in *Finnegan’s Wake* became relevant. At the end, each sentence, each word of each sentence, either spoken or written,

1 Cf. Lacan 2001, pp. 565-570, 610.

2 Lacan 1999, pp. 195-211. See in particular p. 204.

3 Lacan 2011/3, p. 12.

should be unfolded in such a way that a unique text could be read simultaneously at four, five, or more levels.

Lacan had always played with words. But what had been a kind of hobby became progressively an essential part of his work. With the Joycean turn it appeared to be even more than that: it had become a matter of life and death. Lacan knew very well that by making word play the very basis of his oral and written expression, he was taking a risk. He would become more obscure than he had already been accused of; his writings would become almost impossible to translate. As a psychiatrist, he also knew that his very sanity would be questioned, since mainstream psychiatry considers the constant playing with words a symptom of mental disorder. He was fully aware of all that, but too much was at stake.

During the Joycean turn, Lacan's readers are faced with a continuous sequence of wordplays. They are required to consider each of them not only as a *mathème*, but as a bundle of *mathèmes*. They have to analyze their constituents and to dispatch them in various chains of relevance that they are supposed to reconstruct. In this way, a given text will indeed combine several layers of interpretation. A paper like *Joyce le symptôme* is a good example. I do not intend to try a complete reading of it. Such an endeavour would require more than a hundred pages. I shall limit myself to one interpretive line, namely politics. For among the manifold layers of the text, I claim that a new doctrine of politics may be read. What is politics? What are its limits? What are its conditions of possibility?

The first sentences of the paper are based on a play on the word *homme* both in singular and in plural. The first paragraph ends with "Nous sommes z'hommes" (literally *we are men*); the presence of the letter /z/ violates the rules of orthography, but it enables the reader to "hear" the *liaison* between *sommes* and *hommes*. It is one of the few cases where the *liaison*, namely the phonetic materialisation of the /s/ ending of *sommes*, is still obligatory, even in informal conversation. Moreover, Lacan writes the /z/ at the beginning of *hommes*, instead of writing it at the end of *sommes*, where it grammatically belongs. By doing so, he indicates that he does not preoccupy himself with the plural of *sommes* (*we are*), but with the plural of *hommes*.

The first word of the second paragraph is *LOM*. That lexical creation will appear repeatedly in the article, either as *LOM* or as *L.O.M*. It summarizes a whole set of theoretical innovations. In its first occurrence, it resonates with the last word of the preceding paragraph: *z'hommes*. It is in fact the purely phonetic notation of the definite singular *l'homme*. Thus, under two different forms, the word *homme* is present. Consequently, the main subject of Lacan's article will deal with a discourse where this word plays a central role both as definite singular and as plural. But, in the Seventies *l'homme* plays an important role in political discourse.

After having represented for many intellectuals the ultimate paradigm of political thought, the Marxist approach was rejected in some influential circles. Even those who still accepted the validity of Marx's analysis of capitalism, rejected the political consequences of Marxist revolutionary movements. This decline was triggered by factual revelations about what the past and ongoing situation in Soviet Union, China, and Cambodia. From a theoretical point of view, it went together with a rediscovery of the classical tradition of the rights of man that Marx had harshly criticized. Lacan followed closely that political reversal. Without commenting on it in detail, he was aware of the paradoxical character of the situation; some of the most severe critics of theoretical humanism had become believers of a new faith, centered on *l'homme*. Among the founding texts of that new faith, the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*, formulated in 1789, was of primary importance.

The declaration is not written in a careful way, except for its preamble. The comparison between the title and the preamble reveals that the whole declaration depends on the relationship between the singular *l'homme* and the plural *les hommes*. In the title, the singular is deemed proper to express universality, while the crucial sentence in the preamble reaches universality by using the plural *les hommes*, namely "les hommes naissent et demeurent libres et égaux en droits" (*men are born and remain free and equal in rights*). I consider that Lacan's play between *z'hommes* and *LOM* is based on a direct allusion to the *Déclaration*: in *z'hommes*, the plural is heard like it is in *les hommes* [*lè z'hommes*] of the Preamble and *LOM* is homophonous with *l'homme* in the title. In other words, "Joyce le Symptôme" is commenting on the *Déclaration*.

If not, it proceeds at least to a critical reading of the classical tradition of political humanism. The first step is to get rid of the word *homme* itself, by creating the signifier *LOM*; it is indeed homophonous with *l'homme*, but it also absorbs and erases the definite article. Thus, it deletes the linguistic bearer of universality in the noun phrase. While *l'homme* claims to be universal, *LOM* is neutral from that point of view. Moreover, by erasing the definite article, it recalls the way *L'Étourdit* introduces the signifier of the feminine, namely the typographical striking off of the definite article *la*. Thus *LOM* is open to a feminine and to a masculine materialization. Does that mean that he/she is essentially transsexual? I leave the answer to the specialists, as well as finding an English equivalent for *LOM*.

Let us consider now the main departure from the tradition. It concerns the status of the body. According to Lacan, *LOM* has a body. It should be understood neither as a descriptive notation of the type *the horse has a tail*, nor as a definition of the type *the triangle has three angles*. For the center of the definition is not *body*, despite its crucial importance, but the verb *to have*. Compare the fundamental proposition of the third paragraph: "*LOM a, au principe*" *LOM has, on principle*. '*LOM*

has' must be opposed to 'LOM is'. LOM has a body is then to be opposed to another statement, whose possibility goes together with the constant risk of imaginizing the real (*réel*): LOM is a body. But even that does not suffice. In fact, Lacan draws attention to a more complete reversal : granted that the statement LOM has a body is aiming at the real, it finds its imaginary projection in LOM is a soul. The soul is but the stenogramm of a double imaginization : to be a, instead of to have a ; soul instead of body. While LOM has (whatever he/she has), the soul is, whatever it is.

The notion of "having a" is far from trivial. "Avoir, c'est pouvoir faire quelque chose avec", literally to have = to can do something with.⁴ In particular, the man speaks with his body. Among the things that LOM can do with his body, Lacan does not mention explicitly the vast multiplicity of anthropological conducts that Lévi-Strauss, for instance, studied assiduously: masks, garments, dances, but also, in the field of *lalangue*, jokes, insults and most of all myths. I maintain however that that whole field is relevant in order to understand what is at stake in "to have a body". Moreover, such an approach enables one to consider the question "do animals have a body" as strictly analogous to the questions "do animals speak ?" or "do animals have an unconscious ?". Obviously, however, Lacan does not explore these possibilities. He prefers to deal with politics, although its not named.

Instead of politics, history is mentioned and specifically the history of the twentieth century. But Lacan knows all too well that modern history is written in political letters, in the same way the great Book of Nature is written in mathematical letters, according to Galileo. The first revealing statement with regard to history is the following: "Joyce se refuse à ce qu'il se passe quelque chose dans ce que l'histoire des historiens est censée prendre pour objet." *Joyce refuses to admit that anything should happen in what historians' history is supposed to treat as its object of study.*⁵ The sentence is impossible to fully understand, if one does not acknowledge the fact that it tries to deal inside the French language with a distinction that German is drawing between *Geschichte* and *Historie*. "L'histoire des historiens" *historians' history* is but a paraphrase of *Historie*; "ce que l'histoire des historiens est censée prendre pour objet" *what historians' history is supposed to treat as its object of study* is a paraphrase of *Geschichte*. Joyce refuses to admit that anything is happening in *Geschichte* ; historical events are constructs generated by historians; they belong to *Historie*.

This is immediately followed by the second revealing statement: "Il [= Joyce] a raison, l'histoire n'étant rien de plus qu'une fuite dont ne se racontent que des exodes» (Joyce is right, history being nothing

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4 Lacan 2001, p. 566.

5 This quotation and the following ones belong to *Ibid.*, p. 568.

more than a flight, about which only exodus are told). The use of the verb *to tell* in the relative denotes that *Historie* is in question; consequently the main clause deals with *Geschichte*. The crucial distinction between flight and exodus concerns the absence or presence of an aim: a flight is aimless and may be endless, while an exodus takes its departure from a determined point in order to reach another determined point, where it is expected to end. The allusion to the Old Testament is obvious. It is supposed to illustrate the first and perhaps one of the most important transformation of *Geschichte* into *Historie*; the flight of the Hebrews became an exodus that enabled them to reach the Promised Land. In the same way, the multitude of speaking beings are engaged in a perpetual flight, which the historians split up in various series of displacements of so-called nations or populations.

After a short comment on Joyce's choice of exile, comes the third revealing statement: "Ne participant à l'histoire que les déportés : puisque l'homme a un corps, c'est par le corps qu'on l'a» (The only ones to participate in history are the deported: since man has a body, it is by means of the body that others have him). History here is *Geschichte*; *l'homme* is used as strictly equivalent to LOM. However, it is also used in exactly the same way as in the *Déclaration* of 1789, which brings me back to my original point: the analysis of LOM entails an interpretation of the *Déclaration*. In particular, it makes explicit the affirmation that remained obscure in the *Déclaration*, namely the exclusive relevance of the body in the definition of rights. Flights that are the real events of *Geschichte*, are flights of bodies. The only subjects, whose story cannot be disguised by historians in some kind of exodus, are the deported because in their case the real of the body cannot be avoided.

Lacan meditates here on the Second World War. Flight, exodus, exile, the connection of these words produces a subtext about the place of Jews in modern *Geschichte*. However, examples abound in contemporary times. In western Europe, the immigrants materialize the connection between the active and the passive forms of possession: they have a body; each of them has a body, but the smugglers and traffickers have him/her by means of his/her body. The body in question is not the harmonious anatomy that fascinated Greek artists; it is rather a disjointed assemblage of bones, flesh, and excrements. What Racine described in *Athalie*: "Un horrible mélange d'os et de chair meurtris" ('a horrible mixture of wounded bones and flesh'). Indeed, the real body is an object of horror. Classical art elected beauty as the last veil that protected the eyes from such a spectacle. Modern societies covers it by more commercial means: the promotion of anatomical perfection (muscularity, slenderness, etc), the passion for health, and the persistent tendency to condemn natural body functions as an offence to humanity, among others.

Immigrants are found guilty on all these counts. Hence the hate they are subjected to as well as the necessity of humanitarian pity in order to avoid the only logical consequence that western political systems should draw explicitly, if they were to accept their own real structure: the physical elimination of immigrants. As a middle term between verbal pity and factual cruelty, the honourable souls have discovered the virtues of segregation. Since the beginning of 1970s, Lacan considered segregation as the social fact *par excellence*, racism being but a subcase of that general process.

Since *to have* means “to do something with”, *to have a body* means “to do something with the body”. First of all, LOM does something with his/her own body: the main answer is given by *lalangue*. LOM speaks with his/her body. But LOM does also something with the body of LOM; that is implied by the formula: “c'est par le corps qu'on l'a”. Linguistically, *on* is derived from the Latin *homo*; it has another form *l'on*, with the article; it is then the triple echo of *LOM*, *l'homme* and *homme*. A transposition comes to mind: *c'est par le corps que LOM a LOM, it is by means of the body that LOM has LOM*. In that way, Lacan has introduced the multiplicity in LOM. LOM appeared to be neutral with respect to the variation masculine/feminine; in the same way, it is neutral with respect to the variation singular/plural. From a grammatical point of view, the same is true of *on* in French. It is formally singular, but may in fact designate a plurality; it may refer indifferently to a man or to a woman.

In stating *LOM a un corps (LOM has a body)* Lacan built up the core of the real of the grammatical singular *a*. In adding ‘it is by means of the body that LOM has LOM’, he builds up the core of the real of the plurality in LOM. By doing so, he determines the fundamental place of politics. He also raises a fundamental question: what does LOM do with the body of LOM? Between Rousseau's answer (he pities them) and Hegel's answer (he kills them), there is a middle point: he segregates them. *LOM has a body* expresses then a formal statement about the place of politics. Hannah Arendt had indirectly made an equivalent statement in her considerations on politics and human plurality. But, given Lacan's meditation about *to have*, his statement ceases to be purely formal. It becomes substantial: politics is corporeal. It is about what can be done to a body by those who have a body. Shylock's lament may illustrate that point. Liberties, servitudes, segregations deal with the bodies.

LOM has LOM somehow echoes the classical formula about exploitation of man by man. That analogy goes further than rhetorics. It reveals a surprising dimension of Lacan's approach which involves a new reading of Marx's analysis. Indeed, Lacan mentioned the theory of surplus value in several occasions, using it as a paradigm for his own theory of *jouissance*. If the analogy between *LOM has LOM* and the theory of capitalism is taken seriously, it implies that Marx's analysis of surplus value is based on a statement about the body. In other words,

the distinction between labour and labour power constitutes the Marxist definition of the body. In *Capital*, I, 6, Marx wrote: “By labour-power or capacity for labour is to be understood the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being, which he exercises whenever he produces a use-value of any description.” The body is obviously relevant. Yet, Lacan suggests that the formula should be reversed: human body is the condition of the production of use-value. There would be no production in general, no economy in general, if LOM did not have a body.

But capitalism has its specificity; it is based on the possibility for a human being to sell its own labour power or to buy the labour power of another. In both cases, it is a matter of having a labour power to sell or to buy. In short, it is a matter of *having*. Lacan's formula *LOM has* summarizes the fundamentals of exploitation *in general*. Its variant *LOM has a body* summarizes one of the fundamentals of capitalistic exploitation. For, in order for exploitation to become capitalistic, another condition must be met, namely that LOM is able to produce more value than he is paid for during the exchange. This is the very definition of surplus value. Such a capacity belongs to the body itself. Yet, it is not sufficient to grant that surplus value is made possible by the properties of the human body. In capitalism, LOM's body has no other relevance than surplus value. Surplus and body become synonymous in that specific universe. The *more of* in surplus value and the *more of* surplus of *jouissance* derive from the same structure.

L'homme est libre is a philosophical statement, that has to do with the soul; the soul may be free although the body is in chains. It may even be considered as an analytical judgement, if human beings lose their own humanity once their souls are not free. On the contrary, LOM is free if and only if their bodies are free. Moreover, LOM does not cease to be LOM, if their bodies cease to be free. But what does freedom of the body mean? It depends on what it means to have a body. Since *to have* means *to do something with*, a definite number of requirements must be met with regard to what the body may do with itself and with the body of others. Those are the so-called rights of man. They are the same for all of those who have a body, in the narrow sense that Lacan defines. They should be called the rights of LOM, LOM being man, woman, adult, child, healthy, and sick, among others.

To these requirements that must be met everywhere, each social and political system may add its own requirements, provided that they may not contradict or annul the rights of LOM. Hence the legitimacy of the distinction between the rights of LOM and the rights of the citizen. Rather than philosophical, these conceptions are antiphilosophical. They are also political in a minimal sense. From a Lacanian point of view, antiphilosophical, political and minimal are synonymous.

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Lacanizing Marxism: the Effects of Lacan in Readings of Marx and Marxist Thinkers

David Pavón Cuéllar

Abstract

In this essay I discuss the ways that Marxism is read through the lens of Lacanian theory by Lacan's followers and not by Lacan himself. I distinguish between different Lacanian approaches to Marxism and between Lacan's diverse effects on the subjects that are approached. I scrutinize five affirmative effects, namely those of problematising, historicising, generalising, confirming and completing what is read. I first explicate these effects briefly in discussing classic works of the 1980s and then at length in presenting my own Lacanian approach to Marxism. I show how the realisation of such effects implies a *Lacanization of Marxism* and the resulting constitution of a *Lacanian Marxism* that I openly assume.

Keywords: Marxism, psychoanalysis, politics, Marx, Lacan.

Introduction

Jacques Lacan's reading of Karl Marx has already been thoroughly analysed in the literature.¹ The analyses are usually accompanied by extensive reflections inspired by Lacan. Of course, these reflections can also be found without analyses of Lacan's reading of Marx, which is replaced by another reading conducted in Lacanian style. This manner of proceeding has been extraordinarily fruitful in the last thirty years, giving rise to a myriad of Lacanian readings of Marx and Marxist thinkers.²

This essay precisely addresses the way that Marxism is read not by Lacan but by authors inspired by him. The subject is not embraced in all its breadth and depth, but approached in terms of one of its most insignificant expressions, the one I know best: my own Lacanian reading of Marx and Marxist thinkers. However, before grappling with this specific reading, I will briefly examine different Lacanian approaches to Marxism and Lacan's diverse effects on the subjects that are approached.

Most of the essay will focus on five rather affirmative effects of Lacan in the reading of Marx and Marxist thinkers, namely those of problematising, historicising, generalising, confirming and completing what is read. These effects will first be explicated briefly in a discussion of classic works of the 1980s and then at length in a presentation of my own Lacanian approach to Marxism. I will try to show how the realisation of such effects implies a *Lacanization of Marxism* and the resulting constitution of something as problematic and scandalous as the *Lacanian Marxism* that I have openly assumed. For now, before reaching the Lacanian left, let's review a little of what happened with Marx and the Marxists in conventional Lacanism, which is usually right-wing or supposedly apolitical.

1 E. g. Regnault 2005, Bruno 2010, Pavón Cuéllar 2013, Tomšič 2015, Vighi 2016.

2 E. g. Laclau & Mouffe 1985, Žižek 1989, Močnik 1991, Dolar 1993, Silveira 2002, Özselçuk & Madra 2010, Lippi & Landman 2013, Žižek, Ruda & Hamza, 2018.

Normal effects

The average Lacanian is familiar with at least some of the 'mistakes' of Marxism. He or she is even able to recite them from memory. Marx and the Marxists were wrong to postpone desire and turn it into a post-revolutionary issue, to imagine that the problem was capitalism and not language and its discontent, to calculate the incalculable surplus enjoyment and thus transform it into surplus value, to interpret the symptom as a sign and not as a signifier, to fail to see that revolutions return to the point of departure, to believe that they aspired to freedom when they wanted a master, and to remain trapped in the master discourse.

How is it that ordinary Lacanians know the errors of Marxism so well? Obviously, they have not detected them by themselves, but have learned them from Lacan or perhaps from other ordinary Lacanians who repeat again and again what they have learned from Lacan. Among what they have learned are the errors of Marx and the Marxists, almost always the misses and almost never the hits, according to a selective criterion that might be revealing the single thought, *pensée unique*, in which Marxism is necessarily related to error.

In dissolving Lacan into something as anti-Lacanian as mainstream ideological conformism, an average Lacanian may well confine Marx and the Marxists to error. It does not matter, of course, that he or she has not read Marx and the Marxists. Why read them when you can read Lacan to know that they were wrong? Lacan is used here not to read Marx and the Marxists, but to avoid them, to discard and ignore them, to put them aside or, more precisely, to leave them behind, because average Lacanians are convinced that they have surpassed Marx thanks to Lacan, having forgotten what Lacan himself taught them: that Marx is 'always new', that he 'cannot be overcome'.³

In order to overcome Marx, average Lacanians imagine that they have exhausted him, and in imagining this outcome, they do not see that he is inexhaustible. They simplify and trivialise him. He is represented as a naive thinker. They replace him with a caricature of who he was. They make him contemptible to hold him in contempt. They end up being certain that he did not know what he knew very well, such as the circularity of revolutions⁴ or the difference between surplus value and surplus enjoyment.⁵

Many Lacanians mutilate Marx. They steal his ideas and attribute them to Lacan. Then they use these same ideas to argue against a defenceless, weakened, impoverished, unrecognizable Marx. Marx is

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³ Lacan 1946, p. 192; 1959-1960, p. 245.

⁴ Marx 1852.

⁵ Marx 1866.

disfigured to be later corrected, revised, rectified and refuted with his own ideas: with the surplus enjoyment, with the revolutionary circularity, with the symptom, with the lack of metalanguage. Those who do so, usually in schools and associations of Lacanian psychoanalysis, betray not only that they have not read Marx, but also that they have misread Lacan, who always ends up giving credit to Marx for his discoveries.⁶

Other effects

We see that Lacan can inhibit reading Marxism, deviate from it and make us believe that it is unnecessary. It can also happen, however, that Lacan pushes us to read Marx and the Marxists to try to resolve his enigmatic assertions about them. It is possible, in addition, that he transforms our reading, making us read them or reread them in another way: in a Lacanian way. This last possibility is the one that interests us here.

When read through a Lacanian lens, Marx and the Marxists are transfigured and shown in a totally different light. It's almost as if they become others or mad. Suddenly, their speeches are full of nonsense, paradoxes, tensions, uncertainties and enigmas. Their theories are reconfigured. Certain parts are revalued and others are devalued and reduced to absurdity. Some of their lateral ideas become decisive, while their central ideas lose importance. Their seemingly simple and obvious notions cease to seem that way; they become complicated, they move away from common sense, they are carried to their ultimate consequences and reappear with new nuances and an unfathomable depth. It happens that their perspective becomes more solid, radicalises and reinvigorates, acquires greater scope and reveals unexpected aspects. We are surprised again by what no longer surprised us. We stop understanding what we understood perfectly.

Lacan had many more possible effects on readings of Marx and Marxist thinkers, among them the typically postmodern solvent or deconstructive effects, such as disorganising, disarticulating, fragmenting and volatilising. And, in the antipodes of these negative effects, there are five rather affirmative effects, namely to *problematise*, *historicise*, *generalise*, *confirm* and *complete*, upon which I would like to concentrate, and which are perhaps not very consonant with the typical vision of the Lacanian spirit as being essentially characterised by negativity. Let us review an example of each of these effects in the already classic works of well-known authors whose readings of Marx and Marxism had a marked Lacanian tonality:

- Instead of simply avoiding Marxism by considering it Lacanianly irrelevant, it is possible to *problematise* its ideas as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe did by using Lacan to

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⁶ Lacan 1968-1969, 1969-1970, 1971.

discuss the Marxist conception of the subject, of society or of the working class, as a given empirical being. The Lacanian perspective makes this subject problematic, showing its 'precariousness and absence of suture' and its 'ambiguous, incomplete, polysemical' character as 'discursive identity', which is what makes a 'hegemonic articulation' possible and necessary to 'construct nodal points' that 'fix the meaning of the subject'.⁷ Thanks to Lacan, we can see a theoretical and practical problem, a matter of controversy and a challenge for the socialist strategy, whereas before, for some though not all Marxists, there was evidence of the revolutionary nature of the subject. The indisputable became questionable. This did not inhibit reading Marxism, but quite the opposite. Laclau and Mouffe approached the Marxists and read them carefully to discuss the subject with them, disagreeing with some, like Kautsky or Plekhanov, but also coinciding with others, such as Sorel and particularly Gramsci.

- Instead of merely dismissing Marxism by considering it to have been surpassed by the Lacanian perspective, we can *historicise* it by resituating it in a certain historical context with the help of Lacan. This is what Sidi Askofaré did by showing how the 'emergence' of the proletariat as a 'historical figure' of truth and dispossession of knowledge, at the moment of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, allowed Marx to discover a 'social symptom' that 'connotes the universality of the function of the symptom' in which the subject suffers from a particular truth irreducible to what can be universally known about it.⁸ This truth is obviously different for each subject and that is why it resists universal knowledge. It is for the same reason that the symptom is invariably particular, that is, *universally particular*. But this universality of particularity is precisely the insurmountable sense of the social symptom discovered by Marx thanks to a unique conjuncture of history. To historicise is here to recognise the role of history in Marxist discoveries, which were, in fact, discoveries *by* history and not only *of* history. The historical world, in short, discovered itself through Marx's findings. However, as we have just seen, this does not compromise the universality of what was discovered and should not make us relegate it to the past. History is never behind us. We are simply in another moment of the same history.

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7 Laclau & Mouffe 1985, 112-122.

8 Askofaré 1989, 121-138.

- If Lacan prevents us from relegating Marxist discoveries to the past, it is because he makes us *generalise* them by allowing us to recognise the universal scope they possess. Some of the best examples of this kind of generalisation can be found in the Lacanian reading of Marx provided by Slavoj Žižek. For example, when Žižek Lacanianly read Marx's famous reflections on fetishism and the relations between things that replace relations between people, he moved beyond the specific framework of the functioning of commodities in capitalism and scrutinised the general fact of the objectivity and radical exteriority of 'beliefs, superstitions and metaphysical mystifications', as well as the 'most intimate emotions'.⁹ The exterior of the interior, the objective of the subjective and the impersonal of the personal appeared as a universal truth that Marx discovered through the fetishism of commodities in capitalism. The fetishistic configuration, by which things believe and feel instead of us, was no longer a specific situation of the industrial capitalist system studied by Marx, but a general condition of humanity ranging from Greek theatre to television and the social networks. This general condition is what we can read in Marx when reading him through Lacan. Lacanian theory confirms the Marxist concept on a general level.

- Generalisation is not the only possible Lacanian way of *confirming* what we read in Marx. There are other possibilities, among them the opposite of generalisation, specification, by which Lacanian ideas or postulates constitute specific cases with which general Marxist ideas or postulates are confirmed. Fredric Jameson offered us a good example of this process when he realised that Lacan's 'critique of the subject', with his idea of subjective 'decentring' and with his conception of consciousness as an 'effect of structure', theoretically confirmed the Marxist non-individualist notion of the subject in the specific historical context of the 'dissolution of an essentially bourgeois ideology of the subject and of psychic unity or identity'.¹⁰ The crisis of individualism that manifests itself in Lacan allows us to confirm the critique of individualism that we can read in Marx and Marxist thinkers. Marxism demonstrates its truth in the very categories through which it is Lacanianly read. The Lacanian concepts are a specific expression of what the Marxist concepts refer to.

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9 Žižek 1989, 31-33.

10 Jameson 1981, 111-112.

• Sometimes Lacanian concepts do not express what Marxist concepts refer to, but their correlates, their counterparts, their complements, the solutions to some of their problems or something else that has a precise place and that attracts our attention for being undesignated. We then have an opportunity to *complete* the theories of Marx or his followers with Lacan's theory. The Lacanian theoretical contribution comes to correct a lack or to deal with a slope in Marxism. This is what happened, for instance, when Alain Badiou, rejecting both Freudo-Marxism and Marxist psychology, found in Lacan's work the 'theory of the subject' required by Marxism: a theory developed successively as an algebra of the lack and as a topology of excess with which we can elucidate Marxist categories as those of the masses or the party.¹¹ Marxism demanded a theory of the subject like the one that it receives from Lacan. The Lacanian reading of Marx and Marxism responds to what is read to complete it, complement it, ground it, justify it, answer its questions, satisfy its needs and continue it in the sense that it represents.

Since the 1980s the Lacanian reading of Marx, as we have just shown in the previous examples, has allowed for the effective development of Marxist ideas by addressing them in a positive manner. When problematised, historicised, generalised, confirmed or completed, each idea was explained or justified, deepened or extended, nuanced or detailed, prolonged or evolved—that is, it was developed. Each Marxist idea was developed through the consideration, respectively, of the problems it posed, the historical conditions in which it arose, its general scope, the situations that confirmed it or the unexplored dimensions that might have completed it.

Effect of effects: the Lacanization of Marxism and Lacanian Marxism

Certain effects of Lacan in the reading of Marx and his followers are positive as they positively develop Marxist ideas. But the important result is that they develop them in a specifically Lacanian direction. This development implies a Lacanization of Marxism, which, in turn, logically produces what I have obstinately called 'Lacanian Marxism'.¹²

The emergence of the Lacanian Marxist orientation, one of the strangest episodes in the history of Marxism, has its origins in Lacan's own approach to Marx, as well as in the work of some of Lacan's first

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11 Badiou 1982, 132-133, 144-151, 195-197, 245.

12 E. g. Pavón-Cuéllar 2009, 2014a,

readers and disciples. After the death of Lacan in 1981, from the 1980s until now, the Lacanization of Marxism has led to one of the most fertile political-intellectual currents of our time, which is sometimes designated with the vague expression the 'Lacanian left'.¹³ Many of its adherents could be called 'Lacanian Marxists', but they avoid calling themselves that for several reasons: because they do not seem to want to name themselves in any way, because their adherence to Marx or their interest in his ideas does not necessarily imply an inclination for Marxism, because they are all too aware of the errors of Marx and Marxism that they learned from Lacan, because there is something that prevents them from recognising the greater successes of Marx and Marxism that Lacan also taught them, because they remain faithful to Lacan, who was not a Marxist and criticised Marxism, because their very fidelity to Lacan makes them reject any alliance between Marxism and psychoanalysis that reminds them of the Freudo-Marxism rejected by Lacan because Lacan demonstrates that Marxism and psychoanalysis cannot connect to one another without being embroiled, because the homology between Marx and Lacan makes a *Lacanian Marxism* as redundant as a *Marxist Marxism* or a *Lacanian Lacanism* because Marxism implies a positivity that contradicts the negativity accentuated in the dominant reading of Lacan, because we no longer live in a time when being a Marxist intellectual is fashionable or means something like what it meant before, and because of the postmodern discrediting of Marxism and any *-ism* in general.

However powerful some of the aforementioned arguments may be, I have stubbornly sustained myself as a Lacanian Marxist for a decade. I have done so based first on certain personal positions and convictions: because I am a communist, I am in the Marxist tradition and I would never renounce Marxism to adopt a Lacanian theory, which interests me mainly for the service it can render to communism. Now, in addition to my 'subjective' political reasons, there are also 'objective' theoretical reasons and dogmatic rationalisations that appear to me to provide unquestionable evidence to embrace Lacanian Marxism: because there seems to be nothing insuperably incompatible between the Lacanian and Marxist discourses, because Marxism does not cease to be consistent by rectifying the errors that Lacan imputes to it, because this rectification can only purify and reaffirm the Marxist theory, because this theory needs to develop in a Lacanian direction in order to deal with much of what it encounters in the current world, because the new forms of domination and subjectification pose difficulties that Marxism cannot even conceive without being Lacanized, because Lacanian psychoanalysis requires radical positions such as Marxism so as not to degrade itself by dissolving into psychology or dominant ideology, because many of the ideas of Marx and his followers underlay Lacanian theory, because to go deeper into

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13 E. g. Stavrakakis 2006, Alemán 2013.

Lacan inevitably leads us to Marx, because the entanglement produced by adding Marxism to psychoanalysis only mirrors the opacity and complexity of the material reality for those who try to conceive it, because Lacanian Marxism can only be redundant for those who accept its truth, and because most of the reasons to avoid Lacanian Marxism seem more suspicious and tempting than persuasive or dissuasive.

In addition to so many compelling reasons to speak of Lacanian Marxism, there is the decisive factor that I have already referred to, namely that Lacanian Marxism already exists; it is already there since it has been created by the rather affirmative effects of Lacan's theory in readings of Marx and Marxist thinkers. These effects, as we have seen, can be synthesised in a single theoretical effect: that of *Lacanizing Marxist ideas*. The resulting *Lacanian Marxism* is *Lacanized Marxism*, that is, Lacanianly problematised, historicised, generalised, confirmed and completed Marxism. These five effects, previously illustrated in the works of Badiou, Jameson, Žižek, Askofaré and Laclau and Mouffe, will now be exemplified through my own theoretical work, in which, navigating against the air of the times, the effect of the effects, Lacanian Marxism, is assumed and elaborated upon explicitly, deliberately and systematically.

Problematising

Although existent and justified, Lacanian Marxism is extremely problematic, doubtful and controversial, both for internal and external causes, that is, both for its constitution and its position in the field of knowledge. One of the main internal causes of this problematicity is that Lacan's ideas cannot come into contact with the Marxist ones without problematising them. We have already referred to the problematisation of the Marxist notion of the subject in the Lacanian sensibility of Laclau and Mouffe. Under a totally different Lacan influence, I have also problematised the subject of Marxism, as well as various theories related to it, among them one on which I would like to dwell a moment: the Marxist theory of reflection in which it is postulated that consciousness reflects the external world.

In its simplest version, the one elaborated by Lenin, the reflection theory epistemologically generalises and legitimises a particular interpretation of a deceptive subjective experience of the specular imaginary in Lacan: the internal world is conceived as a conscious surface on which the external world is reflected as in a photograph, and if there are errors or mental distortions in the reflection, it is surely because of imperfections in the cerebral surface that reflects it.¹⁴ In problematising this theory of reflection, my Lacanian reading of Lenin coincides with the arguments of other Marxists. Let us consider some of these overlaps.

For me, as for Engels, there is no internal world clearly separated and differentiated from the external world since the external, in addition

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14 Lenin 1908.

to being what is reflected, unconsciously modifies the reflective surface that ideologically distorts the reflection, which is its own reflection.¹⁵ Mental distortions, therefore, are of ideological external origin and not only internal, mental or cerebral. In fact, by adopting a Lacanian symbolic materialism in which I radicalise Engelsian dialectical materialism and agree with Plekhanov in his ephemeral hieroglyphic materialism, I consider that the mental can only exist in an ideologically distorted form because it is formed by its own distortion, because it must distort what it interprets, because it must translate and thus betray what it reflects, because its images are narrated, because it is discourse, because it is determined symbolically, because its structure is language and not a supposed reality independent from language, and because its elements are signifiers and not just reflections.¹⁶

There is at least one point, that of the discrepancy with the Leninist theory of reflection, at which my Lacanian vision agrees with the Vygotskian vision: the psyche cannot reflect the exteriority without interpreting it, signifying it or, better yet, *signifierising* it, symbolising it according to codes and structures that derive from the same cultural exteriority and, in particular, language.¹⁷ It is, then, the symbolic external world itself that manifests itself symbolically in what it makes us conceive as an internal world. We can suppose, therefore, just as Vygotsky supposed, that thought is internalised speech, but perhaps it does not make much sense to pose the concept that way since interiority itself is an internalisation of exteriority.¹⁸

Interiority is nothing more than a kind of crease or fold of exteriority. It is the same language because there is no metalanguage.¹⁹ There is no reflection that would be different from what is reflected, but rather, as Korsch pointed out in criticising the theory of reflection, there is a 'very special part of the whole'.²⁰ Or, better still, there is a moment of the not-all. We cannot even say that this moment is differentiated from the rest by being composed of qualitatively different elements, mental elements such as ideas, since these elements also make up the exterior, as Pannekoek noted in the same Western Marxist tradition of Korsch.²¹

The recognition of the 'mental' aspect of exteriority, which betrays more of a materialist conception of the mind than an idealistic conception

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15 See Engels 1888.

16 Pavón-Cuéllar 2009, 2012.

17 See Vygotsky 1934 and Pavón-Cuéllar 2010.

18 See Pavón-Cuéllar 2017a.

19 Lacan 1960-1961.

20 Korsch 1923.

21 Pannekoek 1938.

of the external world, is a fundamental point of my Lacanian Marxist vision. This point, as we have seen, is not new in the Marxist tradition: it has already been developed in Western Marxism, but also in the Soviet field and particularly in the theory of activity constructed by Sergei Rubinstein, who deeply examined the 'psychological contents' of 'material external activity'.²² Taking Rubinstein's theory to its ultimate consequences, to the Lacanization of his ideas, we even realise that the most external can be the most intimate component of the subject, the '*extimate*', as Lacan would say.²³

The concept of *extimacy* overcomes the apparent, superficial distinction between the interior and the exterior since it designates a single and unique space that is beyond the exterior and beyond the interior. The interior and the exterior are here only specular reflections that reflect each other in an imaginary game while covering the *extimate* behind them, namely the capitalist system studied by Marx, but also the symbolic system of culture and the unconscious studied by Freud and Lacan. In other words, when I go deeper into my Leninist inner reflection, I cross it and come to the same place where I arrive by delving into the outside and crossing it: to the field of research of Marxism, which is also that of psychoanalysis, that is, the most radical exteriority that is also the deepest intimacy, the extimacy, which is behind the interior and exterior mirrors of the imaginary.

In my Lacanian problematisation of the Leninist theory of reflection, not only the exterior is reflected in the interior, but, as the Marxist-Freudian surrealist Karel Teige wonderfully expressed it, the psyche 'makes the material world its reflection and image, the illustration and manifestation of its desire'.²⁴ It cannot be otherwise when we admit what Lacan thought regarding the imaginary and the specular reflection. The reflection exists in both senses. The psyche reflects the external world based on the reality principle, while reality reflects the psyche based on what is desired according to the pleasure principle. The problem is, of course, that it is practically impossible to distinguish one from the other.

The external world, like the internal world, responds to our desire. As André Breton pointed out, the same processes of 'condensation, displacement, substitution, retouching' by which desire forms the dream also allows it to create the reality that surrounds us when we are awake.²⁵ This surrealist conception coincides with the notion of Lacan, a worthy heir of surrealism, that reality is imaginary and that we somehow dream or delude our world.²⁶

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22 Rubinstein 1945, p. 169; 1959, p. 340.

23 Lacan 1968-1969.

24 Teige 1945, p. 296.

25 Breton 1932, 123-129.

26 Lacan 1954-1955.

Our more or less shared delusions internally organise our world by deploying the transindividual exteriority that constitutes our unconscious. This is what makes us all crazy at least in some way and to some extent. The reason for this madness is well explained by Attila József in his original Freudo-Marxist perspective: we are all crazy because it is not our conscience that always responds to our existence, as some Marxists would like, because it is not our psyche that always reflects our world, as Lenin explained, but constantly, as Freud showed us, it is our world that reflects our psyche, which, in a pathological way, 'forms' and 'deforms' our world.²⁷

It is not deplorable that the psyche is also madly reflected in the world instead of only reflecting it. This madness allows us to attend to our desire in reality and not only in dreams. Or, rather, it helps to revolutionise reality by realising the dream in which desire is fulfilled. Hence such madness was the goal of revolutions in the political program of surrealist Freudian Marxism to which my Lacanian Marxist perspective also adheres, but only in its imaginary front, which is not the only or the most important front, as we shall see in the next section.

In the imaginary my orientation aspires to a communist idea that should be insanely reflected in the world besides reflecting it with a strategic dose of sanity. My orientation thus diverges from strategies based unilaterally on the Leninist theory of reflection. The revolutionary conscience, if it wants to be truly revolutionary, cannot limit itself to reflecting reality by adapting or adjusting to it. This is something that Lenin understood very well, but that many Marxist-Leninists forgot. What they forgot is that reflecting reality is nothing more than a way of reproducing it. Of course, such reproduction is necessary for success, but it may end up compromising that success. This is how real socialism, through state capitalism, ended up successfully repeating in its own way, in one country, the capitalist reality of the world with which it maintained its aggressive, imaginary rivalry.

No matter how successful they are in the world, the scrupulously realistic, neurotically- obsessively realistic revolutionaries fail to transform it in a 'historical', 'hysterical' way, according to the revealing Lacanian pun.²⁸ Realists cannot enact more than a small revolution that only describes a circular movement in order to finish at the starting point. It is the circularity inherent in any specular game. As in Lampedusa's *Leopard*, everything has to change so that everything remains the same. Another revolutionary process, one that is fully historical, open and spiralling, cannot be based exclusively on the Leninist theory of reflection. Consciousness that only reflects tends to be conservative, reactionary, and surely ahistorical, even anti-historical.

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27 József 1934.

28 Lacan 1977.

Historising

In fact, as we have seen, it is the world itself that resists history, that reacts to conserve itself and that reproduces itself by reflecting itself through its consciousness. This consciousness is part of the world that logically seeks to persevere in its being, but the world is also historical and historically transforms itself through consciousness by not only reflecting on it. On the one hand, as we saw in the previous section, in addition to the reflection of the world in consciousness, there is the reflection of consciousness in the world. However, on the other hand, something more interesting may also happen: what we can describe as breaking the mirror that allows us to symptomatically discover the logical space of extimacy that lies behind the inner surface of consciousness, beyond the game of the reflections of the imaginary. This symptomatic discovery in turn produces what Lacan has described as a subversion with which the revolution is triggered and, more importantly, the revolutionary circle is opened, something changes and a historical spiral movement is assured.

We have, then, in addition to the reflection, the possibility of a symptomatic discovery of what is behind the mirror: a discovery that provokes a transformation. This is what we find eloquently illustrated in Marx's work when we read it in a Lacanian manner. This reading allows us to historicise Marx when we see how the world and its history are manifested, debated, realised and revolutionised in his thoughts and through what his thoughts do not only reflect, but simultaneously reflect and discover.

What is reflected and what is discovered of the historical world through Marx? What is reflected with frightening fidelity is what had already begun to be reflected in the English liberal political economy: the structure of the capitalist system in the nineteenth century. This material structure must have reached the development it had in Marx's time to be able to externalise itself as it did in the structuralism and materialism of Marx. If Marx was materialistic, it was not only because of everything we already know, but also, as Habermas and others have shown, because he lived in a materialistic world in which materiality reigned impudently; brazen material interest guided all actions, money bought everything, and the economic determined the ideological and dominated the social and the political.²⁹ Similarly, as Lacan showed, if Marx was the first structuralist, that was because globalised capitalism offered the best example of the structure of structuralists: a set of relations between exchange values determined by their differences and mutual relations, a symbolic universe without an exterior, a language without a metalanguage, an Other without

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²⁹ See Habermas 1968.

an Other³⁰ and a closed and unidimensional system comprised only of one qualitative dimension and its quantitative variations and proportions, devoid of otherness and negativity, as Marcuse already showed.³¹ In short, Marx's structuralism and materialism belonged to nineteenth-century capitalism, to capitalist modernity. This historical world was the one that faithfully reflected itself in the work of Marx.

However, in addition to what is cognitively reflected, there is what is symptomatically discovered: the covered-discovered by the reflection, the *extimate* processes that underlie external or internal states, the production of the product and the enunciation of the enunciated, but also the negativity of positivity, the misery of wealth and the abstract character of the most concrete. The discovery is made in the same reflection, in the open and hollow structure, in the imperceptible matter that must be calculated through the microscope of 'abstraction'.³² It is here, in the abstract, mathematical, empty and unfounded material structure, where we discover that the most apparent is the least apparent, that the evident is contradictory, that the whole is not-all, that the Other is barred and that the king is naked, that he is a proletarian, a subject without attributes, except to be alive.

The symptomatic discovery of Marx is what makes him not simply materialistic and structuralist, but what has been called, roughly, 'dialectical' and 'historical'. What is important here is that the structure and its economic materiality appear in Marx as what they are: precarious, transitory, crossed by history, by conflicts and contradictions, by tensions and struggles, by movement and by life, by disrupting desires and corrosive drives and also, on a genetic level, as products of negation, destruction and alienation, expropriation and privatisation, exploitation and pauperisation, fetishisation and reification. We can reject some of these conceptualisations, but we cannot deny that they designate in a more or less accurate and adequate manner what is revealingly embodied by the proletarian and understood as the historical truth of capitalism, as a symptom of how bourgeois society strips and reveals to Marx everything that he discovers.

The discovery of Marx is also a discovery of history. It is as historic, then, as the reflection. However, no matter how historical it is, it is not limited to the moment in which it occurs. Its moment is also ours. History does not stop being our history. We discover ourselves in the proletariat that is discovered through Marx. The particular discovery acquires a universal character.

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³⁰ Lacan 1968-1969, 1969-1970.

³¹ Marcuse 1964.

³² Marx 1867, p. xiii.

Generalising

The universal proletarian is at the centre of my proposal of Lacanian Marxism. Among the effects that Lacan has on my reading of Marx, one of the most important is the generalisation of the category of the proletariat.³³ This category allows me to describe a general experience of the subject and not only the particular situation of the industrial worker who does not have his own means of production, who has only his own life, and is forced to sell it as a labour force in exchange for a salary.

Like the proletarian studied by Marx, the subject conceptualised by Lacan (\$) must detach himself from his life that will be exploited as a labour force to execute the work of the unconscious, to pronounce the discourse of the Other, to express what is articulated by language (S1-S2). The subject, the universal proletarian, is thus exploited by the symbolic system of culture as the worker studied by Marx is exploited by the capitalist system, which is a historical particularisation of the symbolic system of culture. In both cases, while life belongs to the subject who loses it by selling it as a labour force, the work done by such force is owned and used by the Other, by language, by the system.

Language uses the work performed by the subject to produce a surplus value, a surplus of symbolic value, by which discourse is signifying or significant (S1-S2) and not insignificant or tautological (S1-S1). We confirm here the Lacanian idea that it is language that 'employs' the subject to express it instead of being the subject who utilises language to communicate.³⁴ In other words, it is not language that has a use value as a communication tool for the subject, but rather it is the subject who has a use value as an enunciating labour force exploited by language.

The use value of the labour force is the expression of all the signifiers articulated by language (S2). As for the exchange value, as with Marx's proletarian, it is the price of the subject's existence (S1). It is the signifier that allows the subject to exist in the symbolic system, the signifier with which he is identified, the only signifier he receives in exchange for the arduous work of the expression of all signifiers.

The identification of the subject with the signifier, his gain of an identity to exist symbolically, causes him to lose his life, which is alienated in the discourse of the Other. This life is used as a labour force for the production of a symbolic surplus value, a surplus of significance, which will certainly be earned by the Other, but at the price of a surplus enjoyment (*a*). What we have here, in the *plus-de-jouir*, is the surplus of *jouissance* that is gained when we lose the experience of our life, which is reduced to a role in the labour force of the Other, that is, the workforce of the unconscious.

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³³ Pavón-Cuellar 2009, 2010.

³⁴ Lacan 1969-1970, pp. 74-75.

What happens is that our life experience cannot be transferred to the Other who takes our life because the Other, behind his fetishised appearance, is pure insensitive language that cannot experience anything. Instead of experiencing our life, the Other simply *enjoys*, possess a labour force in which our life and possible experience are dissolved. Correlatively, instead of the experience of our life, we experience our alienation in the fetishism of the signifier. We suffer the dispossession of our life in its possession by language. We feel our inertia in the Other's *jouissance*, in its enjoyment of our life, in the satisfaction of the death drive.

If *jouissance* is the satisfaction of the death drive, the *plus-de-jouir* is the surplus of *jouissance* that is produced by losing life, by transmuting the living into the dead, the real into the symbolic, the vital existence of the worker into the death essence of capital and capitalism, the life spent by the subject on the surplus value gained by the Other, the experience of life in the possession of labour power, the generous life experience converted into deadly possessive *jouissance*. This is how *having* supplants *being*, private property replaces the community and the sexual relationship and the social bond are replaced by the signifying chain between things. But this is not something that is only experienced by the workers exploited in capitalism. The proletarian condition is widespread.

We know from Lacan that proletarianisation is the only 'social symptom'.³⁵ Everyone in society is, in a way, a proletarian. Even the capitalists lose the community, the social bond, the being and the experience of their life that is converted into the possession and enjoyment of capital. This was something that Marx understood very well when he showed how the will and consciousness of the capitalists were possessed by capital or, rather, how the vampire of capital derived its existence from the capitalists who obtained their enjoyment, their possessive essence, from capital, but at the price of the experience of their own lives.³⁶

While the capitalists gain their enjoyment from capital, capital obtains its very life from the capitalists. This exchange is found in the different relationships that we establish in the symbolic system. In all relationships, subjects embody what represents them. The signifier receives from the subject its literalness, its conscience and its will, its body and its life, while the subject acquires the deadly enjoyment of its identity, the very being of the signifier that will represent it for another signifier.

The exchange is apparently fair: while the signifier gives a being to the subject, the subject gives an existence to the signifier. And yet, Marx shows us here that there is a trap, a scam and an injustice. Where is this

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³⁵ Lacan 1975, p. 187

³⁶ Marx 1867.

injustice that justifies the frustration, indignation and insurrection of the subject?

First, in quantitative terms, subjects give the Other more existence than the being they receive from it. While we give our whole life to express all the discourse of the Other and all the signifiers articulated by language (S2), the Other pays us only the signifiers we need to identify with them and be who we are in the symbolic sense (S1). This general surplus of the predicates over the subject, of the signifying chain over a single link in the chain, is the general situation that is revealed in the particular case of the surplus of use value over the exchange value of the labour force of the proletarian.

Secondly, in qualitative terms, there is another injustice in the relation of the subject with the signifier. While the signifier obtains its existence effectively from the subject, the subject receives its being from the signifier only in an apparent manner. The subject, in fact, will never be the signifier that represents it. The signifier will never coincide with the subject. The subject will never be completely absorbed by discourse. Hence our alienation (*Entfremdung*) in the Other (S2) implies our division (*Entäusserung*) as subjects (\$). We are never what we are. We never get confused with what we have. This is also why there can be exploitation: the subject can be exploited because he is excluded from what exploits him.

We come here to a fundamental rule of the system: the exploited could not be exploited if he were not excluded with respect to the fruits of his exploitation. The surplus value cannot be accessible to those who produce it. Exploitation requires exclusion. This is why inequality necessitates a separation between the unequal, discrimination requires segregation, workers must remain in their poor suburbs, and high border walls and harsh migratory laws must protect the wealth of Europeans and Americans against Asians, Africans and Latin Americans.

In general, there is no place for the producers in the world that they themselves have contributed to produce. The discourse must eradicate the being that has enunciated it. Linguistics abstracts from its enunciators. The experience of our life does not belong to us, but is forbidden to us; it is the enjoyment of the Other.

Confirming

The symbolic system, both in general and in its capitalist particularisation, excludes the same subjects who are exploited by it. And, nevertheless, these subjects are possessed by the system as if by a demon. The Other manifests in their actions, in their words, in their thoughts and even in their deepest feelings.

