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Death Drive-Transference-Love

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Isabelle Alfandary*

An Irresistible Death Drive?

In *Civilization and its Discontents*, published in 1930, Freud acknowledges the resistance with which the death drive or destruction drive immediately met, "even in analytic circles"[1]. He admits to having defended himself against this idea when he first read it in Sabina Spielrein's 1912 article entitled "Destruction as the Cause of Coming Into Being". Freud explains such a defense mechanism by the difficulty that everyone has in admitting the thesis of an "inborn human inclination to 'badness', to aggressiveness and destructiveness, and so to cruelty as well."[2]

However, the underlying hypothesis of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is not that of a philosopher who might have sought to bring to light the roots of the banality of evil, but that of a psychoanalyst, clinician and theoretician. Before involving the human in its totality, the death drive puts into play and calls into question nothing less than the whole of the psychoanalytic theory and the sense of its technique.

In general, the question of the drive is undoubtedly one of the trickiest and most destabilizing ones that Freud has had to theorize. Indeed, the drive forces him to reconfigure, or at least modify, as a result of a double economic and energetic point of view, the metapsychological edifice as well the successive topics, even leading him to make an exception to the thesis of the dream as fulfillment of a wish. In this sense, it is not surprising that what Freud called the general theory of drives gave rise to so many successive developments and to several significant revisions on his part.

The hypothesis of the death drive, formulated in 1920 in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, to which Freud returns in detail in *Civilization and its Discontents* ten

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1 Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey, W. W. Norton & Company, New York and London 1961, p. 107.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 108.

* Université Sorbonne-Nouvelle

years later, was also widely criticized and challenged. However, Freud maintained and insisted on it, because, according to him, it provides an explanatory schema to precise clinical content, which he believes remain otherwise inexplicable.

The question of the drive, its articulation with the hypothesis of the death drive, did not cease to animate and agitate the founder of the nascent analytic science.

In what he identifies as the third phase of the theory of drives, Freud makes the death drive the pivot of the economy of drives. The end of the dominance of the pleasure principle, and the taking over by the death drive, remain no less profoundly puzzling. It is precisely the question of death in the death drive that I would like to address, by taking and following to the letter, as much as possible, Freud's hypothesis-turned-thesis.

The presentation that is about to follow is concerned with examining the status of the death drive within the Freudian economy of drives, in order to ultimately establish the signification and the sense of death—or at least what Freud means by "death"—in his theory of drives. What I will try to outline in the meanders and reversals of the general theory of drives, and especially in its phase III, is the place of death, in order to bring to light the role played by death in the drive. To this purpose, I will have to return to the dualism claimed by Freud to define and characterize the economy and energetics of drives.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud defined the drive in terms that are immediately disconcerting, and even contradictory: "a drive is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces; that is, it is a kind of organic elasticity, or, to put it another way, the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life."[3]

This definition seems to me to reveal a hesitation—even "shilly-shallying," I would say, and I will explain this term in a moment—that surrounds the conception of the drive defined by means of seemingly opposite notions: elasticity

[3] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey, W. W. Norton & Company, New York and London 1961, p. 43.

and inertia. We tacitly grasp that the elasticity in question is to be understood as relative inertia. Why this difficulty to characterize the drive? Because the phenomenon that Freud seeks to define is of a complex and fundamentally counter-intuitive nature: "This view of drives strikes us as strange because we have become used to see in them a factor impelling towards change and development, whereas we are now asked to recognize in them the precise contrary—an expression of the *conservative* nature of living substance."[4]

The drive causes Freud difficulties in grasping and conceptualizing, which explains, at least in part, that he relies on—despite his guarding himself against it—the resources of intuition and even of fiction, something which he has been violently reproached with. Not that the drive responds to specific determinations, but as a phenomenon, it largely escapes our understanding. What Freud refers to as "the nature of the excitatory process that takes place in the elements of the psychical systems,"[5] creates on him the effect of an unknown that he cannot, however, give up conceptualizing: "We are consequently operating all the time with a large unknown [X] factor, which we are obliged to carry over into every new formula."[6] In section VI of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, he goes so far as to declare: "If, therefore, we are not to abandon the hypothesis of the death drives, we must suppose them to be associated from the very first with life drives. But it must be admitted that in that case we shall be working upon an equation with two unknowns."[7]