Nothing seems to escape the Other. In Marx, for example, the capitalist system, capital itself, is the one that acts, speaks, thinks and feels through the capitalist, but it is also the one that works with the labour force of the worker, which, for that reason, is a component of capital,

the most important component, the capital of capital, variable capital. To be generalised, this conception of Marx does not require a Lacanian reading. Marx himself generalised it when he unravelled the operation of the successive systems of production at the very centre of subjectivity, when he saw an 'open book of psychology' in the field of industry³⁷ or when he referred to the machines that absorb knowledge, skills and the other capacities of the 'social brain'.³⁸ We have a general theory, which, by being Lacanized, can only be confirmed. This confirmation is the most that Lacanian Marxism can offer here.

From the perspective of Lacanian Marxism, as in that of Marx, we think on the outside through language, with the symbolic system of culture. It is out there, not inside our head, where our thinking organ resides. It is an external, cultural-symbolic device, not an internal, organic-cerebral organ. We do not think with the cells of the brain, but with enunciations, with social interactions, with historical events or with economic operations. These are the constitutive elements and the basic processes of our psyche. Our inner life is external. We come, once again, to the Lacanian concept of *extimacy*: the most intimate is external. I leave myself when I go deeper into myself, the ego is two-dimensional and I cannot enter myself without crossing through my imaginary appearance in the mirror.³⁹

Extimacy is only one of multiple concepts, among which there is also that of the unconscious understood as exteriority or as politics or as the discourse of the Other, through which a Lacanian reading can confirm the traditional monistic orientation of Marxism and its correlative opposition to any dualistic perspective that remains trapped in the inner/outer or mind/body dualities. In the same sense, Lacan can also serve to confirm the convincing historical explanation of dualism we read in Marx and especially in Engels, with its three acts: first, at the origin of civilisation, the division of classes; then, on the basis of class division, the division between manual and intellectual work, with the dominant class monopolising the intellectual work and condemning the dominated class to do the manual labour, in such a way that people belonging to the former class think with their minds what people belonging to the latter class perform with their bodies; and finally, because of the division of labour, the mind/body duality appears since the mental and the corporeal, when situated and developed separately into two classes, begin to be separated and differentiated one from the other.⁴⁰

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37 Marx 1844, p. 151.

38 Marx 1857-1858, p. 220.

39 Lacan 1954-1955.

40 See Engels 1876.

A Lacanian reading allows us to confirm the process described by Marx and Engels by rediscovering it at another level through the Hegelian relationship between the master and the slave. As in Marxism, the position of the master, that of power, will have the privilege of consciousness, while the position of the slave is that of the body, that of the unconscious. The soul/body duality has its origin, here also, in a dominant/-dominated duality. Everything begins with a dialectic of domination that unfolds in the discourse of the master with its difference between the master-signifier (S1) of the consciousness that dominates and all the other signifiers (S2), namely those of the discourse of the Other, those of the unconscious that works with the labour force of the subject, with his life and with his body (\$).⁴¹

The interesting thing about the Lacanian reading is that it allows us to appreciate the way in which the historical explanation given by Marx and Engels not only refers to the origin of human civilisation, but also to each discursive gesture, to each enunciation, by which subjects are situated in a position of power, move away from their body and appear as pure souls or psyches, as agents of cognition or thought, by pretending to overcome their unconscious, control their discourse and dominate their body, as if it belonged to them and not to the Other. Thus, a power relationship, a class division with the correlative separation between mental and manual labour, constantly divides each subject between an authoritarian mind and an obedient body. The perspectives of Marx and Engels are confirmed through a Lacanian reading that also allows us to confirm the Foucaultian inversion of the Platonic description of the body as a jail of the soul. The truth is the reverse: 'the soul is the prison of the body'.⁴²

The soul, whether it is conceived as such or as consciousness or spirit or reason or the psyche or otherwise, is the fundamental seat of power. This usually goes unnoticed because the mental domination usually takes the opposite form of freedom for a subject identified with his soul, be it *homo religiosus*, *spiritualis*, *rationalis* or *psychologicus*. In all cases, something dominates us when we believe that we are dominating ourselves and thus freeing ourselves, and even when we believe that we are 'freeing our own body', as Marcuse showed.⁴³

What dominates us through the soul? It does not matter whether we respond by referring to the Lacanian concept of the master-signifier or to the Marxist-Engelsian notion of the dominant ideology understood as the ideology of the ruling class. The important thing is to understand that it is something that is not us, does not concern us and does not even

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41 Lacan 1969-1970.

42 Foucault 1975, p. 34.

43 Marcuse 1964, pp. 89-11.

correspond to our desires or our interests. What dominates us through our soul is rather something that possesses us, represents us and usurps our identity in such a way that we can act against our interests and against our wishes. The soul is necessary, therefore, for the subjects to turn against themselves and help their master to master them.

Our domination requires, then, the support of our soul. This can be well seen, as I have tried to show, in Spanish colonialism that uses evangelisation to generate a soul, to dig an internal world, to build a mental prison in those Amerindian, though not all of them, who had managed to resist the stupid temptation of the soul. In the indigenous communities in which the soul did not exist, the non-existence of a soul correlated with the absence of private property, of social classes and of the division of labour. The processes of colonisation, appropriation and primitive accumulation demanded, and continue demanding at every moment and in each one of us, a process of psychologisation.⁴⁴

Completing

The development of psychology is inseparable from the advance of capitalism. The advancing capital is personified by the capitalist, who, as a bourgeois, is also the prototype of the *homo psychologicus*, the man identified with his soul or psyche, that is, with the fact of being intelligent, thoughtful, calculating, self-absorbed, introspective, depressed, stressed, frustrated, sentimental, in love, jealous, possessive, interested, capricious and so on. Marx and Engels demonstrated that the ego, with its personality, ideas and emotions, constitutes the most intimate private property of the bourgeoisie, the possession of its own existence, the enjoyment of itself, the confusion of being with having in the psychological objectification of the subject.⁴⁵ However, by completing the Marxist demonstration with a Lacanian observation, we should add that the bourgeois cannot limit themselves to enjoy this self, but must verify it again and again through their own reflection on the surface of the mirror, which makes them impose it on the whole society through disciplinary devices, ideological apparatuses of the State, various sectors of the cultural industry and many other specular means.

The *homo psychologicus* becomes as universal as its internal mental world. However, as we have seen, the imposed and universalised mind is not neutral. It is inseparably linked with the dominant class, reflects it and can serve as a means for the dominated to help dominate them by dominating themselves. This may be the case for many reasons, including the origin of the mental sphere as a class privilege, its imaginary specular constitution and its monopolisation and production-reproduction by the

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44 Pavón-Cuéllar 2016.

45 Marx and Engels 1846, chapter III.

ruling class, whose members devote their lives to cultivating their mind and spreading it in society.

In modern society, just as psychology is predominantly bourgeois, so the bourgeoisie is preponderantly psychological. Let us reiterate that the bourgeois class is the *homo psychologicus* class. It is, so to speak, a mental class that sometimes seems to have neither body nor external world and to obey exclusively the 'psychological factor', the ideas, emotions and other impulses coming from the internal world, as Plekhanov observed in certain literature of the nineteenth century.⁴⁶ There is nothing here but intrigues in which souls without bodies participate. The corporal, particularly in its sexual expression, is repressed and reappears in a symptomatic way in Freud's hysterics. As if by chance, this symptomatic return of the body and its drives repressed in the mental class, in the dominant class composed of the intellectual workers, occurs at approximately the same time as the symptomatic return of the repressed mental potentialities of the dominated class, the corporal class of the manual workers of Marx and Marxism. In both cases, among the bourgeoisie and among the workers, the symptom is the irruption of the truth of monism in the dualistic ideological constructions.

A present task of my Lacanian Marxist proposal is to examine how one of the consequences of the Marxist findings, the emergence of the inconceivable proletarian soul under the form of class consciousness, is perfectly correlated with the Freudian discovery, the revelation of the unconscious where the body of the bourgeois has been confined. The problem is that such discoveries seem to have led not to the reconstitution and liberation of total humanity through the overcoming of the mental-bourgeois and corporal-proletarian human halves, but to the proletarianisation of the bourgeois and the embourgeoisement of the proletariat that Lacan perceived so well in showing how the working class regained a master consciousness, a 'master knowledge', while the bourgeois recovered a 'slave body'.⁴⁷ After all, in the kind of society in which we live, there are only models of dominant souls and dominated bodies. No other models are available! This is also something that can be deduced from the point raised by Lacan.

A Lacanian reading allows us to complete Marx and Engels, not only by considering the bourgeois unconscious correlate of the class consciousness of the proletarians, but also by strategically foreseeing the consequences of both correlative expressions of the return of the repressed. We may fear, for instance, that such symptomatic irruptions of the truth of monism do not have the expected subversive effects because of an irremediably dualistic and classist functioning of

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46 Plekhanov 1907, pp. 98-99.

47 Lacan 1968-1969, pp. 172-173, 1969-1970, pp. 20-35.

subjectivity, society, history and culture. This was already observed by the Frankfurtians, particularly by Adorno, and made them opt for the theoretical critique of the dualist-class division, of the tearing of the individual and society, instead of a monist-communist solution that could only come from practice and that in any case still did not seem possible.⁴⁸

Why would it seem that it is still impossible today, and perhaps always impossible, to overcome dualism and classism? We know the Lacanian response that refers to the real as impossible, to castration, sexuation and the non-existence of the sexual relationship.⁴⁹ This response can complete the forgotten intuition of Marx and Engels about the deep link between patriarchy and class society.

Marx and Engels highlight the conjectural simultaneous emergence of the exploitation of man by man and the exploitation of woman by man. According to this hypothesis, the transition from matriarchy to patriarchy coincides with the dissolution of the original community and primitive communism. How is it that private property and the resulting oppressive appropriation of the other originate at the same time as the possession and oppression of women in the monogamous family?

We know the Engelsian explanation of the father who exercises his power over the woman to be sure that the heirs of his private property will also be his children.⁵⁰ This explanation is crucial, but incomplete, because it already presupposes the existence of private property that should still be clarified and it thus frames a situation in which there is no longer either matriarchy or communism, which were practically the same thing and which ceased to exist at the same time and not one after the other. We must still explain why the matriarchal community disappears and gives way to patriarchy and private property.

What if there was a strictly logical relationship between patriarchy and private property, between patriarchal masculinity and possession-possessiveness, between having the phallus and having in general understood as phallic enjoyment, as well as a strictly logical relationship between being the phallus and the being that is at stake in desire, between being a woman and an inevitably common and singular being, between femininity and community, between matriarchy and communism? These relationships, which must be nuanced and complicated through the Lacanian logic of sexuation, have already served me to Lacanianly complete what was just outlined by Marx and Engels.⁵¹ The Lacanian Marxist result already has several old precedents in the field of Freudian

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48 E. g. Adorno 1955.

49 Lacan 1968-1969, 1969-1970, 1971, 1971-1972.

50 Engels 1884.

51 Pavón-Cuéllar 2017b.

Marxism, among which those of Erich Fromm⁵² and Oswald de Andrade⁵³ stand out. They and others elucidated what would later be well sensed in feminism: that the anti-capitalist struggle is futile as long as it is not also anti-patriarchal.

If we must face patriarchy to fight efficaciously against capitalism, it is not only because capital rests on the possessive logical element of the patriarchal function, but because this same function involves another element that is also at the base of the capitalist system, an element that was pointed out by Lacan⁵⁴ and emphasised by Jorge Alemán,⁵⁵ and that has also recently allowed me to add something to help completing the Marxist intuition of the link between capitalism and patriarchy.⁵⁶ I refer to the masculine *for-all* and its contradiction to the feminine *not-all*. While the *not-all* respects the singularity on a case-by-case basis, the *for-all* reduces the singular to the exceptional, to the exception to the rule, or tends to dissolve it into a generality in which there are no singular cases that are qualitatively different from each other, but simply individual expressions of the general category or units that can be counted and calculated in quantitative terms.

Marx and several of his followers have studied how for several centuries, since capitalism has progressed unstoppably in the world, the quantitative dimension of money and exchange value has tended to gain ground over the qualitative dimension of things themselves and their use value. This evolution implies the most diverse transformations, such as those that make us go from the unquantifiable truth to a supposedly quantifiable reality or from knowledge to data and information. My Lacanian reading of such evolution, which aims to complete the Marxist vision, has not only raised the insufficient and arguable hypothesis of a progressive symbolisation and derealisation of the world, but also the conjecture of the advancement of the generalising and homogenising masculine logic of the *for-all* to the detriment of the irreducibly singular feminine element of the *not-all*. This conjecture is politically relevant because it could serve to explain the development of the masses at the expense of the communities, that is, the progression of aggregated and massified interchangeable individuals at the expense of community integrations between different subjects. The same conjecture could also explain the development of quantitative inequalities between income or capabilities or anything else over the qualitative differences between subjects who are so different that they cannot be judged unequal.

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52 Fromm 1934.

53 Andrade 1950.

54 Lacan 1972-1973.

55 Alemán 2013.

56 Pavón-Cuéllar and Boggio Éwanjé-Épée 2018.

In the absence of conclusion

Both the development of inequality at the expense of difference and the advancement of the masses at the expense of communities are victories of capitalism over the subject of communism, but also over the subject of psychoanalysis. The irreducibly singular and absolutely different Freudian subject is the only one that can effectively organise with others to fight for communism or to coherently join and knot with others to form the community for which the communists fight. And this subject has nothing to do with the generalised, interchangeable and summable individuals of the masses, of capitalism and psychology.

The totalised individuality, closed on itself in its general definition, is the antithesis of what remains incomplete, open, undefined, pending, in suspense. The subjects of psychoanalysis and communism respond to the not-all by which they doubt, ignore, desire, struggle, organise and knot with others, make and unmake groups, discuss in endless assemblies and try in vain to complete themselves. On the contrary, the individual of capitalism and psychology obeys the for-all rule that guides most of the psychological tests, *prêt-à-porter* diagnoses of the DSM, opinion polls, mass production for undifferentiated consumers, *emojicons* and *likes* of social networks, the bourgeois democracy of the summable votes and the anatomo-political and biopolitical devices elucidated by Foucault.

The dominant ideology in capitalism, the same that gives rise to psychology, makes us imagine that it is the collective that is composed of individuals, while Marxism and psychoanalysis have taught us that it is individuality that is made up of group components that are knotted in it, namely social relations for Marx⁵⁷ or mass identifications for Freud.⁵⁸ It is the Other who becomes One, who makes the One exist, and not the One who already exists and relates to the Other. There is, then, no socialisation of the individual, as Piaget thought, but an individualisation of the social, as Vygotsky recognised.⁵⁹ Or better yet, there is a generation of individuals in a discourse of the Other that only retroactively, *après coup*, appears as transindividual. In this discourse that does not close in a totality and that is not the same for all, that is not-all and different for everyone, the subject of Marx and Freud is not an individual subject among others, but the result that is always still postponed, always indefinable and evasive of a convergence and unique combination, which is irreducibly singular and absolutely different, of innumerable signifiers corresponding to individual identifications.

The subjects of Marx and Freud are intrinsically subversive because they resist in one way or another that which defines them. They do not

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57 Marx 1845, Marx and Engels 1846.

58 Freud 1921.

59 Vygotsky 1934.

allow themselves to be caught in any signifier, be it the race, the nation, the father or man of patriarchy or any symbol of power, success, health or normality, especially the most important and irresistible of all in capitalism, namely money, something whose only use value is its exchange value, pure possession, principle of possessiveness or quintessence of enjoyment.

Money is the most powerful of the signifiers because it is the most perfect, the purest, the most arbitrary, that is, as Lacan pointed out, the 'most destructive of any significance', the least dependent on a precise meaning, since it can mean everything by being able to buy everything.⁶⁰ However, as Marx remarked brilliantly, money is never enough to buy everything, as its 'quantitative limitation' always prevents the realisation of its 'qualitatively unlimited nature'.⁶¹ This inherent characteristic of the signifier produces the insatiable avidity, the typical enjoyment of capitalism, for which we try to possess more and more, to have more and more money to fulfil all that the signifier is and offers us, to really possess it, a result that is impossible to realise in any way.

By resisting and not just giving in to the enjoyment of money, the subject of Marxism and psychoanalysis, the subject of history and desire, is radically subversive to capitalism. Of course, capital always finds a way to recover what subverts it. There is no need to remember what the communist parties and ego psychologies have been. However, in addition to what is recoverable, there is always something irrecoverable, incurable, in the truth that is revealed symptomatically through Marx and Freud. This makes everything in the capitalist reality conjure itself against the revelation. Everything is like an immense reactive formation to refute Freud and especially Marx. Everything is as it is to show that there is no truth in the truth of our uniqueness and our community. As I tried to explain it once when describing an experience in Tokyo, communism is a truth, the one posed as such by Sen Katayama, that internally moulds, in a negative way, everything that works so impeccably in the Japanese manifestation of capitalism, everything that is possible and visible, everything that is done so that the truth is invisible and impossible.⁶²

Here we must understand the principle of negativity whereby truth is not confused with a reality that Lacan correctly describes as imaginary. Reality is always so wrong and misleading, especially in capitalism, that it cannot but differ from the truth and contradict it. In fact, especially in capitalist society, it is precisely to contradict the truth that reality is what it is when it is constituted ideologically. That is why the truth always has a strange, counterintuitive, incomprehensible aspect, as in the work of Lacan.

The Lacanization of Marxism, like that of psychoanalysis, can also

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⁶⁰ Lacan 1956, p. 37.

⁶¹ Marx 1867, p. 91.

⁶² Pavón-Cuéllar 2017c.

serve to preserve the truth of what is Lacanized, preserving it as it is: incomprehensible, counterintuitive, strange. Thus Lacan may also help to prevent capitalism from reabsorbing and recovering what Marx and his followers discovered. Lacanian Marxism should be for now, at least for now, an entity that is still too irrational to be assimilated to capitalist rationality. Perhaps it can never be rationalised, just as it was never possible to carry out the rationalisation of the encounter between Marxism and psychoanalysis in surrealism, in which, as if by chance, we found the first Lacanian Marxist, the brilliant René Crevel⁶³, who perhaps should have been our starting point.

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⁶³ Crevel 1933, see Pavón-Cuéllar 2014b.

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Lacan's Homeric Laughter

Jean-Michel Rabaté

Abstract: This essay tackles the question of laughter in Lacan by focusing on the function it plays when it appears as a link between Marxist surplus-value and post-Freudian surplus-enjoyment. Lacan had pointed out how and why Marx's capitalist would be shown laughing when discovering the principle of surplus-value. This sudden laugh equates surplus value and surplus jouissance, which forces us to revisit the issue of the economy of jokes. Against Freud who insisted on thrift, sparing and condensation, Lacan promotes a metonymic displacement in the logics of jokes, which entails a theory of the "little meaning" of words that can then be transformed into puns or jokes. Lacan would see excess and speed as the key conditions for laughter, and these features reappear in his later analyses of the discourse of capitalism. I compare Lacan's theory with Paolo Virno's political analysis of the joke as a moment of collective creation that interrupts a certain doxa so as to suggest in conclusion that Lacan's own laughter, that kept hesitating between tragedy and comedy, had a clear political function.

Keywords: Joke, *Witz*, economy, capitalism, metonymy, the politics of laughter.

Homer: Never existed—Famous for the way he laughed:
a Homeric laugher.
Flaubert, *Dictionary of Received Ideas*.

The cruel joke is just as original as harmless mirth; originally the two are close to each other (...). The comic figure is a *raisonneur*; in reflection he appears to himself as a marionette. The finest exemplifications of the *Trauerspiel* are not those which adhere strictly to the rules, but those in which there are playful modulations of the *Lustspiel*.
Benjamin¹

Quite frequently Lacan would make me laugh at the time I went to hear his seminar at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, even though I did not dare emit the least titter or betray by inopportune signs any hilarity, given the atmosphere of rapt attention and philosophical concentration that reigned. Heavy billows of smoke coming from the participants' mouths allegorized the cloud of ideas released, a dense mist from which Lacan alone could extract meaning. All the while he would saunter on stage, an unlit cigar in hand, or spin stories in the microphone, his gaze piercing

.....
¹ Benjamin 1977, p.127.

all the fumes. However, he rarely made me laugh when he tried too hard to be funny; this happened once in a while; most of the time, I found his attempts at jocularity either contrived or rather opaque, as one can see in a sustained moment of written “fun” in *Ecrits*, the longish and involved satire of French analysts in “The Situation of Psychoanalysis and the Training of Psychoanalysts in 1956.”² He was at his best in sudden attacks, vitriolic snarls aimed at institutions or people; we rarely recognized the butt of the sally, however, as was the case when he referred to Lucien Goldmann as “Mudger Muddle” in Seminar XVI. I would have never guessed the identity of the person thus nicknamed without the help of Jacques-Alain Miller’s note³).

Close to the beginning of the first seminar of the fall of 1968, Lacan offered a recapitulation of his Homeric struggles with classical psychoanalytic institutions that had led to his exclusion, or “excommunication” from the IPA, and quoted Beckett’s *Endgame* in which we say an old couple living in a garbage can. He went on: “Personally, after having lived in three psychoanalytic societies for some thirty years now, in three stints of 15, 10 and 5 years, I have a good notion of what it means to cohabit with household waste.”⁴ The punchline works better in French given the order of words. In “*cohabiter avec les ordures ménagères*,” we heard first “*ordures*,” a term which in colloquial French, when used for people, means “piece of shit.” Then the qualification by “*ménagères*” (household, but also literally, housewives) made it even funnier. This sally, well introduced by the diminishing numbers of years, was greeted by wild guffaws.

It was in the same seminar, as I was trying to decipher Lacan’s rather incomprehensible German, that he coined the term of *Mehrlust* (surplus enjoyment) as an echo of Marx’s *Mehrwert* (surplus-value), the latter word pronounced, as he noted later, as “*mère verte*,” or “green mother”.⁵ Both concepts served to tie up links between Marx and Freud, a connection that has been well explored recently.⁶ What was curious in this specific instance was that Lacan needed a theory of jokes to make the knot. He illustrated this with a little story that illuminates everything; it has to do with the function of laughter in Marx’s *Capital*.

.....
 2The overblown rhetorical satire of the French schools belonging to the IPA lists four categories of psychoanalysts, the Sufficiencies, the Little Shoes, the Truly Necessary and the Beatitudes. The text had been privately printed and circulated before it was published at the end of the essay in *Les Etudes Philosophiques*. See Lacan 2006a, p. 397-400.

3 See Miller’s note in Lacan 2006b, p. 415.

4 Ibid., p. 11. All translations are mine.

5 See Lacan 2006b, p.29

6 See for instance Bruno 2010, and Tomšič 2015.

The vignette offered to the public on December 11, 1968 is unabashedly autobiographical. Having elaborated his concept of *Mehrlust* that neatly spliced Marx and Freud in their joint analysis of the production of value and of enjoyment, Lacan told us how he had been reading Marx as a medical student. When he was twenty-five or so, he would go the hospital daily in the Paris metro, where he would read the *Capital* during his trips, and obviously his ear was already attuned to psychoanalytic listening. Reading the *Capital* in the Parisian metro in the mid-twenties must have passed for a mild provocation to the bourgeois. One day Lacan was struck by a scene that no-one else had apparently noticed, a scene in which Marx stages a specific type of laughter: the laughter of the capitalist who grasps both the simplicity and the huge consequences of the principle of surplus-value.

When reminiscing about his discovery of laughter in Marx’s text, Lacan took us to *Capital*, chapter one, book three, a chapter in which Marx analyzes the production of surplus-value. The passage describes the capitalist’s sudden understanding of the mechanism. The capitalist suddenly sees how value is transformed, and he laughs; such a laughter, being contagious, made Lacan laugh:

“Marx introduces this surplus-value—plus he almost did not introduce this surplus-value, neither plus nor value (Lacan is playing on “*un peu plus...*” in the temporal sense, echoing with *surplus*, and then on the phrase “*ni vu ni connu, j’tembrouille*,” meaning that there is a sleight of hand, a rhetorical trick, in Marx’s text), -- he introduces after some time, when, with a genial air, he lets the interested party speak, that is the capitalist. He lets him justify his position by developing the main theme, that is to say the services tendered to workers who only have rudimentary tools for their work, here a jointer, to which the capitalist adds a potter’s wheel and a mill, thanks to which the worker will do wonders, in a loyal exchange of reciprocal services. Marx lets all the time for this advocacy to be heard, and which sounds most honest, and then points out that the ghostly character with whom he is struggling, the capitalist, laughs. // This feature that may seem superfluous is nevertheless what had struck me at the time of these useful first readings. It seemed to me from then on that this laughter had to do with the unveiling by Marx of the essence of surplus-value.”⁷

Why should the analysis of surplus-value generate laughter for the capitalist? To understand this better, we need to take a look the passage in which Marx presents the theory of surplus-value precisely from the point of view of the capitalist:

“The capitalist paid to the labourer a value of 3 shillings, and the labourer gave him back an exact equivalent in the value of 3 shillings, added by him to the cotton: he gave him value for value. Our friend, up

.....
 7 Lacan 2006b, pp.64-65

to this time so purse-proud, suddenly assumes the modest demeanor of his own workman, and exclaims: "Have I myself not worked? Have I not performed the labor of superintendence and of overlooking the spinner? And does not this labor, too, create value?" His overlooker and his manager try to hide their smiles. Meanwhile, after a hearty laugh, he re-assumes his usual mien."⁸

Here is the point at which Lacan pauses. Marx seems to present a variation on the story of prisoners whose calculation of comparative hesitations and exchanges of glances allows them to realize that all three carry white discs on their backs.⁹ Thanks to Marx, we can add a new twist to Lacan's famous sophism: looking at each other for a while, the three prisoners burst out laughing at the same time, which allows them to leave the jail together. Here, similarly, we have three persons, the capitalist, the overlooker and the manager, all on the winning side. Two smile, while only one laughs—this is, of course, the capitalist. Here is what happens:

"Meanwhile, after a hearty laugh, he re-assumes his usual mien. Though he chanted to us the whole creed of the economists, in reality, he says, he would not give a brass farthing for it. He leaves this and all such like subterfuges and juggling tricks to the professors of Political Economy, who are paid for it. (...) The circumstance, that on the one hand the daily sustenance of labor-power costs only half a day's labor, while on the other hand the very same labor-power can work during a whole day, that consequently the value which its use during one day creates, is double what he pays for that use, this circumstance is, without doubt, a piece of good luck for the buyer, but by no means an injury to the seller.

Our capitalist foresaw this state of things, and that was the cause of his laughter. (...) The trick has at last succeeded; money has been converted into capital."¹⁰

The capitalist's laughter accompanies the disclosure of a fundamental principle: the value that labor-power possesses on its own and the value that it creates differ as much in nature as in quantity. This transformation called "metamorphosis," a recurrent signifier in Book I of *Capital*, entails that something has been created out of nothing, even if this contradicts Lucretius's motto of "*nihil posse creari de nihilo*." Marx adds as well that the creation of plus value is a transformation of energy.¹¹ These capitalistic metamorphoses can be measured: "The rate of surplus-value is therefore an exact expression for the degree of

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8 Marx 1906, p. 215. For the German text, see Marx und Engels 1970, p. 207.

9 See Lacan 2006, pp. 161-175.

10 Marx 1906, pp.215-217

11 Ibid., p.239, note

exploitation of labour by capital, or of the labourer by the capitalist."¹² When the capitalist laughed, it was because he was both exposing his trick and enacting it, but because he did this so obviously, in the end, nobody understood his game. Here is the root of capitalism, an unholy conversion of work into surplus-value, a conversion whose mechanism triggers laughter because it is both simple and complex. It's as if the capitalist was saying: "Piece of cake!" while immediately gobbling his cake—to evoke another famous Freudian *Witz*.

Such a shared laughter covers up the silent and monstrous work of metamorphosis that is defining for capitalism. There is something satanic in the process; in another section of *Capital*, Marx quotes Goethe's *Faust*. As Lacan understood it, this very moment showing the disclosure of the secret of surplus-value functions like a Freudian *Witz*. The truth is expressed in a joke exhibiting a secret. Marx agrees with Freud that the paradigm of all jokes is Heine's *Witz* about Hirsch-Hyacinth proudly stating that Baron Rothschild has treated him "famillionnairely" (JRU, p. 4).

This famous joke was the one chosen by Lacan to analyze Freud's theory of laughter in the earlier seminar V. In Seminar V on the "Formations of the Unconscious," Lacan spends a lot of time discussing Freud's joke book, and mentions Marx, twice. The first time, it is to praise his insight in having anticipated what he was going to develop as the "mirror stage." This was on November 27, 1957, when Lacan mentioned the first book of *Das Kapital* in glowing terms:

"I am not talking about the entire text—who's read *Capital*!—but the first book, which almost everyone has read. A prodigious first book, superabundant, revealing someone, this is rare, who sustains an articulated philosophical discourse. I urge you to go to the page where, at the level of the formulation of the so-called *theory of the particular form of the value of merchandise*, Marx shows himself, in a note, to be a precursor of the mirror-stage."¹³

Lacan alludes to a footnote we can find as note 19 to chapter one, part three. Marx's note comments a paragraph in which he insists that the equivalence between two commodities measures the value of the second, which he illustrates by quoting the French proverb, *Paris vaut bien une messe*. He adds this note:

"In a way, it is with man as with commodities. Since he comes into the world neither with a looking glass in his hand, nor as a Fichtian philosopher to whom "I am I" is sufficient, man first sees and recognizes himself in other men. Peter only establishes his own identity as a man by first comparing himself with Paul as being of like kind (*seinesgleichen*).

.....
12 Ibid., p.241

13 Lacan 2017, pp.72-73 (modified)

And thereby Paul, just as he stands in his skin and hair with his purely Pauline corporality (*Leiblichkeit*), will appear to Peter to be the type of the genus homo.”¹⁴

Lacan was right to point out that Marx was presenting a general logic of equivalence that corresponds to the main lesson of the mirror stage: there is no identity without a dual formation of identity in which a projection is key; this entails the way two individuals abstract from each other the image a universal essence of humanity. Such a process of sublimation has to leave behind or erase the specific corporality of each of them.

Lacan discovers that Marx had analyzed the mechanism of identification before him, seeing that this was the place to recapitulate his critique of the idealist philosophy of Fichte, Hegel’s predecessor, who believed that identity could be summed up by the tautology “I equals I.” Marx would also connect this main principle with the engine of economy he is discovering and explaining, for this is the link with a general equivalent, an equivalent that is always found at the root of value. Marx’s passage had been preceded by a discussion of the various words used for value, like *valere*, *valer* and *valoir* in French; and in that context he quotes the French saying supposedly uttered by Henry of Navarre ready to become Henry IV if it just implied that he had to convert to Catholicism if he wanted to be made king of France: *Paris vaut bien une messe*.

This famous saying had been translated into English by Joyce as “... was Parish worth thetette mess,”¹⁵ which echoes with Lacan’s astute remark that a joke has only relevance—hence only triggers laughter—when it is meant for people who belong to the same parish¹⁶ (Lacan, 2017, p. 107-108). In that amazing discussion, Lacan underlines the etymology of French *paroisse* and presents it as a derivation of the Greek *parodia*, people who are not from the house, but also, evidently, parody. The audience could laugh at the joke only because they all had been students, all had had to take oral exams in history for the baccalaureate, and so on. Lacan concludes that session of 11 December 1957 by making another pun, an echolalic pun to be sure, when he links the Freudian “censor” with “sense.” Here is the place of the Other, his linguistically oriented version of the Freudian Unconscious, in case we hadn’t seen it:

“The Other is constituted as a filter that puts order into, and places an obstacle before, what can be accepted or simply even heard. There are things that cannot be heard, or which habitually are never heard any more, and which a joke strives to make heard somewhere, as an echo. To get them to be echoed back, it uses precisely the thing that forms an obstacle

.....
14 Marx 1887, p. 55, modified,

15 Joyce 1939, p. 199.

16 Lacan 2017, pp.107-108

to it, like some sort of reflecting concavity. (...)The little other, to call him by his name, contributes to the possibility of a joke, but it’s within the subject’s resistance—which for once, and this is highly instructive for us, I am rather seeking to provoke—that something that makes itself heard will resonate much further, and this means that the joke will resonate directly in the unconscious.”¹⁷

We understand why Lacan can say that a psychoanalyst has everything to learn from the joke-work described by Freud. Why then is Lacan not so happy with the treatment of jokes given by Freud? As I have attempted to show, Freud insists on the fact that *Witze* condense meaning, whereas Lacan enhances the relative parsimony of sense jokes are predicated upon.¹⁸ This leads Lacan to restate the principle of metonymic displacement typical of the object a:

“It’s not simply a question of equating so many yards of cloth, it’s the equivalence between cloth and clothes which has to be structured, that is, that clothes can come to represent the value of cloth. In other words, the equivalence necessary from the start of the analysis, and on which what is called value is based, presupposes, on the part of both terms in play, abandoning a very important part of their meaning. //The meaning of the metonymic line is located along this dimension.”¹⁹

Lacan teases out the consequences of this principle as he bring into play the dimension of the Other in which he sees the pivot of wit and jokes.

What the following session stresses is that the metonymic chain produces an erasure of differences, and once more, Marx is alluded to:

“I borrowed a Marxist reference in this connection—bringing two objects of need into operation in such a way that one becomes the measure of the value of the other, effaces what is specifically related to need from the object and thereby introduces it into the order of value.”²⁰

However, such an erasure of specificity does not for all that eliminate meaning, for it produces what Lacan calls “de-sense” (*dé-sens*). Lacan immediately points to possible ambiguity in his coining, which could be heard as *décence*, which means “decency” and is not what he means here. Thus, to avoid any confusion, Lacan proposes to call this *le peu-de-sens*, literally “little-sense” or “not-much-of- sense.”²¹

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17 Lacan 2017, p.108

18 Rabaté 2016, p. 82-103. The second section of this essay formulates differently my analysis of Freud’s remarks on the economy of jokes.

19 Lacan 2017, p.73

20 Ibid., p.87

21 I choose not to follow Russell Grigg’s translation as “bit-of-sense” (Lacan, 2017, p. 87). The phrase foregrounds the positive and not the negative. Perhaps “Just-a- little-bit-of-sense” would work better in this case.

As Lacan explains, jokes or witticisms (*mots d'esprit*) rely on a scarcity of meaning, but this diminished sense should not be understood as being tantamount to a negation of sense. Lacan refuses to fall into the theoretical trap consisting in asserting that meaning is totally lacking, which would be the thesis of the “absurd” deployed then by French existentialism. Instead, Lacan engages in a vicious attack on Albert Camus, who is not named but is recognizable because he had just been awarded the Nobel prize at the time (Lacan says that he has been “ennobled”). Quite brutally, Lacan rejects Camus’s disquisition on non-sense as a “discourse of the beautiful soul” (he has aligned himself with Sartre’s ongoing critique of his former friend at the time). Camus would have attempted to deduce from the lack of meaning in life a general theory of the absurd, in which he saw an ethical rebellion of the individual against a world devoid of justification. Lacan seems to hate this: “His discourse on non-sense remains the most pointless (*le plus vain*) that one has ever heard. It’s absolutely not the case that there is a play on nonsense every time equivocation is introduced”²² (Lacan, 2017, p. 87, modified). To prove this, Lacan alludes to Heine’s joke on the golden calf quoted by Freud. Because *veau* is homophonic with the third person of the verb *valoir*, as in *il vaut*, this reiterates the relative thinness of meaning. This meagre meaning comes in handy whenever we use words to play on them, mistake them or distort them:

“Everything you can find in plays on words, and very specifically those called conceptual plays on words, consists in playing upon how bad words are at maintaining a full sense. It’s this little-sense that, as such, is taken up, and it’s here that something occurs that reduces the message to its scope, insofar as the message is both a success and a failure, but always a form necessary for any formulation of a demand.”²³

This brings Lacan to reiterate that the “little-sense” has as its counterpart the huge but invisible power detained by the Other. If the dimension of the Other is primordial, it comes from the fact that meaning is shared between several people, at least as far as jokes are concerned:

“Freud dwells on the fact, as if it were something completely primordial that pertains to the very nature of jokes, that no joke exists in isolation. Even if we have forged it or invented it (if we can one say that any joke is our own invention and it’s not the joke that invented us), we feel the need to attribute it to the Other. A joke is indissociable from the Other, who is charged with authenticating it.”²⁴

Thus no *Witz* can ever testify to the pathos of the absurdity of a human condition, as Camus would have it; on the contrary, the *Witz* puts

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22 Ibid., modified

23 Ibid., modified

24 Ibid., p.88

in motion an awareness of the “little” measure of meaning, this “not much of sense” that our own words contain, especially when contrasted with the endless riches concealed in the Other. It is this Other that sends us back to the interrupted trajectory of the metonymy, asking of us that we answer to the question: “What does this mean?”²⁵ Lacan explains this in those terms:

“A *Witz* (*trait d'esprit*) is only complete once it gets beyond this point—that is, after the Other has taken it on board, responded to it and authenticated it as such. In order for *Witz* to happen, what is needed is that the Other has perceived what is there, in the transmission of the question about the little-sense, as a demand for sense, that is to say as an evocation of a sense beyond – beyond what remains unfinished.”²⁶

Lacan has in mind his graph of desire, which is why the segment that he sees as unfinished has to be chalked to the agency desire. Human desire is nothing without an Other that alone authenticates the *Witz*, which is why jokes cannot be understood as exercises in unchained or unrestrained non-sense, but as creative practices linking several subjects. These subjects can find a common ground precisely because the words they use are interchangeable, shallow, devoid of the depth and weight of interiority, in fact ready to be used as grist to the mill of our bad puns and silly jokes. Jokes exploit the scarcity of meaning that obtains in any given chain of signifiers. Lacan thus prefers to the logic of “non-sense” an economics of “not-much-sense” that soon becomes a “no-sense” (*pas-de-sens*). Lacan immediately seizes the opportunity to play on the amphibology of *pas*, and invokes typical phrases that include it: *pas-de-vis* (screw thread), *pas-de-quatre* (four step dance) or *Pas-de-Calais* (the strait of Dover).²⁷ This series of signifiers hinging around *pas* then generates another pun: this time, the “not-sense” turns into a “step-of-sense,” for “*pas de sens*” can mean the step (*pas*) made by sense to progress. Hence one will not be surprised to see the return of the metaphor as a *pas-de-sens*, for as we know the verticality of poetic images can move beyond the series of equivalence that flow with the drift of a metonymic chain.

Lacan provides examples of jokes or witticisms. One is a joke he heard from his friend the poet and novelist Raymond Queneau. The joke takes place during a history examination when a student is asked about some battles; each time, he answers that he sees corpses, wounded

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25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., modified

27 Ibid., p.89

soldiers, hears the noise of guns. The examiner asks for more precise details; the student reflects, adds that all he can see is a horse rearing and neighing. The line is repeated a few times for different battles until he is asked about the battle of Trafalgar. When the student plays the same linguistic *spiel*, the examiner points out that this was a naval battle. Then the student says: "Whoa! Whoa! Back up, Neddy!"²⁸ Space lacks to discuss Lacan's complex analysis of the joke fully. He takes it as an opportunity to denigrate Freud's joke book, especially the section on the comic. However, after his point in his seminar, Lacan never returns to the parallel he had established between Marx and Freud; one has to wait ten years to see the same thought return, which says a lot about the circular or spiraling way his theories would progress.

II

A detour through Freud's economic metaphors will contextualize Lacan's divergent view. We know that Freud asserts that two principles are at work simultaneously in the joke-work: first a joke economizes on psychical expenditure, and then it overcomes or bypasses the critical sense deriving from repression. The first mechanism describes condensation, often purely verbal, whereas the other achieves something like a displacement, especially when the joke is sexual in nature and aims at seducing someone. "We need only repeat that this pleasure comes from an economizing (*Ersparung an psychischem Aufwand*) in psychical expenditure and a relief (*Erleichterung vom Zwange der Kritik*) from the compulsion of criticism."²⁹

Freud discusses the function of play manifested by children. This analysis remains within the economic domain, but points to "freedom" and "fun" (*Spiel* and *Scherz*), both presented as a release (*Auslösung*) or a "removing" process (*Aufhebung*) shown to be working together. By lifting up or cancelling internal inhibition, the joke-work releases new sources of pleasure. Such a freely-flowing activity functions as a whole; it is thus almost impossible to distinguish what is due to form and what is due to the content of the joke (JRU, p. 126). The process of freeing releases (*entbinden*) pleasurable affects that were hitherto bound and constrained. This releasing power finds a theoretical corroboration in Fechner's definition of a pleasure that is multiplied. It is therefore neither divided, condensed, economized, or "saved."

At some point, Freud quotes Gustav Theodor Fechner's *Preschool of Aesthetics*, a treatise which states that "... there emerges a greater, often much greater, pleasure than the pleasure-value of the individual determinants by themselves, greater than could be explained as the sum

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28 Ibid., p.98

29 I refer to the excellent translation by Joyce Crick, *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, London, Penguin, 2002, here p. 122 and hereafter abbreviated as JRU and page number.

of single effects" (JRU, p. 129). The three terms deployed by Fechner, *Lustbedingungen* (determinants of pleasure), *Lustresultat* (result of pleasure), *Lustwerte* (pleasure values) and *Lustergebnis* (outcome of pleasure), all imply a quantification of the libidinal energy steadily moving toward a plus or as surplus. Freud quotes a passage in bold page 51 of this revolutionary treatise in experimental psychology, and then immediately generalizes the hypothesis when he comments that this principle would be true of artistic production in general (JRU, p. 129-130). All this betrays Freud's uneasiness facing his initial thesis stating that a single principle of "economy," "thrift" or "sparing" would allow us to understand the general mechanism of jokes, wit and even art in general.

Freud seems to discover an opposed principle that would consist in forcefully lifting the ban of inhibition, repression and criticism; this violent subversion of repression then tend to trigger a multiplying factor. Here Freud returns to another logics, a mechanism that he had apprehended when launching the idea of an over-determination of dream-images: over-determination means not just a principle of "thrift" but also a multiplication of the meanings determining a single images. Just as the signifier "rat" condenses all the chains of reasoning of the Rat-Man, the condensation of a good joke generates quiter a few avenues for thought and laughter. Examples appended to this new principle turn around absurd jokes. Here is one, since it echoes with many others: "As he is being served fish at dinner, a man reaches with both hands into the mayonnaise and rubs it into his hair. His neighbor looks at him in astonishment, so he seems to notice his mistake and apologizes: "Excuse me, I thought it was spinach"" (JRU, p. 134, note). Such a teaser confirms an idea of extravagant spending and exuberance in the realization of wishes: whenever the free enjoyment of nonsense is permitted, one cannot distinguish between mayonnaise and spinach any longer.

Does the rationale of the joke reside in the principle of "economy"? Yes, if by "economy" is meant the analysis of the transformation of value in social exchange; not only or necessarily, if by "economy" we have in mind a principle of parsimony, of saving on time, energy or verbal expenditure. And indeed, no sooner had Freud posited the principle that a *Witz* was defined by brevity, condensation and sparing, than he began to voice doubts. His doubts appear when he explains that the unconscious economizes just in the way a housewife is ready to pay more for her travel to a distant market where vegetables are cheaper (JRU, p. 34). Later on, more doubts are proffered in those terms: "Is not the economy (*Ersparnis*) in words expressed more than cancelled (*aufgehoben*) by the expense of intellectual effort? And who is being so thrifty? Who benefits from it?" (JRU, p. 34) It is at this point that Freud examines examples running the gamut from simple word puns to the archaic pleasure found in nonsense, whose signal exemplification is the Irish bull.

Jakob von Falke had taught Freud about the absurdist logic of the Irish bull, which is exemplified by this famous story. Visitors are told about the battle of Waterloo, and one asks: "Is that the place where the Duke of Wellington spoke those words?" The immortal reply is: "Yes, this is the place, but he never spoke the words" (JRU, p. 80, note). The logical shift creates several mental spaces that coexist despite incompatibilities: Wellington was indeed at the battle, but he did not speak; he must have spoken the words elsewhere or the words were invented afterwards; perhaps the entire battle was invented as well... Hesitating between Napoléon and Wellington, we fall into skepticism, and our doubt derives from such an overturning of conventional logic.

The logic of nonsense offers numerous parallels with dreams, and Freud continues his analysis of jokes by comparing them with dreams. It is much later that he returns to the economic principle that he left aside for a while. This time he wants to face his own doubts and tackle the conceptual tension between thrift and expenditure. Freud reiterates that the "savings made by using the same words" count for nothing "against the enormous expenditure involved in the act of thinking" (JRU, p. 150). He develops a complex economic parable:

"We may do well to allow ourselves to compare the economy (*Ökonomie*) of the psyche with a business concern. As long as the business turnover is very small, the main thing of course is that on the whole not much is spent and that the running costs are kept extremely low. The frugality (*Sparsamkeit*) applies to the absolute height of expenditure. Later, when the business has expanded, the importance of running costs lessens; it no longer matters how high the amount of expenditure becomes as long as the turnover and returns can be sufficiently increased. Restraint in expenditure for running the business would be petty, indeed positively unprofitable. However, it would be wrong to assume that given the absolute amount of expenditure there would be no more room for the tendency towards economy (*Spartendenz*). The boss's thrifty-mindedness will now turn to parsimony (*Sparsamkeit*) in single items, and feel satisfied if the same activity can now be managed at a lower cost when its previous costs were higher, however small the economy (*Ersparnis*) may appear in comparison with the total expenditure. In a quite analogous way, economy (*Ersparung*) in details remains a source of pleasure in the complicated business of our psyche, too, as everyday occurrences can show us" (JRU, p. 150).

Here, Freud seems to give us a curious lesson in economy; he takes the idea of business management by explaining how one should shift from a small business for which thrift is crucial to a bigger company in which a rapid turnover is a sign of success. The first example he gives then can strike one as curious: he assumes that there is a pleasure in switching an electric button if one has been used to lighting a gas lamp. Is that true? Whether this is true or not, the gain observed in the joke's saving remains

a small, minimal linguistic saving or smaller even psychic gain. We remain within a minimal "economy" that seems dwarfed by the huge psychic energy deployed and channeled by the Unconscious. As the *Interpretation of Dreams* stated, the Unconscious is a capitalist; however, even a big capitalist likes to make small savings. Freud compares the motive of the wish underpinning a dream with capital:

"The position may be explained by an analogy. A day-time thought may well play the part of *entrepreneur* for a dream; but the *entrepreneur*, who, as people say, has the idea and the initiative to carry it out, can do nothing without capital; he needs a *capitalist* who can afford the outlay, and the capitalist who provides the psychical outlay for the dream is invariably and indisputably, whatever may be the thoughts of the previous day, a *wish from the unconscious*."³⁰

I'll illustrate this idea with a joke that somehow presupposes the Freudian unconscious, and yet sends it up while asserting its relevance. I paraphrase and condense a passage from *The Jewish Joke*.³¹

Samuel sits inconsolably next to the bed on which his wife is lying, obviously dying, with a dry rattle in her throat. Anxious to alleviate the pain of her inevitable demise, he asks: "What can I do to bring some joy in your last moments?" She replies that she would like to have sex a last time. Samuel obliges. Then a miracle happens: all of a sudden the wife is revived, color comes back to her cheeks; she jumps out of bed, opens the window and starts singing. Samuel, meanwhile, bursts into tears. She asks: "Samuel, Why cry? It's time to rejoice. You just saved me from death -- isn't that wonderful!" Tearfully, Samuel replies: "It's not that. I was thinking: *I could have saved mother!*"

In a manner that is similar to the joke narrated by Queneau to Lacan, we see in this example that the key moment is the punchline, which is independent of the brevity of the story, and has very little to do with the density of a verbal pun or a *Witz*. Similar jokes can be expanded at will, minor incidents can be added, and these delays will not kill the laughter that comes from the surprise of the last line. If there is an economy at work here, it can only be understood in a general sense that takes into account the whole of society, including its very economic exchanges. Here is why we need to combine Marx and Freud.

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30 Freud 1965, pp. 599-600.

31 Baum 2017, pp. 88-89.

III

These principles were sketched by Lacan in Seminar V and developed ten years later in seminar XVI. What impelled Lacan forward in 1957 was his idea that any *Witz* would have to be authenticated by the Other. Without the agency of the Other, one cannot grasp what links two subjects who are bantering and joking together. Lacan was led to his main principle that laughter is the best example of a human manifestation that clinches the equivalence between surplus-value and surplus-jouissance. Here is why the 1968 seminar pays homage to the discoveries of the 1957-58 seminar. Linking his previous analysis of the *Witz* with the emergence of the object a, Lacan draws again his graph of desire and points that the double arrow that produces a sort of hook asking the subject to say “what it means,” even when the signifier is as overloaded as “famillionnaire.”