The Elementary structure of the drive

Two basic questions—that of the number of drives and that of their differences in nature—seem not to have ceased to challenge Freud. The drive, for that matter, raises the question of the elementary, of the element, if not originary, at least archaic, at the articulation between soma and psyche. On closer reading, the famous episode of the reel from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in which Freud recognizes the assumption of the compulsion to repeat, implicitly contains such a questioning about the supposed duality of the drive hypothesis:

4 *Ibid.*
5 *Ibid.*, p. 35.
6 *Ibid.*
7 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

"This, then, was the complete game—disappearance and return. As a rule one only witnessed its first act, which was repeated untiringly as a game in itself, though there is no doubt that the greater pleasure was attached to the second act."[8] The incidental, and no doubt far too little commented upon remark about the "first act" conceived as a "game in itself", could be reinterpreted in light of the hypothesis of the death drive that is yet to be formulated.

The hypothesis of the compulsion to repeat, posited out of what Freud identifies as the first game of the child, is well-known: "But if a compulsion to repeat *does* operate in the mind, we should be glad to know something about it, to learn what function it corresponds to, under what conditions it can emerge and what its relation is to the pleasure principle—to which, after all, we have hitherto ascribed dominance over the course of the processes of excitation in mental life."[9]

In the *fort-da* episode are already sketched the terms of Freud's questioning on the elementary structure of the drive. The child's game appears to be a two-step mechanism, even if the question of knowing whether these two steps are indeed separate or only a split step is the immediate question:

> It may perhaps be said in reply that her [the mother's] departure had to be enacted as a necessary preliminary to her joyful return, and that it was in the latter that lay the true purpose of the game. But against this must be counted the observed fact that the first act, that of departure, was staged as a game in itself and far more frequently than the episode in its entirely, with its pleasurable ending.[10]

The pleasure principle, as Freud reminds us as a preamble to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, is deduced from the principle of constancy,[11] or rather, Freud—who does not skimp on reversals—tells us: "The pleasure principle follows from the principle of constancy: actually the latter principle was inferred from the facts which forced us to adopt the pleasure principle."[12] The pleasure in question in the pleasure principle is not simply synonymous with the quest for happiness that the author of *Civilization and its Discontents* declares as characterizing each

8 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
9 *Ibid.*, p. 15.
10 *Ibid.*
11 *Ibid.*, p. 6.
12 *Ibid.*

individual.[13] The pleasure in question here is of an energetic nature. Similarly, the death that is at stake in the death drive must also be tirelessly understood and translated in dynamic terms—I will come back to this. In this respect, and as counter-intuitive as it may seem, the death drive and the pleasure principle, considered in the energetic terms that characterize them, are not without maintaining astonishing affinities with one another.

Freud interprets this throwing of the reel as being able to "satisfy an impulse of the child's, which was suppressed in his actual life, to revenge himself on his mother for going away from him."[14] The clinician recalls the propensity of the child to throw away objects in lieu and place of the adults who annoyed him, and supports this by quoting the article "A Childhood Recollection from *Dichtung Und Wahrheit*" in which the little Goethe had, like a patient of Freud's, distinguished himself in this characteristic Oedipal sport.

Freud had also noted in his fine observation that his grandson

> had an occasional disturbing habit of taking any small objects he could get hold of and throwing them away from him into a corner, under the bed, and so on, so that hunting for his toys and picking them up was often quite a business. As he did this he gave vent to a loud, long-drawn-out 'o-o-o-o', accompanied by an expression of interest and satisfaction. His mother and the writer of the present account were agreed in thinking that this was not a mere interjection but represented the German word '*fort*' ['gone']. I eventually realized that it was a game and that the only use he made of any of his toys was to play 'gone' [*fortsein*] with them.[15]

The gone [*fortsein*] seems to be more than simply the first step of the game: it is a game in itself—a process of symbolization that will certainly only be completed by the second step consisting of an initial aggressive motion. If we consider this step I on its own, it seems to be part of a destruction drive that satisfies itself, at least to begin with. This remark made in passing which Freud neither

[13] "The programme of becoming happy, which the pleasure principle imposes on us, cannot be fulfilled, yet we must not—indeed, we cannot—give up our efforts to bring it nearer to fulfillment by some means or other." Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents,* p. 54.

[14] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 15.

[15] *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14.

develops nor comments, nonetheless seems to me to bear heavy consequences with regard to the general theory of drives.