As Lacan revisits his former close readings in December 1968, he notes the difference between having Heine’s character Hirsch Hyacinth refer to Salomon Rotschild as displaying a generous familiarity and possessing millions, and using the condensed *Witz* that calls Rotschild’s attitude “famillionnaire.” As Lacan says, we only laugh in the second case, and we laugh because a subject is “interested” in the exchange.³²

The subject convoked here will be demultiplied into several avatars, first the moment when Hirsch Hyacinth coins the funny portmanteau-word for a friend, then the moment when the friends tells the witticism to another friend: “This triplicity is maintained when the third one repeats the message in his turn.”³³ It is here that Lacan returns to his analysis of the capitalist:

“Where then is the sensitive spot of this famillionnarity? It will elude those who transmit it. What is at stake precisely is the novelty I have introduced into our discourse, and that I will not hesitate to transpose into the field, namely the capitalist subject. //What is the function of those who manage to pass between the links of the iron network of what is insufficiently summarized by the notion of the exploitation of some men by other men, I mean those who are not caught up in the extremities of the chain of exploitation, and who are they? They are employees. If this *Witz* causes laughter, it is because each of the interlocutors who meet as they exchange the gentle fun of this *famillionnairely* feels, even without knowing it, interested as an employee, or if you want, implicated as working in the tertiary sector.”³⁴

Here the pattern repeats Marx’s vignette in which we saw three men laughing; however, an important displacement has taken place: in Lacan’s reading, these men can only laugh because they are not millionnaires

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32 Lacan 2006b, p.52

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

themselves, but employees, people who envy the familiarity observed between Rothschild and Hirsh Hyacinth but from a distance. It is at this point that Lacan feels the need to add to his scheme the question of the Other: *Che vuoi?* What does the Other want?³⁵ Lacan, we may remember, keeps quoting Cazotte’s 1772 novella, *The Devil in Love*, in which the hero summons the devil, who appears to him under the features of a terrifying camel head with huge ears, asking the fatidic *Che vuoi?* After a series of metamorphoses, the devil turns into Biondetta, a most seductive young woman who can offer everything to the bemused Alvare. His growing sexual desire for her is thwarted by the knowledge that she is the devil—but a happy ending will be found.

We can thus conclude this analysis by saying that the capitalist laughs when he understands what the Other wants from him, just at the moment when he understands the essential joke upon which surplus-value is predicated. This is a link that Lacan developed in 1972, when he gave his talk on “Psychoanalytic Discourse” in Italy.³⁶ In this talk, Lacan returns to the capitalist discourse and even writes it on the blackboard. He then states this: “The capitalist discourse is not “ugly” (*moche*)—on the contrary, this is something that is amazingly clever (*astucieux*). Crazyly clever but bound for a puncture, a break down, a collapse (*crevaïson*).”³⁷ Lacan predicts that because the capitalist discourse is efficient, all too efficient, it presupposes its speedy progression, and therefore will have go too fast, and a headlong drive that will exceed itself: “... it works too fast, it consumes itself and eats up itself (*ça se consomme, ça se consomme si bien que ça se consume*).”³⁸ An endlessly exacerbated consumption will consumes itself and produce a burning out of the system.

I want to stress the adjective “*astucieux*,” which can be rendered as “clever,” but also “natty,” “wily,” “slick” or “crafty.” It derives from “*astuce*,” whose root is the Latin *astus*, meaning “cunning”; this colloquial word suggesting tricks, jokes, and witty repartees. Thus capitalism was not only founded on a trick, as we have seen with Marx, but also on the acceleration of this trickster economy. This is how modern economy combines the production of surplus-value and of surplus-jouissance.

Since I had to follow Lacan in Italy, I will quote an Italian philosopher whose work is attentive to the logics of jokes and to their political function. The question of the *Che vuoi?* of the capitalist system has been posed by Paolo Virno in his excellent book *Multitude: Between*

.....
35 Ibid., p.53

36 See Lacan 1972, pp. 32–55.

37 Ibid., p. 36.

38 Ibid.

Innovation and Negation.³⁹ Virno re-thinks Freud's theory of the joke so as to transform it into a revolutionary tool. *Multitude* develops a political theory of the joke that has a lot in common with Lacan's theory as stated in Seminar XVI. The point of departure for Virno is that any joke will produce a new word, a new term, as in a coining: we assist to the creation of a word that did not exist in the dictionary, as was the case with "famillionnairely." This performative moment is read as a way of doing new things with words, with a nod to Austin's theory of the performative.

Virno also notes that at least three persons are needed for a joke to be produced. In the simplest case, as with what Freud calls "tendentious jokes" or even "smut," we have the author of the joke, the target, and the neutral spectator.⁴⁰ (The laughter produced is with the third person, the witness who, by laughing, authenticates that there has been a joke indeed. Virno concludes by equating "joke" with "praxis" since the process has had the result of "doing something new with words."⁴¹ The third person is enough to turn the joke into a public and innovative action. Here is how Virno sums up his post-Aristotelian theory:

"The joke is an innovative action carried out in the public sphere in the presence of neutral spectators. Joke-making inscribes itself entirely within the framework of *praxis*. It entails the use of *phronesis*, that is to say, of practical know-how that allows us to assess what it is appropriate to carry out within a possible situation. *Praxis* and *phronesis*, however, pushed to the extreme, since the joke is an action that undermines and contradicts the prevalent belief-system of a community (*endoxa*), thus revealing the transformability of the contemporary form of life."⁴²

Virno adds that if a joke exhibits the discrepancy between rules and their applications, it also mimics the pattern of a moment of decision-making: each time, it is necessary to move beyond commonly accepted rules and take into account a broader picture of humanity, as when Antigone, according to Hegel's reading, subverts the laws of the city, taunting Creon, and subverting imposed edict in the name of her superior and non-written laws—this for Hegel, was the introduction of female irony into the closed circuit of the polis, which would lead to its dissolution.

Virno is one of the rare contemporary philosopher to stress one important feature of the joke: it corresponds to a sudden moment of decision, an instant of verbal triumph, a "sudden glory," as Hobbes would say, because it interrupts a certain weak consensus about things. Here,

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39 Virno 2008. I want to thank Joel McKim for having first pointed out to me the importance of the work of Paolo Virno.

40 Ibid., p.80

41 Ibid., p.82

42 Ibid., p.129

a joke "truncates",⁴³ just as Lacan would "cut" an analysand's sentence half-way to achieve the effect of a scansion; he would thus mark the end of a psychoanalytic session by severing the thread of discourse and letting one signifier appear in all its newly gained significance. Virno thus concludes: "The joke is an innovative action that decrees the state of exception. On a par with all other innovative actions, the joke also rises up from the rule to "the common behavior of humankind."⁴⁴ This theory has one main advantage: it critiques all the theses about jokes as embodying a momentary subversion, a "Mardis Gras hiatus when it is finally legitimate to transgress and mock the order that is in place during the normal work week."⁴⁵ (Virno, 2008, p. 165).

Lacan's interruptions were meant to have lasting effects, and not be considered as spontaneous outbursts that subside. One example suffices to show how Lacan's critical laughter managed to cut through certain discourses, even when he was in partial agreement with them. When Lacan laughs at Gide, when for once he lets down his guard and wails like a woman after his wife has burned their precious correspondence, he shows that laughter can be more than a weapon: a way of not being the accomplice in a personal drama, and of taking a critical position that puts things in perspective.

It is important to remember that the analysis of Gide's case was made in the same Seminar V in which Lacan examined Freud's theory of jokes. When Lacan discusses the famous scene in which we see Gide heartbroken, comparing the burning of his love letters by his wife whom he had abandoned to go to England with a young male lover with the killing of an infant, Lacan is not moved; on the contrary, he is amused and even laughs. He compares Gide's cry with that Harpagon, Molière's famous miser, who would cry out for a treasure that he thinks has been stolen, and repeatedly screams "My casket!," whereas he should be more concerned for his daughter's fate that is at stake then.⁴⁶ This derives from Gide's specific issue, his lack of sexual desire for a wife he wanted to marry—she had decided to destroy what was most precious after her husband had given proof of his attraction to a young man. "This woman that he does not desire can effectively be the object of a supreme love for him, and when this object with which her has filled the hole of love without desire disappears, he utters that miserable cry who similarity to the comical cry par excellence, that of the miser, 'My money box! My

.....
43 Ibid., p.121

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid., p.165

46 *Les Formations de l'Inconscient*, p. 261.

precious money box!..."⁴⁷ Unwittingly, Gide has turned into a character of comedy, even if this comedy comes close to tragedy.

Just as Harpagon bemoans the disappearance of a money box whereas he should investigate his daughter's loss, Gide could only understand what had happened later, when he had turned into a "man of letters," someone who could universalize a "truth" valid for all readers. When Lacan returns to that scene in his essay on Gide's youth taken up in *Ecrits*, he points out that comedy might usher in a process without any end: "It all ends with comedy, but who will put a stop to the laughter?"⁴⁸ In Seminar V, Lacan had already articulated comedy and tragedy, for he knew that the two genres had to be linked in the Greek theater. As he sees it, "...comedy was produced for the community, that is, insofar as, above itself, it constitutes the existence of Man as such,"⁴⁹ which chimes in with Virno's idea, already mentioned, that the comedy created by the joke rises up from the rule to reach the level of as "common behavior of humankind."⁵⁰ In his 1958 seminar, Lacan illustrates his theory with a discussion of Jean Genet's play *The Balcony*, a play that he frames within the concept of Christian communion. Genet's ferocious satire of the powers that be ends on a rather parodic note, with "Our Father who art in heaven," and Lacan asks: "The comedy ends there. Is it blasphemous? Is it comical? We can place the accent wherever we like."⁵¹

In this context, the equivalent of Virno's Schmittian "state of exception" for Lacan might have been the role he ascribed to the "saint" in the last decade of his life. It was in *Television* that Lacan offered a last detailed consideration about the links between laughter and capitalism—the key is the function of the saint, someone who both enjoys but embodies "the refuse of jouissance" (*rebut*), which suggests more dejection than rejection. The saint is characterized as someone who can act as the trash (*déchet*) of the symbolic system. Are we back to the quip on "*ordures ménagères*" mentioned at the beginning? Not really—for the saint bypasses any kind of distributive justice, any economy of rewards.

"The saint doesn't really see himself as righteous, which doesn't mean that he has no ethics. The only problem for others is that you can't see where it leads him. // I beat my brains against the hope that some like these will reappear. No doubt because I, myself, didn't manage to make it. // The

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47 Lacan 2017, p.245

48 Lacan 2006a, p.641

49 Lacan 2017, p.245

50 Virno 2008, p.121

51 Lacan 2017, p.252

more saints, the more laughter; that's my principle, to wit, the way out of capitalist discourse—which will not constitute progress, if it happens only for some."⁵²

Here, Lacan puns on the common French saying *Plus on est de fous, plus on rit* (the more, the merrier, but literally: the more mad people, the more laughter there is), changing *fous* to *saints*. Lacan seems to regret not having attained to sainthood himself—a few years later, his model would be James Joyce, a writer who identified as the saintly man of literature, the *saint home* of universal culture or the *sinthome* as such. This did not prevent the rather mad laughter of which Nora Joyce, his wife, would complain when she described her husband laughing alone at night when writing *Finnegans Wake*—not laughing alone but in mystical communion with his absent psychotic daughter who at the time was institutionalized in a psychiatric ward...

Here, for once, Lacan shows that we need to share a common ideal with all others—he points out that no individual solution will obtain facing capitalism; we have to be all saints, laughing saints at that, if we want to exit from capitalist discourse. Lacan's interventions, his scansions or interruptions, he knew it, could only be effective on certain modes of discourse. He was not going to erect barricades or throw Molotov cocktails, but he believed that a revolution could take place in mentalities. Actually, his influence after 1968 was sufficient to turn a whole generation away from "direct action," the sterile terrorism of the kind one saw in Italy --Virno himself was made to pay for this moment, although he did not approve the military armed struggle of certain groups--, or in Germany and Japan.

To his patients, Lacan would have to explain that, when he had stated that his ethics could be summarized as "never yield on your desire," as he says at the end of his seminar on the *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, this did not mean unleashing all libidinal desires against the powers of repression; to read him well, one had to be conscious that this ethics was above all a tragic ethics founded on the finitude of the subject. He would with Walter Benjamin who would point out that in the plays of the German baroque drama, jokers would always appear as a marionettes. They were inveterate *raisonneurs*, which transformed them into the stock characters of comedy, and thus made all these tragedies appear as tragicomedies. The *Lustspiel* was the other side of the *Trauerspiel*, in the same way as *Mehrlust* can be shown to be the reverse of *Mehrwert*.

The performative power that this critical laughter unleashes appeared at the conclusion of an interview given for the Belgian television in 1972. The journalist Françoise Wolff wanted to produce a

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52 Lacan 1990, p.16

program on Lacan that would explain his theories in simple and positive terms. Only at the end, did she dare voice an objection, which made her ask: “Then, under the cover of psychoanalysis, wouldn’t there be a repression of freedom?”⁵³ Startled, Lacan laughed and almost stuttered: “(Laughs) Yes... Those terms..., the word makes me laugh, yes... I never talk about freedom.” Obviously taken aback by such a naive question, but still trying to remain polite, Lacan hesitates, laughs, and finally states that the word “freedom” does not belong to his vocabulary. This is not totally exact, however, but indeed he would never use it in such a broad and vague way. If it is the case that the more saints there are, the more we laugh, we understand how Lacan rethinks in his idiomatic manner what Georges Bataille had been developing with the notion of an “accursed share.” But we can continue singing:

O when the saints go laughing in...
 Yes, I want to be in that number,
 When the Saints go laughing in...

Wishing to be a saint, although not really being a saintly man himself, attempting to straddle the theories of Freud and Marx at a time when they were begin to pull away from each other, Lacan was caught up in a living paradox. The paradox can be approximated by applying to his “personality” (a term that, as he said in his dissertation on paranoia, would allude to the comic or tragic masks worn by actors) what Flaubert writes about Homer: he never existed (if he had existed, why would Lacan keep referring to “Lacan,” talking about himself in the third person?), but all the same he was famous for his Homeric laughter...

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 53 Françoise Wolff’s “Interview pour la television belge,” in her documentary “Jacques Lacan Parle” (1972) online in Purple Diary.

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The For-All: Grappling With the Real of the Group

Jelica Šumič

Abstract: In this essay I propose to explore the status of the not-all in politics and psychoanalysis by analyzing and bringing into question the seemingly self-evident relationship of the mutual exclusion between politics and psychoanalysis. I would argue that in order to expose an affinity in dealing with the not-all in politics and psychoanalysis, it is necessary to move beyond the traditionally hostile polarities of the singular and the universal and to reverse the usual perspective according to which there is no passage between the domain of the singular and the domain of the universal. I then move on to considering the relationship between psychoanalysis and politics from the point of view of the collectivity for-all constituted through a complex practice of disidentification and the production of the ‘whatever’ singularities.

Keywords: Freud, Lacan, psychoanalysis, politics, not-all, for-all

All politics seeks to deal with a real, an impossibility proper to politics, upon which it cannot but stumble, namely that of the collective. Modern politics, since at least the French Revolution, has sought to treat this real, i.e. the impossibility of the social bond that would hold together speaking beings that have nothing in common, under the guise of collectivity which would be for all. And yet from what we might consider to constitute the common ground of modern politics, a radical distinction can be established between two figures of the for-all. There are, indeed, two ways of thinking the for-all, two ways of constituting it. First, it can be theorized or produced with a view to the One. This would, at base, be a “normal” or a “typical” for-all, one grounded on a process of identifying or assuming a common trait: for there to be a group, it is necessary that its members are hooked up to the same identificatory trait.¹ This is a paradoxical “for-all” since the condition for its very constitution requires the exclusion of the exception, of some heterogeneity, that is presumed to lacking the common trait. But to this figure of the closed, consistent for-all, in which for-all means to be reduced to the One, we may oppose another: that of an open, non-totalizable, a not-all for-all, a for-all that emerges when the multitude of speaking-beings is considered from the point of view of that which is non-identifiable in them.

How, then, ought we to grasp this inherent split, this constitutive division of the field of politics? It is not enough to declare that the first approach—that of the politics of identification—using of all the imaginary

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¹ Of course, what is collective in this regard is the relation to the exception. We find the very matrix of this problem in Freud’s famous essay on group psychology. For Freud, a community of equals is “a number of individuals who have put one and the same object in the place of their ego and have consequently identified themselves with one another in their ego.” In other words, the tie binding each isolated individual to the leader generates the ties binding the individuals in the group to each other. They identify with one another through an equally shared love for a single object. Freud 1924, p. 80.

and symbolic apparatuses—covers up the real of the group, since in the place of the latter it summons up an “all the same.” For what is at stake is not just a question of denouncing a false for-all. What is at stake, rather, is the staging of a for-all that comes into being through a process that goes against the grain of identification, a for-all that is constituted through a practice of disidentifications. The thorny question that needs to be grappled with consists in ascertaining what is entailed by such a politics—by a politics which is neither organized around a resemblance nor a differentiating trait, but which is nevertheless capable of producing a for-all.

Our guide here will be one of Lacan’s rather enigmatic remarks. As he put it, “desire, boredom, confinement, revolt, prayer, wakefulness [...], and panic are evidence of the dimension of this Elsewhere [...] as permanent principles of collective organizations, without which it does not seem human life can maintain itself for long.”² Now, if it is true that each of these affects that Lacan adduces as evidence of the glue that keeps the for-all together only ever appear in the moment of their disintegration, the moment of the disaggregation of the collective in which the latter—retroactively, to be sure—appears as impossible, then the politics of disidentification can, as a consequence, only ever find its place in a deficiency; in a dis-completion of the for-all such as it is produced by the politics of identification. A politics of disidentification would, moreover, designate this deficiency or dis-completion as the place of the very real from which it receives its condition.

All politics, however, and especially the politics of disidentification—there are, incidentally, plenty of other names we could use for this irruption, this fracture introduced into a series of various modalities for sharing and managing of goods and social relations: politics of the real, of pure singularity, of emancipation, etc.—is only ever worth its name to the degree that the for-all it strives for can be put to work in a workable, realistic manner. If the latter is only put forward as a utopian proposition, such politics will be immediately disqualified as being, to use Lacan’s term, nothing but a “narcissism of the lost cause.”

Realism constitutes furthermore the perspective from which we can think through the relationship between psychoanalysis and politics because such a perspective will allow us to rethink the intertwining of the categories of politics and those of psychoanalysis, an intertwining that ultimately allows them to define the for-all as an instance of the real in the order of the not-all. We may of course wonder about the justification, or the consequences, involved in transposing the for-all in the order of the real; and it is indeed for this reason that I will begin by evoking some of the difficulties encountered once psychoanalysis and politics attempt to think the for-all with a view to the not-all. Hence, in order to follow the

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² Lacan 2006a, pp. 457-458.

logic of the not-all, I will take the following three guiding threads through the question of the status of the group: that of the paradoxes of the not-all; that of the real; and, finally, that of transmission.

The Polar Bear and the Whale: Bringing about an Encounter³

Let us start by simply asking the following question: how are psychoanalysis and politics different and how, or to what degree, despite these differences, are they comparable? According to the received idea, there seems to be no common ground permitting their encounter. In this view, psychoanalysis is presumed to be defending the rights of the singular, of that precisely which resists the universal. Indeed, psychoanalysis is by definition the domain of the “not for all”. As such, psychoanalysis cannot, without losing its competence, force the boundaries of confidentiality imposed by its practice to wander into a domain in which, on the contrary, something is valid only insofar as it applies to all. From this view, psychoanalysis has no competence in the domain destined “for all”. Politics, by contrast, designed as the order of the collective, deals with the masses, with the multiple. In so far as politics is preoccupied with the question of that which is valid for all, can only turn a blind eye to the singular: the proper object of psychoanalysis. For politics, in which there seems to be no place for the singular, it would be an illegitimate step to make the opposite move: from the “for all” to that of the “only for one”. Indeed, if we follow the received idea, what makes their encounter impossible is a double interdiction of the passage from the register of the singular to that of the multiple. Whence the question: Under what conditions is it justifiable to bring together politics and psychoanalysis? How, on what basis, are we to establish a link between the field of the for-all and that of the singular—between these two fields that, at first glance, appear as mutually exclusive of one another.

Although it may seem that all attempts at bringing together psychoanalysis and politics would be vain, indeed ought to be abandoned, we are unavoidably led back to this very question precisely because the rejection, if not indeed the exclusion, of the perspective of the collective is a postulate nowhere to be found in either Freud or Lacan. Quite to the contrary, in the very first sentence of “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego,” Freud will call into question the opposition between individual and social psychology. He founds his entire theoretical approach on the observation that: “someone else is invariably involved as a model, as an object, as a helper, as an opponent.”⁴ “Individual Psychology,” he notes further, “is at the same time Social Psychology

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³ “The whale and the polar bear, it has been said, cannot wage war on each other, for since each is confined to his own element they cannot meet...” Freud, 1932-1936, p. 410.

⁴ Freud 1924, p. 2.

as well.”⁵ As for Lacan, he would conclude that “the collective is nothing but the subject of the individual,”⁶ not only because the individual could not exist without the collective, but also because the subject is itself “transindividual.” As he underscores, it is impossible to extricate the individual from the enmeshment of social relations—that is to say, from the Other—in which its formation and emergence is inscribed.

And this passage from the One to the Multiple that is opened up by psychoanalysis could help us go around the received idea we started out from and examine under what circumstances the relation between these two domains, that of the “for all” and that of the “irreducible singularity”, can be established. To do so we propose to consider—from an inverted perspective—whether or not, and up to what point, the effect of instantiating a for-all in the field of politics isn’t to ratify that which, at first glance, seems to preclude the question of universality: namely, pure singularities, or whatever singularities.⁷ Conversely, it will be in the way that psychoanalysis treats that which can only be said to one alone, that we will need to locate the possibility of a transmission to all.

Our guide in this pivoting of perspective, will be Lacan. We will refer, more specifically, to his *Television*, in which he presents the task of psychoanalysis in a universe governed by the capitalist discourse. For indeed as Lacan argues, a way out of capitalism is an end peculiar to psychoanalysis: “The more saints, the more laughter; that’s my principle;” adding further, “to wit, the way out of capitalist discourse, which will not constitute progress, if it happens only for some.”⁸ However, it is important to consider how psychoanalysis can emerge as a way out of the capitalist discourse. It is true that Lacan harboured some ambitions concerning the “duty incumbent upon [psychoanalysis] in our world.”⁹ Still, the question is how psychoanalysis can constitute a way out of this discourse which, constantly being pushed further by the imperatives of growth and profitability, neither recognizes any limit, nor admits any territory that might escape its ever-expanding sway. What kind of solution, then, can psychoanalysis offer ?

At first glance, it might appear that the solution put forth by Lacan is valid only for psychoanalysis—that it is restricted, in sum, to the

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5 Ibid.

6 Lacan 2006b, p. 175.

7 The author borrows this term from Giorgio Agamben, for whom “[t]he *Whatever* in question here relates to singularity not in its indifference with respect to a common property [...], but only in its being such as it is,” in Agamben 1991, p. 1. That is to say, a singularity can be termed whatever in so far as the term “whatever singularity” implies all of its predicates, but such that no single one of them constitutes its difference.

8 Lacan 1990a, p. 16.

9 Lacan, 1990b, p. 97.

enclosures of the analyst’s office. This would simply be another way of saying that, in an era in which we are overwhelmed by the effects of the “extensive, and therefore insatiable, production of lack-of-enjoyment”—a production characterized by its “incapacity to procure an enjoyment that could allow it to slow down”—¹⁰ it is incumbent upon psychoanalysis, and upon psychoanalysis alone, to occupy the position of a protective enclave in which the subject can be allowed to safely preserve its singularity. And this from within the confines of the very capitalism whose unrelenting powers of negation are so manifestly and calamitously played out everywhere on scales at once individual and collective. Such would be an elitist interpretation of the psychoanalytic solution,¹¹ one that seeks to situate psychoanalysis on the side of a defensive segregation along the lines of Lacan’s warning that “our future of common markets will balance itself out in an increasingly brutal extension of processes of segregation.”¹²

Of course, there has always been an aspect of psychoanalysis that entailed the creation of a refuge, a shelter—a protective dimension that has been indispensable not just for its practice, but for its theoretical elaboration as well. And yet, the specific phrase Lacan uses—namely that the way out of capitalism “will not constitute progress if it happens only for some”—ought to make us wary of this so-called elitist, not to say the “segregative” interpretation. The emphasis placed on the negation of the particular seems to me, rather, to introduce the possibility of a “democratic” reading; and this in the form of an “all analysts,” or at the very least, in the guise of an appeal to those seeking a cure to contemporary civilization’s discontents to go through the trial of the psychoanalytic experience. In other words, for Lacan, if this way out is really going to prove to be the way out of capitalism, it cannot be reserved for the happy few, for a “club of the (s)elect,” to borrow Éric Laurent’s turn of phrase: that is for “a sort of elite that, having undergone the experience of analysis, would be able to gaze upon the accumulated wreckage of capitalism and cynically laugh it all off.”¹³

If we take as our point of departure this caveat against any interpretation of the way out in terms of an initiatory ritual, can we conclude that the way out that Lacan evokes is—while remaining the way

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10 Lacan 2001a, p. 435.

11 And a certain form of elitism is not entirely foreign to psychoanalysis, as Freud’s example itself attests. When, for instance, it is a question of describing the position of the analysis in his *Introductory Lectures On Psychoanalysis*, Freud claims that “anyone who has succeeded in educating himself to truth about himself is permanently defended against the danger of immorality, even though his standard of morality may differ in some respect from that which is customary in society.” Freud, 1932-1936, p. 410.

12 Lacan 2001b, p. 257.

13 Laurent 1997, p. 111.

out accommodated to the not-all, that is to say, a way out that is enacted on a one by one basis—immediately universalizable, intended for all? That it is *for all*? And if, furthermore, it is the case that psychoanalysis, as Lacan seems to suggest, strives for an opening onto the for all; if, in other words, psychoanalysis allows for a breaking-out, a forcing of the confines of the private or the confidential, what is the scope of this break? What is its political impact?

We have every reason to linger over this question because it holds out the possibility of a passage from the singularity of subjective experience to a certain form of universalization. Such a passage, of course, is not explicitly thematized by Lacan. And yet, while starting from the postulate that the psychoanalytic experience is irremediably foreign to any attempt at universalization, the above-mentioned formula nevertheless holds out the promise of an opening-out onto universalization, thus providing a solution, a way out of the fragmentation, if not the collapse, of the category of the universal that we witness today. What's more, Lacan himself seem to anticipate this opening. In the care with which he underscores the effects of civilization's discontents on contemporary subjectivity he universalizes, as it were, the solution of psychoanalysis—psychoanalysis as solution—by bringing into its purview the political question of the exit from capitalism. In this regard, the great value of Lacan's formula is to provide a kind of short-cut, an abbreviated form of what we are attempting to unpack here: namely, a knotting of the singular and the for-all in the order of the not-all.

It bears pointing out that, in thinking through the two figures of the universal—the all and the not-all—, Lacan never situates the term “for all” on the side of the not-all. Quite to the contrary, he tends to deploy the term “for all” as a synonym of the All, of the closed set constituted through the exclusion of an exception, whereas, for Lacan, the not-all signals the limitless and the inconsistent in which it is hopelessly impossible to construct an All without also generating antinomies and inequalities. It is therefore imperative to show how the for-all—such as we are striving to elaborate here—is nevertheless located at the very core of Lacan's thought on the universal. This for-all, however, is something yet to be constructed, yet to be invented in order to be made compatible with the Lacanian notion of the not-all, which in turn implies opening up the category of the not-all so as to accommodate the for-all. Everything turns here around the meaning we attribute to the statement: “it [does not happen] only for some.” For at stake in this question is knowing whether “not only for some” excludes or not “for all”. It should be noted, however, that I take that statement as indicating “some, without excluding all,” which doubtless constitutes something of a deviation from the more canonically Lacanian reading of it as “some but not all”. My claim is that the expression “not only for some” points in the direction of the “for all”. To be sure, this is a very peculiar “for all” since, in the not-all, that is, in

an infinite universe in which this “for-all” is situated, it is impossible to state the universality of the predicate.

In order to justify the linkage of the for-all and the not-all that I am positing it suffices to tease out the double paradox at the heart of Lacan's proposed solution. On the one hand, such a solution is a paradoxical one since we are dealing here with an interior way out, as it were, a paradoxical way out which implies no transgression, no forcing of a barrier, since there is no barrier separating the outside and the inside.¹⁴ This is because psychoanalysis, according to Lacan, is confronted with a paradoxical task: to find a way out of a discourse which is considered to be limitless, “eternal”, a discourse which precisely knows of no way out. It could, then, be said that, for Lacan, only psychoanalysis is capable to invent, to force even, in the situation of an impasse, a radically new solution: that of an immanent way out. On the other hand, this solution aims at a for-all to be constituted from irreducibly singular experience, in an experience which, quite like the ritual of initiation, demands a certain conditioning on the part of the subject and is thus, precisely, *not* for all.

The crucial question here is of course that of knowing how, from *within* the not-all, a void is hollowed out, an empty space that can only be occupied by summoning all. From there, it is a question of examining the way in which the properly psychoanalytic practice that proceeds on the basis of a “one by one”, relates to the way-out which is available to all, encompassing, ultimately, all of humanity. And this latter question is an eminently political one. One could of course examine the politics of psychoanalysis by limiting this interrogation to the issues of the psychoanalytic institutions and organizations, I believe, for my part, that a more fruitful approach might consist in interrogating the political dimension of psychoanalysis itself, such as can be derived from its practice proceeding on the one-by-one basis, with the ultimate goal of re-examining from the perspective of psychoanalysis, the question of politics as such.

What can psychoanalysis teach us about politics proper? In what way can Lacan's teaching on his School—its deadlocks and failures, its dissolution and reconstruction—serve as a point of reference for our inquiries into political collectives and, more broadly, into the knot binding politics to psychoanalysis?

“The unconscious is politics”¹⁵

The merit of the Lacanian assumption that the “unconscious is politics” consists in signifying that the relation to the unconscious is constitutive of the social link precisely to the extent that it generates, at the same

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¹⁴To my mind, this is how we must read Badiou's claim that “only what is in immanent exception is universal”, Badiou 2003, p.111.

¹⁵ Lacan 1966-1967, the lesson of 10 May 1967.

time, the latter's deadlock. It should be noted, however, that, for Freud, the relationship between psychoanalysis and politics is to be located in the passage from analysis of the subject to that of the collective, and it takes identification as the operator of this passage from the one to the collective. The Freudian approach thus revealed the pivotal role of castration and of the exception in the emergence of the collective (and not just any collective: what is at stake here is the production of the collective "for all"). Equality designates, in this case, a form of collectivity in which renunciation of jouissance is the universal law: not a single one escapes it! With the exception, of course, of the obscene enjoying Father who says no to castration. This for-all, which Freud elaborates through the myth of the primal father snatching all jouissance through the exclusive possession of all of the women, is thus predicated upon the paradoxical conjecture that the order of the for-all is only ever valid for those who consider jouissance to be a property and fear its loss. Whence the question of ascertaining whether or not those who have nothing to lose can be part of the for-all. In a word, Freud is already working both with identification as that which aims towards the group's unification and with the real that divides the group from within, pointing thus towards the not-all.

Whereas in "Group Psychology" Freud began by introducing the question of the collective as a problem of identification, he eventually tackles the question of the collective from the perspective of that which resists identification—a remainder of the real that does not find its place in the symbolic and which, for that very reason, constitutes the mainspring of rebellion.¹⁶ And it is particularly remarkable—though we have to wait for Lacan to work out certain implications at the level of structure—that for Freud it is women who embody this node of the real resisting identification; a resisting remnant that prevents us from spelling out the All at the level of mankind.

To continue further in this vein, if every manifestation of such a residue manages to detotalize or rupture the unity of the All, it would be possible to consider the people, the proletariat, clandestine immigrants, refugees, and, why not?, women as so many figures of those who "have nothing to lose" whose very presence introduces cleavages in the order of the distribution of goods and social roles. And, as Jacques Rancière has so persuasively shown, the act of speaking out (*la prise de parole*) by those who have no place in a given social and symbolic order can bring about not only a collapse of that order but also the emergence of a non-segregative for-all, a peculiar not-all for-all.

Thus already Freud, although implicitly, managed to distinguish between two logics of the universal: on the one hand, there is a logic of

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 16 Need we remind the reader that when Jean-François Lyotard conceptualizes resistance in terms of a real, the intractable, as he calls it, resisting the established social-symbolic order, he is simply following this path first cut by Freud?

the All that is segregative to the extent that its very constitution follows from the exception or exclusion of all those who do not share the required property or attribute. On the other hand, there is the logic of the not-all which is non-segregative by dint of the very impossibility to ascertain the existence of any exception whatsoever. Yet this not-all whose emergence is so subtly heralded, like a muffled clamor still located far off in the distance, in the *Massenpsychologie*, brutally erupts in *Civilization and its Discontents*. One might say that the emergence of the not-all alerts Freud to the impasses of the for-all at the level of humanity taken as a whole. Indeed, picking back up a thread of analysis pursued in the "Group Psychology" essay, he attempts to demonstrate implicitly in *Civilization and its Discontents* that humanity is not something that can be defined according to a positive trait attributed to man, but rather only according to a rejection; by an exclusion dissimulated in the guise of a supposed knowledge: "a man knows what is not a man."¹⁷ It is for this reason that Lacan denounces barbarism of all human assimilation refers in his essay on "Logical Time..." to "human assimilation [...] as assimilative of barbarism"¹⁸—that is to say, as the lurid manifestation of the Other's persecution.

That's one way of rendering Freud's claim that when it comes to his fellow man, and no less with his fellow woman, man maintains the same relationship of hatred that he has with himself. That, in other words, lacking a positive attribute or trait which would definitively pin down man's humanity, the human collective remains a not-all, open-ended. Whence a sentiment of malaise, as well as, inevitably, the temptation of dealing with this discontent in one of two ways: either through the persecution of one's fellow-man;¹⁹ or through the assimilation of barbarity, by following the precept of loving one's neighbor as oneself. Still, the paradoxical effect of this drive to encompass all the possible figures of the Other within humanity, even those of the enemy or the "savage," is that of a detotalization, a *not-alling (pas-toutisation)*, of humanity. Thus humanity, to follow Freud, emerges as a figure of the inconsistent not-all. Not-all to the degree that there is no outside or exception in reference to which humanity could be totalized, designated as an "All". This point of exception from which an All, a totality, could be asserted is, precisely,

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 17 It is because I am deprived of knowing exactly which qualities a human being is supposed to possess, while attributing, at the same time, this knowledge to others, that I hasten to confirm my belonging to humankind, to affirm that I am "a man for fear of being convinced by men that I am not a man." Lacan 2006b, p. 174.

18 Ibid.

19 It bears pointing up that, as early as *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud highlighted the constitutive role played in collective identification by the relation to the enemy, to the neighbor, in a word, to the Other: "it is unmistakable," he claims, "that in this whole connection men give evidence of a readiness for hatred, an aggressiveness, the source of which is unknown, and to which one is tempted to ascribe an elementary character." Freud, 1924, p. 56.

impossible where humanity is concerned. No member of humanity, at this level, can recognize in any single other, man or woman, an exception that would constitute the latter as a totality.

And yet, the exception is not purely and simply denied. It would be better to say that, at the level of the whole of humanity, the exception makes a hole. For, precisely because we are never sure of dealing with an “All”, at any moment we might also encounter someone who says no to humanity. Hence, there can be an endless examination of men and women, one by one, concerning their “human” property, yet at any moment can it be ascertained that the whole of humans is closed, that it constitutes an All. And this is where contingency comes into play. Given that the exception is only ever encountered at the level of the not-all in an unpredictable, aleatory form, it is safe to conclude that the logic of the not-all is no less undecidable regarding the for-all.

Hence, what we are dealing with here is a certain realism of the not-all. Precisely because it allows for no set law, the not-all imposes a kind of “knowing how to make do with (*savoir y faire avec*)”.²⁰ A certain “realism” can be detected in Freud, a realism that entails a way of getting-by or making do with that which is: this is especially the case, for instance, when it is a question of knowing how the givens of existence (that is to say, the presence or absence in a body of masculine attributes) are subjectivized for each speaking being. Lacan will not hesitate to use the term “realism” either. The signification that he attributes to this word, however, is not quite the same as with Freud: he takes up the Freudian term while operating a displacement, or a reversal of meaning, at the same time. But what exactly are we to make of Lacan’s realism?

“A group is real”

Let us begin our discussion of the not-all’s realism, by taking up Lacan’s proposition concerning the collective as belonging to the order of the real. Although this proposition is not directly concerned with the field of politics, it all the same brings us back to politics by simple virtue of the way it detects and locates the workings of the real in the psychoanalytic experience at collective and subjective levels. “The analyst claims to be the guardian of collective reality,” notes Lacan, adding further, “without even having any competence to do so.”²¹

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20 Translator’s note: the expression used here, *un savoir y faire avec*, conveys or contains several senses at once, not excluding some which are present, allusively, at the level of the work of the signifiers used. “*Savoir y faire avec*” designates the idea of having a knack for something, a kind of *savoir-faire*, but the final part of the locution evokes the famous French “système-D”, *le faire avec* as a way of getting by, making do in the face of unfavorable circumstances. (Finally, in the context of the author’s discussion of the for-all and the not-all, the intransitive “avec” at the end of the expression here cannot but conjure up something of the objectless “with-ness” of being.)

21 “L’analyste se fait le gardien de la réalité collective sans en avoir même la compétence.” Lacan 2001c, p. 359.

What this claim foregrounds is the untenable position in which the analyst finds him/herself. Like everyone else, the analyst gets tangled up in the real because his/her choice of being comes at the price of an “I do not think” (*un je ne pense pas*).²² Yet this alienation that affects each speaking being is intensified in the case of the analyst who, unlike everyone else, knows it. And this knowledge, what’s more, is of a special kind for, like all knowledge, it loses its relevance if it only finds its support in one alone (*s’il se soutient d’un seul*). Lacan himself affirms as much, insisting that the analyst’s knowledge “is not bearable (*portable*) because no knowledge can be borne out by one alone.” In short, an autistic knowledge, a knowledge that is inaccessible to others is not a knowledge at all. Thus, while acknowledging that no knowledge can exist without a collectivity to uphold it, Lacan proceeds to add a further, surprising twist by way of conclusion. “Whence [the analyst’s] association with those who only take part in this knowledge with him by not being able to exchange it. Psychoanalysts are specialists (*savants*) of a knowledge (*savoir*) with which they cannot sustain themselves.”²³

On the one hand, then, the knowledge about the real seems to condemn the analyst to remain prisoner of the analytic solipsism. But, on the other hand, this knowledge, which cannot be shared, cannot be transmitted from one to the other, also affects, or perhaps infects, the group to the degree that this knowledge renders the latter impossible. On this score, being “realistic” simply means accepting, in Lacan’s formulation, that “a group is real” (*un groupe, c’est reel*), which amounts to affirming that it is impossible. The analyst may indeed be a guardian—not, to be sure, of a particular knowledge or doctrine, but—of a collective reality; at no point, however, is s/he the yardstick by which that collective reality is measured. In other words, if psychoanalysis produces a new theory of the subject, it does not produce a community. It does produce, however, a collectivity capable of incorporating the real that its experience brings about. The collectivity that thus emerges, as Lacan notes, is far from being “cleansed of group imperatives” and is thus founded on an impossibility, because psychoanalysts cannot maintain themselves with a knowledge of which they are meant to be the sole keepers. How, then, might this group, which is ever exposed to its own dissolution, be maintained? Would not such a collectivity always already have been doomed to dispersal?

In addition, or alongside, the clarification pertaining to the status of the group real that I want to outline here, there is another, more important problem that calls for greater scrutiny. Namely: if we are to take seriously

.....
22 Ibid., p. 358.

23 *C’est ce savoir qui n’est pas portable, de ce que nul savoir ne puisse se porter d’un seul. D’où son association à ceux qui ne partagent avec lui ce savoir qu’à ne pas pouvoir l’échanger. Les psychanalystes sont les savants d’un savoir dont ils ne peuvent s’entretenir.* Ibid.

Lacan's argument about the real of the group, and more specifically, about its impossibility, what are its implications for the possibility of the for-all? What's more, if psychoanalysis truly does hold the key to the deadlocks in which all politics striving for the universal, for the All, finds itself enclosed, is it possible for as much to affirm that psychoanalysis universalizes this impasse? Let us first ask how psychoanalysis intertwines with politics, from what angle. Paradoxically, as it may appear at first glance, it does so from the angle of "the impossibility of the group.

Some important points concerning the political scope of the real of the group has been added to this discussion by Jean-Claude Milner and Alain Badiou. Consider, for instance, the former's landmark *Indistinct Names*, in which Milner foregrounds the deadlocks that politics finds itself trapped as soon as it attempts to establish the for-all in the register of the infinite. Milner thus distinguishes between three types of classes or group assemblage, three modes of assembly²⁴: imaginary class, which is founded on a putatively pre-existing property; symbolic class, which flows directly from the performativity of the signifier itself (thus, subjects are interpellated by and respond to the same name); and real class, the sole type of assembly which is compatible with the not-all and which is distinct from the others in that it is grounded neither in a signifier, nor in an attribute or property, but aims at that which is irreducibly singular in each of its members. Such real or "paradoxical classes", as Milner termed them, are forms of collectivity in which its members are joined or held together by that which disjoins them, namely, their idiosyncratic mode of enjoyment. Real classes, then, constitute inconsistent assemblies, paradoxically destined from the beginning for dissolution, for dispersion.

Likewise, in *Conditions*, Alain Badiou takes stock of the fundamental impossibility of a for-all collectivity that would be, at the same time, not-all, that is to say, the impossibility of there being in our world a generic, non-bounded collective composed of singularities without differential traits which would allow them to be hierarchically organized. Indeed, rather than asserting the for-all composed of singularities "in the non-descript nature and the egalitarian anonymity of [their] presentation as such,"²⁵ Badiou notes that contemporaneous collectives—even those which lay claim to universality—tend to be persecutory and segregative in nature. Ground in some supposedly pre-existing predicate, they exclude all those who do not share the required property.

This Lacanian argument thus re-affirmed, we may draw the following, at first glance mutually exclusive, conclusions: first, if the group

24 Milner 1983, pp. 116-123.

In French, the noun *rassemblement* denotes somewhat generically any assembly, but it also invariably carries a distinctly *political* connotation—it marks a coming-together of a multiple in a common share or idea (a crowd demonstrating in the streets, a political party, etc.) [Translator's note.]

25 Badiou 2008, p. 174.

belongs to the order of the real—if in effect no egalitarian collective can be constituted without recourse either to the exception or to the exclusion (which would confirm the impossibility of its totalization as well as the structural nature of the not-all)—, then all politics that proclaims itself as universally valid can only either be illusory or totalitarian. Let's call this first conclusion the cynical interpretation of the "realism" of politics. The second conclusion would be the inversion the first one. To wit: if the group belongs to the order of the real, then it can only be thought, practiced, experienced and experimented as a species of the for-all, albeit in the guise of a "not-all-ified" for-all (*un pour tous 'pastoutisé'*) that calls into question every predication, every common trait supposedly pre-existing the group's constitution.

Derived as it is from the proposition that "the group is real," this second conclusion is anything but misguided. Rather, it presents a principle for thinking the collective, a way of practicing a form of collectivity that is compatible with the not-all. The very principle, in fact, of the politics of the real. This principle, furthermore, demands the articulation of the proposition, "the analyst becomes the guardian of collective reality" to a proposition which, precisely, would appear to put into question the idea of collective reality in its affirmation that "the group is real", and thus impossible. While this articulation can be interrogated from a number of perspectives, what is of particular interest for the present discussion are its implications for politics. For questioning it from this angle may allow us to address the problem at the core of the present analysis: namely, how might psychoanalysis allow us to redefine the politics of the real?

Before we answer this question, we will have to first grapple with a problem raised by an apparent contradiction between Lacan's proposition about the real of the group and the proposition put forth in *Television*—a proposition which would appear lead to the opposite conclusion to the degree that psychoanalysis is put forward there as a way out of capitalism open to each and every one, in short, to "All", whether analysts or not; a way out for all, even if the for-all towards which psychoanalysis strives cannot be brought into being "as a group" but, rather, on the basis of a "one by one". A shift in Lacan's reflections on politics in general and, more specifically, on the functioning of a psychoanalytical institution whose principal task would be the transmission of a radically singular experience such as can only be encountered in an analysis, is marked by a paradoxical thesis according to which: a group is the real, that is, according to Lacan's vocabulary, a radical impossibility. If Lacan's proposition on the impossible of the group is of consequence for us—and we will come back to this point in order to draw out some of its consequences for the politics of the real—it is to the precise degree that, when he founds his school, *Ecole de la Cause*, School of the Cause, on the group real, on the impossibility of the group, Lacan simultaneously enacts

a form of “knowing how to make do with” (*un savoir y faire avec*) the impossibility of the group. Thus, if we propose to consider Lacan’s thesis about the real of the group seriously, this is precisely because Lacan, while insisting on the impossibility of the group, by founding his School, nevertheless succeeded in demonstrating that there is a way of dealing with this impossibility.

Our assumption here is that psychoanalysis can only be of interest to philosophy and to politics to the degree that it has been able to span a fragile bridge between its fidelity to singularity, which is to say, to radical contingency, and an opening onto universality that is born out by its ambition of transmitting what it has to say to everyone, which is to say, to All. And so it is here, too, that we can pick back up the thread of the argument that Lacan pursues in *Television*, namely that it wouldn’t be worth losing an hour of anyone’s time on psychoanalysis if everyone, each and every one, is not concerned by what it has to say.

What is it, then, in psychoanalysis that could take on the sense of a “for all”? It obviously has to be pointed out that, even if the subject of the unconscious is universal, the way in which each of us is caught up in the unconscious is, for its part, absolutely singular. Lacan gives us a sense of this in his “Founding Act,” from 1964: “a praxis of theory is required, without which the order of affinities delineated by the sciences we call conjectural will remain at the mercy of that political drift which rises by dint of the illusion of universal conditioning.”²⁶

But in putting us on guard against “the illusion of universal conditioning” that science produces in the master’s discourse that treats each and everyone without taking into account that which differentiates them, Lacan thus seems to refer us back to the received idea according to which there is a fundamental opposition between whatever pertains to the domain of the “for all” and that of psychoanalysis that stands in the way of the “for all” precisely because psychoanalysis is sustained by a resistance to the sway of the universal that is materialized in the particularity of the subject’s mode of enjoyment. Except that, with Lacan, the singular is not, as one might imagine, brought to the fore in order to exalt it, but rather to denounce its complicity with the “totalitarian” sway of “universal conditioning.” For the illusion of mastery provokes a kind of mirror-image illusion in the neurotic subject struggling to not be like others, to preserve its exceptionalness.

Hence, to repeat once more, what kind of horizon for the “for all” is opened up by the psychoanalytic experience? Obviously, the “for all” of psychoanalysis, in as much as psychoanalysis inaugurates one—which is hardly a foregone conclusion—, needs to be distinguished from that which is instantiated by science, in mathematics for instance. If mathematics is structurally addressed to All; that is, if,

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26 Lacan 1990b, p. 99.

as one generally assumes, it is for-all, this is because mathematics is inextricably intertwined with demonstration. The for-all established by mathematics refers to anyone as long as they are capable of carrying out a demonstration, of repeating it. Such is the lesson we can take from Plato’s *Meno*: anyone—even a slave boy—is capable of reproducing a geometrical proof, provided that they have the will to do so. No prior, initiatory experience is required. All that is necessary is an axiom—once the axiom is given, it functions automatically, in a totally impersonal, desubjectivized, if not indeed acephalous, manner. This doubtless also explains the curious indifference of the mathematical for-all when it comes to the number of those capable of reproducing a demonstration. Indeed, even if the for-all presumed to animate mathematics ends up being reduced to the handful of those—or even the single individual—able to check the demonstration, to verify the proof, this would not invalidate the mathematical for-all in the slightest, given that this “at least (some) one” is enough to enact the for-all of which this “at least (some)one” is in some sense the place-holder.

By contrast, the for-all poses a problem for psychoanalysis to the extent that, unlike in the case of mathematics, this dimension of the for-all is not a priori assumed to be operative for psychoanalysis. And this, for two reasons: first, the instance set to work in psychoanalysis is not the matheme or the axiom. It is the subject taken in its singularity. Which is where the following question comes in: when it is a question of that which is most specifically singular to the subject, how can we know what can or cannot be transmitted to others in the psychoanalytic experience? And, indeed, the knowledge that the subject is supposed to achieve in analysis is not, strictly speaking, transferable. And this is the case not merely because the analysand’s knowledge is only relevant to her/himself, but above all because it is a form of knowledge that—being incomplete, open-ended, presumably something yet to-come, obtained in the future—appears as a set of theorems lacking exactly that thing which would allow them to be verified: namely, an axiom. Second, the for-all poses a problem because the aim of psychoanalysis is to provide an axiom for that which determines the subject in its absolute particularity. Taking as its premise the subject as a singular, non-universalizable response of the real, the goal of psychoanalysis is to produce a formula that is valid for this subject in particular, and thus for no one else, but which must be verifiable nevertheless.

Lacan’s is categorical on this point: in order for the particular to gain access to the truth, this access needs to be grounded in a discourse such “that (although [psychoanalytic discourse] may proceed merely from the one to the one—that is, from the particular) something new can be conceived and is able to be transmitted as incontestably by this

discourse as is the numerical matheme."²⁷ Thus, in psychoanalysis, the only way to reconcile the for-all with the singularity of the experience of analysis is by carrying out a process of verification for that singularity. What would the scope of such a process of verification be in the field of psychoanalysis, its ramifications? Such is the line of questioning Lacan himself will raise: "If it's verified, can it be taught to everyone, that is to say, is it scientific, since it's on the basis of this postulate that science developed?"²⁸ Psychoanalysis is, consequently, not distinct from mathematics because of a lack of demonstrability. It is not for lack of having implemented procedures for validation that psychoanalysis struggles to verify the results of what has been achieved in the course of analysis. Rather, it struggles to do so because its protocols of demonstration appear as deficient when compared to the rigorous requirements governing scientific transmissibility. Hence, what is at stake is not demonstration or verification as such, but the validity of a demonstration undertaken in a context that is not that of mathematics.