Let me note here, before getting back to it soon, that the dualism that Freud affirms on the subject of the economy of drives is not as easy to conceive, or even to argue, as it would seem. The example of the reel reveals a structure that is admittedly binary, but unbalanced, and somehow asymmetrical and unrelenting.

We have to keep in mind that all organic drives are, to Freud's mind, "conservative."[16] It is from this law of the living that he deduces the compulsion to repeat: "to pursue to its logical conclusion the hypothesis that all drives tend towards the restoration of an earlier state of things."[17] It is because he clings to the characterization as conservative that he rejects the possibility of other configurations of the drive. Although it is seriously posited, the hypothesis of other drives—of drives of another kind than that of death drives and life drives—is quickly dismissed. Thus, Freud considers at the end of section V of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*—but only to give it up right away—the possibility of other drives that "aim at a state of things which has never yet been attained."[18] And he goes on to say: "We shall be met by the plausible objection that it may very well be that, in addition to the conservative drives which impel towards repetition, there may be other which push forward towards progress and the production of new forms. This argument must certainly not be overlooked."[19] The hypothesis of what he refers to as a "universal drive", in other words, of a drive that could be qualified as "progress drive" in evolution, is abandoned on the grounds that it is hardly plausible.

Let me note incidentally in that regard that a Hegelian reading of the death drive as the negative moment seems difficult to me to hold and argue. Freud finds the explanation to the theory of evolution in the consequence of the adaptation to external forces. The idea of a "drive towards perfection" is even deemed by Freud in these pages as being "a benevolent illusion."[20]

16 *Ibid.*, p. 43.
17 *Ibid.*, p. 44.
18 *Ibid.*, p. 49.
19 *Ibid.*, p. 44.
20 *Ibid.*, p. 50.

The goal of all life is death

The thesis that subtends *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and on which the hypothesis of the death drive is based, finds its formulation—as gnomic as it is disturbing—in the acknowledgment that the goal of all life is death:

> [It] must be an *old* state of things, an initial state from which the living entity has at one time or other departed and to which it is striving to return by the circuitous paths along which its development leads. If we are to take it as a truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for *internal* reasons—becomes inorganic once again—then we shall be compelled to say that *'the aim of all life is death'* and, looking backwards, that *'inanimate things existed before living ones'*.[21]

The death in question in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is not metaphysical finitude: Freud calls death the state of return to inorganic matter—a death of a biological kind. According to Freud, the appearance of life is almost contemporaneous with—slightly earlier and, so to speak, a reaction to—the emergence of the first drive understood as the death drive. The idea that life could be identified with a first and fundamental drive, just as the hypothesis that the appearance of life is synonymous with a thrust of drive must, according to Freud, be abandoned for good.

In Freud's hypothesis, death dominates the general economy of drives: not only is the death drive the final drive, but significantly the first: "The tension which then arose in what had hitherto been an inanimate substance endeavoured to cancel itself out. In this way the first drive came into being: the drive to return to the inanimate state".[22] Once again, what we call "life", insofar as it comes into being, is not at all considered by Freud as instinctual energy, or even charged with any energy that is instinctual in nature. In his hypothesis, Freud conceives of life as *ex nihilo*—pure given whose origin remains mysterious:

> The attributes of life were at some time evoked in inanimate matter by the action of a force of whose nature we can form no conception. [...] The tension which then arose in what had hitherto been an inanimate substance endeavoured to cancel

[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 45–46.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 46.

> itself out. In this way the first drive came into being: the drive to return to the inanimate state.[23]

In Freud's elaboration—an elaboration that at this precise point turns into a speculation—that falls in the realm of the discourse of fables and tales ("at some time"—to the gift of life understood in the sense of donation responds the originary drive in reaction: that of putting an end to it. The first drive is therefore literally deadly and reactive in the sense that it carries death, it strives to return to a previous state. The death drive returns to the origin. As a result, drive is defined as that which cannot detach, divest or undo itself—hardly let itself be temporarily diverted—from the origin. Because of its originary tendency to dislocate itself, the death drive marks the drive process and the resulting general economy of drives. As such, and if we follow Freud's reasoning all the way through, all drive insofar as it is conservative is marked by its return to the inorganic. Let me specify that when Freud mentions "drive" insofar as it is "given", he takes care not to specify the drive that is in question, and does not qualify it as "death drive". The life drive emerges, insofar as it progressively and incrementally extracts itself, as it operates out of the bond from the very process of unbinding, as it silently splits itself. It is from the drive as the drive towards death that the possibility of a life drive exceeds and excludes itself. Derrida's notion of "*lavie-lamort*" – a seminar of 1975–1976[24] just to be published – no doubt echoes this indecisive and this inextricability of the origin. Nevertheless, the death drive can be said to be originary in at least two ways: it is first, previous, but at the same time, is marked by the origin and the return to a prior state. In these pages of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the drive is entirely understood as the death drive, identified by a regressive movement towards a primitive state.

Freud's hypothesis of the emergence of life—inseparable from the fiction of origins—is guided by death, wholly reaching out towards it, like an irresistible catabasis: life is the deferral of the moment of destruction, the resistance to the ineluctable movement of return to a prior inorganic state. Life is a negative force insofar as it is a defense against the irresistible pull of death. It insists by creating *in extremis* the conditions of a pure present, unceasingly renegotiated, trimmed, and conquered on nothingness. It fights to the death against death.

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[23] *Ibid.*

[24] Jacques Derrida, *La vie la mort (Séminaire 1975–1976)*, Seuil, Paris 2019.

For Freud, life is survival (*Überleben*). Freud leans on an evolutionist conception of life considered as resilience to death: "It was still an easy matter at that time for a living substance to die; the course of its life was probably only a brief one, whose direction was determined by the chemical structure of the early life"[25]. Once again, what justifies the pertinence of the hypothesis of the drive fable of origins, is, according to Freud, "the exclusively conservative nature of drives"[26]. The drive is not only linked to the archaic, but also to the archive in the double etymological sense of commencement and commandment of a proto- or sub-life. This thesis of an "archiviolithic" drive, to call it by a Derridian name,[27] that affirms itself in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* will not be refuted in *Civilization and its Discontents*, which nonetheless revisits the general theory of drives, to partly support it and nuance it.

Regardless, these final pages of section V of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that rely on an anthropomorphic fictionalization and a dramatized casuistry of the drive conflict are among the most astonishing that Freud has written, especially when he takes up the question of an infra-conscious intentionality of the soma:

> What we are left with is the fact that the organism wishes to die only in its own fashion. Thus these guardians of life, too, were originally the myrmidons of death. Hence arises the paradoxical situation that the living organism struggles most energetically against events (dangers, in fact) which might help it to attain its life's aim rapidly—by a kind of short-circuit. Such behaviour is, however, precisely what characterizes purely instinctual as contrasted with intelligent efforts. But let us pause for a moment and reflect. It cannot be so.[28]

In the instinct law, and the fable that introduces it here, Freud takes the risk of going astray in conjectures where the hypostasis of the death drive seems to give way to hypotyposis. The quest for the origin of the drive triggers a fable of origins coupled with a fiction of instinctuality that leads Freud to deliberate, not without some *hubris*, on the will-to-live of the pure somatic, of life itself.

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25 Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 46.

26 *Ibid.* "If we firmly maintain the exclusively conservative nature of instincts, we cannot arrive at any other notions as to the origin and aim of life." *Ibid.*

27 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1996, p. 10.

28 Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 47.

The conservative nature of the drive from which Freud infers the law of the living leads him to face the facts, no matter how disconcerting and counter-intuitive they may be: those of the logical and chronological precedence of death over life. The aim of life considered from the standpoint of the drive is death; the tendency of all life is to return to a state of non-life. Freud decides, at least in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, that there is a beyond, beyond the pleasure principle, not a predominance of the death drives, but on the originary predominance of death within the general economy of drives, which is not exactly the same thing.

In a slightly later essay entitled "The Ego and the Id" (1923), Freud takes up again explicitly the thesis of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and generalizes it to the point of suggesting that the shared or even combined goal of erotic drives and the death drives is the return to the inorganic state: "Acting in this way, both the drives would be conservative in the strictest sense of the word, since both would be endeavouring to re-establish a state of things that was disturbed by the emergence of life"[29]. In this very chapter entitled "The Two Classes of Drives", Freud observes the difficulty he has in grasping "the manner in which the two classes of drives are fused, blended, and alloyed with each other."[30]

The trajectory of the drive

Let me pause for a moment to measure the trajectory of the drive on the scale of Freud's work, and of the path traveled by this notion: considerable and remarkable is its fate, when we know that Freud resorts for the first time to the notion of *Trieb* in 1905 in the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, precisely to describe human sexuality and acknowledge the singularity of the libido:

> The fact of the existence of sexual needs in human beings and animals is expressed in biology by the assumption of a 'sexual drive', on the analogy of the instinct of nutrition, that is of hunger. Everyday language possesses no counterpart to the word 'hunger', but science makes use of the word 'libido' for that purpose.[31]

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29 Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*. *Freud – Complete Works*. Compiled by Ivan Smith. Web. 31 March 2019, p. 3974. https://www.valas.fr/IMG/pdf/Freud_Complete_Works.pdf.