And here we might establish a distinction between psychoanalysis and mathematics: if mathematics remains indifferent both to *what* is transmitted and to *how* it is transmitted, the same cannot be said for psychoanalysis where the question not only of what can or cannot be transmitted is of the utmost importance, but so too are the mode of transmission and the addressee. An approach by matheme alone is thus insufficient since neither topology nor mathemes, even if they constitute means of integral transmission, ensure anything. Worse still, mathemes do not immunize psychoanalysis against obscurantism. Deprived of all signification, incapable of controlling the effects of meaning they generate, and nevertheless requiring a certain know-how in order to be manipulated, mathemes lead all too easily to the bewildering drift of initiatory mystification as the fate of the Pythagoreans amply suggests. It follows that for psychoanalysis the problem of transmissibility does not reside in the mode of transmission by matheme; the problem has to do, rather, with that which resists the matheme and, thus, with that which allows for new refutations.

For unlike scientific knowledge—that is to say, a knowledge in the real that is supposed to be demonstrable by matheme—, psychoanalytic knowledge is concerned with a real—namely, the non-existence of the sexual relation—which, according to Lacan, is ultimately impossible to demonstrate: "this relation is impossible to write" and "it is for this reason that it is not affirmable but moreover not refutable: as truth."²⁹ Psychoanalytic knowledge, in sum, touches on a real that remains, strictly

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27 Lacan 1990a, p. 39.

28 Ibid., p. 38.

29 Lacan 2001d, p. 310.

speaking, outside of the domain of demonstration. Neither verifiable, nor falsifiable. And yet, in gaining access to this impossible, unnameable real, as Lacan puts it, the knowledge of the psychoanalyst must be able to determine it every bit as much as the scientist's knowledge demonstrates the real.

On the one hand, then, there is no such thing as a passage from the singular to the for-all, in psychoanalytic experience. On the other hand, however, Lacan clearly endows psychoanalysis with the task of proving equal to science. Although he neither lends support to the idea that psychoanalysis, *qua* scientific invention, could be entirely transmissible via matheme, nor does he contend that psychoanalysis is true because it happens to be mathematizable,³⁰ the knowledge that he expects from psychoanalysis has to be modeled on scientific knowledge: just like science, the aim of psychoanalysis is to produce a knowledge that would allow it to modify the real. In both cases, knowledge of the real consists less in discovering what is out there, what exists, than in creating something new, something that has not previously existed. The new object, this object that did not exist prior to the intervention of psychoanalysis, is a new state of the subject: that of the psychoanalyst. At stake is a verification that the act of bearing witness—that is, bearing witness to the transformation of the subject, to the particular way in which it adds itself to the real—constitutes a new knowledge, one not guaranteed by any Other, but one which is nevertheless transmissible to all.

The question thus arises: what is it in the experience of analysis that is capable of being transmitted to all? Yet the question that preoccupies Lacan is more fundamental, and has to do with knowing how to communicate to others that which is taken for the subject's absolute particularity—namely, the way it enjoys (*son mode de jouir*). To this latter question, which ultimately determines the scope and limit of the transmissibility of what psychoanalysis can teach us, Lacan not unambiguously replies that psychoanalysis, or rather his "teaching of psychoanalysis can be transmitted from one subject to another only by way of a transference of work."³¹ In other words, because there is no instance to guarantee the validity of psychoanalytic knowledge, it is imperative that, as a counterpart to the foundational principle that "no one authorizes the analyst but himself," there be verification in terms of collective work. There is thus a dimension to psychoanalysis that necessary entails going beyond the frame of confidentiality or

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30The same argument can be found in Lacan's "Note italienne," where he affirms that "[b]elieving that sciences is true on the pretext that it is (mathematically) transmissible is a truly delusional idea that is disproved at every step by casting a first formulation back to a by-gone times. Because of this there is no notable progress is ever made for want of knowing the consequences. There is only the discovery of a knowledge in the real." Ibid., p. 309. [Translation modified] See also, <http://www.lacani-ireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Italian-note-1973.pdf>. Consulted 04/06/2019/.

31 Lacan, 1990b, p. 103. [Translation modified]

privacy. Furthermore, in order for this knowledge to be operative in the psychoanalytic community, it must not be transmitted solely to an other, but to absolutely anyone. To all, in a word.³²

So how is a universal scope of address to be ensured to a discourse which operates solely on a one-by-one basis, a discourse that proceeds from the particular rather than the universal? What kind of displacement takes place in the passage from the One to All? As J.A. Miller has shown in his seminar on *The Analysts' Banquet*, the passage in question here is itself overdetermined by the inversion of the work of transference into the transference of work. This inversion brings into light the fact that what is prone to being transmitted to all is a knowledge that takes the form of work. It is only in accepting the lack of guarantee in which their work is inscribed—that is to say, in proving themselves—that the subjects involved in the psychoanalytic experience are capable of producing a knowledge that—despite being unique in its novelty—is not ineffable, for that matter, but entirely transmissible. Paradoxically, the experience which—because of its utmost particularity—condemns the subject to its radical solitude, is not for as much a solitary experience precisely because what allows us to account for it is the pass—that is, a procedure designed to regulate the passage from the particular to the collective. A passage from the particular to the collective, furthermore, that wagers on the possible transmission of a new knowledge destined to model itself upon science. It is at precisely that moment of passage that we may introduce within psychoanalysis a distinction between initiatory transmission of the type that is addressed to those who take part in a shared experience, and a type of transmission that address all “those, be they psychoanalysts or not, who take an interest in psychoanalysis in the act.”³³ Thus, for there to be a chance for the for-all in psychoanalysis, the latter has to create an apparatus allowing a passage of the outside into the very interiority of the inside. We are now in a better position to grasp Lacan’s argument that psychoanalysis represents the way-out of a capitalism posited as limitless, indeed as not-all. Or, to be even more specific, psychoanalysis is a way-out precisely there where there is no outside. It is an inner way-out, as it were, one that, by dint of the fact that it doesn’t rely on the givens, can only be put to work through the creation of an empty space destined to be inhabited by nothing but a work. Lacan’s solution to the impasse of collectivity consists in opening his School “to everybody”, which is to say “to anybody”. Setting out from the assumption that there is absolutely nothing to define the analyst, no pre-given predicate or property on which his identification could be

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³² Lacan accorded a great deal of importance to the presence in his school of those who had never undergone analysis, in essence to ascertain whether or not the discourse of psychoanalysis was transmissible to any-and-everyone, to all, or if it was simply a discourse reserved for initiates.

³³ Lacan, 1990b, p. 106.

grounded, the only viable solution is one that takes into account precisely this impossibility of determining a predicate that would be proper to the (Lacanian) analyst. The solution is then none other than to call on all those who are willing to work in the Freudian field. By inviting to his school anybody, without any qualification, Lacan created an open, empty space destined to be inhabited only by a special kind of work, the work of the “determined workers”³⁴, be it analysis or not, as he puts it. If it is indeed possible to take the school such as Lacan conceives it as a model of the for-all at the level of the not-all, taken now as a for-all in the sense of a “open-to-each-and-everyone,” this is because Lacan proposes to reach this goal through the creation of the kind of opening, of an empty space, in which the inside encounters the outside, in short, through disidentification. For what is at stake with the Lacanian for-all is the trait that determines identity, the mark of belonging of a member to a group. And this mark of belonging can only be called into question if the non-member—hence, the uncountable one—is included in the group; it can only be questioned if the non-member is not exterior to the member. To that end, the collectivity of the for-all is the site created specifically to allow for the encounter of the member with the non-member.

Lacan thus envisages a space in which no trait carries the attributes of a specific or specifying property; a group constituted without identifying itself with a normative trait. And this is the case less because psychoanalysis is supposed to be everyone’s concern—which is far from self-evident—than to allow the analyst to encounter the non-analyst, that is to say his/her other; or, better yet, to allow the analyst to encounter him/herself as his/her own other: as other to him/herself. To gloss Lacan: the non-analyst serves here as a relay so that the analyst becomes that Other to him/herself as s/he is to the non-analyst.³⁵ This is no casual gloss on Lacan because what’s at stake in the predicate “being (an) analyst” is the asymmetry of A and non-A itself. Put otherwise, it is because the subject undergoes a change—because it finds itself called into question—in the experience of the School, that it loses itself to the precise degree that it believes to have achieved its self-possession, or to know itself (*il croit s’avoir ou savoir*).

What is at stake here is a form of collectivity entirely different from that of community, which is grounded in the logic of the All and of the One. In a community, one is supposed to know who is whom. (To borrow Lacan’s turn of phrase: a man, and only a real man, is supposed to know who is not a man.) In the collective of the for-all, however, a collective founded on the principle that the non-A is not someone other than A, one never knows with whom one is dealing. Thus, the for-all as collective is

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³⁴ Ibid., p. 100.

³⁵ “A man,” says Lacan, “serves here as a relay so that a woman becomes this Other to herself, as she is to him.” Lacan 2006c, p. 616.

meaningless unless it forms the site where one has to desire what one is as not being that. What characterises this collective for-all is not that it finally locates the whole's unifying trait, even if that trait is, as Bataille suggested, the community of those without community. It consists, on the contrary, in transforming the very attempt to make the difference between member and non-member, inside and outside, into an exploration to be carried out within the very group in which one appears, an exploration that presupposes an irreducible non-knowing concerning the criteria for belonging to the group. It is, in sum, only on the basis of an authentic "not knowing" that one can come to grips with the for-all.

In this light, the space of the for-all that Lacan calls "School" can be thought of as the space in which the "communitarian," segregative for-all is transformed into a non-segregative for-all. More to the point, the School is created to demonstrate the intertwining of two logics at work in the for-all: that of a incomplete, yet consistent for-all which because it is constituted through the exclusion of an exception, and a different for-all, an inconsistent for-all which can, paradoxically, be obtained not through the exclusion of the exception, but through its inclusion. By the very fact of subtracting the exception from an assembly it is rendered boundless, non-totalizable. It is a for-all which takes as its foundational principle that "there aren't any who don't" (*y'en a pas qui ne pas*)—a principle, in other words, that makes every exception which would allow us to measure, ascertain the All an impossible, undecidable one. There is no exception, indeed, when it comes to the not-all-ified for-all (*le pour tous pas-toutisé*). The exception that would make it possible to take the measure of the not-all, the exception-measure, remains radically undecidable, erratic. And this errant, erratic exception is what makes the consistent for-all inconsistent. Because it has no place that would be assigned to it in advance, unlike in so-called "normal" communities, the exception is displaced: one might say that it is everywhere and nowhere at once. Which is to say both that there is no exception and that each-and-everyone is exceptional. The only way to escape the segregative "for-all" is then through the generalization of exception. To the consistent, segregative for-all is thus opposed the inconsistent for-all, a collective from which the measure, the limit, the exception have been withdrawn, a truly open, inclusive, in a word: "for all" collectivity, yet which, precisely because all exception is postulated as being undecidable, indeterminable, imposes verification. Hence, if we are compelled to verify, this is because, precisely, one can never know with whom or what one is dealing.

This also explains why, at this stage, it is work that decides the belonging to the Lacanian for-all. Lacan thus launches a call to work that would allow each subject willing to participate in the collective work in the Freudian field to come out of the anonymity of the crowd and ask, in their own name, to be admitted to the School. Here, we are in the register of the one-by-one maintained by the logic of the not-all, or, that logic

which, in the absence of the analyst's signifier, requires everyone to verify that their work corresponds to that of the "determined worker" while at the same time accepting lack of the Other's guarantee. The necessity of verification signals that this work cannot be standardized. The work to be done is by definition indeterminable since it cannot take place unless there is a transference to a cause at hand. The expression "determined worker" emphasizes the importance of the fidelity to a cause, the willingness of everyone involved to risk him/herself in the pursuit of what is ultimately unknowable. All that the work to be done by everyone requires, and that despite the fact that neither its quality nor quantity can be prescribed, is a new relation to the cause. What is expected to be shown, more specifically, is the putting to work of the subject split by the cause—that is, by the psychoanalytic cause. The work at stake, here, is thus a work that cannot be carried out without a transference to psychoanalysis. And this is the case because the work that each is called upon to provide is not just any work, as Lacan suggests in his "Founding Act," but a "labor which, in the field opened up by Freud, restores the cutting edge of his discovery—a labor which returns the original praxis he instituted under the name of psychoanalysis to the duty incumbent upon it in our world."³⁶

It is precisely in this sense that in Lacan's School it is impossible to distinguish good, determined workers from idlers. The work that each has to provide, requires proof nevertheless. This is why it is with regard to the non-members of the group, what's more, that the presumed member needs to prove him/herself. Therein lies the reason for which such collectivity is profoundly non-segregative. It is non-segregative to the degree that the presence of an element allegedly heterogenous to the group—non-analysts, in this case—is not only tolerated, but well and truly required if the predicate "to be an analyst" is to be brought into question.³⁷ Here, we come at last to the political dimension of the duty that Lacan evokes. The project of work, the labor, to which Lacan summons analysts or those who are not, aspiring applicants or not, is one of building an institution that takes into account both the collapse of identifications established by the social order as well as those constructed in the course of analysis itself. Indeed, Lacan's goal was to demonstrate that the real which is at stake in the experience of analysis is what allows an assembly of singularities to be held together—not due to some master signifier but due to a transference to psychoanalysis, to the cause of psychoanalysis.

The goal of the School as Lacan defined it, however, was not limited to breaking psychoanalysis out of the chains of identification. It was also

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36 Lacan 1990b, p. 97.

37 Lacan 2001e, pp. 270, 272.

to make possible a passage there where only the impasse of the group is encountered. If, as Lacan remarks, it is the case that there is a “real at stake in the very formation of the psychoanalysis,” and if the School is founded on this real, it is to allow each and everyone to elaborate a novel relationship to the psychoanalytic cause, a relation proper only to him/her, radically original, such that each and everyone, one by one, “is forced to reinvent psychoanalysis.”³⁸ And it is this unexpected, unpredictable reinvention that psychoanalytic group is called upon to verify.

One can clearly see the political stakes subtending the claim that there are two logics to the universal. Of course, it is not a question here of choosing between the two logics, or of choosing the right one. What is at issue, rather, is to set to work the logic of the not-all there where the segregative logic is operational, there where the law of exclusion—visibly or invisibly—prevails. For, even if the two logics of the universal are always operative whenever we are in the field of the collective, thus affecting every collective being, the for-all which is at stake here—the for-all compatible with the not-all—is not a given that one happens upon or discovers. It is the outcome or result, rather, of a process of disidentification that produces whatever or generic singularities—singularities without predicate or attribute, detached from all bonds of belonging.

Hence, if the for-all *qua* boundless, open, assembly is by definition non-segregative, it is so because it takes root in the impossibility of reducing singularity to an identification with the master signifier, to the declaration “You are this,” for example. This impossibility of representation justifies our gesture of defining the singularity as one of the modes of the hole. Puncturing a hole in every count, not letting oneself be counted or represented, simply means confirming the presence of something that cannot be accounted for, described. Not, of course, because singularities are not endowed with specific properties, but because none of those properties constitutes a difference that would matter, that would count. As such, the collectivity of the for-all is absolutely unrepresentable. It follows from this that a for-all is above all a for-all for those who are able to proclaim one. For all those who are authorized only by themselves. Thus, a for-all can only be founded in a declarative act: “We, the...”

Like any act, what’s more, a declaration takes place without Other or subject. Without Other because every act begins with the disruption of the law, the suspension of every guarantee. Thus, where one expects to find the founding law of the act, one encounters only a hole. Without subject because, contrary to what one might imagine, the act does not presuppose the presence of any subject whatsoever. To the contrary, one of the primary consequences of the act is to bring into being a new

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38 Lacan 2001d, p. 261.

figure of the subject. In view of this it can then be stated that there is no subject prior to the act’s taking place. Better yet: the subject is only ever staged in the aftermath of the act, as the instance called upon to assume responsibility for the consequences that follow from the act.

If the act produces the subject, it also produces the instance tasked with validating the act or, rather, its consequences. In this way, we can say, along with Lacan, that the act “is what depends on what follows from it.”³⁹ And the most effective manner of verifying the status of an act is to draw out all its consequences following a strict logic. Once this logical machine has been set in motion, however, we might interrogate the desire that animates it, and that impels it to go as far as it will take it, to go all the way to the end. Yet, the very expression, “to go all the way to the end,” at once poses a limit—albeit a limit situated at an inaccessible point—and calls the latter into question. Stated a little differently, as soon as the evaluation of an act is carried out from the perspective of its consequences or becomes a matter logic, all that remains is the question of knowing “how far one can go *within* this limit.”⁴⁰

This also explains why psychoanalysis questions the group as collectivity of work via the consequences of the act, through its verification. One might say that what is at stake there is a new figure of the Other, understood not as that agency which provides the measure or guarantee but indeed as the locus of articulation of the transference of work; the site where, taking into account the non-equality of each’s singular path, one nevertheless makes the wager on the ability of each determined worker to face that “how far I can go *within* this limit”. This is collective work, but also work that depends on individual discipline. In this respect, psychoanalysis equals science and politics, for in each of these three cases subjects have to prove themselves not to satisfy themselves, but to satisfy others.

It is not, therefore, a question of simply privileging the act, which would find its homologue in the unclassifiable subjective attitude of the hysteric forever at odds with the accepted code of conduct. Rather, it is a question of putting to work a politics capable of linking that aspect of the “uncounted” which is hysterical to the “psychotic” rigor of the logical deduction of the consequences that any act of speaking (*prise de parole*) by such a subject—one which is non-situatable in the given social order—can have for the for-all of identification. That’s the first lesson that politics can draw from the way Lacan founded his School. And it is far from the last.

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39 Lacan 2001e, p. 261.

40 On this score, it is doubtless worth citing the whole of Lacan’s response to the Kantian question, ‘What can I know?’ “Nothing in any case doesn’t have the structure of language; whence it follows that [the question] how far I can go *within* this limit is a matter of logic.” Lacan 1990 a, p. 36. [Translation modified]

Can There be a “Realistic” Politics of the Real?

If the question of the School commands so much attention from Lacan, this is because the School allows for a fundamental aspect of the real of the group to emerge into visibility. Rather than discarding the possibility of all forms of collectivity unless it grounds itself in the logics of exclusion or exception, affirming the impossible of the group constitutes the point of departure for any politics which, because it is situated in the register of the not-all, aims at the creation of a non-segregative for-all. We are dealing here with a politics that aims at the for-all while preserving singularity *qua* singularity— a “whatever” singularity as Agamben so accurately put, in order to signify that no property, predicate, or a bond of belonging ever exhausts the singularity’s “whatever” or generic being. What is at stake here is a peculiar for-all, that of workers, a for-all that entails a practice of disidentification at the level of the group whereby each and everyone in the group becomes whatever. It is not that one discovers that one has always been “whatever”. Rather, one becomes it. What takes place in the production of the for-all is a transformation of the subject that each one has to carry-out, on their own terms and for themselves.

Paradoxically, this emphasis on the singular presupposes a certain mode of subjective renunciation. The subject is called upon to renounce its subjective difference, including the indetermination that maintains it in its lack of being. This point is a crucial one: it is not enough for the subject to separate itself from the master signifier, from the identifications imposed on it by the existing order. A further effort is needed: namely, a withdrawal from whatever pushes the subject to seek out ever-newer identifications, from that quest which generates an illusion cherished by postmodernists who see in such a metonymic drift the expression of the subject’s freedom to choose, without any constraint, the identity that best suits it, or to discard the latter as soon as it becomes a nuisance.

Living proof of the not-all, at the moment of becoming whatever, indeterminate—in a process that Lacan calls subjective destitution—the subject cannot imagine itself being all alone, prisoner of its irreducible particularity. Rather, it finds itself “whatever”: on its own, but not alone. How, then, are we to understand this operation of the subject’s becoming whatever, generic, indeterminate, if the major stakes of such a procedure consist in suspending every particularity of the subjective position? If the analyst has stripped off from every identification, every attribute, to be finally reduced to a mere *quod*, sheer being-there, it is with an aim toward opening him/herself up to the uncharted singularities at the heart of every other, so that the singularity of anyone at all (*la singularité de quiconque*) can be addressed to the analyst in order to take the latter as cause of one’s desire.

Yet, how does the most singular aspect of a position—such as the analyst reveals it in the pass—end up erasing all the particularity of the subjective position? In psychoanalysis, it should be noted, the void that is the subject cannot be filled by the consistency of its singularity. It mustn’t be too filled with its own particularity, Lacan warns, since the point of psychoanalysis is rather to offer an empty space, a void, in which the subject can bear witness to its singular relation to the psychoanalytic cause. Every destitution, in other words, is put to work; each destitution is a form of putting to work which is required to ascertain the act in its aftermath.

The question of subjective destitution thus turns out to be critical for any collective that purports to be non-segregative. And this is because, at the level of the subject, the result of desubjectivation is, as Lacan notes, that “[the subject] is made to be rather and singularly strong,” before adding further that “subjective destitution brings about being rather than its loss” (*cela fait être plutôt que désêtre*).⁴¹ How, to come to the question of the “realism” of any politics faithful to the real, are we to make this erasure into a response inscribed in the real?

For the politics of the real to be conceivable, practicable, in sum “realistic,” one has above all to examine closely, and experiment with, the ties binding the for-all to the real. One has to go to the end of this process in order to open up a horizon of new possibilities where, at present, one finds only the triumph of cynicism, acquiescence to the given, and the realism of the possible—or, stated more explicitly, that mode of realism which demands that we adapt ourselves to the regimen of possible and impossible that the existing social order imposes. To the extent that it sets up an open, non-segregative for-all, the politics of the real, by contrast, provides the occasion for politics to become realist once again by taking upon itself the function that is proper to it: that of being a collective exploration. As a question that implicates the group, the collective, the question of politics is posed today with as much urgency as it was in the past. And it is a question to which one cannot reply all alone: “There, I cannot invent,” as Lacan says in his 1973-74 seminar, “[...] for some reason, that a group is real.”⁴²

If no human group can maintain itself without an elsewhere, we need to ask: what is this elsewhere towards which the for-all capable of taking on the real of the group aspires? For the elsewhere in question is not the Other, but rather that dimension of the irreducibly other, heterogeneous, to oneself to which the ordeal of the real points. And it is precisely in this sense that this ordeal opens up for the group the possibility of giving itself a cause other than itself.

41 Lacan 2001d, p. 273.

42 <http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Book-21-Les-Non-Dupes-Errent-Part-3.pdf>. Consulted 03/12/19.

Which leaves us with the for-all, about which we can now conclude with the following proposition: there is a for-all only to the extent that it is grounded in a common cause; more precisely, in a cause that puts us to work. As for the result of this work, even if it has to be carried out on the basis of the subjectivation of (psychoanalytical and political) experience, this result does not depend on any particular subject. Quite to the contrary, it is that which can be inscribed in a “logifiable”, mathematizable, acephalous manner that allows it to become collectively calculable. This is the wager of the for-all *qua* experience of transmission. And it is in this that politics as break with established identifications could be said to enter into the real, not so much to take measure of it as to introduce into the real that which is, ultimately, measureless, incommensurable, a radical novelty: a paradoxical collectivity that is at one and the same time not-all, nontotalizable, and for all. Ultimately, the solution that the politics of the real proposes is a paradoxical immanent way out that consists in constituting a local, temporary, provisory “for-all” collectivity.

A for-all based on the real of the group is undoubtedly a kind of forcing: a forcing of speech, of saying, first, for because what constitutes a “for-all” collectivity is precisely the emergence of an allegedly mute, uncounted, invisible instance that starts to speak out, and, in so doing, asserts its presence: “We are here”. It is also a forcing of all social-symbolic order and its counting. It is not a question, on this score, of correcting the miscount of the existing order by including the excluded, those who were left outside or who didn’t count. What is at stake, rather, is an attempt at carrying out, in view of those counted and uncounted alike, an operation of transfinitization, an operation whose ultimate goal is the constitution of an open, non-segregative for-all. How many members will the for-all of the not-all count, you may ask? It doesn’t matter! For the “for all” is not about numbers. What matters is for it to remain, like Cantor’s alephs, impervious to addition or subtraction:

$$\aleph_0 + 1 = \aleph_0 \quad \aleph_0 - 1 = \aleph_0$$

Translated by Rob St.Clair

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“Pandora’s Box Has Been Opened”: Lacanian Psychoanalysis and Politics after 2017

Gabriel Tupinambá

Abstract: This essay proposes a diagnostics of the current predicament of Lacanian psychoanalysis, based on the recent political crisis of the WAP, in 2017. Based on this critical study, we then investigate the history of different articulations between Marxism and psychoanalysis in order to delineate the underlying ideological relation currently allowing psychoanalysis to consider itself a judge of political thinking. Finally, we confront this ideological position with a schematic theory of the compossibility between fields, a different way of conceiving the non-relation between forms of thought which does not continue to reproduce this problematic articulation.

Key-words: WAP, crisis, non-relation, compossibility

1. Lacanian revolutions

Lacan’s answer to the political militants who interpellated him during his seminar in Vincennes, on December 1969, is well-known:

“the revolutionary aspiration has only one possible way of ending, only one: always with the discourse of the Master, as experience has already shown. What you aspire to as revolutionaries is a Master. You shall have one!”¹

Years later, in *Television*, Lacan would further ratify the intensity of his original reproach: “They got on my back, which was the fashion at the time. I had to take a stand” - and extract from the effects of his intervention the correctness of his stance: “A stand whose truth was so clear that they've been crowding into my seminar ever since. Preferring my cool, after all, to the crack of the whip”².

However, it is quite remarkable that, three years prior to the famous “incident” at Vincennes, Lacan had been adopting a rather different position with regards to the “revolutionary aspiration”. In his *Response to philosophy students*, from 1966, he declared: “in order to avoid any misunderstanding, take note that I consider that *psychoanalysis has no right to interpret the revolutionary practice*”³. But if it was not psychoanalysis which had the right to interpret revolutionary practice, who was it that interpreted the desire of revolutionaries, three years later, at Vincennes? A man called Jacques Lacan, of course. In fact, it is quite easy place ourselves in Lacan’s shoes, losing his temper, trying to captivate the interest of a young audience in his complex theories,

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¹ Lacan 2007, p. 207

² Lacan 2001, p.534

³ Ibid, p. 208

but being constantly interrupted and made fun of. It does not take much - certainly no psychoanalyst - to call a group of disorderly teenagers a bunch of hysterics searching for a leader.

What should grab our attention here is rather how Lacan did *not* interpret the situation: how could he not realize that, by “crowding” into his seminar, these students *had already chosen their master* - precisely the one who had ascribed some meaning to their desire? Here psychoanalysis is effectively at stake, but not as a clinical praxis so much as an ideological resource which allows us, psychoanalysts, to distinguish the delirious desire of revolutionaries, supposedly trapped in an “imaginary” circuit, from the purported truth-effects of an out of place analytic intervention: “a stand whose truth was so clear” that led revolutionaries to abandon their aspirations for a master and come crowd Lacan’s seminar!

If it is true that “wild interpretations” outside of a clinical setting usually say more about the interpreter than about the one being interpreted, then it might be useful to utilize this preamble as a point of inflexion, leaving aside the question of a Lacanian theory of political revolution in order to focus a bit more on the revolutionary cycles of Lacanian psychoanalysis itself. The term “revolutionary cycle” does imply here some of the irony that Lacan ascribed to it - when comparing political transformations and astral orbits⁴ - but it is employed more in the sense of the “cyclical crises” of which Marxists speak, or of the “economic cycles” of Kondratieff and Kuznets, which correspond to more or less determinate temporal sequences of productivity and subsequent economic stagnation. In fact, the history of Lacanian psychoanalysis displays a cycle of more or less 18 years, and which now undergoes the closure of its fourth turn: 1963, 1981, 1998 and - as we will argue here - 2017. Approximately every 18 years a new institutional crisis takes place within Lacanian psychoanalysis⁵, followed by a new debate on the articulation between politics and psychoanalysis - and, curiously enough, a new reference to the figure of Louis Althusser.

The tensions at stake in Lacan’s so-called “excommunication” from the *Société Française de Psychoanalyse* (SFP), in 1963, are well-known⁶ and, even at the time, the political dimension of his conflict with the *Internationale Psychoanalytique Association* (IPA) did not escape Althusser⁷. Besides the seminars and articles dedicated to Lacan

.....
4 Ibidem, p. 420

5 In the following analysis, we will focus on the trajectory that connects the SFP, the EFP, the ECF, the Forum of Lacanian Schools and the WAP - even if the actual ecosystem of Lacanian School is rather vast and pulverised.

6 Roudinesco 1997

7 Althusser 1999, p.151

and psychoanalysis, and his long letters to Lacan on the problem of constructing a theory for the clinical practice, the Marxist philosopher was also crucial in helping Lacan to reestablish his teaching in a new academic setting and with a new audience. It should not come as a surprise, then, that Althusser was sufficiently implicated in Lacan’s institutional trajectory to intervene, almost twenty years later, at the time of the dissolution of the *École Freudienne de Paris* (EFP). In 1980, during a gathering in which the dissolution of the school was to be voted by its members, Althusser asked to speak in order to denounce that there was something strange in the way the vote was being dealt with, as if Lacan had performed an “analytic act”, which should then be “worked through” by the remaining members of the institution, when in fact there was a political and juridical process in course, one in which the founder of the organisation did not have any more say than anyone else⁸. What should surprise us, perhaps, is how easily Althusser’s old students, as well as Lacan himself, disregarded his intervention - even interpreting it as a sign of his poorly resolved transference relation with Lacan⁹.

What makes this 18 year interval between the foundation and the dissolution of the EFP so significant is, of course, its repetition: in 1998, the *World Association of Psychoanalysis* (WAP), founded by Jacques-Alain Miller in 1992, reached a critical point and split into two fields: the WAP, still led by Miller, and the *International Forum of the Lacanian Field*, under the guidance of Colette Soler. The irony of finding, within psychoanalysis, the same dramatic scissions, the same accusations of revisionism and the same mixture of personal and theoretical disputes which are so easily recognised in Leftist political organisations - problems which psychoanalysts in fact commonly evoke as justification to keep away from the “neurosis” of political militancy - might have been so evident that no one bothered to reflect upon it. Nevertheless, it is again in Althusser’s work that we find a theoretical anticipation of this tragicomical solidarity between Marxism and psychoanalysis. Already in 1978, in a text called *Marx and Freud*¹⁰, he described how the tendency within Marxist and psychoanalytic institutions to undergo a movement of “truth-revision-scission” was in fact an effect of the constitutive and paradoxical structure of each field, an effect of their status as “conflictual sciences”.

If Althusser was no longer with us by 1998, there was still - and perhaps more active than ever - a movement, initiated around the time of the EFP’s foundation, in 1963, which remained faithful to his project

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8 Ibid, p.125

9 Althusser reports that his intervention was met with a blunt interpretation by one of the presents: “One may wonder on which couch you are in order to speak as you do”, Althusser 1999, p.182

10 Althusser 1999

of never accepting psychoanalysis or Marxism such as they currently present themselves, constantly forcing them to be rethought in the light of their interactions. Even Jacques-Alain Miller himself had defended this project for a certain time¹¹, as have many others, who continued on this path long after the *Cahiers* and after Miller himself moved in another direction. This is the movement to which diverse names such as Alain Badiou, Michel Pecheaux, Chantal Mouffe, Luce Irigaray, Ernesto Laclau, Jorge Alemán, Judith Butler, David-Pavón Cuellar, Slavoj Žižek, Alenka Zupančič, as well as many others, belong: a heterogeneous set of philosophers, psychoanalysts and political militants who have maintained a theoretical basis in both Lacan and Marx, and who have further investigated the project of extracting lessons from psychoanalysis for emancipatory politics, while always reassessing, through philosophy and psychoanalysis, the political legacy of the XXth Century. So it might also not be a coincidence that, at the same time in which the crisis of the WAP came to the fore in 1998 - and without this split demanding any reevaluation of the political dimension of psychoanalysis on the part of Lacanians - the popularity of this heterogeneous movement of thinkers of Lacanian inspiration reached its peak. The missed encounter between politics and psychoanalysis was staged at this new scansion point once again: Lacanian institutions, ever more worried about protecting their clinical orientations - but to protect them from *whom?*, it should be asked - observed with outright despise and distrust the popularisation of Lacan's ideas and their absorption by the Left, as if nothing useful for psychoanalysis could come from this process.

This brings us, finally, to the present. In 2017, the *École de la Cause Freudienne* decided to position itself - not as a group of public intellectuals, but as an institution - against the candidacy of Marine Le Pen in the French presidential elections. Several activities were planned and an "Anti-Le Pen front"¹² was created by the ECF, who also promoted the circulation of a petition against the reactionary candidate¹³. But the concern with her possible election did not only justify the mobilisation of the School's institutional apparatus, it was also used as a way to delimit, within the political field, the idea of a certain transitivity between the defence of psychoanalysis and the defence of the neoliberal candidate Emmanuel Macron: to criticise Le Pen was not enough, it was also necessary *not* to support Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the centre-left candidate, and, most of all, to avoid the nostalgic universe of the radical Left. And besides the abundant use of psychoanalytic-inspired interpretations

11 Hallward & Peden 2012

12 <http://www.causefreudienne.net/event/forum-anti-le-pen/>

13 *Lacan Quotidien n.632: Appel des Psychanalystes contre Marine Le Pen* - available at: <https://www.lacanquotidien.fr/blog/2017/03/lacan-quotidien-n-632/>

in the critique of the political positions of other Leftists - such as the already famous diagnosis of the "narcissism of the lost causes" - a dangerous syllogism was proposed: (I) psychoanalysis depends on freedom of speech, (II) only the State of Law guarantees this freedom, (III) both the radical Right as the radical Left are willing to suspend the State of Law, hence (IV) to defend the practice of psychoanalysis is to fight against both of these political fields¹⁴.

The institutional mobilisation by the ECF around the affirmation that there is only one political position that is coherent with the "discourse of the analyst" marks a new sequence in the history of Lacanian psychoanalysis. It is surely undeniable that the last two decades were filled with a myriad of public polemics involving prominent figures from the WAP and other Lacanian schools, but their positions were as debatable as those of any other public figure, coming down, in most cases, to provincial quarrels. However, even if we are not short of examples of situations in which the institutional apparatus of the Lacanian schools was put to an ambiguous use as means of giving further visibility to a personal political position - only to repeat the problem of mixing personal and institutional dimensions which has accompanied both psychoanalysis and political organisations for ages - this had never led, until now, to a concrete politics of re-orientation of the WAP as a whole.

In the beginning of 2017, the WAP created an international forum to internally debate the political orientation of Lacanian analysts around the world¹⁵. In the submission form to partake in the forum, one can find an explicit clause claiming that analysts who are affiliated to a political party or movement are not allowed to participate¹⁶. At the same time, psychoanalysts who have been engaging with party politics at their own risk have been "denounced" by the WAP as perverting the truly "coherent" form of political participation of an analyst - which has led, for exemple, to the circulation of a petition against the presence of a famous Italian Lacanian psychoanalyst in a school for the formation of political militants within the democratic party in Italy¹⁷. Analysts in Spain and in Argentina, who have directly or indirectly participated in Leftist populist movements, were accused of "unconsciously" desiring the suspension of the State of Law - and, therefore, of desiring the consequences that this suspension has historically led to, such as the persecution of Jews¹⁸.

14 Miller 2017a

15 Material on the "La movida Zadig" Forum can be found at <http://lacaniannet.weebly.com/>

16 The submission form can be read at: <http://lacaniannet.weebly.com/sinscrire.html>

17 Focchi 2017

18 Miller 2017b and Miller-Rose & Roy 2017

In Slovenia, an absurd and slanderous campaign, explicitly supported by the WAP and its publications, is currently in place against Slavoj Žižek and the School of Theoretical Psychoanalysis, accusing them of having hindered the development of “true” clinical psychoanalysis in the region, due to their political and theoretical commitments to socialism¹⁹. At the same time in which these and other actions are being promoted, the WAP has created new platforms for debating the political orientation of Lacanian psychoanalysis - which also means the creation of filters, determined by the institution itself, as to who gets to participate in these discussions. In one of these publications, we find the following interview with Jacques-Alain Miller:

“Pandora’s box has been opened for too long! We have now Žižek, who “žizekianises” Lacan, using the rudiments of a doctrine that I have taught him in my seminar. We have Badiou, who “badiouanizes” Lacan, which is not good at all. It is time to close once again Pandora’s box. Now that the analysts of the ECF have been convoked to take the streets and to position themselves as psychoanalysts in the political debate, carrying the flag of the State of Law against the heirs of the Counter-Revolution, those who amuse themselves with Lacan’s toys, for the pleasure of mesmerised audiences and who tour American universities with pseudo-communist threats, need to drop it, or change their tune. Laughs are over! As Lacan would say”²⁰

This was the year of 2017: the end of the cycle, initiated in 1998, of a more or less stable disarticulation between psychoanalysis and its political interpreters, but also the beginning of a new phase in its history, one in which we can no longer laugh at the missed encounters between Lacanian psychoanalysis and politics. It has now become undeniable the possibility that a Lacanian institution might make use of its theoretical framework as means to reject, slander, segregate and delegitimise - the irony! - precisely the intellectuals and militants who have found, usually outside of the small province of Europe, the need and means to continue the program of the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, in search of a new articulation of psychoanalysis and Marxism. Most of them, in fact, directly associate themselves to the post-Althusserian legacy, who after all returns once more to the stage. And the recognition that this new use of Lacanian psychoanalysis is possible is further reinforced by the silence with which it was met amongst Lacanian intellectuals and analysts - some quite satisfied with the

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 19 Nina Krajnik - the main spokesperson of this campaign - has an illustrative interview in Gilbert 201=7, but we can also find other articles, with sensationalist titles such as “The Truth about Žižek”, or “Žižek, the Fraud”, in WAP’s official publication *Lacan Quotidien*: <https://www.lacanquotidien.fr/blog/2017/06/lacan-quotidien-n-720/>

20 Miller-Rose & Roy 2017žŽižek,ni,framework. See Badiou, Tupinambá lar 2017b10

situation, some indifferent to it, while others still reserve their critiques to the private sphere, having already become accustomed to working through these conflicts outside of the public domain²¹.

It remains to be seen how many of us - sufficiently distant from the seductive episode at Vincennes so as not to forget Lacan's previous position regarding revolutionary practice - will feel motivated by this new historical scansion to question what underlying impasses in Lacanian theory might have led, or at least allowed, for this sort of dangerous political appropriation, and to investigate what kind of new alliance between psychoanalysis and revolutionary politics is necessary today in order to meet the challenges of this new conjuncture.

Our own wager is that there are structural reasons for the current predicament of Lacanian psychoanalysis, amongst them its supposedly political effects, which is why a preliminary process of disarticulation between the two fields is necessary if we want to break out of this repetitive cycle. However, as we will see, this process of disentanglement does not entail that we are no longer allowed to conceive of a political dimension to psychoanalysis. Rather, it prepares the ground for us to recognise *the absolutely ordinary status psychoanalysis acquires when considered politically*. Despite all the specificities of the analytic clinical practice, and all the important consequences that the existence of psychoanalysis entails for other fields of thought, one of the crucial insights we can extract from the current crisis of Lacanian institutions is that the time has come for us to see psychoanalysis under a new light, one which combines the affirmation that *psychoanalysis is not in itself political* with the recognition that, from the political standpoint, psychoanalysis is subjected to all the regular ideological, geopolitical and economic constraints that organize our contemporary social world. If it becomes impossible to simply derive from psychoanalytic theory the basis for its political positions, we are then invited to recognise the autonomy of political thinking itself and to confront the same challenge that engages us all when deciding how to orient ourselves and our institutions within the political world. To fight for political novelty - in psychoanalysis as elsewhere - is ultimately a political struggle, one that cannot avoid a direct confrontation with political ideas.

But before we can begin to sketch what such a (non) relation between politics and psychoanalysis could look like, let us first step back and contextualize the saturation of the previous cycle, from 1998 to 2017, within the long history of articulations between psychoanalysis and politics, as this will help to clarify the basic premises of this project.

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 21 One of the few serious public responses of intellectuals who were not directly cited by Miller in this polemic (as it was the case with Jorge Alemán) came from David Pavón-Cuellar - who chose however to focus on “millerian” politics, rather than on the underlying structural problem which determines it, Pavón-Cuellar 2017b

2. A brief history of the relations between psychoanalysis and politics

It is possible to divide the history of the relations between psychoanalytic theory and Marxism into at least three distinct sequences, roughly speaking²².

In a first moment, we have the autonomous theories of Marx and Freud themselves: trajectories which, given the very amplitude of their respective projects, had to ultimately cross and contrast. It is not our purpose to reconstruct these tensions here, but it is not difficult to recognise that, rather than composing a harmonic whole - as if, on Marx's side, we had a theory of society and, on Freud's, a theory of individuals - it is the very superposition of the two authors which prevents the establishment of any direct compatibility between them: Marx had his own theory of individuality and psychism, while Freud had his own concept of culture, civilisation and social structure.

The work of Marx is evidently centred on politics and economics, and his theories adopt a point of view which allow us to think the internal logic of a world in which social exchange and social reproduction are almost exclusively organised by commodity exchange - leading to the commodification of labor, money and natural resources. But we also find here several contributions concerning individuality - both in what concerns the social constitution and reproduction of individuals under capitalism as well as to the pathological dimension which accompanies these specific social constraints. However, even if Marx clearly recognised the value and importance of individuality in a new society, he opposes it to the idea of individualism, that is, to bourgeois ideology and the centrality of personal satisfaction through the consumption of commodities. For Marx, no great change in the social determinations of our world could come from an exclusively individualist transformation, tailored to the measure of personal consumption. On account of this, the Marxist perspective challenges Freud and psychoanalysts into showing that the transformations promoted by the analytic theory and clinic do not merely aim to adequate its patients to the constraints of bourgeois society.

On the other hand, we have Freud's writings, which investigate the psychic apparatus and the process through which each one constitutes themselves as individuated beings, with their own identities and their own modes of satisfaction and suffering. However, throughout his study of the psychic "interior", Freud never ceased to highlight the fundamental role of external elements in this process of individuation: natural aspects, pertaining to the organic and physiological structure of humans, as well as social ones, such as the role of culture, customs and familial relations.

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²² A beautiful work of reconstruction of the nuances of this long history can be found in Pavón-Cuéllar 2017, a book which I have reviewed elsewhere, Tupinambá 2017, pp.752-763

Nonetheless, even if he never disregarded the enormous influence of collectivity in the genesis and maintenance of individuality, Freud's research led him to consider the relations which individuals establish with their social environments - be those familial, religious or political - as being active ingredients in their libidinal economies, and, therefore, as relations that can be distorted by our own expectations of personal satisfaction. Because of this, even if Freud never denied the necessity of social change, the Freudian perspective challenges Marx and all revolutionaries to show that their worldview and strategic vision are not conditioned by unrealistic expectations of well-being and social harmony.

In other words, the intersection between these two autonomous projects, far from uniting them, comports a series of quite abstract *conceptual challenges*, given that none of the two fields directly depended on the other in order to continue its own development. This "disarticulation-by-superposition" is quite distinct from the association between psychoanalysis and Marxism which characterises the following sequence, which might be called - in a very broad sense, and not without some conceptual loss - the "Freudo-Marxist" period. By this denomination, usually restricted to the project of the Frankfurt School, a very general theoretical strategy is being singled out, one which includes thinkers who sometimes have almost nothing in common: the project of developing a critical framework that would unite both Marxism and psychoanalysis and which would mobilize both Freud and Marx in the attempt to understand a *common object* or phenomena whose very existence would require the simultaneous adoption of both points of view.

An important example of this sort of object, which would require the elaboration of such general critical theoretical standpoint, was the failure of the Weimar revolution in 1919. According to a somewhat orthodox reading of Marxist theory, a socialist revolution should find a more fertile ground in more advanced capitalist countries. However, even with the instability created by the war, even with a politicised worker's movement, with strong leaderships, and even with the productive forces in Germany offering effective means of a greater socialisation of wealth, still the promise of a socialist revolution gave way, instead, to a republican constitution with restricted popular participation and, right after it, to the rise of nazi-fascism. Different aspects of this perplexing situation suggested the need to complement Marxism with a psychoanalytic view, since the analytic concepts seemed to increment the understanding of the ideology and culture of the middle classes, the enigmatic logic of the masses, the dangerous fascination with authority and the notable effects of the instrumentalisation of reason.

It is important to note that the idea that this renewed encounter between Freud and Marx was in fact required by these social phenomena themselves did not only lead to a program of theoretical unification, but also allowed for different strands of Freud-Marxism to find a formal place

within academic institutions. The Frankfurt School, associated with the Institute for Social Research of the Frankfurt University, was founded in 1923 and, even if many of the thinkers connected to it did not share the same view of what this “critical theory” would be, they still shared the affirmation that it was the very objects of research which brought about the need to articulate Freud and Marx²³.

From abstract challenges to common objects, the history of this articulation can be punctuated yet a third time, insofar as thinkers such as Louis Althusser or Jacques Lacan countered the previous view and proposed, in different ways, the emptying out of any positive interconnection between psychoanalysis and Marxism, allowing only for certain *structural* isomorphisms between these theoretical perspectives.

If the failure of the Weimar revolution, and the subsequent rise of fascism, informed the Freudo-Marxist research program, we can surely associate the failure of the “de-Stalinization” of Marxism to the political and theoretical project of Althusser²⁴. The famous twentieth congress of the Soviet Communist Party, in 1956, put on the agenda of a whole generation of European Marxists the need of settling accounts with “Marxism-Leninism”. The so-called “secret report”, presented by Nikita Khrushchev, denouncing the horrors of the Soviet regime under Stalin, made common knowledge the already known limits of the Soviet project and led many Marxists to find ways to distance themselves from the official interpretation of Marx - for example, seeking in his early writings the basis for a more humanistic view of political action. Althusser’s project could be defined as the one which, identifying both the irreflexive adoption of Marxism-Leninism as well as its humanistic revision as equally problematic deviations, found in the question of the *method*²⁵ - rather than in some new social object - the basis for reformulating the Marxist theory, a method which, for Althusser, could also be recognised in Freud’s thinking.

For Althusser, psychoanalysis and Marxism share no common object: the first deals with the critique of the “homo psicologicus”, while the latter deals with the critique of the “homo economicus” - and even if the ideology of psychology feeds economic ideology, and vice-versa, these are in fact totally distinct conceptual fields²⁶. However, for him both fields make use of a common method: both are materialist discourses, which seek to know reality through means that are irreducible to individual experience, and both are dialectical discourses, in which the subject is immersed in the world which she seeks to conceptually

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23The canonical work on the history of the Frankfurt School remains Jay 1996

24 Elliot 2009

25 Althusser, 2006 and 2016

26 We refer here, once more, to the essay *Marx and Freud* in Althusser, 1999

grasp and transform. Once the unconscious and political economy were decoupled as theoretical objects, what was left as a common ground was only a similar epistemological statute, that of being “conflictual sciences” - sciences whose objects of investigation include aspects of the very science which seeks to apprehend them, which is, in fact, the reason why both fields would present similar institutional histories, filled with scissions, internal conflicts and new organisations, constantly immersed in internal debates and processes of revision. This common method allowed Althusser to identify, in each of these fields, internal problems and open questions and, through this, to initiate a process of theoretical reform which did not presuppose that the solutions to outstanding impasses already lay dormant somewhere in the writings of its founding fathers. In the case of psychoanalysis, for example, Althusser considered that the Freudian theory of sublimation had not yet found its proper formulation, up to the measure of Freud’s own rigor. In the case of Marx, a series of open and fundamental problems could then be tackled, such as the development of a materialist theory of ideology, a new comprehension of historical causality, a new view of the role of theory with regards to political strategy and practice, to name a few.

It is also worth noting that the problems with interested Althusser were, usually, formulated as epistemological obstacles internal to the very theoretical fields which he so ardently defended, rather than as new social phenomena - even if the crisis of Soviet Marxism, the challenges of Maoist cultural revolution and the anti-colonial struggles were undeniable influences in his project. The fact that these problems were considered essentially theoretical obstacles to be overcome by an appropriate theoretical method also allowed Althusser to remain within an academic environment. However, given that these impasses did not correspond to well-defined sociological objects, but to the need of establishing new positions within the conflictual realities of psychoanalysis and Marxism, Althusser was equally obliged to remain connected to the psychoanalytic and political organisations of his time - as demonstrated by his engagement with Lacan’s EFP and the French Communist Party.