30 *Ibid*., p. 3975.

31 Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. *Freud – Complete Works*. Compiled by Ivan Smith. Web. 31 March 2019, p. 1464 https://www.valas.fr/IMG/pdf/Freud_Complete_Works.pdf

Since 1905, we can argue that the whole of Freudian psychoanalysis is posed and proposed as a revision of the doxa on the drive:

> Popular opinion has quite definite ideas about the nature and characteristics of this sexual drive. It is generally understood to be absent in childhood, to set in at the time of puberty in connection with the process of coming to maturity and to be revealed in the manifestations of an irresistible attraction exercised by one sex upon the other; while its aim is presumed to be sexual union, or at all events actions leading in that direction.[32]

The commonly accepted idea of a sexual drive endowed with a single purpose and a single object is demolished by the thesis of *Three Essays*. The sexual drive, as Freud conceives of it, multiplies and breaks up the unitary and monolithic character of purpose and object, and ultimately contributes to suspending the opposition between the normal and the pathological: the drive is thought of as a polymorphic force, vicarious, and interstitial.

Freud's invention of the category of the "sexual" is indistinguishable from the notion of the drive and of the economy from which it stems: the drive that Freud brings to light is plural, and if necessary, partial; it carries an energy that is the economic and dynamic condition of the psyche. In 1915, in "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes", Freud qualifies it as "the demand made upon the mind for work"[33]: the drive animates as much as it agitates the individual.

Freud's conception of sexuality that is thus deduced from the general theory of drives inaugurated in 1905 will not cease to be repeated until at least 1930. Let us note in passing that it is of course "the nature and the characters of sexual drive" that Freud will not cease to ponder from *Three Essays* (1905) to *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), as if he were unable to be satisfied with a definitive conception on these basic points that deal with the articulation and conjugation of drives, as if the successively advanced and argued theses were

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32 *Ibid.*

33 Sigmund Freud, "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes." *Freud – Complete Works*. Compiled by Ivan Smith. Web. 31 March 2019, p. 2960 https://www.valas.fr/IMG/pdf/Freud_Complete_Works.pdf.

always likely to be called into question by the novelty of the clinical or anthropological material considered.

The drive which thus makes a sensational entry into the Freudian lexicon to account for the libido as *il primo mottore* will however be linked, from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* onwards to the instance of death, but not without contradicting nor excluding the reference to said libido. "*Il primo mottore*" is the phrase that Freud uses to characterize the force of the drive in *Leonardo da Vinci and A Memory of His Childhood*[34]: a motor, if I dare say, with a double trigger. This becoming of the drive, which is not exactly a reversal, but an extreme complication of the initial conception, is neither simple nor obvious for its author. The bringing to light of death in the economy of drives to which he held does not seem to have left him alone. This probably explains why Freud did not cease to modify, amend, and balance his general theory of drives.

A dualistic theory of drives

The Freudian theory of drives "always remains dualistic", as Laplanche and Pontalis write[35]. And this, be it the initial dualism that opposes sexual drives and ego drives or drives of self-preservation, or the one invoked in *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* between life drives and death drives. If the terms of the conflict did not cease to change, Freud rejected any monistic conception—the one with which he reproaches Jung at the end of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. The Freudian drive model retained in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* indeed has two terms: the articulation between these terms however is not dialectical but proves to be determined by a heavy tendency. The dualism advanced by Freud is more singular, more intricate than expected, due to the precedence of death and a tendency of its underlying drive to dominate. In section VI of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud returns to his previous conception which he revises

[34] Sigmund Freud, "Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood." *Freud – Complete Works*. Compiled by Ivan Smith. Web. 31 March 2019. https://www.valas.fr/IMG/pdf/Freud_Complete_Works.pdf.

[35] Jean Laplanche, J.-B. Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse*, Presses universitaires de France, Paris 2007, p. 361 [my translation].

and once again[36] marks his disagreement with Jung and his objection in principle to monism.