Lacan, like Althusser, also argued that psychoanalysis and Marxism had no common objects, and he also claimed that the revitalisation of the psychoanalytic movement was conditioned by the traversal of obstacles that were internal to its own theory and practice. Still, and even if it is not possible to underplay the effect that the Second World War had on his work, the “historical failures” which explicitly mobilised Lacan’s teaching were rather the “social decline of the paternal imago” - a transformation which required psychoanalysis to let go of some theoretical presuppositions hindering the update of clinical practice - and the decadence of the *International Psychoanalytic Association*, which had allowed for the revision and outright neutralisation of Freud’s greatest

insights²⁷. This double challenge led Lacan, on the one hand, to consider in innovative ways how both contingency and social structures affect the constitution of subjectivity and, on the other, to reconstruct Freud's theoretical apparatus in such a way as to avoid the same conceptual traps that led to the psychologising revisions of the IPA.

Unlike Althusser, however, Lacan did not claim that Marxism and psychoanalysis shared a common method, rather asserting that there was a "homology" in the "logical space" mobilised by both fields²⁸. That is, both Freud and Marx would have considered the same logical paradox in their theories on libidinal satisfaction and surplus-value, respectively - even if these two theories do not deal with the same object, nor do it in a similar way. Still, if, on the one hand, Lacan claimed that this underlying recognition of a fundamental paradox at the heart of the logic of representation led both Freud and Marx "not to bullshit"²⁹, on the other, Lacan recognised an essential asymmetry between psychoanalysis and Marxism: while psychoanalysis would fully assume the structural role of this paradox - leading, for example, to a universal theory of the "discontent" in civilisation - Marxism, which theorised it as the specific characteristic of a particular historical period, would remain attached to the illusions its overcoming and the coming into being of absolute social harmony.³⁰

Althusser and Lacan demarcate, in this way, the beginning of a new phase in the articulations between Freud and Marx, a sequence characterised, paradoxically, by the *non-relation* between the two. For Althusser, this lack of articulation opened up mostly to epistemological questions, given that the theoretical reformulation of each field relied on a total separation of their objects, while requiring them to recognise the immanent contradictions to their theoretical and practical apparatuses. For Lacan, this "non-relation" had an eminently ontological status, so that the only admissible conceptual solidarity between Freud and Marx concerned the very "topology" of the representational space, a feature both of libidinal and political economies, while the asymmetric treatment given to this ontological impasse in each field justified the psychoanalyst's underlying distrust in revolutionary aspirations.

This sequence was both accompanied by a call to the "return" to the original positioning of Freud and Marx - given that both authors invested in a similar immediate separation between psychoanalysis and politics - as well as a new sort of invitation or conceptual challenge: if there is no direct relation between psychoanalysis and Marxism, then

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27 Roudinesco 1997

28 Lacan 2008

29 Lacan 1999

30 Lacan 2007

it is possible to imagine - and, effectively, to invent - new *indirect* ways to relate them. It is under the orientation of this immediate non-relation between Freud and Marx that we should therefore understand, for example, the project of the *Circle D'Épistémologie*, which joined together young Lacanians and Althusserians, like Jacques-Alain Miller and Alain Badiou³¹.

The attempt of the "young Miller" to propose a mediation between the discourse of historical overdetermination, in Althusser, and the discourse of unconscious overdetermination, in Lacan, through formal logic and a critique of the Frege's project is a paradigmatic example of the effort to produce "ruled transformations" between the two fields - here, through a philosophy of science of Bachelardian inspiration³². Another example would be the position of Slavoj Žižek, who sought to substitute the mediation through formal logic for an innovative use of Hegelian dialectics, proposing a "borromean knotting" between philosophy, politics and psychoanalysis, so that not only the relations between Freud and Marx ought to be mediated by Hegel, but also the relations between Hegel and Marx should go through Freudian theory, and so on³³. The same can be said of the project of mediating the relations between psychoanalysis and Marxism through a theory of hegemony and discursivity, as in the work of Laclau e Mouffe³⁴, or of the project of reclaiming the challenges of a general ontology while respecting the autonomy of "generic procedures" such as psychoanalysis and Marxism, as with Alain Badiou³⁵. The examples abound and, as never before, they extrapolate the confines of Western Europe³⁶.

Another property shared by these different projects is their increasing distance from any organised institutional project - political or psychoanalytic. Besides the complex relations with the academia - increasingly distrustful of both psychoanalysis and Marxism - these thinkers have generally placed themselves at a certain distance from political parties as well as from the analytic schools, contributing to the mutual distrust between "clinical" psychoanalysts - increasingly concerned with the "purity" of Lacanian thinking - and those who continued the project of articulating psychoanalysis and politics - increasingly frustrated with academia, institutions and political organisations. This distance was clearly recognisable at the time

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31 Hallward & Peden 2012

32 Ibid

33 Žižek 1989

34 Laclau, & Mouffe 1985

35 Badiou 1982

36 Pavón-Cuéllar 2017a

of the crisis of 1998, when the separation between the institutional impasses of the WAP and the thinkers interested in the relation between psychoanalysis and politics led to a near-absolute theoretical silence about that institutional scission.

3. Lacanian ideology

This rather brute overview of the history of the relations between psychoanalysis and Marxism clearly does not consider the near infinite ramifications, anticipations of later moments, persistences of previous paradigms, and important exceptions that would most certainly enrich this panorama. But it is quite sufficient for our purposes, as it allow us to make two introductory observations concerning the current *Lacanian ideology*.

Before anything else, our attempt to localize Lacan as one of the great proponents of a new way of articulating Freud and Marx, psychoanalysis and politics, also implied the inscription of the previous analysis of the “cyclical crises” of Lacanian organisations within a more general theoretical paradigm. This begs the question, then, of the relation between the paradigm of the “non-relation” - and, specially, the asymmetric treatment given by Lacan to analytic and revolutionary aspirations - and the limitations of the Lacanian field when thinking about its own social, economic and political existence.

In fact, if, on the one hand, Lacan sought to preserve the structural dimension of the “sexual non-relation”, such as conceived by Freud, and thereby using the “realist” severity of psychoanalysis to counter the utopian and delirious aspirations of non-psychoanalysts - that is, if he identified psychoanalysis as the discourse which is capable of abstaining itself from this mirage - it is then perfectly understandable that the identification process within the Lacanian field takes place *in opposition* to the dramas of group formations, mastery and institutionalisation in general. The very way in which Lacan named his formulas for discursive structures - the discourse of the “analyst”, of the “master”, of the “university” and of the “hysteric” - suggests that *within* psychoanalysis there is no threat of imaginization or identificatory sutures: when these effects emerge, we are already in another discourse, which supposedly describes not psychoanalysis, but its “others”. The structures we consider to be more “productive”, such as discourse of the analyst or the hysteric, take on names that refer them back to the analytic framework, while “unproductive” or outright demonised discourses - of the master and the university - take on the name of political or academic instances. But none of this alters the fact that this theory of the four discourses was elaborated by psychoanalysis itself, and that the objects and situations it legitimately refers to all take place within the clinical, institutional and conceptual universe of psychoanalysis. Nor does it alter the fact that it remains perfectly possible for one to *identify with a discourse that is*

critical of identifications - as the rituals of seduction amongst Laconians attest to everyday. In other words, it is part of the very paradigm of Lacanian thinking, certainly due to the collateral effects of its mission to recuperate the subversive edge of Freud against later revisions, to treat all strategies of defence against the real as intrusions coming from outside of the “proper psychoanalytic” practice.

At the same time Lacanian theory expanded in unheard ways the clinical and theoretical reach of psychoanalysis, it also removed from the proper practice of analysis the legitimate existence of identificatory and hierarchical structures without which it would have been impossible to found a school, and much less to internationalise it. The very act of dissolving the EFP can be read in this same key: what most likely perplexed Althusser, after all, was the way Lacan reduced the *organisational* problem of an institution - whose social network extended not only to the main “cadres” and the remaining analysts, but also to the analysands and their families - to a *narcissistic* decision, as if the “ossification” of his teaching was an offensive and unexpected process, the product of tendencies external to psychoanalysis itself³⁷ Rather than demonstrate the capacity of the analytic position to remove itself from identifications, the dissolution of the EFP would then serve as a good example of how the process of dis-identification can perfectly function as just another social identity, precisely when the “real” of a situation required psychoanalysts to respond like *any other* collective organisation and to engage with organisational challenges as *anyone* would - that is, politically³⁸. And it is precisely this other face of the real - not as *cause* of desire, but as its *consistent* support - that remains beyond the theoretical limits of Lacanian psychoanalysis, insofar as “consistency”³⁹ has been reduced within its theoretical framework to an imaginary effect and therefore has no place within the “analytic discourse”.

This brings us to the second crucial observation, which also stems from the effort of situating, within the paradigm of “non-relation”, the new moment of the WAP, since 2017 - which, as we previously described it, can be defined by the institutional proposition of a transitivity between the analytic and the political positions. It is, however, not a matter of

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37 Lacan's position is particularly clear in his text *Monsieur Aa*, written just after Althusser's intervention, where Lacan talks about the transformation of psychoanalysts into “jurists” and negatively compares the School to a trade union - as well as makes some dismissive remarks about Althusser - the text is available at: <http://espace.freud.pagesperso-orange.fr/topos/psych/psyssem/dissolu9.htm#monsieur%20A>

38 Yuan Yao and I have analysed the details of this dialectics between identification and dis-identification in the case of the EFP's dissolution in Tupinambá & Yao 2013

39 Already in 1979, Alain Badiou warned us that the philosophical and epistemological presuppositions of psychoanalysis could lead to unsurpassable obstacles for the Lacanian theory of the real, whose effects could be minimal in clinical practice, but were palpable when psychoanalysis sought to think political processes within its own framework. See Badiou 1982

contrasting the paradigm of a non-relation between psychoanalysis and politics and this immediate identity between clinical practice and the defence of the State of Law, currently upheld by the WAP, but rather of recognising that the *latter is only possible under the auspices of the first*. It is perfectly coherent with the Lacanian paradigm the fantasy that, if only psychoanalysis is capable of dealing with the constitutive dimension of our discontent - which is why not even the analytic method is shared by psychoanalysis and political thinking - then *only psychoanalysis can truly guide contemporary politics*. This realisation could help to clarify, in fact, the symptomatic dimension of the justification so commonly presented by so many psychoanalysts as to why one should keep a distance from the tradition of emancipatory politics, as well as from collective organisations: on the one hand, it is said that “clinical work is already politics”, thus recognising the importance of politics and social transformation, on the other, all other forms of political work are to be avoided because politics itself cannot avoid trying to suture, harmonize or overcome our constitutive discontent. In other words, once the asymmetry between the analytic procedure and concrete political practices is established, given that only the former “touches on the real”, while the latter covers it up with idealisations, the autonomy of psychoanalytic thinking becomes no longer a *regionally* defined - that is, it no longer needs to respect the limits of its legitimate application - and becomes *generalised*, as if it could set the criteria of validity of any other field of thought, politics especially.

In light of this interpretation - in which the supposed monopoly of “the real” by psychoanalysis leads it to simultaneously reject and identify with political practice - it also becomes quite clear why the French presidential election ended up prompting the political campaign of the WAP. Let us imagine a victory of Le Pen, the right-wing candidate: the very fact that *nothing would change for psychoanalytic practice* would depose against the fantasy that clinical work is, by itself, committed to some subversive political effect. It was necessary therefore, to fight against her candidacy, but not due to what it would change for France, but because of what it would leave exactly in its place. Lacanian psychoanalysis would survive unharmed to her government, what could rather not survive was the fantasy concerning the immanent politic effects of the psychoanalytic clinic. It is not a surprise, then, that instead of a grand institutional “act”, what we witnessed was rather a massive staging of this very fantasy: the time had come for psychoanalysts to position themselves politically as *psychoanalysts*.

It is up to us now to inscribe this new moment in the history of the relations between psychoanalysis and politics, just as other historical events which led us to rethink this articulation and to recognise new scansions within this process - that is, it is up to us to inscribe this moment as a *historical failure*, perhaps the first one which Lacanians have no “other” to blame.

4. After the non-relation

However, what could it mean to think once again Lacanian psychoanalysis? That is, how could we abdicate, as psychoanalysts, from the standpoint of psychoanalysis such as it exists today, without thereby leaving our own field? To remain within the schematic considerations we have sketched in this study, let us consider the different ways in which psychoanalysis can position itself with regards to other fields - generalizing some insights already gained in our periodisation of the relations between Freud and Marx, while signalling a possible alternative route to our current predicament.

Let us consider, then, the four general orientations through which psychoanalysis might articulate itself to other practices and fields of thought.

A. Unilateral contribution. A first possible strategy here is to claim that the psychoanalytic field has access to a certain dimension of life which, despite only being intelligible from within the analytic frame, has relevant consequences for other fields and practices. For example, psychoanalysis alone is capable of considering the libidinal dimension of group identifications, while politics, which would be attached to an underlying commitment to ideals, cannot articulate by itself a critique of ideals - hence psychoanalysis would have something to add to the political field. Here politics is thought from the standpoint of psychoanalysis: there is nothing of the analytic practice or theory at stake in this contribution, the object of intervention - political practice - is localised outside of the analytic domain.

B. Correlation. It is also possible to propose a less asymmetrical articulation between the two. One might recognise, for example, some similarity between specific aspects of both fields, allowing the psychoanalyst to orient herself by it when taking a political stance. The paradigmatic case here is probably that of democracy: insofar as Lacanian psychoanalysis claims to orient itself clinically by the singular and radical alterity of each subject's mode of enjoyment, and insofar as democracy is associated to the construction of a heterogeneous social space in which divergent and even contradictory positions co-exist, there would be a certain *correlation* between the analytical orientation and the fight for democracy. To defend democracy is a compatible commitment for a psychoanalysts, just as psychoanalysis is a practice that is in dialogue with the challenges of democracy - preparing individual subjects to deal with the alterity of others, with the empty centre of power or with the arbitrariness of social representations.

C. Separation. There are also strategies which invest in the negative articulation between psychoanalysis and its others. One might argue, for

instance, that psychoanalysis simply has nothing to do with politics - a position which can be defended in at least two ways: one might argue it out of principle - claiming that each field has its own object, its own practice and purpose, and therefore have no effective intersections - or because we identify some inherent deficiency in the other - claiming, as we have seen, that politics is so caught up in certain commitments that it would just be impossible for it to absorb any serious psychoanalytic input. Here, the only legitimate form of relation that remains is therefore a critical or negative one: to constantly revise the different idealised links that we create from time to time amongst fields, forcing a proximity that is not truly capable of preserving what is essential to each discipline - if the disarticulation has been argued out of principle - or to psychoanalysis - if it has been argued through the depreciation of another field.

However, it is not the case of choosing between these three positions - even if we might formalize the current crisis of the WAP as displaying a closed circuit between these three alternatives. It is, after all, perfectly possible to maintain, simultaneously, that psychoanalysis can contribute to the reformulation of non-psychoanalytic questions, that the analytic field has affinities with non-trivial positions in other spheres of life and thought and that it is also necessary to criticise impostures and imaginary articulations between psychoanalysis and other theories. What should be noted, however, is that *in none of these three positions psychoanalysis appears as one of the terms under scrutiny*: be it as the field which contributes to another practice, as the one which provides our orientation within other discourses, or as that which should be preserved from the intromission of others, psychoanalysis is always present as the place *from which* one thinks, never as what is given to be thought. An observation which brings us to the fourth possible articulation between psychoanalysis and other fields of thinking.

D. *Compossibility*. This fourth case would be the one in which the affirmation of a commitment that is extrinsic to psychoanalysis demands that we also reconsider its own limits or foundations. It is the strategy at stake in claims such as “what must psychoanalysis be if I affirm that x or y is possible for politics?” - for example: if there is such a thing as a consistent thinking of real social equality in the realm of the material conditions of social existence, then what are the consequences of this for our understanding of the idea of singularity in the clinic? Or even; what is it that singularity *cannot mean* for psychoanalysis if it must respect the possibility of a thinking of social equality in politics?

It is crucial to note that this fourth position is not simply an inversion of the first, in which psychoanalysis appeared as that which questions and supplements other fields from its own establishes position. There is an essential distinction between taking the current state of political or militant thinking for a safe harbour from which we can

evaluate the limits of psychoanalysis - a position which would just mean a return to the first form of articulation proposed above - and questioning the limits of a discipline from the standpoint of the exigency that it remain *compossible* with the challenges of another. After all, who today would maintain that revolutionary politics was ever capable of articulating a complete doctrine of social equality? But, at the same time, which other field of thought is truly in condition of interdicting the claim that the development of this doctrine is a legitimate political challenge, perhaps the limit-point out of which politics constructs for itself the renewal of its thinking? Compossibility is, therefore, neither an asymmetrical relation between different fields, nor a correlation, nor even a pure effort of separation between them. It is a matter, instead, of affirming that the task of formulating the interiority of a practice or theory should not entail the legislation over the limits of the possible within other fields of thought - hence the conditional form: “if x and y are possible...”. If it is part of the interiority of politics the possibility of thinking equality in its own terms - which does not imply that “real equality” should be a concept with any pertinence for psychoanalysis as such - then what would psychoanalysis have to be so that *both forms of thinking are possible within the same world*?

The relation of compossibility most certainly does not substitute other possible forms of articulation between these two fields, but it introduces an indispensable operator in the search for a new paradigm in the history of articulations between psychoanalysis and politics: a form of partnership which would allow us to find support in the autonomy of *other* fields of thought in order to better think the autonomy of our own practice. If the third type of articulation we introduced - the operation of separating politics from psychoanalysis to better protect the second from possible deformations - postulates an absence of relation, we could define the paradigm of compossibility as the proposition of a positive “non-relation”, that is, a solution which allows us to orient ourselves by the common conviction that both politics and psychoanalysis have the tools to formulate and solve their own problems. This is a productive separation, rather than a restrictive one, because it imposes as a condition for the development of thought - to both critical and constructive efforts of a given field - the imperative that it do not rely on the extrinsic interdiction of a similar movement within the interiority of other fields. From the standpoint of compossibility, psychoanalysis and politics do not think the same thing, nor do they think within similar conceptual frameworks - but this does not entail that any of them should thereby lose its status as a legitimate form of thought, which implies that both should remain equally capable of finding, formulating and overcoming their own historical limits.

The most explicit formulation of such operator can be found in the work of the philosopher Alain Badiou, one of the main proponents

of a new paradigm for the relation between psychoanalysis, politics and philosophy today. For Badiou, both psychoanalysis and politics are autonomous forms of thinking, fields capable of formulating their questions in terms of their own vocabularies, and of disposing of the immanent means to overcome their practical and theoretical obstacles - what the philosopher calls “generic procedures”⁴⁰. It is under the emblem of compossibility which Badiou then reconstructs, from the historical existence of these generic procedures, the role of philosophy: for him, philosophy does not produce new truth-statements, nor does it legislate over what is and what is not possible, it can only make an effort to know the historical singularity of the different non-philosophical procedures - such as the art, science, love and politics of its time - and try to systematise in a creative and provisory fashion a certain common horizon of what has become thinkable and possible within a certain historical moment.

However, even if the term “compossibility” is itself a Badiouian one, it is not hard to recognise the same impetus of overcoming the limits of the paradigm of “non-relation” within the work of other great contemporary thinkers. Slavoj Žižek, for example, has elaborated a “borromean” theory of how to relate psychoanalysis, politics and philosophy, one which - through a different strategy than Badiou’s proposal - also respects the autonomy of each field at the same time that it requires it each of them to be aware of the developments in the other ones⁴¹. The borromean structure, just like the operator of compossibility, helps us think both the interiority as well as the relation between the fields it articulates. On the one hand, such structure implies that there are not complementary relations between any two of these fields: philosophy and psychoanalysis, politics and philosophy, psychoanalysis and politics, are all unstable constructions which can only become stabilised through the - silent or explicit - mediation of the third field. Philosophy and psychoanalysis can only articulate through political decisions, the relation between politics and psychoanalysis depends on philosophical commitments, and so on. On the other hand, if this regime imposes a generalised “non-relation” between these fields, it also imposes another clause, namely, that every interiority is inconsistent: psychoanalysis, when taken far enough, poses problems that do not belong to its own field - questions that require political or philosophical reformulation - and the same happens with the other two fields. It is the combination of these two clauses - the first of “non-complementarity” and the second of an “immanent transition” - which justify calling this operator a “borromean” one.

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40 Badiou 2006

41 Žižek 1989

Another philosopher who proposes a similar form of articulation is the Japanese Marxist philosopher Kojin Karatani, who elaborated a sophisticated theory of the “parallax”⁴² - one that Žižek himself has discussed at length⁴³. Through an innovative reading of the theme of “transcendental reduction”, from Kant to Husserl, Karatani devised a way of thinking the articulation of fields which are *incommensurate precisely because of their almost absolute superposition*. Here, the central operator is that of “abstraction”, which Karatani defines as a suspensive practice: for example, in Kant, so that the object of scientific investigation might constitute itself - the object of statements concerning truth and falsity - we must first abstract, suspend, or “bracket” all questions concerning the beautiful - is it pleasing/displeasing? - and ethics - is it right/wrong? This suspension of aesthetic and moral domains is what operates the transcendental reduction of the thing into the object of science. But this does not entail an absolute exclusion of what has been abstract, given that what has been bracketed can be recuperated, and other objects constituted in a new process of abstraction: the suspension of the true/falsity question and of right/wrong lead to the constitution of the object of aesthetics, and so on. The consistency of science, ethics and aesthetics is, thus, a *relative* one, insofar as they depend on the fields each abstracts from, but this does not mean that any of them touch less on the *absolute* of their own domain, nor that they do not cover the *totality* of the objects of their interest - in fact, it is precisely because each bracketing constitutes a different totality that they are ultimately incommensurable amongst each other.

As these examples show us - all extracted from the works of different post-Althusserian thinkers - to think the compossibility between psychoanalysis and politics is to investigate, simultaneously, the separation and the solidarity between incommensurate regions of thought. Ultimately, it means to rely on the autonomy of *other fields* in order to better determine and conceptualise our own. As we have tried to show, neither one of the three great sequences binding Freud and Marx in the XXth Century have truly explored this operation - and we have recently witnessed some of the pernicious effects of insisting on an asymmetrical separation between the two, which silently places psychoanalysis in a privileged position amongst other fields of thought, called upon only to further reinforce the static closure of our own field.

Strangely enough, a consequence of the historical saturation of the current paradigm is that it becomes no longer enough for anyone interested in the advancement of “pure” psychoanalysis today to simply *remain* within psychoanalysis, for the very interiority of our practice is

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42 Karatani 2003

43 Žižek 2009

epistemologically dependent on several extrinsic “crochets” we do not recognise - but which make themselves legible once they are mobilised by our sense of superiority concerning other fields of thought. To truly gauge the current state of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the actual shape of its interior development, we must therefore begin by severing these silent ties, by criticising the means through which we have achieved the closure of our theoretical space, before being able to recognise the open questions and problems that lurk about in our conceptual and practical edifice.

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Lacan's Answer to Alienation: Separation

Paul Verhaeghe

Abstract: Lacan's pivotal processes in the 'advent of the subject', i.e. alienation and separation, are discussed from an ontological point of view. For Lacan, alienation is inevitable, (there is no original identity) and structurally incomplete. Separation offers an escape from a total determination of the subject by the Other via an identification with the 'sinthome'. I argue that the body may present us with a criterion for the quality of that solution.

Keywords: Lacan, social theory, alienation, separation, subject, essentialism, constructivism, determinism, sinthome

During a psychoanalytical therapy, remarks such as 'I am fake', 'This is not me', 'I am not true to myself' or even 'I am an impostor' express a feeling of alienation. The original concept goes back to Rousseau (the noble savage who lost his innocence because of civilization), although it is usually associated with Marx (the proletarian saddled with a false consciousness because of capitalism). Ever since the Frankfurt school, alienation has become a central concept in critical theory. Marcuse presented a psychoanalytic reading on this notion, combining Marx with Freud.

A common theme in these different theories is that alienation is the negative result of a dominant social-cultural-economical discourse.¹ It allows for a social-diagnostic reasoning, echoing the original denomination for mental derangement (alienation) treated by an 'alienist'. An important exception is Hegel, who was convinced that his contemporaries were alienated because they were split from their world and failed to understand how it could be their home; his philosophical project was to overcome alienation by reconciliation with the modern social world.²

What is probably less known is that, alienation is a pivotal concept for Lacan as well. Before going into his theory, I introduce the concept in its commonly accepted version and conclude by addressing the originality of Lacan's approach.

Alienation as an ontological nightmare

The question 'Who am I?' is a popular version of a central issue in ontology: is there an essential kernel to human identity? Indeed, the question itself expresses suspicion, even a certain kind of anxiety: maybe I am not the person that I could have become. There is a difference between who I am now, and who I essentially am in the kernel of my

¹ For the reader who wants to refresh his knowledge about alienation, the article by D. Leopold (2018) in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and the article on authenticity by S. Varga and Ch. Guignon (2014) will serve as a good refresher. The book by R. Jaeggi (2014), *Alienation*, brings an original contemporary reading.

² See Hardimon, M. (1992). *The project of reconciliation: Hegel's social philosophy*.

being; or between who I am now, and who I could have become. The suspicion is that all the good things I could have become, were thwarted, or twisted by society in general and particularly by my parents. In a poem by Philip Larkin:

They fuck you up, your mum and dad.
They may not mean to, but they do.
They fill you with the faults they had
And add some extra, just for you.

But they were fucked up in their turn
By fools in old-style hats and coats,
Who half the time were sippy-stern
And half at one another's throats.

The less poetic denomination is alienation, as the opposite of authenticity: I am not truly myself and this lack of authenticity is a result of bad influences. Closer scrutiny of this simple ontological reasoning leads to more complex ideas and questions.

The initial examples ('I am fake') demonstrate how a person is painfully conscious of his alienation – 'This is not me'. Most theories accept the idea that many people are alienated without being aware of it. In that case, it is decided for them that they are alienated from their supposedly true self without being conscious of it. The next step sees the one who decided about their alienation, install a system to raise their consciousness and help them get rid of their false self. Political history presents several examples of this reasoning, thus illustrating the proverb that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. What is probably less known is that the same kind of reasoning may be applied to psychodiagnostics and psychotherapy. An individual develops a mental illness because of the devastating effects of his education, as determined by the cultural and the social class (see Larkin). Psychotherapy must help patients rid themselves of their false self and to rediscover their original identity so that they can be true to themselves.

The trouble is that nobody really knows what this true self might be. Only one thing seems clear: it is much better than the actual self. Hence the moral connotation in alienation. There is good and a bad version of me; the good me is really me, the bad me is a consequence of bad influences. This confronts us with yet another difficult question: what are the criteria for deciding on a 'good' or a 'bad' me? So-called essentialist theories are never convincing, and the moral appreciation of a supposedly true self usually illustrates the power of the dominant discourse of that specific time and place.

Often enough, the intellectual and political discussions about alienation tend to overlook something that might be the only essence in

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our identity, i.e. our inner division and the ensuing double relationship. The relationship that I have with myself is as complex as the relationship that I may have with other people, from self-hate to self-love. This myself and its inner rapport stands in relation to the external world and to the Other. In my opinion, for us to understand alienation, the essential division of human identity is a good start.

Authenticity: me, myself, and I

Self-consciousness illustrates our inner division. When asking myself who I really am, at the same time I am asking whether I have become who I potentially am or originally was. Am I authentic, i.e. true to myself? Notice that in this reasoning, we take the existence of an essential kernel in our identity for granted. Development is to unroll what was already there, from birth onwards. This 'essentialism' stands in sharp contrast to 'constructivism', where a baby is considered as a blank slate waiting to be written upon by others. Identity comes down to a combination of roles, as presented by education and society. Change the roles, and you get a different identity.

In their extreme version, essentialism and constructivism are not accepted today; contemporary developmental psychology advocates a combination between the two. As a species and as an individual, human beings dispose of certain possibilities and potential talents, whose development is influenced by external influences, either in a negative or a positive way. Srinivasa Aaiyengar Ramanujan (1887-1920) developed his mathematical skills mostly on his own while living in India; once he worked at Cambridge, his genius took a higher flight. A child born with Downs syndrome may learn to read and write, if raised in a stimulating environment. In cases where a mathematical genius is repressed because of racist reactions, or a child with Downs syndrome is left to itself, we talk about missed opportunities. Contemporary neoliberal ideology presents a version where everybody must strive for excellence; to develop your talents is an individual responsibility and in the event of failure, blame is on yourself.

This kind of reasoning is loosely based on Aristotelean teleology: every living organism aims at realizing itself as optimal as possible. If self-realization is thwarted, the result is a lesser version of myself. Unnoticed, we face here the same problem as in case of essentialism. This is even more the case because ever since Darwin, science has discarded teleology. When an individual does his best to excel, to realize his talents in the best possible way, then this is already an effect of his culture and his education telling him which talents are important (contemporary version: those that lead to financial success) and endowing him with the idea that he has to rise 'above himself'. In other words, such an ideal 'self'-realization might be a perfect example of contemporary alienation, where authenticity is used as a marketing gimmick. This brings us to the relation between me and the Other.

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Alienation: me and the Other

That the interaction between 'nature' and 'nurture' determines our development is widely accepted. The combined effect between hereditary elements and the environment finds a humorous illustration in an *East of Eden* dialogue (J.Steinbeck).

'You can't make a race horse of a pig'. "No, but you can make a very fast pig." The relation between me and the external world is central in the study of alienation. Often, the concept indicates the negative influence of the outside world on the development of an individual, whereby different authors identify different sources of alienation. Modern urbanized civilization for Rousseau, religion according to Feuerbach, capitalism for Marx. The common denominator is that the individual is saddled with an identity which is not truly his own. Alienation belongs to the age-old strand of cultural pessimism.

Independent of philosophy, the very same process was already described by Freud, albeit in a positive way and with a different name, i.e. identification. A baby becomes a human child because it identifies with the images and words presented by his parents and by important others in general. What these others present, is representative for the dominant culture. Lacan epitomizes both these concrete others and culture in general in his concept of the Other. Identifications are necessary, and a child that grows up outside a social context with no possibilities of identification, just does not become human. So-called feral children do not develop a normal identity.

In this reasoning, alienation might be an apt word to indicate an identification gone awry. This tallies with the contemporary attachment theory, a psychoanalytical branch of developmental psychology. Fonagy et al. (2002) describe the mirroring processes as the first identifications between infant and mother. Basically, the mother mirrors the affects that the baby experiences in its body – hungry, when hungry, angry when angry, etc. The net result is a gradual development of the 'self' – i.e. identity – combined with affect regulation. In case a parent systematically presents the wrong image, i.e. 'incongruent' mirroring – e.g. hungry when angry – the child develops an 'alien self'. The most well-known example is the borderline personality disorder.

The alien self from attachment theory illustrates the analogy between alienation on the larger social level and on the smaller developmental level. In both cases, an image is presented to a child or adult with the message: "This is you". If the presented images mirror what the child is indeed experiencing, the resulting identification is congruent. To apply the same reasoning on the social level is less easy; in that case, the identificatory models presented by the Other should mirror a supposed essence of the subject. The analogy goes even further. In case of incongruent mirroring and the resulting alien self, psychotherapy is required to correct the alien aspect. It is plausible to assume that

the same incongruent mirroring can happen on a larger scale of the social. E.g. the rising numbers of borderline personality disorder is often understood as an effect of social changes. Nevertheless, as I mentioned earlier, it is impossible to put forward what a true or authentic core of our identity might be; just as it is impossible to conceive a therapy on the social level.

Alienation?

Although it is easy to recognize, the concept of alienation presents several difficulties. Obviously, the interaction between an individual and the other/the social is necessary from birth onwards. Without such an interaction, identity does not develop. The interaction implies two sides: the organism with its limits and potentialities; the social world (the Other) that may hinder or enhance the realization of these possibilities. The question is when the influence of the Other is positive and when negative, i.e. alienating. An additional question is: alienating relative to what?

The assumption that there is an essential kernel in human identity, targeting at its realization, is impossible to prove and hard to maintain. Its weaker version – a child is born with several potentialities; ideal circumstances will promote their optimal realization – confronts us with the same problems. What are those potentialities? And who is to decide about their ethical value? If a human being is potentially an aggressive predator, it is not such a good idea to promote this quality.

Alienation is the bad version of identification, because the presented identity does not tally with a supposedly correct version – but we are at a loss when asked what this correct version might be. For a left wing intellectual, Trump-voters advocating guns, denying climate change and promoting true manhood, are alienated, based on their social background and their 'news' feed. For a right wing intellectual, liberal thinking people advocating green energy and in favor of LGBT-tolerance are alienated as a result of their elitist upbringing and their refusal to see how the world 'really' works.

The discussion about alienation becomes even more difficult when we accept the idea that an individual may be alienated without knowing it, thus suffering from a 'false consciousness'. According to Marx, the working class have identified with the social norms, value systems and social stigmas of the ruling class, as a result of which they unknowingly endorse a system that oppresses them. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, a similar false consciousness can be ascribed to liberals. In both cases, alienation is 'diagnosed' by someone belonging to the other group and the remedy may be worse than the disease – see George Orwell's *1984* where people are 're-educated'.

Even in when a person is conscious of being alienated, there is no easy solution either. Often, such a consciousness is present at the start

of a psychoanalytic therapy and – if not – the therapy itself provokes it. At that point, the analysand needs to make choices. Knowing my identity is alienated, based on images and ideas coming from the Other, offers me the possibility to make different choices. But are they really choices? The summum of alienation is an individual who tries to be free and original and therefore refuses commonly accepted beliefs. But isn't his desire to be original by itself not an alienation, based on an imposed ideal? How can we ever escape alienation at all? Thus considered, a study of alienation confronts us with the question of free choice versus determination. The same questions return in Lacan's theory as well, albeit with different accents.

Lacan: alienation and separation

The notion of the 'subject' has a long history in Lacan's theory. It can be understood as his attempt to distance himself from ego psychology in general and particularly from the autonomous ego. The Lacanian subject lacks all substance and comes down to an effect of a continuing chain of signifiers – a narrative – that never reaches a final stage. The underlying 'being' is always lost, especially when it is supposed to appear in the signifiers of the Other. Just think about what I call 'the cocktail experience' – you find yourself in a company of new people, upon meeting, you have to introduce yourself. If you want to present yourself genuinely, as you *really* are, you will never find enough words. That is because the subject is condemned to a structurally determined form of never-being-there. Hence the paradoxical fact that the essence of the Lacanian subject comes down to its lacking any kind of essence whatever, and that the accent must be put on its divided character.

At the time of his paper on the mirror stage, Lacan questioned the how's and why's of identity formation.³ His first theory presents us with the two sides of a dialectical process: the body and the Other. The infant is happy to find a first identificatory model in the mirror image presented to him by his (m)Other. He is happy because the identification with the mirror image and the accompanying message of the (m)Other ('Thou art that') gives him a much-needed sense of mastery over his original helplessness, the fragmented experience of his body and the push of the partial drives. The result is the first formation of the 'Je', the Ego, based on a body image presented by the other as an ideal.

Lacan considers this alienation – the concept is there – necessary for the development of a human identity. Alienation is desired against the inner chaos arising from the body, but at the same time it marks our identity as ontologically foreign, coming from the Other. In his further elaboration of the mirror stage – the "schema of the two mirrors" (Lacan, 2006c) – the accent shifts from the body and the partial drives

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³ Lacan 1953; 2006a

to the Other and his desire. The desire of the Other is enigmatic for the child: "What does s/he want from me?" The answer is not obvious, and the question evokes anxiety. The result is never a satisfactory attempt to be identical with what one supposes that the Other desires, in order to master the anxiety. Again, identity is a result of our attempt to be identical with images and signifiers presented by the Other.

These ideas were elaborated further in the early sixties, with the introduction of the Real, as a third category, and with a return to the question of the body and the drive. As a category, the Real is both substantial and negative. It is a negative category by definition: the Real is what is excluded from the Symbolic because of the phallic foundation of the signifier. Hence the typical expressions: The Woman does not exist (the phallic order does not permit signifying femininity); the Other of the Other does not exist (there is no primal father founding the primal father); consequently, there is no such a thing as a sexual relationship. The Real is substantial, because it has everything to do with the real thing, meaning the drive and jouissance. To mark the difference with the body from the mirror stage and its image, Lacan talks about the organism.

Notwithstanding the normalizing impact of the mirror stage on the partial drives, an important aspect of the drive remains beyond images and signifiers. The concept Lacan invents for the non-representable remainder is the object *a*. "The [object] *a* is what remains irreducible in the advent of the subject at the locus of the Other, and it is from this that it is going to take on its function."⁴ Characteristic of the object *a* is that it produces a breach in the experience of our identity. Because of the Real of the drive, essential aspects of who we are, remain at odds with the mental representations we construct of ourselves.

In Seminar XI (1964) we find the most elaborate account of what Lacan coins as the 'advent' of the subject, an expression he probably uses to mark the differences with the idea of development. The subject is an ever-shifting effect of the chain of signifiers, divided between the Real of the drive and the desire of the Other. The two constitutive processes are alienation and separation. Their net result is the subject as a hypokeimenon, a supposed being, because it is never really 'there'. In-between the Other and the subject-to-be, we find the object *a*, as a denomination for a lack. This lack is the motor for the formation of the subject and as we will see, it comes in two versions.

Ever since seminar XI, the focus in (post)lacanian theory has been on object *a* and jouissance. As a result, alienation and especially separation have received less attention. Later in this paper, I will argue that his idea of separation might present us with a solution for the impasse presented by alienation as described in the first part of this

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⁴ Lacan 2004, p.189

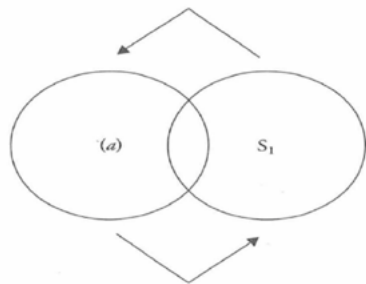
paper. Before that, I will present my reading of alienation and separation as described by Lacan in seminar XI.⁵

Alienation

The advent of the subject takes place in a field of tension between the subject-to-be and the field of the Other: 'The Other is the locus in which the chain of the signifiers is situated – it is the field of that living being in which the subject has to appear.' (Lacan, J., 1998 [1964], p.203). Freud's theory about the ego is usually understood from a developmental point of view, governed by the pleasure principle. With Lacan, the accent lies on a structural point of view, that is, on a structure beyond development. Hence, the repercussions on the ontological level. Alienation is the basic mechanism: the subject-to-be identifies with the signifiers of the desire of the (m)Other.

Implicit in Lacan's reasoning, we can assume the existence of a 'primal' alienation. This first level concerns a mythical point of origin – mythical because of the very idea of origin – in which "l'être" (being) as such must make its appearance in the field of the Other, of language. This coincides with what Freud, in his essay on Moses, calls 'hominization' ('Menschwerdung'), the process of becoming a human being (Freud, S., 1978 [1939a [1937-39]], p.75, p.113). On the whole, this is what Lacan had already described in his paper on the mirror stage. A real part of the drive is processed through the first signifier coming from the Other. Thus is laid the foundation of human identity, immediately indicating its alienated nature. The attribution of our identity comes from the Other, the subject must identify with the presented images and signifiers. This occurs in a relation in which the Other assumes responsibility for removing the original unpleasure or arousal (Lacan, J., 1998 [1964], pp.203-216). The latter nevertheless continues to insist, resulting in the circular and never-ending character of this earliest process.

Figure 1. 'Primal' alienation



⁵ In another paper, I have explained Lacan's advent of the subject with Freud's metapsychology, see Verhaeghe 1998

In the figure, the bottom arrow indicates 'beings' appeal to the Other, from whom it receives its first signifier. Hence the top arrow, indicating the founding identification with the S1. As a result, a is displaced to the external side of the subject-to-be, and more specifically to the intersection between the two circles (see figure 2 below). This process is a never ending one, because a can never be completely answered for, resulting in the need for more and more signifiers, turning subject-formation into an endless process.

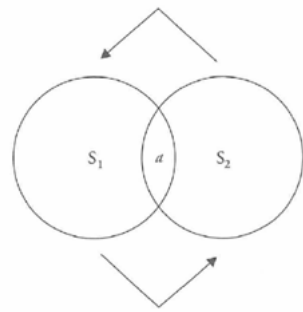
Even at this primary level, the effects are quite dramatic: when 'being' makes its appearance on the level of language, the subject loses the reality of its being. For Lacan, this is a matter of choice, albeit a very special choice, for whatever decision is made, one element is lost forever. He compares this to a classical dilemma presented by a robber: 'Your money or your life!'. Whatever you choose, you will lose your money anyway. The element lost in the process of becoming a human being is being itself, the thing without a name, leaving us with a 'loss of being' as a condition for our becoming, which Lacan calls the "manque à être" (the want-to-be, or lack of being).⁶ Thus, right from the start, the subject is divided between the necessary loss of its being on the one hand and the ever-alienating meaning coming from the Other on the other hand.

This primal alienation presents the human being with a first identity and a first mastery of the Real of the drive based on the Symbolic. Such a mastery is structurally incomplete, hence the necessity to make a new appeal to the Other. The continuation of the subject-formation takes place within language and amounts to a continuous extension of the chain of signifiers through which the subject continues to acquire more of an identity in relation to the Other. This is alienation in its most well-known version.

Such an acquisition process is not neutral but constructed within a dialectic of desire on top of the insisting real part of the drive. The Other is responsible for answering to a, but in order to receive this answer, the subject-to-be must identify with the Other's desire. The relation between the subject and the Other will come to take on specific content and form, depending on the reactions of the significant others and the choices made by the subject-to-be (see figure 2). The earliest identity (the 'I' of the mirror stage) – here indicated by S1 – expands with further signifiers S2, presented by the Other, attempting to obtain a final answer to the drive. But it is precisely the impossibility of ever receiving such a final answer that makes this process endless. The original division between the subject-to-be and its being is continued here by the division over several signifiers; consequently, the subject will never again be able to coincide with 'itself', with the S1 of the first mirror identity, let alone with its body.

⁶ Lacan 1998 [1964], p.29

Figure 2. Alienation



Here, Lacan's description of the subject as a hypokeimenon is obvious, as it continuously appears and disappears from signifier to signifier: "[A] signifier is that which represents the subject for another signifier."⁷ Again, the subject can 'choose' its signifiers in the field of the Other ('Your money or your life'). Yet again, there is a limited choice because the Other determines the possibilities of the choice. This reminds me of a fundamental remark made by Ferdinand de Saussure in his *Course in General Linguistics*. The Swiss linguist demonstrated the arbitrariness of the relationship between signifier and signified; as there is no natural or essential relation between a word (signifier) and the thing (signified) to which it refers, anybody can name anything as he likes. But, says de Saussure, the choice has already been made before an individual speaker enters the scene, hence his famous expression: 'la carte forcée de la langue', meaning that the free choice in language is a 'set-up'.⁸ In Lacanian terms: the Other determines the possibilities of our choice.

Thus considered, the acquisition of identity comes down to a continuously progressing symbolic realization of the subject. In view of its starting point, such a realization is contingent, necessary, and impossible. The contingency has to do with the random nature of the interaction – initially centered on the body – between the subject and Other. Family and culture in general determine the mirroring presented to the infant; another family and another culture might have presented different mirroring's and hence a different identity. The necessity is a consequence of the compelling nature of the drive tension, insisting for an attempt at mastery. The impossibility is caused by the structural gap between the Real of a and the Symbolic character of the signifier. Hence the double negation in Lacan's statement: 'It doesn't stop not being written.'⁹ In simple terms: we will never end with our body, nor with the Other, hence the need for more.

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7 Lacan 2006d

8 de Saussure 1960, p. 71. Baskin has translated 'la carte forcée' as 'the stated deck'. In the more recent translation of Saussure's work by Harris, 'La carte forcée de la langue' is rendered as 'the linguistic Hobson's choice'. See: de Saussure 1983, p. 71.

9 Lacan 1998 (1972-73), p.94, p.144

The important thing about the subject is that it has no essence, no ontological substance. Its production is by the signifiers, coming from the field of the Other, but it would be a mistake to assume that a subject is identical to the produced signifier(s). A fixed identification with several signifiers presents us with the ego. In this sense, the Lacanian subject is exactly the opposite of the Cartesian one. In the formula 'I think, therefore I am' Descartes concludes from his thinking that he has a being, whereas for Lacan, each time (conscious) thinking arises, its being disappears under the signifier.

This explains two basic characteristics of the Lacanian subject: it is always at an indeterminate place and it is essentially divided: "Alienation consists in this *vel*, which - if you do not object to the word condemned, I will use it - condemns the subject to appearing only in that division which, it seems to me, I have just articulated sufficiently by saying that, if it appears on one side as meaning, produced by the signifier, it appears on the other as *aphanisis*."¹⁰

Lacan distances himself from any idea of substantiality. The division does not take place between a real or authentic part and a false external one; the division defines the subject as such. The subject is split from its real being and forever tossed between eventually contradicting signifiers coming from the Other.

This rather pessimistic view confronts us with the question of the ends and goals of psychotherapy and even larger, with the question about determination and choice. Alienation seems to be inevitable and total. Paradoxical as this may seem, Lacan's point of view is more optimistic than the Freudian one. Freud's theory is on the whole quite deterministic, whereas Lacan leaves an element of choice, albeit a 'forced' choice. It is this element that brings us to the second operation in the advent of the subject, i.e. separation.

Separation

If alienation were all-encompassing, everyone would perfectly coincide with the story dictated to them by the Other. There are several reasons why this is not the case. First, and above all, because the causal starting point, the drive tension *a*, can never fully be answered; it continues to insist. Moreover, the different answers of the different others presented to the subject-to-be, will inevitably contain contradictions. Consequently, the subject must continually make choices, confronted with a usually unspoken question: "Who do you love the most?" Independent of these internal contradictions and the ensuing division, there is a third reason why alienation is never complete: the chain of signifiers contains a lack, meaning that 'it' can never

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10 Lacan 1998 [1964 p. 210. The *vel* refers to a process of forced choice, whereas *aphanisis* indicates a fading of the subject.

be said. "This is what they're saying to me, but what does he or she want?"¹¹

As a result, subject-formation circles around a lack that comes in two versions. The original drive tension in the Real – the jouissance – can neither be fully represented nor mastered by the Symbolic, and, it is precisely for that reason, the latter continues to maintain a structural opening. The excess of the Real reappears in the Symbolic's shortfall, its inability to 'say it all'; viewed from a Freudian standpoint, this makes up the core of the unconscious, Freud's "kernel of our being."¹² From the subject's interactions with the Other, the primordial lack reappears within the chain of signifiers as that part of the Other's desire that cannot be fully represented and continues to insist through the signifiers. It is precisely at this point that the second process in the advent of the subject, i.e. separation, becomes a possibility.

The lack in the chain of signifiers – the unrepresentable part of the desire of the Other – inhibits total alienation and opens up the possibility for separation and a desire 'of one's own', albeit with a continued dependence on the Other's desire.¹³ A desire 'of one's own' comes down to a conscious choice for and a conscious interpretation of the Other's desire, with the subject's own drive in the background. Such an interpretation always contains a choice for the subject itself, through which it influences its own identity formation and acquires a certain autonomy. The latter is a third important concept, besides authenticity and alienation.

Where alienation was based on a set composed by the two circles, separation can be seen in their intersection (see figure 2) where the two lacks meet – the Real of the drive in relation to the Symbolic; the enigmatic desire of the Other. Lacan reminds us that we can read separation both etymologically and homonymically, as in the Latin verb 'se parare', to give birth to oneself or in the French 'se parer', to clothe oneself, to defend oneself.¹⁴ The subject defends itself against the Real of the drive by obtaining a representation and, hence, mastery of it, through the Other. This explains why the original defense against the Real of the drive shifts to a defense against the Other's desire. In the course of this, the subject must interpret the desire of the Other. Such an interpretation of the Other's lack always implies an interpretation of the relationship as well, where the subject ascribes a specific position both to itself and to the Other.

Important in this respect is the difference between the original lack – the structurally determined lack in the Symbolic in relation to the Real of the drive – and the lack in the chain of signifiers because it is impossible to signify fully what the Other desires. Beneath the gap in the

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11 Lacan 1998 (1964), p. 214

12 Freud 1978 (1990a), p. 525

13 Lacan 1998 [1964], pp.211ff

14 Ibid., pp.214-215

chain of signifiers, the original drive impulse of the organism persists. In the dialectical exchanges with the Other, the subject expects the Other to provide the answer to the original drive impulse. Furthermore, this impulse is attributed to the Other, though translated in terms of desire: What does this Other want from me?

In the confrontation with this desire that can never be fully met, the normal-hysteric subject produces a characteristic reaction: does this Other *really* desire me, can I satisfy his or her desire? At this point, the never-ending dialectic between a subject-to-be and the Other is set in motion. Lacan's saying, "Desire is the desire of the Other" can thus be understood as: the subject desires that the Other desires the subject and is therefore prepared to go a long way in the process of alienation, i.e. a long way in identifying with the supposed desire of the Other. The ultimate testing of the Other's desire takes shape in those fantasies where the subject visualizes its own death, with the intent of measuring the Other's reactions: "Can she or he lose me?"¹⁵ A large number of suicidal fantasies and even suicide attempts can be understood in this context and amount to a final stage in alienation. Separation presents us with a better answer.

Separation presupposes the ability to detach oneself from the original dual relation with the Other, where previously the only possibilities were either to fuse entirely with, or to completely distance oneself from the Other; i.e., the impossible dilemma presented by a robber: 'your money or your life!' ('la bourse ou la vie'). Through separation, self-determination becomes a possibility, although this is far from self-evident. The inherent difficulties of autonomy become clear when Lacan discusses separation as an aim for a psychoanalytic cure.

A psychoanalytic treatment is a social praxis based upon a relation between a subject-to-be (the patient) and the Other-who-is-supposed-to-know (the analyst). Consequently, the processes of alienation and separation will be preeminently present. It is fair to say that Lacan links neurosis and especially hysteria to alienation, whilst presenting separation as a possible answer based on a psychoanalytic process. Lacan abhorred the idea of an analysis ending in an identification with the analyst, which would imply just another alienation. The desire of the analyst as an analyst desire ought to aim at the exact opposite, namely absolute difference.¹⁶

This brings us back to ontology. From the point of view of alienation, the subject has no substance whatsoever; it is an ever-fading effect of the symbolic order, the Other. At this point, Lacanian theory belongs to constructionism and determinism. Ideas of authenticity, self-realization

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15 Ibid., p.214

16 Ibid., p.276

and autonomy do not belong to this line of thought. They never will, yet the accent shifts once the Real is introduced. Through separation, the subject receives an element of choice. Ultimately, the choice is an impossible one, insofar as the choice has already been made and the aimed-for separation *takes the shape of a peculiar form of identification*.

The first developments of this idea can be found in Seminar XI, where Lacan suggests the existence of another form of identification, inaugurated by the process of separation, and thus by the object *a*: “Through the function of the object *a*, the subject separates himself off, ceases to be linked to the vacillation of being, in the sense that it forms the essence of alienation.”¹⁷ This idea is not developed any further in this seminar and can hardly be understood here. We must turn to Lacan’s final conceptualizations, where this special identification/separation is understood from the standpoint of the analytical goal of analytic treatment. It must be said that this further elaboration is limited and obscure.

What is the goal of an analysis? At first sight, the answer is strange: a successful analysis ought to bring the subject to the point where she can identify with the symptom. Normally, i.e. neurotically, a symptom is based on an identification with signifiers presented by the Other. The identification as the result of an analysis is a special one, because it concerns an identification *with the Real of the symptom*, meaning its root in the drive, and thus it concerns an identification on the level of being¹⁸ (This is exactly the counterpart of what the analysand experienced before, namely the identification/alienation with the (desire of the) Other and the accompanying belief in this Other, and thus in the existence of an Other without a lack.¹⁹ The analytic experience makes clear that this Other does not exist, and hence that the subject does not exist either.

The discovery of the inconsistency of the Other results in a mirror effect. If the Other is inconsistent, then the same goes for the subject, and both of them tumble down from their positions. In this way, the subject comes to “subjective destitution”: it assumes the non-existence of the non-barred Other and the non-existence of itself as a ‘that’s me’-subject. Such a subjective destitution entails the possibility for a radical form of separation, paving the way to the real being of the subject, son “être du sujet”. From that point onwards, the subject can no longer be reduced to a mere “answer to/from the Other” (“une réponse de l’Autre”); on the contrary, the subject is now an “answer to/from the real” (“une réponse du réel”). Thus, the idea of “se parer”, to engender oneself, as it was announced in Seminar XI, is realized after all.

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¹⁷ Ibid., p.258

¹⁸ Lacan 1977 [1976-77], pp.6-7

¹⁹ Lacan 1975 [1974-5], p.109

This brings us to the idea of creation. Indeed, in my opinion, the “identification with the real of the symptom” must be understood through the idea of creation, as already presented in Lacan’s earlier ideas on sublimation and *creatio ex nihilo* in his seminar on ethics. The subject can ‘choose’ to elevate nothing into something and to enjoy this: “The object is elevated to the dignity of the Thing.”²⁰ Applied to the goal of analysis, this means that, the subject may create its own symptom in the Real and identify with it. In this way, such a symptom takes the place of what is forever lacking. Finally, it takes the place of the lacking sexual rapport and furnishes a self-made answer to it, instead of the previous, Other-made ones.

Lacan accentuates this shift by introducing a neologism. The subject must become a *sinthome*, i.e. a combination of ‘symptôme’ (symptom) and ‘saint homme’ (holy man). ‘On the level of the *sinthome* . . . there is relationship. There is only relationship where there is *sinthome*.’²¹ This delineates a before and an afterwards. Previously, the subject-to-be believed in his neurotic symptoms, which yielded an imaginary answer to the lack of the Other and which at once located the *jouissance* within the Other. At the end of analysis, the identification with the *sinthome* is a real answer, providing the subject not only with consistency, but also with *jouissance*.

Needless to say, this part of Lacan’s theory is difficult to follow. The main thing to understand is that the real part of the body comes to the foreground. With this final theory, Lacan introduces another subject, one that has a kind of substantiality. It no longer focuses on the (lack of the) Other, that is, the Symbolic and the Imaginary. Rather, this neo-subject tries to come to terms with the Real of the *jouissance* dictated by its own drive, without falling back into the previous trap of stuffing it full of signification coming from the Other. This is how the decision, the choice of the subject, is to be understood: it makes a choice to create a *sinthome*. If there is anything original or authentically present, it should be looked for in the Real of the body and the drive.

Elegant and mysterious as this solution may be, it nevertheless contains a serious flaw. The trouble is that such a decision or choice by the subject implies the existence of a decision-taking system, *independent* of the Other. This hardly tallies with the constitutive process of becoming a subject, that is, the alienation, which makes the subject-to-be dependent on the Other – hence the necessity of the ideas of separation and destitution. It is not clear where such a decision-making system can be situated. It seems as if the organism is responsible for such a choice, and that the subject-to-be should identify with the

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²⁰ Lacan 1992 [1959-69], p.112

²¹ Lacan 1976 [1975-76], p. 20 (my translation). For a documented discussion of the ‘*sinthome*’, see Verhaeghe, & Declercq 2002.

requirements presented by the body. At that point, the decision-making system acquires *substantiality* through its decision. In its turn, this does not tally with the idea that the subject lacks any kind of essence whatsoever.

Implications & critical discussion

The originality of Lacan's approach

Philosophical theories discuss alienation as an ontological problem on the level of society. A psychoanalytical approach, starting with Freud, studies the same process on the individual level (identification), where it is necessary for the development of an identity but not necessarily a problem. Lacan combines the social-cultural and the individual level with his concept of the Other. The primary caretakers, usually the parents, present the infant with images and words mirroring a first sense of identity and an attempt at drive regulation through symbolization. Their images and words reflect the cultural discourse and – even larger – the symbolic order. The Other summarizes all the different ways of presenting the Symbolic order to the subject, with the internet as its latest instrument.

A striking difference between a psychoanalytical approach and the philosophical reading of alienation, is that for Lacan identification with images and signifiers coming from the Other is inevitable, because there is no original identity whatsoever. Hence the fact that every identification is an alienation. Lacan quotes T.S. Eliot: “We are the hollow men/We are the stuffed men/Leaning together/Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!”²² The very kernel of our personality is an empty space: peeling off layer after layer of identification in search of the substantial nucleus of one's personality, one ends up with nothing. Obviously for Lacan there is no original self.

A second difference concerns the motive. In social theory, alienation is a process induced by the dominant powers in a society – capitalism, institutionalized religion – to mislead the subordinate group. A cultural discourse propagates social norms, values, and social systems in such a way that most people identify with them, even when it goes against their own interests. In psychoanalysis, the motive for identification/alienation is the original powerlessness against one's own drives. One of the definitions that Freud formulated about the drive voices the endlessness of this process: it is 'as a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work'.²³ This psychic elaboration – in

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²² Lacan 2006b, p. 234; Eliot 1925, 1974, pp. 87-92.
The same idea returns in: 'Man's desire is the desire of the other', Lacan 1988 [1953-54], p.146, and in 'The unconscious is the discourse of the Other'. Lacan 1993 [1955-56]), p. 112.

²³ Freud, 1978 [1905d], p.168, added 1915. These ideas appear for the first time in the *Entwurf* (1978 [1950a [1895]]) where Freud talks about the endogenous excitations as something that the organism needs to discharge, but he has to acknowledge that a full discharge

contemporary terms: affect regulation – is the most important part of our identity. Identifying with social norms and value systems – see Freud's Super-Ego – helps us to master our drives. Such mastery, as offered by the Other, may lead to a process of alienation as put forward by social theory, i.e. alienation that goes against the interests of the subject. This was one of Freud's starting-points, as illustrated by the title of one of his early papers: '*Civilized Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness* (1908). Here, psychoanalytical identification and social alienation meet.

At first, Lacan's theory on alienation is more pessimistic than social theory: there is no authentic identity whatsoever, alienation is part of the human condition. As a process, it knows no ending because there is no final answer to the drive; determination seems to be everywhere. At a second glance, this is not the case. The most striking innovation is Lacan's introduction of 'separation'. In developmental psychology and in attachment theory, separation, sometimes called individuation, is a major developmental step for the child to acquire a more independent position. In Lacan's reading, separation receives a larger importance. The determination of the subject by the Other can never be total and final, because there is a structurally determined mismatch between the Real of the body and the Symbolic order. Consequently, there is an opening in the alienating chain of images and signifiers, permitting an escape from determination. The subject-to-be has a limited possibility to make choices of his own.

This choice comes in two versions, a weak and a strong one. The subject is presented with a never-ending series of signifiers and images to identify with; not one of them offers a definite answer to the existential questions ('Who am I? As a man, a woman, a parent, a ...'). On the condition that the subject has become conscious of the lack of a definite answer, s/he can choose between the many offered possibilities and consciously identify with his/her choice. Such a conscious choice will always be accompanied by a feeling of provisionality, as there are no definite answers.

This is the weak version of separation because the answers that are chosen, are still coming from the Other. I have already compared such a limited choice to the 'set-up' in language, as described by De Saussure. The same comparison can be further developed, as an example of separation and choice: a longstanding couple in love develops within their language an intimate speech of their own; their 'dialect' is based on the common language but contains a number of idiosyncratic choices turning it into 'their' language. The main difference with alienation as such is the fact that the subject makes a conscious choice between different possibilities in the full knowledge that not one of them is definite.

is impossible.

The stronger version of separation is the creation of something new, a solution that goes for this subject, in view of her experiences in matters of jouissance. That is what Lacan described with the neologism 'sinthome', based on an identification with a part of the Real. In view of its idiosyncratic nature, it is hard to explain this solution – the main thing that can be said about it, is that the body plays a central role. In my final part, I will return to the importance of the body.

Earlier in this paper, I mentioned the analogy between separation on the social level and separation as a goal of a psychoanalytical therapy. My experience as an analyst has convinced me that this is possible, albeit often enough in combination with a personal trauma that obliges the individual to rethink his/her life. It is a better solution than the conventional one, where the Other/others are blamed (from the parents to 'the system') and the possibility for a personal choice is denied.

A clinical vignette illustrates how separation may operate as a personal choice, even when almost invisible to the outside world. A man in his mid-forties enters analysis because of generalized feelings of depression and alienation (he uses the word himself). Raised in a working-class family with a father who was an active union member, he has become a lawyer himself, working in and for the same union. Over the years, the confrontation with political corruption and the like has turned him into a middle-aged cynic. During his analysis, the oedipal determinations of his professional choice are a major issue: is he really interested in working for the union, or is it because of his father? He experiences what Lacan described in his *Discourse de Rome*: "For in the work [i.e. analysis] he does to reconstruct it [his identity] for another, he encounters anew the fundamental alienation that made him construct it like another, and that was always destined to be taken away from him by another."²⁴ Whilst working through his oedipal history, he develops his own interests in union work. At the end of his analysis, he makes a conscious choice to continue his job, trying to make the best of it without being naïve or cynical. He is changed, just as his relation to the Other is changed. He has separated himself from a previous alienating identification, by making a conscious choice for a revised version of the same identification.

Diagnosis of alienation?

The man in the clinical vignette was painfully aware of his alienation. As I mentioned in the first section of this article, this is often not the case, as illustrated in the idea of 'false consciousness'. In social theory, it is widely accepted that people can suffer from alienation without being aware of it. In most cases, they will continue to endorse the Other who is the source of their alienation. This challenges us with a problem that is

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²⁴ Lacan 2006b, pp.207-208

well-known in psychiatry: how do you reach somebody who is not aware of her (mental) problems? How can you convince her that something is wrong, and that change is needed?

Obviously, these questions can be addressed on an individual and on a social level; when looking for an answer, on both levels we encounter the same problems. In my introduction, I referred to 'alienation' as an older denomination for mental illness. Ever since the start of psychiatry, its diagnostic system has been in search for objective diagnostic criteria. Contemporary psychiatry is desperately looking for somatic criteria, the so-called body markers. Despite all the research, so far there are no convincing results. A second line of diagnostic thought starts from the difference between the patient in her present condition and her original true self. E.g. an individual suffering from anorexia is convinced that she is fat, even when she is starving. In this case, the therapist can tell her what her normal body mass index should be. Unfortunately, with most psychiatric problems, it is far from obvious what a true self might be. A third diagnostic ground assesses the difference between a patient and a normal individual by using conventional normality as a norm. This is the case with the *DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders)*, the handbook that is used worldwide by most psychiatrists today. The critique on its latest version formulated by the British Psychological Society reflects the same problem faced by social theory when looking for a benchmark.²⁵ The definition of a normal, non-alienated person is arbitrary and expresses the norms and value systems of a dominant group. This explains why psychiatry is always at risk of becoming an enforcer of a given social order. From time to time, it changes sides and becomes a critique of the system, as Freud-Marxism and the antipsychiatry did in the sixties.

The third diagnostic ground illustrates how alienation on both individual and social levels are related and even mixt. This mixture obliges us to look for another approach to the problems with which I began my introduction (is there an original self? How to make a difference between a 'good' and a 'bad' me?). Obviously, from a psychoanalytical point of view, there is nothing wrong with identification, even when every identification turns out to be an alienation. In case something goes wrong, we might have an objective criterion after all, by looking at the starting-point of alienation. For Lacan, that is 'being', i.e. the body.

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²⁵ The letter of critique was sent in June 2011 to the editors of the DSM. An extract: 'The putative diagnoses presented in DSM-V are clearly based largely on social norms, with 'symptoms' that all rely on subjective judgements, with little confirmatory physical 'signs' or evidence of biological causation. The criteria are not value-free, but rather reflect current normative social expectations. Many researchers have pointed out that psychiatric diagnoses are plagued by problems of reliability, validity, prognostic value, and co-morbidity.' (My italics; see <https://dxrevisionwatch.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/dsm-5-2011-bps-response.pdf>)

The 'true self' is the body

In my opinion, the criterion by which to decide whether a certain alienation is good or bad, must be looked for in the very foundation upon which the advent of the subject is constructed, meaning the body as an organism. The alienation imposed by the Other does not only affect the body image (as explained by Lacan's mirror stage), it aims at regulating the organism and the drives as well. The effect of alienations on the body and its image is a good criterion to judge the desirability of a given alienation.

The first example that I can present here is gender identity and the emancipation of women. In that respect, it seems that the battle is ended and won. In a free (western) world, women can choose to wear a bikini, a monokini or a burkini. In the same free world, they can choose for breast implants and liposuction. And what about vaginal corrections, the latest hit in so-called aesthetic surgery for women, as a western variant of religious genital mutilation, although without the protesting against it?

You don't need to be a psychoanalyst to see that such choices have nothing to do with a choice, let alone with emancipation. They are the effect of a new alienation that is much less visible because it is disguised as an individual search for 'excellence', based on a continuously produced media stream of images showing perfect bodies. This disguise goes for every contemporary alienation, but the examples give me the possibility to make a differentiation between alienations that can be undone and those that cannot. Making a choice for a bikini or a burkini is a choice that is reversible – it leaves the body intact. Making a choice for a genital mutilation cannot be undone, the body is literally mutilated. Alienations that are irreversible and damaging to the body are by definition pathological alienations.

Such choices are presented as individual decisions, but of course they are induced by the Other. The personal is the political, and the same reasoning can be applied to less obvious alienations. Excellence, entrepreneurship and growth have become the new moral obligations, in a perpetual competition with others and – since social media and their different versions of 'like buttons' – with ourselves. Here, we can make the same analysis as in the case of breast implants and genital mutilation. The 'work hard, play hard' ethic is presented as a choice, whilst it is an imposed rat race in disguise. We have been running in a maze for at least three decades now, and the effects on our bodies are becoming more and more obvious. The prevalence numbers of chronic illnesses and medically unexplainable symptoms (irritable bowel syndrome, chronic pain, being tired all the time, sleeping problems and the like) have been steadily rising, as well as with patients suffering from diabetes and auto-immune diseases. If you look at the most advanced medical research, time and time again the same explanation is put forward: these diseases are stress related, they are the result of chronic stress induced by our way of living. Our body goes on strike or becomes ill.

After all is said and done, a diagnosis of a pathological alienation may be less difficult as it seemed at first sight. Our identity clothes our body – if the clothing makes that body ill, it is time to look for a new outfit or to reconsider the outfit we are wearing.

Appropriation, reconciliation, separation.

From Rousseau onwards, alienation has been presented as a problem in need of a solution. Because of the way our identity is constructed, two reactions to this problem are to be expected. The subject-to-be works hard to meet the desire of the Other, by modeling his looks, thoughts, and identity as much as possible to what she assumes the Other expects from her. When she becomes aware of the futility of her efforts or – even worse – gets ill, her reaction is either self-blaming (I did not work hard enough, I am a failure) or blaming the Other (the politicians, society, God, or the stock market). Such reactions are predictable, because of the dual nature of the constitutive relation between subject and Other. As a solution, neither of them is useful. By way of conclusion I want to discuss a third reaction that might escape the pitfalls of dualism. This reaction appears in two closely related processes: appropriation (Jaeggi) and reconciliation (Hegel), in relation to Lacan's separation.

In her book on alienation, Rahel Jaeggi revives the concept and defends its legitimacy. Her aim is to get rid of the defects of essentialism. She understands alienation as an impairment of self-determination and as a consequence of the inability to identify with one's own desires and actions. Her solution is *appropriation*, the process through which "one is present in one's actions, steers one's life instead of being driven by it, independently appropriates social roles, is able to identify with one's desires, and is involved in the world."²⁶ She avoids the classic pitfall (what is the true nature of man?) by focusing on the process of self-determination. What is realized is less important than the way in which it is realized.

Her book is rich and thoughtful, especially because she takes the trouble to present the reader with four detailed examples of contemporary real-life alienation, where agency and self-realization is missing. When presenting her solution ("a productive process of practical (self-)appropriation"),²⁷ she falls prey to what is probably unavoidable, i.e. the presentation of a teleological ideal in combination with the assumption that man is free to choose. Whilst avoiding carefully the essentialist tradition, her ideal is a postmodern human being that looks for self-realization.

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²⁶ Jaeggi 2014, p.255

²⁷ Ibid., p.152

One of Raeggi's major inspirations is Hegel. He is notoriously difficult, so I admit immediately that my knowledge of his theory is based on a thought-provoking study by Michael Hardimon in 1992. Important to know is that Hegel interpreted alienation quite differently compared to its commonly accepted meaning. Alienation is not a detrimental effect of modern society on the individual; it is a consequence of a failure in the individual, who fails to understand that the modern social world could be a home, giving him the opportunity to realize himself. Hegel's philosophical project was to help his contemporaries to overcome their estrangement from the new world. *Reconciliation* is the key word in this project.

Hardimon takes care to delineate the concept. It is not resignation or submission, as it involves complete and wholehearted acceptance (on condition that the social world is worthy of such an acceptance) in the full knowledge that even the modern society contains problematic features and conflicts. Reconciliation is an active process and 'a matter of *subjective appropriation*.¹²⁸ Alienation is being split from the social world, reconciliation is the process of overcoming that split. This is necessary because humans need to be connected to the new social world of the modern state. Hegel being Hegel, the possibility of such a connection is the result of a historical process that brings humanity to complete self-knowledge. Obviously, the solution is there, right for the taking – the modern world presents us with a home – on condition that we overcome our hesitations and lack of (self-)knowledge.

It is not too difficult to recognize Jaeggi's appropriation in (Hardimon's reading of) Hegel's reconciliation. A comparison with Lacan's solution – a particular kind of identification, based on the separation from the Other – shows similarities and differences. Self-knowledge is necessary, especially the knowledge that there is no original self. Implicit in Lacan's reasoning, the important self-knowledge concerns the division of the subject and the constitutive lack. The intimate deliberation with myself on the subject of myself may lead to the choice for a new identification, on the condition that the subject has come to terms with its inherent incompleteness. Appropriation, reconciliation or separation require active humility.

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28 Hardimon 1992, p. 182, italics original

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Genie out of the Bottle: Lacan and the Loneliness of Global Capitalism

Fabio Vighi

Abstract: The article argues that Lacan's understanding of the capitalist discourse should be framed within the ongoing crisis of valorisation, where for the first time in the history of capitalism the impact of automation causes the economy's operating logic to backfire. Contemporary capitalism's crippling inability to generate the necessary mass of economic value required for the reproduction of our societies can be fully appreciated by reconstructing Lacan's critique of labour qua value-fetish, the specific ruse through which capitalism fictionalises the uncountable (unconscious) dimension of any "knowledge at work". By triangulating between Lacan, Marx and Hegel, this piece seeks to reflect on the empty core of the capital-labour dialectic. The next step will be to explore the capitalist symptom as obdurate form of resistance to the transformation of an exhausted and increasingly self-destructive mode of production.

Keywords: Lacan, capitalist discourse, Marx, Hegel, mode of production, labour, value critique.

'Nothing can change our life but the gradual insinuation within us of the forces which annihilate it.'¹

1. Bad news as good news?

In the Introduction to his latest book, *Like a Thief in Broad Daylight*, Slavoj Žižek engages with, among other things, the impact of techno-scientific development on the resilience of our big Other, Jacques Lacan's name for the commonly shared, unwritten and naturalised symbolic rules sustaining our social space. As he explicitly puts it: 'The progress of today's sciences destroys the basic presuppositions of our everyday notion of reality'.² After listing various reactions to this calamitous predicament – the ideologically worst of which being New Age obscurantism – Žižek performs his most cherished Hegelian manoeuvre: the speculative pirouette from negativity (our 'New World Disorder, this gradually emerging word-less civilization')³ to transformation via retroactive resignification (the opening up of the space of an event which signals the possibility of radical emancipation). At the risk of oversimplification, it can be argued that Žižek's standard Hegelian reasoning lies in his claim that only the confrontation with the void/emptiness of our situation will encourage us to think again, i.e. to

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¹ Cioran 2012, p. 16.

² Žižek 2018, p. 4.

³ Ibid, p. 5.

engage in the battle for a different/better socio-symbolic order. Or, as Žižek puts it in his latest metaphorical dressing: the bad news is already the good news. This captures in a nutshell not only one of Žižek's most widely rehearsed dialectical points but, probably, also the fundamental contribution of his philosophical thought, which in Lacan's parlance I am tempted to characterise in terms of *jouissance*: an irresistible coercion to repeat, a form of libidinal attachment to a specific idea that constitutes the very core of his *cogito*.⁴ So, what is new about all this?

The novelty comes when Žižek mentions, arguably for the first time in his immense output, 'the prospect of automatization of production, which will – so people fear – radically diminish the need for workers and thus make unemployment explode'.⁵ I confess that I had long been waiting for Žižek to tackle what I regard as *the* problem of our global-capitalist (dis-)order. For if the silent presuppositions of our everyday reality are rapidly losing their symbolic efficiency, slowly evaporating before our very eyes, it is becoming increasingly obvious that the direct cause of this de-realisation of our lives is contemporary capitalism's growing inability to churn out the necessary mass of economic value required for the reproduction of our social machine. In Marxian terms – through a radical reassessment of his theory of "tendency of the rate of profit to fall", exposed in *Capital* volume 3 – we would say that, due to the unheard-of technological advance over the last 40 years or so, capital finds itself increasingly embarrassed vis-à-vis its mission of squeezing surplus-value out of the exploitation of labour-power. Lacan alluded at this embarrassment in a prophetic passage of Seminar XVI (session of 19 March 1969), when he argued that capitalism introduced 'liberal power' in order to mask its being 'against power', that is to say against any form of political power that might attempt to challenge its dynamic of self-expansion. Lacan's point is simple and even fairly obvious from our standpoint: in modern liberal democracies, 'power is elsewhere'; it is not to be found in politics, but in the dominance of the economy over politics. While Lacan claims that the 1917 Russian revolution was essentially a (failed) attempt to 'restore the functions of power' over the discourse of the economy, he points out that this situation

'is not easy to hold onto, precisely because in the time when capitalism reigns, capitalism reigns because it is closely connected with this rise in the function of science. Only even this power, this camouflaged power, this secret and, it must also be said, anarchic power, I mean divided against itself, and

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 4 For Lacan, the Cartesian *cogito*, the kernel of modern rationality, is the unconscious. See for example Lacan's texts 'The Instance of the Letter in the Freudian Unconscious' and 'Science and Truth' (in Lacan 2006a, pp. 412-41 and 726-45 respectively).

5 Žižek 2018, p. 6.

this without any doubt through its being clothed with this rise of science, it is as embarrassed as a fish on a bicycle now.'⁶

This passage is worth pondering. Capitalism, Lacan avers, is a form of 'camouflaged power' whose intimate nature is self-destructive ('divided against itself'), as a consequence of its being strictly conjoined with the epistemology of modern science. In fact, Lacan continues, 'something is happening in the science quarter, something that transcends its capacity for mastery'. The embarrassment of contemporary capitalist societies, driven by the 'curious copulation' between capitalism and science, as he will put it in Seminar XVII,⁷ lies precisely in the fact that, all of a sudden, the reference to the capacity of the big Other to provide symbolic cover (alienation) for our lives weakens dramatically. Hence the significance of Lacan's warning to the subversive students of 1968 that all they aspire to is a new master.⁸ Except for the revolutionary spirit of those years, the situation described by Lacan in March 1969 is still our situation. The erosion of the big Other, which began when societies fuelled by capitalist value started losing their capacity for self-mastery, today reaches new heights due to the devastating impact of technological innovation on the valorisation dogma of the capitalist mode of production. To use one of Lacan's most popular mottos, we could say that the copulation between science and capital today misfires, revealing that there is "no such thing as a sexual relationship" between them, but only an embarrassed impotence, which is hardly covered up by the reactionary strategies of denial popping up everywhere on our political horizon.

My Lacanian perspective on crisis invites me to explore the extent to which the ongoing implosion of our socio-symbolic constellation, coupled with the predictable return of political authoritarianism, is nothing but the mode of appearance of the terminal sickness of its economic logic, which in its blind hunger for profitability ironically undermines the basic condition of its own reproduction, namely the exploitation of human labour. In an exemplary case of what Hegel called the "cunning of reason", it is as if contemporary capitalism was desperate to show us that it does not need any rebellious opposition; it can destroy itself much more efficiently on its own. Precisely at its point of maximum expansion and ideological triumph, the capitalist mode of production reveals its fundamental loneliness and vulnerability. This point is by now widely shared by thinkers of diverse political and ideological persuasions. Jeremy Rifkin, for instance – the staunch defender of

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 6 Lacan 2006b.

7 Lacan 2007, p. 110.

8 Here is the well-known passage: 'the revolutionary aspiration has only a single possible outcome – of ending up as the master's discourse. This is what experience has proved. What you aspire to as revolutionaries is a master. You will get one' (Lacan 2007, p. 202).

“collaborative commons” – has for some time insisted that ‘[c]apitalism’s operating logic is designed to fail by succeeding’, insofar as ‘intense competition forces the introduction of ever-leaner technology’ which boosts productivity, reduces marginal costs to near zero and with it the global mass of profits. This prompts the following deduction:

‘Ironically, capitalism’s decline is not coming at the hands of hostile forces. There are no hordes at the front gates ready to tear down the walls of the capitalist edifice. Quite the contrary. What’s undermining the capitalist system is the dramatic success of the very operating assumptions that govern it. At the heart of capitalism there lies a contradiction in the driving mechanism that has propelled it ever upward to commanding heights, but now is speeding it to its death.’⁹

The embarrassment of which Lacan spoke comes precisely from this paradoxical coincidence of success and failure, power and impotence, against the background of the perfect fit between technology and capitalist accumulation. Today, Marx’s insight that the limit of capitalism is capital itself rings truer than ever, since it is not met by the dream (turned nightmare) of a higher social order (Communism) but by the cunning silence of reason, which allows for the free deployment of capital’s full (self-destructive) potential. For Hegel, power is truly antagonised only when we ‘make it return into itself as movement, so that it negates itself.’ In other words, ‘silence is the worst, vilest cunning’,¹⁰ which is exactly what Lacan had in mind when he formulated his discourse of the analyst: the analysand, faced by the silent cunning of the analyst, unravels all by herself, that is to say she talks and talks until she is confronted by the meaninglessness of her symptom, which in a crucial move she has a chance to assume. Yet the big question is: (when) will capitalism assume its symptom? Or, perhaps more pointedly: is not capitalism already its own symptom?

These initial considerations are meant to introduce a Lacanian approach to the radical ambiguity surrounding the future of our societies. To make sense of such seemingly irreducible ambiguity, let us begin with the following hypothesis: in itself, the capitalist discourse as discussed by Lacan is divided between its drive, which engenders an intrinsically traumatic deregulation of the social bond in which it proliferates, and a strategy of self-containment inscribed within its astute logic of self-valorisation, where the value-fetish disguises the intrinsic impotence (void, emptiness) of the signifying chain. While commentators have

9 Rifkin 2014, pp. 2-4. See also Rifkin 2011.

10 In Rauch 1983, p. 104. On this point see also Žižek 2013, pp. 510-11.

tended to emphasise the former dimension, Lacan, as we shall see, endorses both aspects: the specific type of capitalist alienation lies in its centrifugal or de-territorialising impetus coupled with the centripetal or re-territorialising logic of valorisation, where every aspect of life is mediated by economic value. At the same time, Lacan intimates that such balancing act is undermined beyond repair by contemporary capitalism’s alliance with technological innovation: it runs very fast, ‘comme sur des roulettes’ (as if on wheels), and yet ‘ça se consomme si bien que ça se consume’ (it consumes itself to the point of consumption).¹¹ What is alluded to here has become self-evident today: the new levels of automation in production unwittingly call the bluff of the valorisation fetish, thus showing how – in Lacan’s terms – surplus-value (*Mehrwert*) was always surplus-*jouissance* (*Mehrlust*), namely the empty core and potential breaking point within the logic of self-expansion.¹²

In his brief mention of automation, Žižek liquidates the real prospect of mass technological unemployment in a couple of, ultimately, rather superficial lines: ‘But why fear this prospect? Does it not open up the possibility of a new society in which we all have to work much less? In what kind of society do we live, where good news is automatically turned into bad news?’¹³ These rhetorical questions effectively work against a background of disavowal: while most of us would, in principle at least, welcome a society where there is less work to do, the point is that such prospect clashes rather ominously with the overwhelming evidence that the capitalist valorisation process, based as it is on the extraction of surplus-value from wage labour, continues to be regarded as the only possible fuel on which to run the social machine. The urgent issue for us is therefore to think how to reconfigure a work-society that, despite the increasingly self-evident ineffectiveness of its productive turbine, blindly continues to stick with it as a matter of – let us say it with Lacan – *jouissance*. Despite the prospect of implosion and potential change, value-fetishism for profit-making will remain our only existential horizon unless we manage to politicise its failure and demise. What I want to discuss in this essay is the Marxian question of the relationship between

11 Lacan 1978, p. 36.

12 There is a vast literature on the impact of automation on value-production. For a specific Lacano-Marxian approach, see Feldner and Vighi 2015.

13 Žižek 2018, p. 6. In truth, in the first chapter of his book Žižek develops a deeper reading of the explosive contradictions that are leading us toward what he calls “posthuman capitalism”. The progressive decomposition of our socio-symbolic order, however, is only briefly correlated with the unstoppable de-valuation of value that is affecting and afflicting contemporary capitalist societies. While Žižek mentions in passing the effects of technological unemployment, with millions of people relegated to the role of marginal/excluded subjects whose relation to capital is increasingly no longer that of traditional exploitation as denounced by Marx, i.e. mediated by the valorisation process, but one of direct personal domination, i.e. slavery, he does not develop the analysis of the cause, namely capitalism’s continuing, obdurate reliance on the valorisation fetish (wage labour) despite its increasingly catastrophic ineffectiveness in an automated society.

value-creation and value-fetishism, a question that Lacan himself had tackled in the late 1960s.

2. A new master?

Lacan's fifth discourse – the discourse of capitalism – was meant to capture the novelty of a social formation whose fundamental purpose is to turn the deadlock or negativity of any discourse into a positive object of enjoyment/consumption. Through this extraordinary prestidigitation, capitalism promises no less than to deliver the modern subject from castration, that is to say from the experience of lack, alienation and frustration brought in by the law. While the promise of a systemic and universal foreclosure of castration marks a major shift in the modern subject's libidinal economy, at the same time it is functional to the hegemonic affirmation and planetary triumph of the capitalist lust for self-expansion, the sole *raison d'être* of a blind, acephalous and intrinsically (self-)destructive economic dynamism where, as we shall see, the negativity of the social bond is recuperated as its disavowed cause.

As anticipated, Lacan grasps the dual nature of capitalism, which constitutes its internal contradiction. On the one hand, as a radically new type of mastery, capitalism promises paradise on earth: it claims to make no attempt at delimiting the subject's freedom within power edifices erected upon symbolic authority and prohibition; rather, it stealthily imposes commodified enjoyment as a new form of superego authority. This is how the discourse of the capitalist attempts to revolutionise the structural logic of the four discourses (Master, University, Analyst and Hysteric), which are generated by the anticlockwise quarter-turn rotation of a signifying chain whose constant feature is the production of an impasse (surplus/lack) that cannot be absorbed within signification. Capitalism, on the contrary, aspires to be a paradoxical discourse without discourse, thus setting up a worldless world, a free and disalienated global community entirely substantiated by the freedom to consume (commodity fetishism). What matters in this scenario is less the actual satisfaction of the drives than the imposition of the generalised illusion that the human animal is essentially selfish, narcissistic and hedonistic.¹⁴ Although the illusion informing such capitalist utopia may be more readily associated with the contemporary hegemony of neoliberalism and financial capitalism,¹⁵ there is little doubt that it had already quickened the pulse of classical economists like Adam Smith, whose notorious metaphor of the invisible hand of the market pointed precisely in the direction of such an autonomous and scintillating scenario.

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14 On this point see especially McGowan 2003.

15 See for instance Tomšič 2015.

While Lacan's discussions of capitalism are often aimed at denouncing its perverse ideological core, I argue that the significance of his contribution lies elsewhere, namely in the signalling of capitalism's self-destructiveness. Although Lacan's capitalist discourse is mostly read as a diabolical contraption for subjective capture,¹⁶ it seems to me more auspicious to reflect on Lacan's warnings that the capitalist project is destined to fail precisely by succeeding. The two dimensions, of course, are dialectically intertwined. The more capital manages to manipulate, regiment and tame people's desires, the more it is haunted by its own drive. It is, however, the ultimate impotence of this drive that a Lacanian reading of capitalism should emphasise. Today, when the triumphant historical march of the economy has spectacularly annihilated all potentially antagonistic ideologies, and the enjoyment of the value-fetish has acquired global traction, we are presented with a remarkably unique situation, one where the capitalist genie has found its way out of the bottle and is faced only by itself – by the libidinal core of its own restless dynamism. While in this scenario the economic compulsion is able to visit all its cynical indifference upon a social bond that in many parts of the world is already on the verge of collapse, it also reveals its own systemic impotence. It is this novelty that should energize us into thinking a different version of the social bond. The impotence radiating from the cold heart of contemporary capitalism, which is both internal (mode of production) and external (ecology), should not simply be negated, but actively integrated within a new political project that prioritises our collective destiny – not in the name of a utopian future, but of our radical finitude. The possibility of this thinking, however, is precisely what our politics seems doggedly bent on preventing.

If we briefly consider the ongoing political debate between neo-Keynesian and neoliberal approaches to the economy and its crisis (the stimulus vs. austerity debate), we cannot but be stricken by how hopelessly outmoded and inconsequential our political narratives are. This is because both approaches share the same presupposition that capital is an inexhaustible wellspring whose point of origin is not human but divine. In today's politics, questioning the finitude of such wellspring is like questioning the existence of God for a believer – it is simply impossible, regardless of how much evidence to the contrary one collects. Yet, while this debate continues to excite our political elites and their followers worldwide, its real function would best be sought in its (fetishistic) disavowal of the truly cardinal question that may save our future: how can we reconfigure our hopelessly debilitated mode of production? The capitalist drive is already beyond any possible containment or repair, which is why, at some point, we will begin to feel

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16 See, among others, Lesourd 2006; Declercq 2006; Olivier 2009; Sauret 2009; McGowan 2003 and 2016; Verhaeghe 2014; de Castro 2016; Žižek 2016; Pauwels 2019.

the unbearable urge to politicise the push for an exit strategy. In this respect, capital's own ever-increasing flight into the financial sector, where "money makes *money* work" instead of human labour, is nothing but the forward-escape route through which the capitalist discourse seeks to overcome its inherent imbalance, which should be understood in its precise historical context: the terminal phase of a long-winded dynamic of reckless self-expansion which commenced when human beings started "freely" to sell their ability to work.

This also means that Marx's concept of labour-power is still central to the understanding of our deadlock. In fact, everything turns around the specific capitalist "fictionalisation" of labour-power – the way in which capital turns the negative materiality of human praxis into a positive, fictitious entity which it then places at the heart of its mode of production. It is no surprise, then, that when Lacan identified this ruse he started to refer to capitalism as the new master. The specific 'cunning' of capitalist capture, according to Lacan,¹⁷ lies in the way traditional mastery is relinquished and at the same time powerfully reasserted precisely in its relinquished form, as an objective, neutral and continuously hystericized knowledge. Lacan's point here is that while the traditional master relied on the efficacy of its symbolic authority, the new capitalist master functions by disavowing such authority, that is to say by delegating it to the impersonal objectivity of its *modus operandi*. So, what has labour got to do with all this? Lacan's crucial insight, developed throughout Seminar XVI and Seminar XVII, is that labour-power should be understood not merely as the expenditure of a certain amount of human energy predated upon by capital, but as the unconscious know-how (*savoir-faire*) possessed by the slave/artisan of pre-capitalist times – an opaque knowledge the traditional master knew nothing (and could not care less) about.

The knowledge in question is not to be understood pedagogically as a set of skills, but has to do instead with the awareness that 'getting to know something always happens in a flash';¹⁸ which means, essentially, that knowledge is inseparable from what it lacks, namely the unconscious. Of course, it could not be otherwise for Lacan: insofar as it is supported by the signifier, knowledge by definition strikes against the wall of its own negative/lacking substance, thereby yielding an entropic surplus, a meaningless leftover, a surplus-*jouissance* that, as such, cannot be counted. By claiming that knowledge is a means of *jouissance*, then, Lacan suggests that, when at work, it generates a point of loss, a residue of entropic waste that is ultimately irreducible to valorisation.¹⁹

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17 Lacan 1978, p. 36.

18 Lacan 2006b, session of 26 February 1969.

19 I have developed this point in Vighi 2010, pp. 39-58.

It is the original *opacity* of knowledge that is scientifically fictionalised by capitalism, that is to say quantified in order to be invested into the accumulation cycle. All of a sudden, *savoir-faire* acquires visibility and agency, as it is bought and sold in the market. This paradoxical operation, which puts valorised labour-power in the driving seat, undermines traditional mastery by replacing it with the value-fetish, whose dual nature resides in its claiming neutrality and objectivity (the quantification and computability of modern "knowledge at work") while also providing a fetishistic solution (the commodity) to the subjective logic of desire that continues to fuel the scientific foundations of modernity ("Keep knowing!"/"Keep consuming!").

Simply put, while in traditional societies work only mattered insofar as it got done, and value resided elsewhere (in forms of symbolic authority related to prestige, social class and religion), with the advent of capitalism work progressively becomes *the only value*, in the specific sense that it begins to be counted, quantified, packaged (the University discourse of modern science), and turned into that unique commodity (the Capitalist discourse) around which the social reproducibility of modern societies is articulated. In Lacan's words:

'Work has never been given such credit ever since humanity has existed. It is even out of the question that one not work. This is surely an accomplishment of what I am calling the master's discourse. [...] I am speaking of this capital mutation, also, which gives the master's discourse its capitalist style.'²⁰

Lacan's key intuition consists in highlighting how the ascendancy and eventual triumph of valorised wage labour qua new form of capitalist mastery was the result of a particular shift in the social link's relation to the entropy it generates. This new relation begins to impose itself historically and epistemologically with the arrival of modern science and it is based on the assumption that the unconscious (the unknown roots of "knowledge at work") can be not only known objectively, but also computed and exchanged with money. It is through this minimal but crucial *fictional construct* – a specific type of alienation – that the capitalist mode of production begins to impose its new mastery over human communities.

As described by Marx in *Capital*, the capitalist process of value-creation is the expression of a *social relation* of exploitation where the metabolism between man and nature, qua wage work, is entirely subsumed under the logic of capitalist accumulation. This is a paradigm-shift that sets up capital as a socially synthetic category. In his reading of Marx's labour theory of value, Lacan comments that at the dawn of the capitalist revolution those who do the work are not merely spoliated of surplus labour-

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20 Lacan 2007, p. 168.

time, but more importantly they are robbed of their singular knowledge-at-work: 'The proletariat is not simply exploited, he has been stripped of his function of knowledge'.²¹ Oddly enough, this point is often missed by Lacanians. As anticipated, the historical novelty brought in by capitalism is its ambition to transform uncountable *savoir-faire* into "commodified knowledge", a measurable amount of work that feeds into the narrative of surplus-value and profit formation. The *forcing* of this valorisation programme constitutes the particular form of alienation introduced by the capitalist mode of production.

The simple act through which, at a certain point in our history, money was exchanged for labour-power, thereby beginning to morph into the specific money-form we call capital, corresponds, according to Lacan, to an extraordinary epistemological revolution that inaugurates a new discourse based on what we might call, metaphorising a fashionable term, an act of recycling. In Seminar XVI Lacan tells us that capital's glorious course begins with the imperceptible conversion of surplus-*jouissance* into a countable value, which destabilises the until then solid foundations of the discourse of the Master:

'Something changed in the master's discourse at a certain point in history. We are not going to break our backs finding out if it was because of Luther, Calvin or some unknown traffic of ships around Genoa, or in the Mediterranean Sea, or anywhere else, for the important point is that on a certain day surplus *jouissance* became calculable, could be counted, totalized. This is where what is called the accumulation of capital begins.'²²

The important point, for Lacan, was the mutation of what was until then discounted, repressed, relegated to a position of shameful unworthiness within the social link (the unconscious roots of the human being's labouring capacity), into something visible, quantifiable and central to the new discourse (valorised wage labour). All of a sudden, 'we are in the field of values', and

'from that moment on, by virtue of the fact that the clouds of impotence have been aired, the master signifier only appears even more unassailable [...]. Where is it? How can it be named? How can it be located? – other than through its murderous effects, of course. Denounce imperialism? But how can this little mechanism be stopped?'²³

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21 Ibid, p. 149.

22 Ibid, p. 177.

23 Ibid, pp. 177-78.

Lacan's questions are genuinely open toward the future and not rhetorical. The capitalist for Lacan is the new master whose discourse has internalised the symbolic authority (and violence) of traditional mastery into the minimal structural shift through which labour becomes labour by being valorised. Fundamentally, the capitalist master delegates its power (and violence) to the structure it sets up, which is, at its core, a headless dynamism fuelled by the incessant valorisation of labour-power. Thus, the 'clouds of impotence' disappear as traditional mastery morphs into the dogma of valorisation, which rapidly imposes itself as modernity's second nature. Insofar as the traditional master coincided with the phallic function, its inconsistency and vulnerability were always available, since for Lacan the symbolic phallus is, ultimately, the signifier of lack pertaining to the human being *qua* effect of language.²⁴ While it is precisely through its meaninglessness that phallic (symbolic) mastery functions (by providing an anchoring point to the endless sliding of the signifying chain), the veil of such meaninglessness can be lifted at any given moment, which would expose the master's imposture and fundamental impotence. What becomes invisible and therefore virtually unassailable with the advent of capitalism is precisely the *inconsistency* of the master.

This paradigm shift, of course, becomes particularly apparent with neoliberal ideology, where workers increasingly transmute into their own bosses, fully internalising the authority and command of the traditional master, whose 'clouds of impotence' are thus truly aired. This way, discipline becomes self-discipline, and the externally imposed valorisation of labour becomes self-valorisation, as workers are increasingly co-opted into measuring their own productivity. The escalation of what Moore and Robinson call the 'quantified self'²⁵ – the self-evaluation of productivity through online tools tracking everything from fitness activities to calories ingested and sleeping patterns – is the latest form taken by capital's founding act of valorisation. When life itself turns into a relentless process of vigilant and aggressive self-quantification, capitalist ideology becomes total, and arguably reaches its tipping point. However, neoliberalism has not altered the elementary capitalist matrix; it has only produced a different model of its aggressiveness. It is therefore a mistake to attack neoliberalism without acknowledging in its excesses the persistence of the original act of capitalist capture, which has always driven the logic of accumulation. While the 1970s post-Fordist restructuring of employment relations has been critiqued in various ways by many prominent scholars,²⁶

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24 See Lacan's 'Signification of the Phallus', in Lacan 2006, pp. 575-84. For an excellent reading of Lacan's text, see McGowan 2019, pp. 1-20.

25 Moore & Robinson 2015.

26 See, among others, Lazzarato 1996; Virno 2004; Chiapello and Boltanski 2007; Berardi 2009; Dean 2009; Fleming 2009; Spicer 2013.

it would be wise to remind ourselves that such shift reveals nothing but the axiomatic principle of the capitalist discourse *tout court*, namely, in Lacan's terms, the specific way in which the capitalist relation fictionalises the real of *jouissance* by turning it into the engine of its mode of production (and social reproduction). The reason why thinkers like Michael Hardt and Toni Negri argue that cognitive labour has the potential to self-valorise autonomously from the capitalist colonisation of work is, arguably, that they do not recognise how deeply the capitalist matrix is at work in its neoliberal version. Any instance of self-valorisation within a world dominated by capitalist relations is necessarily valorisation for capitalist ends, namely *a way of counting what does not count*. Rather than opening up lines of flight from capital, the pandemic shift toward cognitive labour should be framed within the rise of the "self-quantification society", which is revealing of the extent to which the valorisation dogma has totalised our lives. Our perverse obsession with "counting life" (calories, steps, heartbeats, etc.) is one with the paradigm-changing ruse that turns labour-power into a countable entity; they are basically the same thing, which also means that we would be mistaken in blaming technology alone. In December 1969, Lacan famously warned the students of the autonomous, "Marxist-Leninist" University of Vincennes (Paris VIII) that the introduction of credit points in higher education had the effect of reducing knowledge to a numerical unit for the purpose of making it marketable, just like any other commodity.²⁷ Whether credit points of fitness tracker bracelets, what is at stake is the same epistemological operation whereby the unknown roots of signification are translated into a measurable unit which, on the strength of its presumed self-transparency, must be valorised and accumulated.

Already in Seminar XII (1964-65), Lacan had claimed that capitalist accumulation was, in its deepest configuration, an accumulation of knowledge, insofar as the problem of the unconscious truth of the subject (*savoir insu*, knowledge that does not know itself) was being removed:

'From Descartes on, knowledge, that of science, is constituted on the mode of the production of knowledge. Just as an essential stage of our structure which is called social, but which is in reality metaphysical and is called capitalism, is the accumulation of capital, so is the relationship of the Cartesian subject to that being which is affirmed in it, founded on the accumulation of knowledge. Knowledge from Descartes on is what can serve to increase knowledge. And this is a completely different question to that of the truth.'²⁸

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27 Lacan 2007, pp. 197-208.

28 Lacan 1964-65.

On the one hand, Lacan's claim suggests that, far from being potentially liberating, the shift toward cognitive capitalism leads us out of the frying pan into the fire, since (as emphatically demonstrated, for instance, by the metrics mania in our education systems) what triggered the capitalist revolution was precisely the spurious computation of knowledge. On the other hand, Lacan's critique brings into focus the epistemological overlapping of capitalism and modern science, inasmuch as it emphasises how the birth of the capitalism coincided with the arrival on the scene of the new scientific method that is best represented not only by Descartes but especially by Isaac Newton and his depiction of the universe as a clockwork mechanism of actions and reactions, causes and effects.

The novelty of modern science (since the 17th century), which forcefully manifests itself in the capitalist computation of work, is for Lacan the novelty of a signifying articulation that attempts to foreclose the subject of the unconscious – the subject that reveals itself in the 'stumbleings' and 'intervals' of discourse, where 'a truth is announced to me where I do not protect myself from what comes in my word'.²⁹ However, Lacan is keen to emphasise the inherent impossibility of this operation. For instance, in his reading of the scientific revolution of Newtonian physics, through which all divine shadows are expelled from the heavens,³⁰ Lacan notes how the subject, although foreclosed, is also secretly presupposed. That is to say, the Newtonian formula *hypotheses non fingo* (I do not need causes to describe phenomena, for I only describe them) 'presupposes in itself a subject who maintains the action of the law', since 'the operation of gravity does not appear to him [Newton] to be able to be supported except by this pure and supreme subject, this sort of acme of the ideal subject that the Newtonian God represents.'³¹ This presupposition of a subject who believes rather than simply who knows, signals the inherent yet profoundly disavowed fallibility of the new social bond. Although the historical development of modern science in its alliance with capitalism progressively negates such fallibility, this does not mean that the latter disappears. Rather, it continues to haunt the flat ontology of our time.