> Our views have from the very first been *dualistic*, and to-day they are even more definitely dualistic than before—now that we describe the opposition as being, not between ego-drives and sexual drives but between life drives and death drives. Jung's libido theory is on the contrary monistic; the fact that he has called his one instinctual force 'libido' is bound to create confusion, but need not affect us otherwise.[37]

These lines, added in 1921, are not indifferent: perhaps we must re-read, at least partly, Freud's obstinacy to brandish the banner of dualism through the prism of his conflict with Jung. But that is undoubtedly more than a personal question for Freud. What he rejects is the idea of a single source of energy within the *anima*. As such, the death drive is not the only force, nor is it even the originary force. What dominates in the theory of drives however remains a model dominated by the dual tendency to release excitation and to maintain a constant level—two tendencies that, insofar as they are combined, gesture towards death, towards the state of non-life. The risk he runs of retaining only one of the terms, be it the decisive and irreducible term, can be deduced from the objection he makes to the Jungian thesis of the originary libido: a model consisting of one term loses sight of the role of Eros and of the sexual drive, or the life drive, and does not make it possible to account for a principle that for Freud is necessarily thought in economic and energetic terms. The reason why Freud holds to dualism towards and against everything is that it is the condition of the psychic conflict encountered since the first clinic of hysteria in *Studies on Hysteria* and which Freud does not want to and cannot give up.

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[36] "C. G. Jung attempted to resolve this obscurity along speculative lines by assuming that there was only a single primal libido which could be either sexualized or desexualized and which therefore coincided in its essence with mental energy in general. This innovation was methodologically disputable, caused a great deal of confusion, reduced the term 'libido' to the level of a superfluous synonym and was still in practice confronted with the necessity for distinguishing between sexual and asexual libido." *Freud – Complete Works*, p. 3932.

[37] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, pp. 63–64.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud takes care to qualify the relation that links life drives to death drives:

> They are the true life drives. They operate against the purpose of the other drives, which leads, by reason of their function, to death; and this fact indicates that there is an opposition between them and the other drives, an opposition whose importance was long ago recognized by the theory of the neuroses. It is as though the life of the organism moved with a vacillating rhythm. One group of drives rushes forward so as to reach the final aim of life as swiftly as possible; but when a particular stage in the advance has been reached, the other group jerks back to a certain point to make a fresh start and so prolong the journey.[38]

At the end of this conception, which is straight in line with the fable of origins and which stages another scripted fiction, life drives are defined negatively: not as pure affirmation of life, but the diversion of death, the dismissal and deferral of deadly forces. The expression "vacillating rhythm" to translate "*Zauderrhythmus*" is particularly enlightening for it provides a model for the very principle of life conceived as discontinuous tension between opposite forces, as the power of syncope. In German, *Zaudern* means to hesitate, to be suspended. Life is a suspension between two times. The time in question is not the continuum of the consciousness of time, but implies a rhythmicity that alternates positions. Life conceived on this rhythmic modality is strangely consonant with what we call in prosody an iamb—an element of metrics that alternates an unstressed (weak) time followed by a stressed (strong) time. The rhythm Freud talks about is the result of an oscillation between two opposite, disjointed, and ultimately heterogenous tendencies—and this is despite the participation of the life drive in the originary tendency of all drive. Life is conceived as maintaining the possibility of a suspension, of a detour in the form of deferment, of a setback to the scheduled death. Its binding modality (*Bindung*) is at once inchoative and iterative in nature.

The work of the so-called life drives, according to the staging proposed by Freud in the passage I just quoted, consists in prolonging the path towards death by introducing an additional loop, a digression that takes the shape of a short circuit, a torn-out duration against a background of rhythmic difference. According

[38] *Ibid.*, pp. 48–49.

to this hypothesis, life would be nothing more than a deferral of death, a time gained over and against death. Anything but *sponte sui*, life is thought as force of resistance conceived on the mode of recovery. Let me note that the metaphor to which Freud resorts at this precise point makes the life drive coincide with a process of repetition: "once again", suspensive repetition of an ineluctable end, but repetition at the service of the prorogation of life, of an again [*encore*] of deferred *jouissance*. The "*Encore*" that Lacan turned into a signifier of *jouissance* is marked in Freud with the seal of the unshareable "lavielamort". Life drives behave a bit, if we were to believe Freud, in the way in which Scheherazade, seeking to escape the promised death each night, tells the sultan a story whose continuation is postponed to each new sunrise.