3. Collapse of a frictionless discourse?

In the early 1970s Lacan claimed that, despite being very clever, the well-oiled, ever-accelerating capitalist machine was heading for self-destruction. The French word he used to indicate the implosion of capitalism was *crevaisson* ("puncture"), which aptly conveys the image

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29 Ibid, session of 5 May 1965.

30 Ibid, session of 12 May 1965.

31 Ibid.

of a mechanism breaking down, being suddenly forced to halt its course. But why should the smooth and frictionless *discours du capitaliste* suffer such a lethal accident? Lacan began by endorsing Marx's claim that capital is an "automatic subject" (*automatisches Subjekt*): the capitalist accumulation dynamic, as an impersonal compulsion to generate ever-increasing amounts of profit, is in a constant state of overexcitement, or *overdrive*. In this respect, in his 1915 essay 'Instincts and their Vicissitudes' Freud had already noted that the *aim* of the drive is not its *object* (in our case, profit-making) but rather the endless circuitual gravitation *around* the object, which brings satisfaction not by obtaining but by missing the target. Lacan endorsed Freud's view in Seminar XI, claiming that 'no object of any [...] need, can satisfy the drive [...]. This is what Freud tells us [...]. As far as the object in the drive is concerned, let it be clear that it is strictly speaking of no importance. It is a matter of total indifference.'³²

In capitalism, satisfaction comes precisely from never realizing enough profit: the more profit one makes, the more one becomes aware of not having enough of it, that is to say of *lacking* it, which triggers the compulsive repetition of the same sovereign gesture of accumulation. As with any form of addiction, the satisfaction of the drive coincides with its missing the target. The paradox is that the moment we get some of it, we are immediately overwhelmed by the awareness that we lack *it*, and thus that we want more. As with any pathological dependence, we are addicted to the lacking object, that is to say the *object as lack*. The splitting of the drive between object and aim is of fundamental importance if we are to grasp the contradictory nature of capitalist accumulation from a Lacanian perspective. While a capitalist consciously craves profit, what she really wants is not having (enough of) it, so that she can continue to crave it. It goes without saying that this unconscious elevation of lack as the driver of the capitalist logic of accumulation clashes with the conscious targeting of profit, making capitalism blind to its own cause. Incidentally, the result of this blindness is signalled in the lower part of Lacan's discourse of the capitalist, where surplus-value qua surplus-*jouissance* (*a*) is unable to establish any connection with the master-signifier (S1).

The main implication is that the capitalist cycle of accumulation, which cares only about its own self-reproduction, remains ignorant as to how surplus-value works as its lacking substance. Instead of nothing, the capitalist sees a value. It is precisely because it is fundamentally *not there*, then, that Lacan renames surplus-value (Marx's *Mehrwert*) as *Mehrlust* (surplus-*jouissance*), a libidinal object whose pulsating, intermittent presence dissimulates its own real absence – a kind of equivalent of the proverbial empty eye of the hurricane; or, as Lacan put it poetically in his short essay 'On Freud's *Trieb*', 'the colour of

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32 Lacan 1998, pp. 167-68.

emptiness, suspended in the light of a gap'.³³ Lacan's critical point was that Marx, by conceding that labour is, ultimately, a quantifiable economic value subsumable in temporal terms, stopped too soon in his critique of surplus-value, neglecting 'the initial stage of its articulation',³⁴ and thereby endorsing the scientific presuppositions of modern economic thought in general.

Lacan was deeply aware that Marx's critique of political economy came about in relation to two distinct methodological pressures: the idealist philosophical model asserted by Hegel, and the positivist approach to scientific knowledge that became overwhelmingly dominant in the second half of the 19th century. Let us recall that in his theory of the three stages of human development, Auguste Comte – the father of positivism – argued that religion (the theological stage) is for children, philosophy (the metaphysical stage, extension of the former) for adolescents, and only the scientific method (positivism) for adults. His conviction that scientific observation, measurement and comparison represented the highest developmental stage for humanity was, by the time Comte put ink to paper, the dominant discourse of his epoch. The fact that Comte went on to found a secular religion based on strict principles and organized in a liturgical structure replete with a panoply of beliefs, sacraments and rituals, is highly symptomatic of the fundamentally *hysterical* character of the positivist revolution, whose urge to eliminate the philosophical search for causes and presuppositions generated the very anxiety it sought to abolish.

If we ascribe weight to the idea that Marx's mature thought developed into a teleological vision of history later named "historical materialism", the cause for this elaboration should be sought in the social pressure to conform to the dogma of his time: the injunction to observe the object of his critique (the capitalist mode of production) like a 'physicist' who 'either observes natural processes where they occur in their most significant form, and are least affected by disturbing influences, or, wherever possible, he makes experiments under conditions which ensure that the process will occur in its pure state.'³⁵ Marx could not be free from the pressure of positivism, and yet he did not give in to its requirements completely. Arguably, since around 1845 (*The German Ideology*) he felt increasingly obliged to incorporate into his thought the analytical method of positivism, which allowed him to provide an empirical basis for his critique of capital. At the same time, however, his empiricism continued to be supplemented with, and antagonized by, a systemic and dialectical understanding of social relations which was not

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33 Lacan 2006a, p. 722.

34 Lacan 2007, p. 108.

35 This well-known passage is from the Preface to the first edition of *Capital*. See Marx 1990, p. 90.

limited to the study of the observable, but also sought to probe entities and magnitudes that were not directly measurable.³⁶ In this respect, the tragic dimension of Marxism is to have discovered the powerful engine of capitalism as source of wealth (and socio-anthropological degradation) while also peddling the illusion of its dialectical overcoming via the proletariat. What Lacan's critique of the capitalist discourse makes clear is that, within the capitalist relation, there are no antagonistic forces (subjectivities) that might be able to overthrow capitalism; no Aristotelian potentiality within (the capitalistic appropriation of) labour that might trigger a revolutionary act.

In short, what is missing in Marx's labour theory of value is none other than the cause insofar as it is *ontologically lacking*: the cause, that is, as *the negative substantiality of human "knowledge at work"*, the unconscious substance that informs living labour and from there that spurious economic magnitude known as surplus-value. In his reading of Marx, Lacan urges Marxists to probe further into the nature of this surplus supposedly made of value. If they do, he contends, they would realise that the value-fetish is a fictional construct whose elementary role is to conceal not only the exploitation of labour-power, but especially the epochal transformation affecting the unconscious roots of knowledge. Precisely as a fetish, the value-form qua positive, abstract and yet terribly concrete measure of human labour (real abstraction) is an act of positing *via a thoroughly contingent gesture*: the purchase of labour-power. This, ultimately, is the sovereign capitalist gesture that surreptitiously turns the negative (lacking) substantiality of *savoir-faire* into an empirically measurable and exchangeable entity.

The immediate implication of this argument is that our social totality relies on the minimally transcendental operation we perform by disavowing the insubstantial character of labour-power. In the totalitarian reign of the value-form, fetishism (commodity consumerism), like all forms of perversion, functions as the minimal instance of disavowal that sets up our socio-ontological horizon of sense – that is to say, our big Other and its alienating effect. Within this paradigm, our inability to confront and assume the disavowed cause of the global capitalist big Other translates into our stubborn inability to tackle its terminal crisis at its roots. By definition, a fetish plugs the structural hole that constitutes its (impossible) truth. As anticipated, it is not merely a matter of locating the cause of the capitalist mode of production in its material and socio-historical status, namely the extraction of surplus-value from the worker's surplus labour-time. Rather, Lacan insists that the exploitation

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³⁶This central contradiction within Marx's thought can also be framed, of course, as a conflict between his materialistic critique of Hegel's speculative idealism, which he derived from Feuerbach, and his tendency not to jettison Hegel's dialectical method of enquiry into the self-development of humankind. There exists a vast critical literature on this theme, which for reasons of space cannot be discussed in this essay.

denounced by Marx conceals the radical inconsistency of a missing cause, i.e. the self-relating negativity of labour insofar as it is rooted in 'the gap-like structure that is the structure of the unconscious'.³⁷

As is well known, Marx's opening gambit in *Capital* volume 1 is to reveal how the abstraction of the exchange relation (the buying and selling of commodities in the market) functions through the disavowal of the operation that takes place "underground", in the hidden abode of production. The enigmatic character of the commodity-form is famously captured in the fourth and final section of the first chapter of *Capital* volume 1, aptly entitled 'The Fetishism of the Commodity and its Secret'. Here, through extensive use of esoteric terminology, Marx argues that the commodity is 'a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties'; he discusses 'the mystical character' of commodities that makes them 'sensuous things which are at the same time suprasensible or social'; and, most importantly, he claims that 'this fetishism of the world of commodities arises from the peculiar social character of the labour which produces them'.³⁸ The metaphysical lure of the fetish-commodity as encountered in the sphere of circulation, in other words, has to do with the specific *form* of the commodity. It is this form that Marx reveals to be created in the sphere of production through a particular use of the social character of labour, namely the capitalist's crafty appropriation of surplus labour-time. Thus, if the sphere of circulation is the 'very Eden of the innate rights of man', or more explicitly 'the exclusive realm of Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham' ('Bentham, because each looks only to his own advantage'),³⁹ Marx invites his readers to 'leave this noisy sphere [circulation], where everything takes place on the surface and in full view of everyone', and follow him 'into the hidden abode of production, on whose threshold there hangs the notice "No admittance except on business." Here we shall see, not only how capital produces, but how capital is itself produced. The secret of profit-making must at last be laid bare'.⁴⁰

In Marx, then, the negation of the immediacy (self-sufficiency) of the sphere of circulation leads us straight to the sphere of production as its other. What emerges from this dialectical analysis is a circular and processual loop whereby production and circulation constantly presuppose each other. However, Marx's theory arguably misses, eventually, the decisive passage in Hegel's dialectics, namely the question of the *groundlessness* (or negative substantiality) of the labour-substance in its grounding function. In other words, if labour provides

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³⁷ Lacan 1998, p. 176.

³⁸ Marx 1990, pp. 163-65.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 280.

⁴⁰ Ibid, pp. 279-80.

the substantial ground for the exchange-values in circulation, the key Hegelian point is not only that production itself is mediated by circulation, but that, in “becoming labour” through its relationship with circulation, labour shows its essence to be groundless. What escapes Marx is the fact that labour constitutes not only a negation (contradiction) of capital in its money-form, but especially *a negation of itself as negation of the latter*. Precisely as negation of the negation of what takes place in the market, labour is subsumed by capital as socially substantial, i.e. it is posited as its presupposition. Labour therefore exercises its grounding role by vanishing as *insubstantial* mediator. The dialectical link between labour and value is the particular way in which the capitalist mode of production posits its own presuppositions, an operation involving the disappearance of labour as self-relating negativity.

While in pre-capitalist times the relationship between production and circulation was *causal* (from production to the market), with capitalism it becomes *dialectical*, whereby both moments come to presuppose each other. As is well documented, the influence of Hegel's *Logic of Science* on Marx's critique of political economy is particular noticeable in some passages of the *Grundrisse*, like the following ones:

‘While, originally, the act of social production appeared as the positing of exchange values and this, in its later development, as circulation [...] now, circulation itself returns back into the activity which posits or produces exchange values. It returns into it as into its ground. [...] We have therefore reached the point of departure again, *production* which posits, creates exchange values; but this time, production which *presupposes circulation as a developed moment* and which appears as a constant process, which posits circulation and constantly returns from it into itself in order to posit it anew’.⁴¹

This captures Marx's Hegelian understanding of the previously mentioned dialectical inseparability of circulation and production:

‘Production itself is here no longer present in advance of its products, i.e. presupposed; it rather appears as simultaneously bringing forth these results; but it does not bring them forth, as in the first stage, as merely leading into circulation but as simultaneously presupposing circulation, the developed process of circulation’.⁴²

.....
41 Marx 1993, p. 255.

42 Ibid, p. 256.

Marx uses the example of commercial relations between England and the Netherlands in the 16th century, where the import of Dutch commodities in exchange for wool forced England to produce a surplus:

‘In order then to produce more wool, cultivated land was transformed into sheep-walks, the system of small tenant-farmers was broken up etc., clearing of estates took place etc. Agriculture thus lost the character of labour for use value, and the exchange of its overflow lost the character of relative indifference in respect to the inner construction of production. At certain points, agriculture itself became purely determined by circulation, transformed into production for exchange value. Not only was the mode of production altered thereby, but also all the old relations of population and of production, the economic relations which corresponded to it, were dissolved. Thus, here was a circulation which presupposed a production in which only the overflow was created as exchange value; but it turned into a production which took place only in connection with circulation, a production which posited exchange values as its exclusive content’.⁴³

The alteration of the mode of production described by Marx resonates very closely with Lacan's claim that what caused the passage from the Master's discourse to that of the Capitalist and of the University (modern science), was a structural shift affecting the substance of labour (production). As Marx underlines against the classical political economists, capital is not simply money exchanged for labour. On the contrary, it is a social relation, and as such it constitutes itself dialectically. This means that if to comprehend capital it is necessary to start with money, money in its ‘abstract generality’⁴⁴ must first be negated. Money exchanged for labour is not the same as money in circulation, where it appears as ‘a simple positing of equivalents’.⁴⁵ Rather, when it returns to itself, i.e. as capital, money becomes a process, a self-valorising capacity through its dialectical relation with labour – Marx calls this capacity *vervielfältigen seiner selbst*, a “reproduction of itself”. The dialectical relationship entertained with labour is thus the “magical” point where money, from a rigid and tangible thing that aims to become immortal by withdrawing from circulation, becomes capital. In respect of this dialectical liaison, Marx is very clear on the reciprocal alienness of labour and capital in its money-form:

.....
43 Ibid, p. 257.

44 Ibid, p. 263.

45 Ibid.

'Let us analyse first the simple aspects contained in the relation of capital and labour [...]. The first presupposition is that capital stands on one side and labour on the other, both as independent forms relative to each other; both hence also alien to one another'.⁴⁶

This mutual alienness, however, is not mere indifference. It is, rather, a dialectical opposition, in the precise sense that capital is different from labour only insofar as it relates to it – and the same goes for labour. They therefore constitute a unit through the interaction of their specific contradiction. Delving deeper into the essence of this contradiction, Marx discusses two types of labour: objectified labour and non-objectified labour. The first exists *in space*, i.e. as the congealed amount of labour contained in the commodity and equivalent to a given amount of money. The second exists *in time*, i.e. as the living labour of the worker:

'If it is to be present in time, alive, then it can be present only as the *living subject*, in which it exists as capacity, as possibility; hence as *worker*. [...] Labour as mere performance of services for the satisfaction of immediate needs has nothing whatever to do with capital, since that is not capital's concern'.⁴⁷

It is this labour as subjective capacity, as non-capital, which is appropriated by money, and turned into objectified (abstract) labour: 'Capital exchanges itself, or exists in this role, only in connection with *not-capital*, the negation of capital, without which it is not capital; the real *not-capital* is *labour*'.⁴⁸ To become capital, then, money must first posit labour as its other, as not-capital. By the same token, to become the living source of capital, labour must first be "pure capacity", the Aristotelian potential to work (*dynamis*) which is not yet mediated by capital.

The Hegelian point to highlight here is that what connects capital and labour as incongruous entities is their inherent inconsistency (self-relating negativity). That is to say: the difference between the two oppositional entities in question is also their own self-difference, their own impossibility to be, autonomously, "capital" and "labour". Each, in other words, contains within itself its non-being, and what brings them together is the act of mediation (fictionalisation) of this intrinsic negativity. The distance between capital and labour is the distance of labour from itself, its self-relating negativity; and it is also the difference of capital from itself, which, as I have argued, fuels capital's drive qua automatic subject.

.....
46 Ibid, p. 266.

47 Ibid, p. 272.

48 Ibid, p. 274.

As with Hegel's dialectic of subject and substance, what brings the two together is their positivized/mediated negativity, which takes the form of the value-fetish.⁴⁹ This is how capital turns the relation to its other (labour) into self relating qua movement of self expansion. That is to say, it retroactively sublates its own conditions of possibility by mediating them into moments of its own "spontaneous" self-reproduction. By doing so, capital *posits its own presuppositions*: it creates its principle of self-valorisation out of the contradiction between itself and labour. But to what extent is Marx able to follow the Hegelian dialectic to the end, namely to the self-relating negativity of the cause? For Žižek, Marx is unable to reach this point:

'the problem is how to think together the Hegelian circulation of capital and its decentered cause, the labour force, that is, how to think the causality of a productive subject external to the circulation of capital without resorting to the Aristotelian positivity of workers' productive potential? For Marx, the starting point is precisely such a positivity: the productive force of human labor; and he accepts this starting point as unsurpassable, rejecting the logic of the dialectical process which, as Hegel put it, progresses "from nothing through nothing to nothing".⁵⁰

It is because Marx's ultimate horizon is the affirmative character of labour that, as Žižek notes, 'Marx's reference to Hegel's dialectics in his "critique of political economy" is ambiguous, oscillating between taking it as a mystified expression of the logic of capital and taking it as a model for the revolutionary process of emancipation'.⁵¹ For Lacan, Marx's ambiguity vis-à-vis labour did not prevent him from designating 'the function of surplus value [...] with complete pertinence in its devastating consequences', and yet it also meant that the limit of his critique resides in accepting the ontological presuppositions of the scientific-cum-capitalist discourse of his time:

'If, by means of this relentlessness to castrate himself that he had, he hadn't computed this surplus *jouissance*, if he hadn't converted it into surplus value, in other words if he hadn't founded capitalism, Marx would have realized that surplus value is surplus *jouissance*'.⁵²

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49 What comes to mind here is Lacan's notion of sexual difference, where the impossibility of the relationship is sustained by a particular fantasy, a fictional formula whose purpose is to bridge the universal gap of sexuality.

50 Žižek 2013, p. 251.

51 Ibid, p. 250.

52 Lacan 2007, pp. 107-08.

The limit of Marx's labour theory of value, steeped as it is in the positivist economicism of his time, lies in its failure fully to accomplish the step from value as positive ground to value as the grounding gap or inconsistency that triggers the dialectical self-deployment of the capitalist dynamic. Hegel's dialectical approach allows us to dispel the illusion that the external obstacle (the capitalist exploitation of labour) thwarts the potential inherent to non-alienated labour, preventing it from realizing itself in a communist/utopian scenario. In respect of this misleading binary logic, the Hegelian lesson is that a given ontic potential, such as the potential of human "knowledge at work", is always consubstantial, or speculatively identical with, the contradiction or negativity that qualifies its historically deployed ontological essence. What should be emphasised, dialectically speaking, is the self-relating negativity of labour, and by the same token the self-relating negativity of the "discourse of the Capitalist" as a socio-ontological formation.

Consequently, the nexus between surplus labour-time and surplus-value needs to be redefined. The presupposition of capital positing itself as an autotelic discourse is not merely the exploitation of labour-power as source of surplus-value. If we stop at this conclusion we risk missing the *missing* cause of the whole process. Everything rests on grasping that what capital presupposes is not just the use-value of labour but the fact that labour constitutes the founding contradiction, or determinate negation, of capital's own self-deployment. Radically understood via Lacan (and Hegel), labour-power as "substance of capital" is nothing but *labour-powerlessness*, its own self-contradiction; it becomes an affirmative (valorised) substance only after capital has posited its presuppositions, that is to say after it has turned its insubstantial "nothing", its ineffable quality, into "something", a quantity of labour-time necessary for the production of a given commodity and the reproduction of the worker's livelihood (socially necessary labour-time). Thus, the extraction of surplus-value from surplus labour-time depends on a retroactive movement whereby money turns an unquantifiable "other" into the presupposition of its smooth, ever-accelerating discourse as capital. The very fact that capitalism *coincides* with its own acceleration, i.e. that in a stagnant state it would perish, is proof that its ontology of self-reproduction is, literally, built upon "nothing". Labour as substance of wealth is therefore the *fiction* that founds capitalism as a social relation. Put differently, the capitalist autopoiesis needed to fictionalise labour-power as its cause. This is the loop involved in the Hegelian *Setzung der Voraussetzungen* (positing the presuppositions): the self-organisation of the capitalist discourse emerged through the positing of the "labour presupposition", which determined the seemingly spontaneous socio-ontological boundary within which the capitalist mode of production proliferated. This boundary was installed precisely by the minimal narrative concerning the computation of the unconscious roots of labour-power.

Historically, we are now at a point where the labour-fiction is increasingly untenable, as valorised human labour is being ousted by machines and will not be given a second chance. What is evaporating before our very eyes is not just labour as substance of value, but labour as fiction, that crucial fantasy formation through which labour-power was once constituted as constitutive of capital. In this respect, if we fail to apply the Hegelian reading on how capital retroactively subsumed the inherently self-contradictory status of labour into the engine propelling its own mode of production, we will continue to engage in fundamentally misleading debates on what to do with capitalist value (e.g. stimulus vs. austerity). Labour as presupposition of capital does not have a substantial consistency of its own. And Lacan stressed exactly this point when he claimed that labour-power originates in unconscious knowledge. The task ahead, then, is to insist that in its current terminal phase capitalism is increasingly naked, i.e. deprived of its anchoring point in its own labour presupposition. When the mask of valorised labour drops, the positing of the such presupposition also fails, with catastrophic consequences for everyone.

Capitalism emerged as a dominant discourse only through its failure to actualize itself fully: the sublation of labour does not signal reconciliation with it, but instead the endless failure of reconciliation qua class struggle, which is precisely the contradiction upon which capital erects its logic. As anticipated, capital's relation to labour is akin to subject's relation to substance in Hegel. This is why the capitalist positing of the labour presupposition has nothing to do with a teleological process: it is not the logical development of human activity from something less substantial to something more substantial. What is retroactively called into existence (the substantial character of labour) was already there prior to the arrival of capitalism. The labouring capacity as form-giving activity, interaction with nature and substance of wealth was, of course, already at the heart of feudal societies, which had posited their own particular labour presupposition. The effect of the capitalist revolution was to re-signify the previous substantiality of labour by giving it a specific agency through its compulsive quantification and commodification. From that moment on, the dividing line between capitalist and pre-capitalist notions of human "knowledge at work" was obfuscated, and the pre-capitalist past suddenly appeared within the teleological framework of capitalist relations. This, however, should not prevent us from recognising the self-relating negativity of substance (labour) in its speculative identity with the self-relating negativity of subject (capital). This, again, means that labour qua substance of capital is deeply inconsistent, and it is by identifying and tarrying with such inconsistency that the new might emerge – in Lacanian terms, a new social link (*signifiant nouveau*) based in a new relation with surplus-*jouissance*.

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Ibi Rhodus Ibi Saltus! Theology, Hegel, Lacan

Slavoj Žižek

Abstract: The present essay deals with Lacan and Hegel and their relation to theology, or more precisely, Christianity. It begins with discussing the notion of freedom and its meaning and implications in Aristotle, Kant. It continues with explores the consequences of the Luther event in the realm of freedom.

Keywords: Lacan, freedom, theology, Hegel, Luther

Our common notion of freedom implies a well-known ambiguity. (1) I am free when I do what I want, when I am not hindered by external obstacles. This mode of freedom is not incompatible with determinism: my acts can be totally determined by objective (neuronal, biological, social, etc.) conditions; what makes them free is that no external obstacle hinders them. (2) The next mode of freedom is freedom as self-control: I am truly free when I do not helplessly succumb to temptation (of external objects or of my inner nature) but remain able to resist it, to decide against it. Insofar as we, humans, act “freely” in the sense of just spontaneously following our natural inclinations, we are not really free but are enslaved to our animal natures. We find this same line of reasoning already in Aristotle who, referring to slavery as an example to illustrate a general ontological feature, wrote that, left to themselves, slaves are “free” in the sense that they just do what they want, while free men follow their duty—and it is this very “freedom” which makes slaves slaves:

all things are ordered together somehow, but not all alike—both fishes and fowls and plants; and the world is not such that one thing has nothing to do with another, but they are connected. For all are ordered together to one end, but it is as in a house, where the freemen are least at liberty to act at random, but all things or most things are already ordained for them, while the slaves and the animals do little for the common good, and for the most part live at random; for this is the sort of principle that constitutes the nature of each.¹

In spite of all that is deeply problematic in the quoted passage, is there not a grain of truth in it, i.e., does this characterization of slaves not provide a good determination of today’s consumerist slavery where I am allowed to act at random and “do what I want,” but remain precisely as such enslaved to the stimuli of commodities? However, the complication that arises here is: On behalf of what am I able to resist my immediate (or mediated) natural inclinations? For Kant, when my motivations are free from empirical content, I am motivated by the moral law (by the sense of duty). But can the good also be a temptation to be resisted, i.e., can the

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¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII.10, trans. W. D. Ross.

freedom of self-control also extend to my resistance to follow the inner pressure of the moral law? In other words, can there be a pure choice of evil not motivated by empirical/pathological interests? If we deny this possibility, we fall into what can be called a “moralist shortcut”: if to act freely means to follow the moral law, then “the effect of morally interpreting the positive sense of ‘free’ will be to make ‘unfree’ equivalent to immoral; if unfree is immoral, free immoral actions are not possible.”² But if we are not free in committing immoral acts, is it not that then we are also not responsible for them? Do we at least freely choose between true freedom and slavery (submission to our pathological interests)?

(3) This brings us to the third mode of freedom, that of a choice which should not be determined by any pre-existing line of causality and is therefore not reducible to any kind of objective determination. If we are able to commit such a free choice, what motivates it? Lacan’s answer is here clear: the non-pathological object-cause of desire he calls *objet a*. This object doesn’t entail any limitation of our freedom because it is nothing but the subject itself in its objectal mode, an object which does not pre-exist desire but is posited by it.

No one brought out more forcefully these paradoxes of freedom than Martin Luther. One of his key references is the claim of Jesus that a good tree does not bring forth evil fruit (i.e., a good tree produces only good fruit), and he concluded from it that “good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works.” One should fully assume the “static” anti-performative (or anti-Pascalean) aspect of this conclusion: we do not create ourselves through the meanders of our life-practice, in our creativity we rather bring out what we already are. It’s not “act as if you are good, do good works, and you will become good,” it is “only if you are good can you do good works.” The easy way to read this claim is to interpret it as a “necessary illusion”: what I am is effectively created through my activity, there is no pre-existing essence or essential identity which is expressed or actualized in my acts; however, we spontaneously (mis)perceive our acts as merely expressing or actualizing what we (already) are in ourselves. However, from a properly dialectical standpoint, it is not enough to say that the pre-existing self-identity is a necessary illusion; we have here a more complex mechanism of (re)creating the eternal identity itself. Let’s clarify this mechanism with an example. When something crucial happens, even if it happens unexpectedly, we often get the impression that it *had* to happen, that it would violate some higher order if it were not to happen. More precisely, once it *does* happen, we see that it had to happen—but it may *not* have happened. Let’s take a case of desperate love: I am deeply convinced that my love is not reciprocated, and I silently resign myself to a gloomy future of despair; but if I all of a sudden discover that my love is reciprocated,

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² Gabriel and Rasmussen 2017, p. 24.

I feel that this had to happen and I cannot even imagine the despair of my life without it. Or let’s take a difficult and risky political decision: although we sympathize with it, we are skeptical, we don’t trust the scared majority; but when, as if by a miracle, this decision *is* taken and enacted, we feel it was destined to happen. Authentic political acts take place like this: in them, (what was considered) “impossible” happens and, by way of happening, it rewrites its own past and emerges as necessary, “predestined” even. This is why there is no incompatibility between Predestination and our free acts. Luther saw clearly how the (Catholic) idea that our redemption depends on our acts introduces a dimension of bargaining into ethics: good deeds are not done out of duty but in order to gain salvation. If, however, my salvation is predestined, this means that my fate is already decided and my doing good deeds does not serve anything—so if I do them, it is out of pure duty, a really altruistic act:

This recognition that only as one was freed from the paralyzing need to serve one’s own self, could acts of love become altruistic, was one of Luther’s most positive contributions to Christian social ethics. It enabled him to view good deeds as ends in themselves, and never as a means of salvation. . . . Luther realized that a love that sought no reward was more willing to serve the helpless, the powerless, the poor, and the oppressed, since their cause offered the least prospect of personal gain.³

But did Luther draw all ethico-political consequences from this key insight? His great pupil and opponent Thomas Muntzer accused Luther of betrayal: his basic reproach to Luther’s social ethics concerns the

perverse application of the Law-gospel distinction. The rightful use of the law was to bring “destruction and sickness to the healthy,” and that of the Gospel to bring “comfort to the troubled.” Luther had turned this application on its head by defending the presumptuous and tyrannical rulers with the gracious words of the Gospel, while bringing the “grim sternness” of the law to bear against the God-fearing poor and oppressed peasants. The result was a total misuse of Scripture. “Thus the godless tyrant says to the pious, ‘I must torture you. Christ also suffered. Therefore you are not to resist me.’ [Matthew 5] This [is] a great perversion. . . . One must forgive with the Gospel and the Spirit of Christ, to the furtherance and not the hindrance of the Gospel.”⁴

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³ Kuenning 1987, pp.306-307

⁴ Ibid.

With this perversion, “the elect were no longer envisioned as directly active or forceful instruments of that retribution” against those who violate the spirit of the Gospel.

This critique of Luther is clear, but it nonetheless seems to court the danger of succumbing to the perverse position of perceiving oneself as the direct instrument of the big Other’s will. How to avoid this danger? Let us begin at the beginning, with the triad of Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Protestantism.

Central to the Orthodox tradition is the notion of “theosis,” of man becoming (like) god, or, to quote Saint Athanasius of Alexandria: “He was incarnate that we might be made god.” What would otherwise seem absurd—that fallen, sinful man may become holy as God is holy—has been made possible through Jesus Christ, who is God incarnate. St. Maximus the Confessor wrote: “A sure warrant for looking forward with hope to deification of human nature is provided by the Incarnation of God, which makes man God to the same degree as God Himself became man... Let us become the image of the one whole God, bearing nothing earthly in ourselves, so that we may consort with God and become gods, receiving from God our existence as gods.”⁵ This orthodox formula “God became man so that man can become God” is totally wrong: God became man *and that’s it*, nothing more, everything already happens here, what needs to be added is just a new perspective on this. There is no resurrection to follow, the Holy Ghost already *is* resurrection. Only Protestantism enables us to think Incarnation as an event in God himself, as *his* profound transformation: He was incarnate that HE became God, i.e., He became fully God only through His self-division into God and man. This may sound paradoxical since God is an unknown Beyond, *deus absconditus*. We thus seem to have three incompatible positions: God is an absolutely impenetrable Beyond; God is the absolute Master of our fate which is predestined by Him; God gave us freedom and thereby made us responsible for our deeds. The unique achievement of Protestantism is to bring together these three positions: everything is predestined by God, but since God is an impenetrable Beyond for me I cannot discern what my fate is, so I am left to do good deeds without any calculation and profit in view, i.e., in total freedom.

True freedom is not a freedom of choice made from a safe distance, like choosing between a strawberry cake or a chocolate cake; true freedom overlaps with necessity, one makes a truly free choice when one’s choice puts at stake one’s very existence—one does it because one simply “cannot do otherwise.” When one’s country is under a foreign occupation and one is called by a resistance leader to join the fight against the occupiers, the reason given is not “you are free to choose,” but: “Can’t you see that this is the only thing you can do if you want to

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⁵ Shamelessly quoted from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theosis_\(Eastern_Christian_theology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theosis_(Eastern_Christian_theology)).

retain your dignity?” This is why radical acts of freedom are possible only under the condition of predestination: in predestination, we know we are predestined, but we don’t know how we are predestined, i.e., which of our choices is predetermined, and this terrifying situation where we have to decide what to do, knowing that our decision is decided in advance, is perhaps the only case of real freedom, of the unbearable burden of a really free choice—we know that what we will do is predestined, but we still have to take a risk and subjectively choose what is predestined.

Freedom of course disappears if we locate a human being into objective reality, as its part, as one among objects—at this level, there is simply no space for freedom. In order to locate freedom, we have to make a move from the enunciated content (what we are talking about) to our (the speaker’s) position of enunciation. If a scientist demonstrates we are not free, what does this imply for the position from which he (and we) speaks? This reference to the subject of enunciation (foreclosed by science) is irreducible: whatever I am saying, it’s me who is saying it, so apropos of every scientific reduction to objective reality (which makes me a biological machine) a question is to be raised of the horizon from which I see and say this. Is this not why psychoanalysis is exemplary of our predicament? Yes, we are decentered, caught in a foreign cobweb, overdetermined by unconscious mechanisms; yes, I am “spoken” more than speaking, the Other speaks through me, but simply assuming this fact (in the sense of rejecting any responsibility) is also false, a case of self-deception—psychoanalysis makes me even more responsible than traditional morality, it makes me responsible even for what is beyond my (conscious) control.

This solution works on one condition: the subject (believer) is absolutely constrained by the unsurpassable horizon of its subjectivity. What Protestantism prohibits is the very thought that a believer can as it were take a position outside/above itself and look upon itself as a small particle in the vast reality. Mao Ze-dong was wrong when he deploys his Olympic vision reducing human experience to a tiny unimportant detail: “The United States cannot annihilate the Chinese nation with its small stack of atom bombs. Even if the US atom bombs were so powerful that, when dropped on China, they would make a hole right through the earth, or even blow it up, that would hardly mean anything to the universe as a whole, though it might be a major event for the solar system.”⁶ There is an “inhuman madness” in this argument: Is the fact that the destruction of the planet Earth “would hardly mean anything to the universe as a whole” not a rather poor solace for the extinguished humanity? The argument only works if, in a Kantian way, one presupposes a pure transcendental subject non-affected by this catastrophe—a subject which, although non-existing in reality, *is* operative as a virtual point of reference (recall

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⁶ Mao 2007, p. 87.

Husserl's dark dream, from his *Cartesian Meditations*, of how the transcendental *cogito* would remain unaffected by a plague that would annihilate entire humanity). In contrast to such a stance of cosmic indifference, we should act as if the entire universe was created as a backstage for the struggle of emancipation, in exactly the same way that, for Kant, God created the world in order to serve as the battleground for the ethical struggle of humanity: it is as if the fate of the entire universe is decided in our singular (and, from the global cosmic standpoint, marginal and insignificant) struggle.

The paradox is that, although (human) subjectivity is obviously not the origin of all reality, although it is a contingent local event in the universe, the path to universal truth does not lead through the abstraction from it in the well-known sense of “let's try to imagine how the world is independently of us,” the approach which brings us to some “grey” objective structure—such a vision of “subjectless” world is by definition just a negative image of subjectivity itself, its own vision of the world in its absence. (The same holds for all the attempts to picture humanity as an insignificant species on a small planet on the edge of our galaxy, i.e., to view it the same way we view a colony of ants.) Since we are subjects, constrained to the horizon of subjectivity, we should instead focus on what the fact of subjectivity implies for the universe and its structure: the event of subject derails the balance, it throws the world out of joint, but such a derailment *is* the universal truth of the world. What this also implies is that the access to “reality in itself” does not demand from us that we overcome our “partiality” and arrive at a neutral vision elevated above our particular struggles—we are “universal beings” only in our full partial engagements. This contrast is clearly discernible in the case of love: against the Buddhist love of All or any other notion of the harmony with the cosmos, we should assert the radically exclusive love for the singular One, a love which throws out of joint the smooth flow of our lives.

This is also why the idea of sacrifice is foreign to Protestantism. In Catholicism, one is expected to earn salvation through earthly sacrifices, while Protestantism moves beyond this logic of exchange: there is no need for external sacrifice, a believer as empty subject (\$) *is* sacrifice (of all substantial content, i.e., it emerges through what mystics and Sade call the second death). This is what Catholicism doesn't see: one doesn't get anything in exchange for sacrifice, giving already *is* getting (in sacrificing all its substantial content a believer gets itself, emerges as pure subject).

This is also why in a consequential Protestantism there is no second coming, no final reversal—as Hegel put it, reconciliation means that one has to recognize the heart in the cross of the present, or, as he put it in a famous passage from the Preface to his *Philosophy of Right*:

This treatise, in so far as it contains a political science, is nothing more than an attempt to conceive of and present the state as in itself rational. As a philosophic writing, it must be on its guard against constructing a state as it *ought to be*. Philosophy cannot teach the state what it *should be*, but only how it, the ethical universe, is to be *known*.

Hic Rhodus, hic saltus.

To apprehend what *is* is the task of philosophy, because what *is* is reason. As for the individual, everyone is a son of his time; so philosophy also is its time apprehended in thoughts. It is just as foolish to fancy that any philosophy can transcend its present world, as that an individual could leap out of his time or jump over Rhodes. If a theory transgresses its time, and builds up a world as it ought to be, it has an existence merely in the unstable element of opinion, which gives room to every wandering fancy.

With little change the above saying would read:

Here is the rose, *here* dance

The barrier which stands between reason, as self-conscious Spirit, and reason as present reality, and does not permit spirit to find satisfaction in reality, is some abstraction, which is not free to be conceived. To recognize reason as the rose in the cross of the present, and to find delight in it, is a rational insight which implies reconciliation with reality.”⁷

This “reconciliation” refers to Luther whose emblem was precisely a rose in a cross. Luther understood this in a Christian way (deliverance [rose] only occurs through Christ's sacrifice), while Hegel conceives of it more conceptually: Luther's emblem was the black cross in the center of a heart encircled by roses, while for Hegel Reason is apprehended as the rose in the cross of the present. However, to get properly what Hegel aims at here, one should take a step further and turn around the usual wisdom *Hic Rhodus hic saltus* to which Hegel refers: *Ibi Rhodus ibi saltus!* Not here, *there* is Rhodus, *there* jump! We are ready to jump here in any way, to engage ourselves, to fight. . . on condition that we can rely on some form of big Other which guarantees consistency of it all. Many Leftist intellectuals pursue their academic career *here*, fortified by their assurance that a true revolution is going on somewhere out *there*; religious people live (and participate) in brutal chaos *here*, fortified by their belief that there is a higher order of Justice out *there* in Heaven. . . And something similar goes on in sexuality—as the saying goes, *hic Rhodus hic salta*, don't just boast and promise, show me here, in my bed, how good you really are in jumping on me. . . And the opposite also

.....
7 Hegel 1942

holds: we are all ready to indulge in utter skepticism, cynical distance, exploitation of others “without any illusions,” violations of all ethical constraints, extreme sexual practices, etc.—protected by the silent awareness that the big Other is ignorant about it:

the subject is ready to do quite a lot, change radically, if only she can remain unchanged in the Other (in the symbolic as the external world in which, to put it in Hegel’s terms, the subject’s consciousness of himself is embodied, materialized as something that still does not know itself as consciousness). In this case, the belief in the Other (in the modern form of believing that the Other does not know) is precisely what helps to maintain the same state of things, regardless of all subjective mutations and permutations. The subject’s universe would really change only at the moment when she were to arrive at the knowledge that the Other knows (that it doesn’t exist).⁸

The solution is thus not “don’t jump here”—we are here, there is no other place to jump. The solution is: jump here, but in such a way that you don’t rely on any figure of the big Other.

This is also how we should read Hegel’s formula of reconciliation—I (the subject) should achieve reconciliation by way of “recognizing myself in my Otherness” (in the alienated substance which determines me). This formula is profoundly ambiguous: it can be read in the standard subjectivist way (I should recognize this Otherness as my own product, not as something strange) or, more subtly, as a claim that I should recognize myself, the core of my being, in this very Otherness, i.e., I should realize that the Otherness of the substantial content is constitutive of my Self: I am only insofar as I am confronted by an eluding Otherness which is decentered also with regard to itself. *Ibi Rhodus ibi saltus* means: overcome your alienation in the Other by way of recognizing that that Other itself does not possess what you are lacking.

So what does *Ibi Rhodus ibi saltus* amount to in our actual ethical deadlocks? Here negative theology enters—as an obstacle to self-instrumentalization. Self-instrumentalization presupposes the big Other whose privileged interpreter and instrument is the revolutionary agent. Münzer belongs to this line, he even grounded it; he was wrong in founding the authentic revolutionary spirit on natural law (or a theological version of it): for him, a true believer is able to decipher the Other (his command) and to realize it, to be the instrument of his realization. Luther was right here to criticize Münzer as *der Schwärmer* who pretended to know the divine mind. Luther warns against such *Majestätsspekulation*,

⁸ Alenka Zupančič, “Die Sexualität innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft” (manuscript).

against trying to discern the will of god, of *deus absconditus*: one should abandon attempts to know what the Other wants from you and to assume your position in this world, while realizing the Other as a “hole” in this position, a subtraction from it. God introduces the cut of the Absolute, into the ordered Aristotelian universe (thus, of course, making the latter contingent), and the tension between the two can be resolved neither through excluding one side nor by thinking a “pactum” or a historical-dialectical relation between the two but only by thinking one (the divine Absolute) as the subtraction, the hole in the Other. Yet, in order to uphold the theological and statist reality he affirmed, Luther could not uphold the radicalism of this solution which goes much further than Münzer’s. Although Münzer’s notion of revolutionary activity implies that our struggle for liberation is a process that takes place in God himself, his self-instrumentalization of the revolutionary agent as an agent of divine will enables him to avoid the radical openness of the struggle, the fact that the fate of God himself is decided in our revolutionary activity.

However, Luther himself later compromised this radical position, not only for pragmatic-opportunist reasons (“I need state support to guard against counter-reformation, therefore it is not prudent to support a revolt that is bound to fail anyway”), but also on a purely theological level: as a “professor of Old Testament theology,” as he was characterized, he begins to practice what Lacan called “discourse of University” and, as a “professor of Old Testament theology,” as someone once said, he retreats to the Thomist-Aristotelian safe ground: “he reverts back to a position which elides the ‘hole,’ the ‘subtraction’ that the Other’s desire (its constitutional unknowability) rips into the fabric of the ordered (causal) world.” So we find ourselves back in a rationally ordered hierarchic universe where “everyone is called to a station and it is sin to surpass and transgress that station”; the peasant revolt is rejected because it disturbs this well-ordered universe.

Of course Luther does not simply regress to Aquinas—he remains within the nominalist lineage and maintains the gap between *deus absconditus* and *deus revelatus* usually correlated with the difference between *potentia dei absoluta* and *potentia dei ordinata*. In the Thomist tradition, God had become rationalized to the point of nearly becoming intelligible in terms of the laws of nature which resulted in a kind of impinging of the ordered whole on the Creator. In response to these difficulties, nominalist theologians introduced a distinction between God’s absolute power (*potentia Dei absoluta*) and God’s ordained power (*potentia Dei ordinata*). Being utterly transcendent and mysterious, God could do anything; however, God has also entered willingly into a covenant with his people and freely binds himself to this covenant. Thus, from the point of view of God’s ordained power, he is intelligible, as is of course not the case in regard to *potentia Dei absoluta* which thereby implies the severing of the relations of the Creator with his creation.

Since *deus absconditus* is beyond our rational comprehension, the temptation is to privilege mystical experience as the only contact with Him. In the predominant reading, the young Luther was a mystic, but then later, after dealing with the radical elements of the Reformation, he changed his position. But there is a basic continuity in his thought regarding mysticism: Luther did not rule out “high mysticism” as impossible but rather cautioned against its dangers—for him, *accessus* has priority over *raptus*, i.e., justification by faith through the incarnate and crucified Word has priority over *raptus* by the uncreated word (the latter being that which was characterized by dangerous speculations not tethered to the Word).

Although Luther employs the concept of the *potentia ordinata* of God, so characteristic for nominalistic theology, he gives it a Christological point instead of its primary epistemological meaning: the *potentia ordinata* is for him not primarily the order established by the inscrutable free God who could as well have established another order, but the order of redemption in Jesus Christ, established out of God’s mercy to provide sinful man with a refuge from danger.⁹ But is this notion of *potentia ordinata* not all too close to the traditional notion of a transcendent God who dwells in itself and then decides to reveal Himself to us humans, to become God-for-us, by way of the divine Word which provides meaningful order to our existence? So what if we risk the opposite approach and conceive *potentia absoluta* not as some transcendent and impenetrable God of Beyond but as the “irrational” miracle, a hole in reality—in short, as the incarnation/revelation itself. It is the Aristotelian God which is in-itself and for us, i.e., our representation of the In-itself, while Revelation is not logos (logos is the Aristotelian order) but the break of the Absolute into logos. When we are talking about God-in-itself, we should recall what Hegel says about our search for the meaning of Egyptian works of art (pyramids, Sphinx):

In deciphering such a meaning we often, to be sure, go too far today because in fact almost all the shapes present themselves directly as symbols. In the same way in which we try to explain this meaning to ourselves, it might have been clear and intelligible as a meaning to the insight of the Egyptians themselves. But the Egyptian symbols, as we saw at the very beginning, contain implicitly much, explicitly nothing. There are works undertaken with the attempt to make them clear to themselves, yet they do not get beyond the struggle after what is absolutely evident. In this sense we regard the Egyptian works of art as containing riddles, the right solution

⁹This line of thought is paraphrased from <http://lutherantheologystudygroup.blogspot.si/2011/05/luther-and-potentia-ordinata-of-god.html>.

of which is in part unattained not only by us, but generally by those who posed these riddles to themselves.¹⁰

It is in this sense that Hegel talks about “objective riddle”: a Sphinx is not a riddle for our finite mind but in and for itself, “objectively,” and the same holds for *deus absconditus* whose impenetrable mystery is a mystery for God himself. Chesterton saw this clearly—in his “Introduction to Book of Job,” he praised it as “the most interesting of ancient books. We may almost say of the book of Job that it is the most interesting of modern books.”¹¹ What accounts for its “modernity” is the way in which the book of Job strikes a dissonant chord in the Old Testament:

Everywhere else, then, the Old Testament positively rejoices in the obliteration of man in comparison with the divine purpose. The book of Job stands definitely alone because the book of Job definitely asks, “But what is the purpose of God? Is it worth the sacrifice even of our miserable humanity? Of course, it is easy enough to wipe out our own paltry wills for the sake of a will that is grander and kinder. But is it grander and kinder? Let God use His tools; let God break His tools. But what is He doing, and what are they being broken for?”¹²

In the end, the book of Job does not provide a satisfying answer to this riddle:

it does not end in a way that is conventionally satisfactory. Job is not told that his misfortunes were due to his sins or a part of any plan for his improvement. . . . God comes in at the end, not to answer riddles, but to propound them.¹³

And the “great surprise” is that the book of Job

makes Job suddenly satisfied with the mere presentation of something impenetrable. Verbally speaking the enigmas of Jehovah seem darker and more desolate than the enigmas of Job; yet Job was comfortless before the speech of Jehovah and is comforted after it. He has been told nothing, but he feels the terrible and tingling atmosphere of something which is too good to be told. The refusal of God to explain His design is itself a burning hint of His

¹⁰ Hegel 1991, pp.21-22.

¹¹ G. K. Chesterton, “Introduction to the Book of Job”

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

design. The riddles of God are more satisfying than the solutions of man.¹⁴

In short, God performs here what Lacan calls a *point de capiton*: he resolves the riddle by supplanting it with an even more radical riddle, by redoubling the riddle, by transposing the riddle from Job's mind into "the thing itself"—he himself comes to share Job's astonishment at the chaotic madness of the created universe: "Job puts forward a note of interrogation; God answers with a note of exclamation. Instead of proving to Job that it is an explainable world, He insists that it is a much stranger world than Job ever thought it was."¹⁵ So, far from providing some kind of satisfactory account of Job's undeserved suffering, God's appearance at the end ultimately amounts to pure boasting, a horror show with elements of farcical spectacle—a pure argument of authority grounded in a breathtaking display of power: "You see all that I can do? Can you do this? Who are you then to complain?" So what we get is neither the good God letting Job know that his suffering is just an ordeal destined to test his faith, nor a dark God beyond Law, the God of pure caprice, but rather a God who acts as someone caught in the moment of impotence, or at least weakness, and tries to escape his predicament by empty boasting. God-the-Father thus quite literally doesn't know what he is doing, and Christ is the one who does know it, but is reduced to an impotent compassionate observer, addressing his father with "Father, can't you see I'm burning?"—burning together with all the victims of the father's rage. Only by falling into his own creation and wandering around in it as an impassive observer can god perceive the horror of his creation and the fact that He, the highest Law-giver, is himself the supreme Criminal (as Chesterton saw clearly in *The Man Who Was Thursday*).

We should be very precise here: the death of Christ is not the death of the transcendent real God and its sublation into a symbolic God, a God who exists only as a virtual/symbolic entity kept "alive" through the practice of believers – such a "sublation" already happens in Judaism, and in Christianity, something much more weird happens: God has to die the second time. What dies in the cross is not the real God but the big Other, the ideal/virtual entity, or, as Lacan would have put it, as the symbolic big Other. This is why God has first to be re-personalized in reincarnation, not as the majestic absolute Being but as its opposite, the miserable-comic figure of Christ, in his appearance an ordinary human like others. (In short, Christ is like the Monarch in Hegel's philosophy of right: an ordinary human who, in the very arbitrariness of his presence, provides the "quilting point" for the State as the ideal-spiritual order

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14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

of society and thus makes the State an actual entity – if the Monarch is deposed, the State disintegrates.) King The function of Christ is, in Lacanese, to fill in the gap in the big Other, to provide *le peu de reel* that sustains the symbolic/virtual order, so when Christ dies, the symbolic big Other also collapses. This is why the Holy Spirit is not a new figure of the virtual big Other but the spirit of a community (of believers) which accepts the non-existence of the big Other.

The ultimate choice is thus: Is God the big Other, a guarantor of meaning (accessible to us or beyond our reach), or a crack of the Real that tears up the texture of reality? With regard to the topic of theology and revolution, this choice means: Is god a transcendent point of reference that legitimizes our instrumentalization (enabling us to claim that we act on His behalf), or is he the guarantor of ontological opening which, precisely, prevents such instrumentalization? In Badiou's terms, is the reference to God in political theology sustained by the logic of purification (a nihilist destruction of all that seems to contradict the divine message) or by the logic of separation—separation which means not only our separation from God on account of which God remains impenetrable to us believers, but primarily a separation in the heart of God Himself? Incarnation is the separation of God from Himself, and for us humans, being abandoned by God, abandoned to the abyss of our freedom, without His protective care, is when we are one with God, the god separated from itself.

In a joke about Auschwitz that circulates among Jews, a group of them who were burned in the camp sit at a bench in paradise and talk about their suffering, making fun of it. One of them say: "David, you remember how you slipped on the way to the gas chamber and died before even gas engulfed you?", etc. Strolling around in Paradise, God himself comes by, listens to them and complains that he doesn't get the joke; one of the Jews steps towards Him, puts a hand on his shoulder and comforts him: "Don't be sad. You were not there, so of course you cannot get the joke!"¹⁶ The beauty of this reply resides in the way it refers to the well-known statement that God died in Auschwitz, that there was no God there: "no God in Auschwitz" does not imply that God cannot understand the horror of what went on there (God can do that easily, it's his job to do it) but that He cannot understand the humour generated by the experience of Auschwitz. What god doesn't (and cannot) get is the obscene sovereignty of the human spirit which reacts with laughter to the very space where he (god) is absent.

Perhaps, however, Christianity provides a specific solution here - the only consistent Christian answer to the eternal critical question: was god there in Auschwitz? How could He allow such immense suffering? Why didn't He intervene and prevent it? The answer is neither that we

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16 I owe this joke to Udi Aloni, of course.

should learn to withdraw from our terrestrial vicissitudes and identify with the blessed peace of God who dwells above our misfortunes, from where we become aware of the ultimate nullity of our human concerns (the standard pagan answer), nor that God knows what he is doing and will somehow repay us for our suffering, kneel its wounds and punish the guilty (the standard teleological answer). The answer is found, for example, in the final scene of *Shooting Dogs*, a film about the Rwanda genocide, in which the group of Tutsi refugees in a Christian school know that they will be shortly slaughtered by a Hutu mob; a young British teacher in the school breaks down into despair and asks his fatherly figure, the elder priest (played by John Hurt), where is Christ now to prevent the slaughter; the elder priest answer is: Christ is now present here more than ever, he is suffering here with us...

But there is another god who was alive in Auschwitz – the pre-symbolic brutal god of the Real, god of the sacred terror. Today's rising fundamentalism compels us to turn around Lacan's that god always was dead, he just didn't know it (or, more precisely, we (believers who kept him alive with our prayers) didn't know it. Today it is that god is alive again (in his most terrifying real, in fundamentalism), but we don't know it - and don't want to know it. Habermas was one of the atheist philosophers who sensed this already two decades ago.

A naive counter-question: But why do we need God at all? Why not just humans living in a contingent open world? What is missing in this picture is the minimal theological experience described by Rowan Williams, that of being out-of-place in this world. In a primitive reading of this out-of-place, we are out of place in this world, and there is another true world. In a more radical reading, we exist because God itself is out of itself—and it is only in Protestantism that this dimension becomes visible. The triad of Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Protestantism thus seems to correspond to the Lacanian triad of Imaginary–Symbolic–Real: the horizon of Orthodoxy is that of the imaginary fusion between man and God; Catholicism focuses on the symbolic exchange between the two poles; Protestantism asserts the “subtracted” God of the intrusion of the Real.

Protestantism is thus totally incompatible with the New Age critique of the hubris of the so-called Cartesian subjectivity and its mechanist dominating attitude towards nature. According to the New Age commonplace, the original sin of modern Western civilization (or already of the Judeo-Christian tradition) is man's hubris, his arrogant assumption that he occupies the central place in the universe and/or that he is endowed with the divine right to master all other beings and exploit them for his profit. This hubris that disturbs the just balance of cosmic powers sooner or later forces Nature to reestablish the balance: today's ecological, social and psychic crisis is interpreted as the universe's justified answer to man's presumption. Our only solution thus consists in

the shift of the global paradigm, in adopting the new holistic attitude in which we will humbly assume our constrained place in the global Order of Being. . . In contrast to this commonplace, one should assert the excess of subjectivity (what Hegel called the “night of the world”) as the only hope of redemption: true evil does not reside in the excess of subjectivity as such, but in its “ontologization,” in its re-inscription into some global cosmic framework. Already in Sade, excessive cruelty is ontologically “covered” by the order of Nature as the “Supreme Being of Evilness”; both Nazism and Stalinism involved the reference to some global Order of Being (in the case of Stalinism, the dialectical organization of the movement of matter).¹⁷ True arrogance is thus the very opposite of the acceptance of the hubris of subjectivity: it resides in false humility, i.e., it emerges when the subject pretends to speak and act on behalf of the Global Cosmic Order, posing as its humble instrument. In contrast to this, the entire Western stance was anti-global: not only does Christianity involve the reference to a higher Truth which cuts into and disturbs the old pagan order of Cosmos articulated in profound Wisdoms, even Plato's Idealism itself can be qualified as the first clear elaboration of the idea that the global cosmic “Chain of Being” is not “all there is,” that there is another Order (of Ideas) which holds in abeyance the validity of the Order of Being.

The feature one has to bear in mind here is the utter ambiguity of the notion of evil: even what is commonly regarded as the ultimate evil of our century, the cold, bureaucratic mass killings in concentration camps, is split into two, Nazi Holocaust and Gulag, and all attempts to decide “which is worse” necessarily involve us in morally very problematic choices (the only way out seems to be the properly dialectical paradox that the Stalinist terror was in a way “worse”—even more “irrational” and all-threatening—precisely because it was “less evil,” i.e., nonetheless the outcome of an authentic emancipatory liberation movement).

Perhaps the crucial ethical task today is to break the vicious cycle of these two positions, fundamentalist and liberal—and our last example already shows the way out: the true ethical universality never resides in the quasi-neutral distance that tries to do justice to all concerned factions. So if, against fundamentalisms which ground ethical commitment in one's particular ethnic or religious identity, excluding others, one should insist on ethical universalism, one should also unconditionally insist on how every authentic ethical position by

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¹⁷There is, of course, a difference in the basic functioning of the two universes. A small marker of this difference is the attitude towards anti-Semitism: Hitler just rounded up and killed as many Jews as possible, while Stalin, when he prepared the deportation of the Jews to a designated area in Siberia, was careful to make it appear that he was merely acquiescing to the request of the Jews themselves. According to some sources, the secret police planning the deportation compelled the big representatives of Jewish culture (in sciences, arts...) in the USSR to sign a petition demanding the Soviet state to allocate them a territory in Siberia...

definition paradoxically combines universalism with taking sides in the ongoing struggle. Today, more than ever, one should emphasize that a true ethical position combines the assertion of universalism with a militant, divisive position of one engaged in a struggle: true universalists are not those who preach global tolerance of differences and all-encompassing unity, but those who engage in a passionate fight for the assertion of the Truth that engages them.

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Interview with Alenka Zupančič: Philosophy or Psychoanalysis? Yes, please!

Agon Hamza & Frank Ruda

Let's begin with the title of one of your books:
Why Psychoanalysis? So: why psychoanalysis?

I ask this question from a particular perspective, let's call it philosophical. In principle, in the same way you don't ask "Why biology?" – except perhaps if you are a hardline creationist –, you don't ask "Why psychoanalysis?" – except if you want to suggest that it should be banned or forgotten altogether. But psychoanalysis is not exactly like biology, or any other science, in spite of Freud's indisputable scientific aspirations. And this is not simply because its object is so "subjective", elusive, uncertain, impalpable, but because it touches the very core of the question "What is a subject?", as well as "What is an object?". To cut a long story short, this is the answer to your question. This is "why psychoanalysis". And, of course, because of the way these questions get discussed in – particularly – Lacanian psychoanalysis: in an extremely surprising and productive way, that is productive for philosophy and its practice.

At the moment when philosophy was just about ready to abandon some of its key central notions as belonging to its own metaphysical past, from which it was eager to escape, along came Lacan, and taught us an invaluable lesson: it is not these notions themselves that are problematic; what can be problematic in some ways of doing philosophy is the disavowal or effacement of the inherent contradiction, even antagonism, that these notions imply, and are part of. That is why, by simply abandoning these notions (like subject, truth, the real...), we are abandoning the battlefield, rather than winning any significant battles. This conviction and insistence is also what makes the so-called "Lacanian philosophy" stand out in the general landscape of postmodern philosophy.

It was with Lacan, despite his struggle against philosophy, that psychoanalysis got massively involved, and appeared at the forefront, as it were, of the contemporary philosophical debates and discussions. However, since its inception with Freud, psychoanalysis has been attacked from all sides and for different reasons than philosophy has been attacked for. How would you locate the proper place of psychoanalysis in the wider field of the sciences? We are asking this also because some claim that psychoanalysis, especially following Lacan, is first and foremost a clinical practice and should not be considered to be a "theoretical" enterprise. In this sense it would not be a science (and if we are not mistaken, Lacan famously remarked that the subject of psychoanalysis is the subject of modern science, but not that psychoanalysis is a science). What is your view on this?

I think it's quite obvious that psychoanalysis is, and has always been, *both*: "theory" and clinical "practice". Moreover, clinical practice itself has always been both, theory and practice. I think it is quite erroneous to perceive the clinic as a kind of experimental site, as a laboratory from which psychoanalysis derives its concepts and theories. The mere fact that – as Freud already noticed – analysand's knowledge about psychoanalysis affects her unconscious formations, the analysis of which "informs" psychoanalytic theory, should be enough to make us discard this simple notion of the laboratory. I believe that genuine psychoanalytic concepts are not derivatives of the clinic, but kind of "comprise" or contain the clinic, an element of the clinical, in themselves. I believe it is possible to work with these concepts in a very productive way (that is a way that allows for something interesting and new to emerge) even if you are not a clinician. But you need to have an ear, a sensibility for that clinical element, for that bit of the real comprised in these concepts. Of this I'm sure. Not everybody who works with psychoanalytic theory has it, but – and this is an important "but" – not everybody who practices analysis has it either. As Lacan knew very well and liked to repeat – to be a practicing analyst is in itself not a guarantee for anything. His feud with the established psychoanalytic schools and institutions was actually much harsher than his dispute with philosophy as "theory". As you see, I shifted your question a bit, and for a reason. One of the predominant ways or strategies with which psychoanalysts today aim at preserving their "scientific" standing, is by trying to disentangle themselves from philosophy (or theory), returning as it were to pure clinic. I think this is a very problematic move.

The Clinic should not be considered as a kind of holy grail providing the practitioners with automatic superiority when it comes to working theoretically, with psychoanalytic concepts.

There are, perhaps even increasingly so, attacks coming from the clinical side against "mere theorists" who are condemned for being engaged in pure sophistry, operating on a purely conceptual level and hence depriving psychoanalysis of its radical edge, of its real. Yes, there are many poor, self-serving or simply not inspiring texts around, leaning strongly – reference-wise – on psychoanalytic theory, and producing nothing remarkable. But interestingly, they are not the main targets of these attacks. No, the main targets are rather people whose "theorizing" *has* effects, impact, and makes waves (outside the purely academic territories). *They* are accused of playing a purely self-serving, *sterile* game. I see this as profoundly symptomatic. For we have to ask: when was the last time that a genuinely new concept, with possibly universal impact, came from the side of the accusers, that is, from the clinical side? There is an obvious difficulty there, and it is certainly not "theoretical psychoanalysts" that are the cause of it, for there is no shortage of practicing analysts around, compared to, say, Freud's time. This kind of

confrontation, opposition between philosophy (or theory) and clinic is in my view a very unproductive one. Which brings us back to your inaugural question: psychoanalysis is not a science, or "scientific" in the usual sense of this term, because it insists on a dimension of truth which is irreducible to "accuracy" or to simple opposition true/false. At the same time the whole point of Lacan is that this insistence doesn't simply make it unscientific (unverifiable, without any firm criteria...), but calls for a different kind of formalization and situates psychoanalysis in a singular position in the context of science. And here philosophy, which is also not a science in the usual sense of the term, can and should be its ally, even partner. They are obviously not the same, but their often very critical dialogue shouldn't obfuscate the fact that there are also "sisters in arms".

You are very careful not to identify philosophy with psychoanalysis but you do also not simply oppose the two either. In *Why Psychoanalysis*, do you argue the following:

The question of sexuality should indeed be brutally put on the table in any serious attempt at associating philosophy and psychoanalysis. Not only because it usually constitutes the 'hard core' of their dissociation, but also because not giving up on the matter of sexuality constitutes the sine qua non of any true psychoanalytic stance, which seems to make this dissociation all more absolute or insurmountable

You then propose a specific form of articulation between psychoanalysis and philosophy. How do you see the relationship between the two disciplines? Psychoanalysis could be viewed to be emphasizing a new account of difference – but there also seems to be something internally unassimilable in the way in which psychoanalysis conceives of difference under the heading of sexuality. Why and what is so resistant in psychoanalysis – a concept of difference different from all conceptual differences that is associated with the tradition of philosophy?

I'm deeply convinced that psychoanalysis (its fundamental discoveries/theories) is an event that concerns philosophy itself, and which the latter cannot ignore, nor pretend that nothing happened there that concerns it. Philosophy is not psychoanalysis today no more than it has been in the past. Philosophy has its own way of functioning, its own practice, if you want. It also involves certain conceptual decisions. Like the decision to work with concepts that comprise an element of "heterogeneity"

that I mentioned before. The question is how to handle these concepts. To assimilate them entirely in philosophy, like translating them into already existing philosophical concepts, would be a failure – not of psychoanalysis, but of philosophy. But let me be very precise here: I'm not propagating a philosophical affair with that which “resists philosophy” (namely, psychoanalysis), a romantic engagement with a heterogeneity that philosophy can never fully assimilate. No, my point is that philosophy *can* assimilate psychoanalysis, and if it doesn't, this constitutes a genuine philosophical, conceptual decision and necessitates a *philosophical* invention; the distance/gap is produced in this case from within philosophy itself. But how? You mention sexuality, my insistence on this. And the concept of difference, of a different kind of difference. Deleuze is a good example here. He is definitely a full-blown philosopher, and often very critical of psychoanalysis, but when he is developing his major and genuinely new concept of difference (a different kind of difference), he massively relies on Freud and psychoanalysis, particularly on the theory of the drives. He relies on Freud and psychoanalysis not simply to import or assimilate its insights, but to *think differently* in philosophy.

My claim is that the Freudian notion of sexuality is above all a *concept*, a conceptual invention, and not simply a name for certain empirical “activities” that exist out there and that Freud refers to when talking about sexuality. As such, this concept is also genuinely “philosophical”. It links together, in a complex and most interesting way, language and the drives, it compels us to think a singular ontological form of negativity, to reconsider the simplistic human/animal divide, and so on...

There is a widespread return of ontology, ontologies even, after a long period in which ontological claims were almost always bracketed as metaphysical or replaced by a straightforwardly pragmatist approach. But is this proliferation of ontologies symptomatic of something else? We read your most recent work as an attempt to offer, if not answer, this question. We are saying this because your reading of the concept of sexuality has a bearing on the most fundamental ontological concepts. Yet, at the same time, you do not simply suggest to identify the psychoanalytic account of sexuality with ontology – so that psychoanalysis would simply be the newest name of ontology. Rather in psychoanalysis, if we are not mistaken, we can find an account of being and its impasses and of subjectivity and its impasses. Both are systematically interlaced (in such a way that subjectivity with its impasses has something to do with being and its impasses). And this conceptual knot has an impact on our very understanding: not only of sexuality's ontological import, but also on our understanding of ontology itself. Could you help us disentangle some bits of this knot?

I see this proliferation of new ontologies as a symptom. On the one hand, there is a truth, or conceptual necessity, in this kind of “return to ontology”. Philosophy should not be ashamed of serious ontological inquiry, and the interrogation here is vital and needed. There is, however, something slightly comical when this need is asserted as an abstract or normative necessity — “one should do this,” and then everybody feels that he or she needs to have their own ontology. “I am such and such, and here's my ontology.” There is a lot of arbitrariness here, rather than conceptual necessity and rigor. This is not how philosophy works.

Also, there is this rather bafflingly simplifying claim according to which Kant and the “transcendental turn” to epistemology was just a big mistake, error, diversion — which we have to dismiss and “return” to ontology proper, to talking about things as they are in themselves. Kant's transcendental turn was an answer to a real impasse of philosophical ontology. We can agree that his answer is perhaps not the ultimate, or philosophically, the only viable answer, but this does not mean that the impasse or difficulty that it addresses was not real and that we can pretend it doesn't exist.

The attempt to “return to” the idea of sexuality as a subject of ontological investigation is rooted in my conviction that psychoanalysis and its singular concept of the subject are of great pertinence for the impasse of ontology that Kant was tackling. So the claim is not simply that sexuality is important and should be taken seriously; in a sense, it is spectacularly more ambitious. The claim is that the Freud-Lacanian *theory* of sexuality, and of its inherent relation to the unconscious, dislocates and transposes the philosophical question of ontology and its impasse in a most interesting way. I'm not interested in sexuality as a case of “local ontology,” but as possibly providing some key conceptual elements for the ontological interrogation as such.

We apologize for making this move twice, but you yourself raise such far reaching questions with some of your book titles that we think it is best to simply repeat them. So, what is sex?

This title is not meant as a question to which then the book provides an answer. It is not so much a question as it is a claim. We usually talk about or invoke sex as if we knew exactly what we are talking about, yet we don't. And the book is rather an answer to the question why this is so.

One of the fundamental claims of my book is that there is something about sexuality that is inherently problematic, “impossible”, and is not such simply because of external obstacles and prohibitions. What we have been witnessing over more than half a century has been a systematic obliteration, effacement, repression of *this negativity* inherent to sexuality – and not simply repression of sexuality. Freud did not discover sexuality,

he discovered its problem, its negative core, and the role of this core in the proliferation of the sexual. Sexuality has been, and still is, systematically reduced, yes, *reduced*, to a self-evident phenomenon consisting simply of some positive features, and problematic only because caught in the standard ideological warfare: shall we “liberally” show and admit everything, or “conservatively” hide and prohibit most of it? But show or prohibit *what exactly*, what is this “it” that we try to regulate when we regulate sexuality? This is what the title of my book tries to ask: What *IS* this sex that we are talking about? Is it really there, anywhere, as a simply positive entity to be regulated in this or that way? No, it is not. And this is precisely why we are “obsessed” with it, in one way or another, also when we want to get rid of it altogether.

The question orientating the book was not simply what kind of being is sex, or sexuality, but pointed in a different direction. Sex is neither simply being, nor a quality or a coloring of being. It is a paradoxical entity that defies ontology as “thought of being *qua* being”, without falling outside ontological interrogation. It is something that takes place (“appears”) at the point of its own impossibility and/or contradiction. So the question is not: WHAT is sex?, but rather: What IS sex? However, the two questions are not unrelated, and this is probably the most daring philosophical proposition of the book. Namely, that sexuality is the point of a short circuit between ontology and epistemology. If there is a limit to what I can *know*, what is the status of this limit? Does it only tell us something about our subjective limitations on account of which we can never fully grasp being such as it is in itself? Or is there a constellation in which this not-knowing possibly tells us something about being itself, its own “lapse of being”? There is, I believe; it is the constellation that Freud conceptualized under the name of the unconscious. Sexuality is not simply the *content* of the unconscious, understood as a container of repressed thoughts. The relationship between sex and the unconscious is not that between a content and its container. Or that between some primary, raw being, and repression (and other operations) performed on it. The unconscious is a thought process, and it is “sexualized” from within, so to say. The unconscious is not sexual because of the dirty thoughts it may contain or hide, but because of how it works. If I keep emphasizing that I’m interested in the psychoanalytical *concept* of sexuality, and not simply in sexuality, it is because of the fundamental link between sexuality and the *unconscious* discovered by Freud. Sexuality enters the Freudian perspective strictly speaking only in so far as it is “*unconscious* sexuality”. Yet “unconscious sexuality” does not simply mean that we are not aware of it, while it constitutes a hidden truth of most of our actions. Unconsciousness does not mean the opposite of consciousness, it refers to an active and ongoing *process*, the *work* of censorship, substitution, condensation..., and this work *is itself “sexual”*, implied in desire, intrinsic to sexuality, rather than simply performed in relation to it.

Sexuality certainly proves itself to stand at the center of psychoanalysis. But it is, as you demonstrate, something quite different, far less juicy if you wish, than what we might immediately assume when we hear “sex”. In what way is thinking sexuality specific to psychoanalysis? What we mean is the following: is sexuality an object or does it name a realm of phenomena that allows to define the singularity of the psychoanalytic discourse? Or could there also be a philosophy of sexuality (Kant for example talked about marriage, Hegel had to say things about women, Plato, too, but, well, is this enough)? In what way would it be imprecise to assume that this is what you are doing?

It would be imprecise in the sense that I actually don’t “talk about sexuality”. If you read my book, not only is there no “juicy” discussion of sex, you will learn nothing about “sexual behavior” in the sense, say, of erotology. The question is rather what are the onto-logical impasses and contradictions that generate this “juiciness”? The interesting question about sexuality discovered by Freud cut into the question of sexual meaning by relating this meaning itself to the question of (sexual) satisfaction. In other words, generating sexual meanings, juicy stories and innuendo is itself an immediate source of sexual satisfaction, sometimes much stronger than an act of copulation... So the question is not “What can we know *about* sex?”, but rather: What kind of knowledge does IT (i.e., sex) transmit, if we take into account the circular, redoubled and complex way of its functioning, the way it is organized around its own gaps and contradictions? This is what I invoked earlier as the short-circuit between ontology and epistemology.

Adorno once claimed that “in psychoanalysis, nothing is true except the exaggeration.” Is it necessary to exaggerate the workings and effects of sexuality to make its truth appear?

Adorno’s is an extremely important point: contrary to the adage according to which the truth is always “somewhere in the middle”, particularly if we deal with exaggerations and opposite claims, psychoanalysis claims that we must have an *ear* for truth, so to say. Truth is not the biggest common denominator of different claims, nor is it the golden middle between opposite claims, but is to be looked for in what is there in the extremes of a given situation. Because extremes usually point to contradictions, to “something going on”, or something being erased. And this is where an “ear” for truth is needed.

So, it is not that we need to overemphasize the role of sex in order to make its truth appear, sex has this tendency of overemphasizing itself, so to speak, and this is why it is a good place to start. And I’m not after

the truth of sex, but rather after the truth of the onto-logical configuration in which sex appears as it appears. What this eventually implies is that sex is the point of exaggeration of our – both social and biological – reality, that it is *its* excessiveness, its extreme – and as such it is also a possible point of its truth.

How do you conceive of the relationship between sexuality and the Freudian-Lacanian conception of the unconscious? We know that this is a very broad question, but maybe you could tell us a few things about the specificity of the link between sex and the unconscious – so that, say, it becomes also more apparent why there is a difference between psychoanalysis and some rather empirical sciences that also attempt to study the ways in which we function, like brain sciences.

Brain sciences are, to some extent at least, a pretty heterogeneous field, difficult to discuss under a single heading. But nevertheless. To some extent what is at stake in this debate between psychoanalysis and brain sciences today is a battle for psychology. This will sound strange coming from me, because I often insist on the necessity to “de-psychologize” all sorts of notions related to psychoanalysis, but I believe the time has come to rethink what this actually means. What Freud refers to and grounds as “psychology” is very different from what psychological sciences have in mind (and in this respect psychology as science is quite compatible with brain sciences). As a student of mine, Bojan Volf, working on the question of socio-psychological experiments has rightly pointed out, the whole machinery of official, scientific psychology is out on a mission to de-psychologize our behavior, that is to say, on a mission to explain psychology away. Official, “scientific” psychology seems to be needed in order to dismiss psychology as possibly involving a fundamentally different kind of causality from the so-called natural causality. And it is here that psychoanalysis breaks away from psychology and brain sciences. Not by insisting on some deeper and impenetrably mysterious ways in which our psyche works, but by insisting that if our psychology cannot be fully reduced to the (organic and linguistic) structures that generate it, it is because these structures themselves are not fully consistent, but involve gaps and contradictions.

We could perhaps say that according to psychoanalysis, our psychology fills in the gaps in “natural” or structural causality.

And when we speak of de-psychologization in psychoanalysis, we speak about the dismantling of this “filling in”, of this stuffing, and exposing the gaps and contradictions of the structure itself. And not about reducing everything to this structure as fully coherent, which is basically the mission of psychology as science, and the presupposition

of brain sciences. “Psychology” in the psychoanalytic perspective is not simply the effect of the structure, it is also the effect of a gap in this structure. It is inseparable from, and inexistent without the structure, yet at the same time not simply reducible to it, because it (co)responds to something in the structure which is not (fully there). And this is what the Freudian concept of the *unconscious* – particularly in its Lacanian reading – is all about. This is also why Lacan will say that the status of the (Freudian) unconscious is “ethical”, rather than ontic.

One of the most famous Lacanian claims is that “la femme n’existe pas” – woman does not exist. But as you have shown, thinking through sexuality we are forced to confront the fact that the problem is not simply that we have men on the one side and a not-existing woman on the other, but that even men are not fully constituted. So, it is not that we have something that is and then something that is not; we have two sides on which something appears which *is* only in a strange way. In what sense does it force us to reconsider fundamental ontological claims if we read sexuality as confronting us with such a peculiar difference, with a difference that even differs from Deleuze’s account of pure difference, and maybe might be described as an impure difference? In what sense does non-being (the non-being consistently constituted of the man and the not-being consistently constituted of the woman), or maybe non-beings and their relation have consequences?

The starting point of all these arguments in Lacan, which look very strange and complicated, is actually very simple. Being, or existence, is coextensive with the signifier. Something “is” if it has a signifier, if it exists in the symbolic order. This is Lacan’s “diagnostic”, his way of saying that we should not confuse, or fuse, being and the real. So, something exists if it exists in the symbolic order. Now, does the symbolic order exist? Lacan’s paradoxical answer is: No. You can view this as a version of Russell’s catalogue paradox: symbolic order does not exist in another symbolic order. Symbolic order (or the Other) is like a catalogue that would contain itself. This is the original template of the “does not exist” statements: the Other does not exist. The Other is not-all, it is “inconsistent” in the logical sense, it is grounded only in itself, and not in any other Other. The same goes for “the Woman” who doesn’t exist. Differently from “man”, who exists.

But of course you can ask why this is so: are “man” and “woman” not both signifiers? Why then one would exist and the other not?

Because the signifier at stake in sexual difference is phallus, and not “man” or “woman”. And phallus is the signifier not of men, but of *castration*, which for Lacan is a universal function when it comes to

speaking beings: nobody escapes it. Why is phallus, which also refers to an anatomic organ, the universal signifier of castration? Because one of the most salient features of this organ is that *it can also not be there*. Phallus obtains its value of the *signifier* against the background of its possible and easily perceptible absence. Put even more bluntly: it is because roughly half of the human race doesn't have it (as *organ*), that this organ is elevated to the ranks of the *signifier*, to the rank of the universal. There is no contradiction here. Nor "discrimination" (the latter surely exists, but it doesn't start here). Phallus is not a signifier because men have it and masculinity is naturally favored, but because women don't have it, and this negativity, this non-immediacy, this gap, is constitutive for the signifying order. Now, the question of sexual difference is that of how one relates to this signifier or, which is the same question, how does one handle castration, relate to it. Men are identified as those who venture to put their faith into the hands of this signifier, hence acknowledging symbolic castration (the signifier now represents them, operates on their behalf), with different degrees of how (un)conscious this acknowledgement actually is. There are many men who strongly repress the dimension of castration involved in their access to symbolic power, and believe that this power emanates directly from them, from some positivity of their being, and not from the minus that constitutes phallus as the signifier. The anatomy obviously plays a part in facilitating this "masculine" identification, but the latter still remains precisely that: an identification, and not a direct, immediate consequence of anatomy. One can be anatomically a man and this identification doesn't take place. Not all subjects identify with the signifier (of castration) in this way, accept its representation of them, take the symbolic order at its face value, so to say. Those who do not, identify as "women", and tend to expose the "nothing", the gap at the very core of the signifier and of symbolic identifications.

This opens a really interesting perspective on psychoanalysis and feminism, which is often missed. It is not that women are not acknowledged, fully recognized by the symbolic, oppressed by it; no, to begin with, women are *subjects who question* the symbolic, women are the ones who, by their very positioning, do not fully "acknowledge" its order, who keep signaling its negative, not-fully-there dimension. This is what makes them women, and not simply an empirical absence of an organ. This is their *strength* – but also the reason for their social repression, the reason why they "need to be managed" or "put in their place". But these are two different levels. If we don't keep in mind the difference between these two levels, we risk to fall prey to versions of liberal feminism which loses sight of precisely the radical positioning of "women", depriving this position of its inherent thrust to question the symbolic order and all kinds of circulating identities, replacing this thrust with the simpler demand to become part of this circulation, to be fully recognized by the given order.

Demands for social equality are of course important, but they are part of a larger struggle. Early feminism was significantly connected to the class struggle, and this connection is vital. Not because class needs to prevail over sex, but because issues of "women" and of "class" are structurally connected, they question the very constitution of a given social order, not simply some redistribution within it. To be sure, some redistributions can have the effect of shifting, affecting, the very constitution of the social order, and relatively "small", modest demands can sometimes become revolutionary. So these two levels are connected, but they are still *two*, and the social struggle is not simply about jumping on the winning-side's train which keeps on running on the fuel of injustice and discrimination. This, for example, is the problem of the co-called "glass ceiling" feminism. It involves obliterating the very difference that, also socially speaking, makes a difference. Feminism cannot be exempted from other issues of social injustice, no more than it can be subordinated to them.

But let us return to the phallic signifier as that which is at stake in sexual difference. It is important to point out the following. With "phallus as signifier" the situation is not that anatomy is caught up in the symbolic order, but almost the opposite: the symbolic order is caught up in some anatomical contingency, which makes it, yes, "impure". For Lacan, to *name* this symbolic function "phallic" is to *expose the contingency* at the heart of the symbolic order. This is what the critics who suggest to replace the signifier phallus with something else, fail to see. As I developed more extensively in my book on comedy, it would be very wrong to think that the so called "phallocentrism" could be countered by a politically correct restriction regarding the use of the term phallus, replacing it by something more neutral. As it is more than clear from history, phallocentrism can work splendidly, and much better, if phallus is not directly named, but remains veiled and reserved for Mysteries. One should also not forget that it was only with the advent of psychoanalysis that the talk about phallocentrism really took off in the first place. Psychoanalysis first of all equipped us with the very terms we use in the critical thinking about all this. By using the name phallic signifier, Lacan is very far from idealizing an anatomic peculiarity of men, promoting it into an ultimate reference of human reality. His gesture is exactly the opposite: on the very ground where, throughout centuries, there existed *only a cultural* signification of phallus, that is to say (religious, as well as other) rituals and symbolic practices enwrapping the Mystery of Man and dictating the hierarchical structures of his universe as emanating directly from this supreme Mystery – on this very ground steps Lacan, and Freud before him, to say: surprise, surprise, the Mystery is nothing else but the phallus; the symbolic order hinges here on an anatomical peculiarity: on contingency.

Contingency is not the same as relativism. If all is relative, there is no contingency. Contingency means precisely that there is a

heterogeneous, contingent element that strongly, absolutely decides the structure, the grammar of its necessity – it doesn't mean that this element doesn't really decide it, or that we are not dealing with necessity. To just abstractly assert and insist that the structure could have been also very different from what it is, is not enough. This stance also implies that we could have simply decided otherwise, and that this decision is in our power. But contingency is not in our power, by definition, otherwise it wouldn't be contingency. Ignoring this leads to the watered-down, liberal version of freedom. Freedom understood as the freedom to choose, for instance between different, also sexual, identities. But this is bullshit, and has little to do with freedom, because it doesn't even begin to touch the grammar of necessity which frames the choices that we have. Freedom is a matter of fighting, of struggle, not of choosing. Necessities can and do change, but not because they are not really necessities and merely matters of choice.

Althusser claimed that ideology interpellates individuals into subjects. Does sexuality do the same?

Nice point. It does, but not exactly in the Althusserian sense. As I keep insisting, the sexual in psychoanalysis is a factor of radical disorientation, something that keeps bringing into question all our representations of the entity called "human being." This is why it would also be a big mistake to consider that, in Freudian theory, the sexual is the ultimate horizon of the animal called "human," a kind of anchor point of irreducible humanity in psychoanalytic theory; on the contrary, it is the *operator of the inhuman*, the operator of dehumanization. And this is precisely what clears the ground for a possible theory of the subject (as developed by Lacan), in which the subject is something other than simply another name for an individual or a "person." Moreover, it is precisely the sexual as the operator of the inhuman that opens the perspective of the universal in psychoanalysis, which it is often accused of missing *because* of its insistence on the sexual (including sexual difference). What Freud calls the sexual is thus not that which makes us human in any received meaning of this term, it is rather that which makes us subjects, or perhaps more precisely, it is coextensive with the emergence of the subject.

So this subject is not the Althusserian subject of interpellation, emerging from "recognition". But this is not simply to say that (the Lacanian) subject is directly an antidote for ideological interpellation. Things are a bit more complicated than that. I would almost be tempted to turn Althusser's formula around. Not "ideology interpellates individuals into subjects", but rather: ideology interpellates subjects into individuals with this or that identity. In some sense, ideology works like "identity politics". By turning the Althusserian formula around I don't mean to

suggest that subject is a kind of neutral universal substrate on which ideology works, like "individuals" seem to be in Althusser's formula. No, subject is – if you'd pardon my language – a universal fuck-up of a neutral substrate, it is a crack in this substrate. But this in itself is not what resists ideology, on the contrary, it is rather what makes its functioning possible, it is what offers it a grip. Subject as a crack, or as interrogation mark, is in a sense "responsible" for the ideological interpellation having a grip on us. Only a subject will turn around, perplexed, upon hearing "Hey, you!" But this is not all. Precisely because the subject is not a neutral substrate to be molded into this or that ideological figure or shape, but a negativity, a crack, this crack is not simply eliminated when an ideological identification/recognition takes place, but becomes part of it. It can be filled up, or screened off, but its structure is not exactly eliminated, because ideology is only efficient against its background. So not only is the subject in this sense a condition of ideology, it also constitutes its inner limit, its possible breaking point, its ceasing to function and losing its grip on us. The subject, as negativity, keeps on working in all ideological structures, the latter are not simply monolithic and unassailable, but also fundamentally instable because of this ongoing work.

Ideology is not something that we can *resist* (as subjects). This usually gets us no further than to a posture of ironical or cynical distance. It is not by "mastering" our relation to ideology that we are subjects, we are, or become, emancipatory subjects by a second identification which is only made possible within the ideological parallax: say by identifying with the underdog, by locating the gaps that demands and generate "positive" repression... In a word, the subject is both, the problem and the possible (emancipatory) solution.

How does such a position allow for a different take on contemporary political movements that are precisely trying to (again maybe) politicize sex (think of the LGBTQ+ but also of #MeToo)?

I strongly believe, perhaps against all contemporary odds, that the inherent and radical political edge of sexuality consists in how it compels us to think the difference. A difference that makes the difference. This is what I tried to say earlier, concerning the question of "sexual difference" and feminism. In the LGBTQ+ movement I perceive a similar general course or destiny as in the feminist movement, that is a shift from struggle aligned with political struggle for social transformation, to identity movement and struggle for recognition.

There are very few people who feel perfectly and completely at home in their bodies and sexual identities, starting with those who think of themselves as men and women. And one could plausibly argue that

these (who feel perfectly and completely at home in their bodies and sexual identities) are not exactly what one would call ‘normal people’, since the latter are usually prone to have all kinds of tormenting doubts and uncertainties in this respect. There is a reason for this, and Freud was the first to point it out: sexuality appeared to Freud as redoubled by its own inherent impasse and difficulty.

Ok, goes the objection, those who think of themselves as men and women may well have their own uncertainties and identity problems, but these are not problems of social discrimination based on their sexuality. Really? The history of feminism has a different story to tell. The fact that “woman” has always been a legitimate sexual position or “identity” did nothing to prevent all kinds of atrocities, injustices and discriminations being conducted against women. Do we need to remind ourselves, for example, that women only got the right to vote in 1920 in the US, in 1944 in France, in 1971 in Switzerland (at federal level), and in 1984 in Liechtenstein? And one would be wrong to assume that these battles were won once and for all. Recently the alt-right leader Richard Spencer openly said for *Newsweek* that he was not sure that women should vote. The fact that it is even possible to say something like this publicly should give us a strong jolt.

The fact that to be a “woman” has always been a socially recognized sexual position, did little to protect women against harsh social discrimination (as well as physical mistreatment) based precisely on this “*recognized*” sexuality. Part of this discrimination, or the very way in which it was carried out, has always led through definitions (and images) of what exactly does it mean to be a woman. So a recognized identity itself does not necessarily help. And the point is also not to fill in the identity of “woman” with the right content, but to empty it of all content. More precisely, to recognize its form itself, its *negativity*, as its only positive content. To be a woman is to be nothing. And this is good, this should be the feminist slogan. Obviously, “nothing” is not used as an adjective here, describing a worth, it is used in the strong sense of the noun.

So, what is sexual difference if we don’t shy away from thinking it? Sexual difference is not a difference between masculine and feminine “genders”; it doesn’t start out as a difference *between* different entities/identities, but as an ontological impossibility inherent to the discursive order as such. Or, to use a Deleuzian parlance, it is the difference that precedes individuation, precedes differences between individual entities, yet is involved in their generation. This impossibility, this impasse of the discourse exists *within* the discourse as its division. And constitutes, or opens up, to a political dimension. This “radical” political dimension is what tends to get lost in identity-recognition politics, and in the terminological shift from “sex” (which originally refers to division, cut) to “gender”. What are genders, as different from sexes? They are seen

as ways in which we construct our sexuality in relation to the sexual division which, in turn, is often reduced to a merely biological division. This retrospective naturalization of the “masculinity” and “femininity” is indeed a curious effect of switching from “sex” to indefinite number of gender(s). When it comes to describing specific features of these genders’ particular identities, terms “man” and “woman” are often used in these descriptions as natural elements which then get combined in different ways and in different compounds.

There are several problems at work here, which should be discussed. It may be politically correct to sweep them under the carpet, but at the same time this is precisely *politically wrong*. Because this way, we also sweep politics (of sex) under the carpet. So let’s briefly discuss this. On the webpage containing a “Comprehensive list of LGBTQ+ vocabulary definitions” we read for example:

“We [the creators of this webpage] are constantly honing and adjusting language to — our humble goal — have the definitions resonate with at least 51 out of 100 people who use the words. Identity terms are tricky, and trying to write a description that works *perfectly* for *everyone* using that label simply isn’t possible.”

Language is understood and used here as a tool with which we try to fit some reality. The problem with this is not simply that this reality is already “constituted” through language; but also that language itself is “constituted” through a certain sexual impasse. This, at least, is a fundamental Freud-Lacanian lesson: sex is not some realm or substance to be talked about, it is in the first place the inherent contradiction of speech, twisting its tongue, so to speak. Which is why we can cover sex with as many identities we like, the problem will not go away.

It is in this sense that sex (as division, impossibility, as well as “sex struggle”) is sealed off when “sex” is replaced by “gender” and multiplicity of gender identities. But sex keeps returning in the form of the +. The + is not simply an indicator of our openness to future identities, it is the marker of Difference, and its repetition.

As I put it some time ago: sex and sexual difference as understood by psychoanalysis are always in the +. Not because sex eludes any positive symbolic grasp or identity, but because sex *is* where the symbolic stumbles against its own lack of identity, its own impasse and impossibility. (“The Woman doesn’t exist” is a way of formulating this.)

As it is sort of “visually striking” in the formula LGBTQ+, and many of its longer versions, identities are formed by way of externalizing the difference that always starts by barring them from within. And when a new identity is formed, and hence a new letter added, it just pushes the +, as the marker of the difference, a little bit further. The “bad infinity” (and

so on ...) suggested in this form of writing is a symptom of our inability or refusal to think the difference as the form of what Hegel would call a true infinity.

The difference that is being thus repeated and externalized is one and the same difference. And this is the Difference (and not simply yet another identity) that *makes a difference*. This is the real meaning of "sexual difference". There may be many genders, but there is only the singular sexual difference that is repeated with them, and expelled/ pushed forward when they are constituted as identities.

What I'm saying IS NOT that the difference between "men" and "women" is repeated with (the constitution of) all these different identities; no, I'm saying that what is repeated with them is the *impossibility of this difference* (the impossibility of a sexual "binary" as difference between two entities or identities), which is the real of sex. Emancipatory struggle never really works by way of enumerating a multiplicity of identities and then declaring and embracing them all equal (or the same). No, it works by mobilizing the absolute difference as means of universalization in an emancipatory struggle.

There is a joke from the times of the Apartheid that can help us see what is at stake here: A violent fight starts on a bus between black people sitting in the back and white people sitting in front. The driver stops the bus, makes everybody get out, lines them up in front of the bus, and yells at them: "Stop this fight immediately! As far as I'm concerned, you are all green. Now, those of the lighter shade of green please get on the bus in front, and those of the darker shade, at the back."

What this joke exposes concisely, in my view, is how "neutralization" strategy can be rather ineffective in stopping the perpetuation of discrimination. ("Queer" or "third sex" strategy sometimes function like the "green" in the joke). If we forget, or decide to let go of the concept of sexual difference in this radical sense, we risk ending up like the passengers of this bus: declared non-sexual, yet continued to be discriminated and/or "framed" on the basis of sex(uality).

As for #MeToo, it is a very significant movement, already and simply because it is a movement. But movements have a way of sometimes inhibiting their own power. #MeToo should not become about "joining the club" (of the victims), and about demanding that the Other (different social institutions and preventive measures) protect us against the villainy of power, but about women and all concerned being *empowered* to create social change, and to be its agents. Movements generate this power, and it is vital that one assumes it, which means leaving behind the identity of victimhood. And this necessarily implies engagement in broader social solidarity, recognizing the political edge of this struggle, and pursuing it.

Can we talk briefly about the relationship between psychoanalysis and politics in more general terms? Slavoj

Žižek has repeatedly claimed that standard Marxists liked psychoanalysis for a simple reason: if the masses did not do what Marxist theoreticians believed they will (or should) do, one could always claim that one therefore needs psychoanalysts so that they can explain to us why that is. Psychoanalysis thus seemed to have the function to provide an easy way out and provided the means with which we avoid confrontation with our own theoretical weaknesses or fallacies. In your recent work you addressed political issues head on and dealt with issues that one could classically have been allocated to the domain of the critique of ideology (for example in your analysis not of the emperor's new clothes, but of his nudity having become his newest clothes). How would you describe the politics of psychoanalysis? Does psychoanalysis have consequences for politics (and if so, how)?

First, I think there is an inherently political dimension of psychoanalysis. It has to do with the point of structural impasse and division that I keep insisting on. But it also has other aspects or facets. In *What is sex?* I invoke a very powerful scene from John Huston's film *Freud: The Secret Passion* (1962). Freud is presenting his theory of infantile sexuality to a large audience of educated men. His brief presentation is met with strong and loudly stated disapproval, interrupted by roars after almost every sentence; several of the men leave the auditorium in protest, spitting on the floor next to Freud. At some point the chairman, trying to restore order, cries out: "Gentlemen, we are not in a political meeting!" – This exclamation puts us on the right track: that of a strange, surprising coincidence between politics and psychoanalysis. Discussion of both can provoke very passionate responses. They both work with passions and, even more generally, they both *work with people*, in the strong sense of the term. What is perceived today as the rise of populisms may well be a consequence of the decades in which politics has stopped working with people in any meaningful sense of this term. Public space was carefully and thoroughly cleansed of all political passions. Passions were preserved for "private life". (Except for just before the elections...) Political passion as a specific entity has been dismantled, *disarticulated*, as well as censored: it has become extremely suspicious to be really passionate about political ideas.

What is returning with populisms today is not the political passion. What is happening is rather that passions are entering public space, including political space, as fundamentally disarticulated from politics. They are not in themselves political passions, but more like Pirandello's (six) characters in search of an author, that is to say, in most cases, of a Leader. They [populist passions] combine "politics" and politicians

who propose to embrace them, to put them on the loudspeaker, and *not* to genuinely politically articulate them. (For example, if Trump wanted to politically articulate passions that got him elected, he would have to invent a very different kind of politics...)

If anything, the divide between politics and psychoanalysis does not correspond to the divide between public and private. On the contrary, what they both have in common is that they work at, and with the intersection of, both. If you lose this intersection you lose both politics and psychoanalysis. Which is to a large extent what happened in the past decades. The idea that you refer to in the first part of your question, that of a possible division of labor in which psychoanalysis would take care of our “private passions” and their pathologies, so that we could appear on the public stage as fully rational beings, is terribly wrong. But I’m not saying that this is impossible, no, as a matter of fact, this is precisely what has been strongly encouraged and *did* happen with the advance of “liberally-democratic capitalism”. To eliminate passion from politics is to eliminate politics (in any other sense than simple management). And this is what’s happened. But it is crucial here to avoid a possible misunderstanding: I’m not saying that politics needs to make space for passions as well, and needs to involve them as well. This way of speaking already presupposes the wrong divide, an original *distinction* between politics and passion, their fundamental heterogeneity: as if politics were something completely exterior to passion, and would then let some passion in when needed, and in right dosages. One should rather start by dismantling the very idea that passions are by definition “private” and apolitical (because personal). No, passion is not a private thing! Even in the case of amorous passion, it concerns at least two, and has consequences in a wider social space of those involved.

Politics, different kind of politics, are different articulations of a communal passion, of how we live together and how we would like to live together.

To allow for political passion, or politics as passion, does not mean to allow for people to freely engage in all kinds of hate speech as expression of their feelings. First, feelings and passion are not exactly the same thing, passion is something much more systematic, it allows for organization, thinking, strategy... When I say “passion” I also don’t mean frenzied gaze and saliva coming out of our mouth.

What is political passion? It is the experience of being concerned by ways in which our life in common (as societies) takes place, and where it is going. We are all subjectively implied in this communal space, and it’s only logical to be passionate about it.

Foucault remarked in one of his lecture series at the *Collège de France* that there might at one point emerge a new type of power-figure or sovereignty, that he refers to as obscene

(a category that was previously itself reserved for what was considered to be pathological abnormality). Obscenity, he claims, is the kind of power that does not even try to disguise its corruption and/or total incompetence any longer but displays it openly and precisely through this becomes invincible to critique. In Europe, we might think of Berlusconi who was the first to embody this kind of power (one should just remember the parties he celebrated with Gaddafi in the center of Rome and his electoral campaigns), yet today this power-figure seems to be spreading. What to do with contemporary political obscenity – as it seems to stand in a direct relation to sexuality?

Obscenity of power, which consists in openly displaying one’s faults and appetites, has two aspects today. One is related to what Angela Nagle has pointed out: even if mostly taking place on the right, it flies on the wings of the old “leftist” idea of breaking the taboos, of transgression and rebellion. They dare to speak up, say the forbidden things, challenge the established structures (including the media). In short: They have the balls.... In this situation, even the disregard for the most benign social norms of civility can be sold off as a courageous Transgression and as fighting for, say, the freedom of speech. In other words, transgression is “sexy”, even if it simply means no longer greeting your neighbor, because, “Who invented these stupid rules and why should I obey them?” So, part of the new obscenity of power is still the much more traditional game of transgression, although the latter is often reduced to a pure and completely empty *form* of transgression. The other part is a shameless and open way in which those in power display their enjoyment and their faults, which has indeed the effect of disarming a critique. Because there seems to be nothing behind it, nothing left to critically expose. But this does not mean that this posture is unassailable. On the contrary, I actually think its fascinating spell has a relatively short breath. People soon realize that the only “balls” you need to be so blunt and outspoken are the “balls” that the position of power, including financial power, provides for you. There is no courage here. You do it because you *can afford* to do it. And this is in fact the essence of what is displayed in this case, repeating like a broken record: Look at me, I can afford it, I can afford it, I have the power, I have the power... The ongoing display of all that you can “afford to do” because you have the power, that is the sheer and self-serving display of power and boasting about it, soon turns into a rather sickening spectacle, to which people respond accordingly.

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