The tendency of the drive, be it the life drive or the death drive—the key to the Freudian apparatus, its difficulty lies in the fact that the life drives are no less conservative, but of a previous state that is not death—is, according to Freud, invariably retrograde: it aims at the reinstatement of a previous state. Its path is teleologically oriented towards an end that is located upstream of the journey. Even if the repressed drive seems to tend towards its full satisfaction understood as "repetition of a primary experience of satisfaction,"[39] it ultimately only aims to reinstate an inorganic state. The quote from Goethe's *Faust* borrowed by Freud must not deceive its reader: the "presses ever forward unsubdued"[40] [*ungebändigt immer vorwärts dringt*] of which the poet speaks must be interpreted as going back.

In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud mentions in support of his demonstration the case of lower animals that die after having performed the reproductive act:

> The ejection of the sexual substances in the sexual act corresponds in a sense to the separation of soma and germ-plasm. This accounts for the likeness of the condition that follows complete sexual satisfaction to dying, and for the fact that death coincides with the act of copulation in some of the lower animals. These creatures die in the act of reproduction because, after Eros has been eliminated through the process of satisfaction, the death drive has a free hand for accomplishing its purposes.[41]

39 *Ibid.*, pp. 50–51.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 51.

41 Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, p. 3981.

In this particular case, life drives are separated from death drives by the space of a sigh, of a tiny gap, an originary difference. The rhythmic model in this case—that of the return—is not iambic, but trochaic: it is a model in which a stressed (strong) time is followed by an unstressed (weak) time.

The case of the death of lower animals in the sexual act is not the only instance of the drive defusion at the service of an end of the discharge of excitation: *The Ego and the Id* as well as *Civilization and Its Discontents* insist on the model of drive defusion that is brought to light by sadism in which Freud recognizes that "for purposes of discharge the drive of destruction is habitually brought into the service of Eros."[42]

The case of the sadistic drive

From *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to *Civilization and Its Discontents*, the sadistic drive holds a very special place in Freud's argumentation, because it allows him to advance what he calls a hypothesis according to which "a death drive which, under the influence of the narcissistic libido, has been forced away from the ego and has [...] only emerged in relation to the object."[43] Freud also notes that he has acknowledged since 1905 "a sadistic component in the sexual drive."[44] The sadistic component of the sexual drive is paradigmatic of the tendency of the drive to "detach itself", "to make itself autonomous", promised as it is to a becoming that posteriorly makes its origin virtually unassignable. As early as 1915 in "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes", Freud had already advanced the idea that all drive could be broken down into successive waves ("We can divide the life of each drive into a series of separate successive waves, each of which is homogenous during whatever period of time it may last, and whose relation to one another is comparable to that of successive eruptions of lava."[45]

The sadistic drive that he reexamines in *Civilization and Its Discontents* condenses the double question related to the nature and characteristics proper to any drive: does it come from Eros, as one might be tempted to think at first,

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42 *Ibid.*, p. 3975.

43 Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 65.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 64.

45 Freud, "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," p. 2967.

or is it related to the death drive pushed out of the ego by the influence of the narcissistic libido? It is towards this second hypothesis that Freud leans as early as 1920, and one that he will confirm ten years later. In this respect, the sadistic drive is not one of the drives in the Freudian theory of drives: it enables us to identify the double character of entanglement and displacement, proper to any drive-type motion. In "the obscurity that reigns at present in the theory of the drives," it shows the analyst the possibility of an instinctual destiny, that takes the form of an alloy. Earlier in "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes" (1915), Freud had conceived of different outcomes for the sexual drives and the ego drives or the drives of self-preservation, that are: reversal into its opposite, turning round upon the subject's own self, repression, sublimation.[46]

Eros may be noisy, it is threatened, including and especially in the *jouissance* that marks the satisfaction of the erotic drive to the exact point where it gives way to Thanatos. This example is not one among others: it reveals the logic that justifies the thesis of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Erotic satisfaction is not first: it was preceded by a state no less struck by amnesia than the other, and whose power of repressed attraction is even more powerful. The possibility of Eros's being put out of play is inherent in the structure of instinctuality for Freud, and ultimately of the libidinal economy.

In its pure state, the death drive, just as its corollary that is the compulsion to repeat[47] that can hardly be grasped "unsupported by other motives", can only very rarely be seen, except in the case of melancholia in which the superego appears, according to Freud, as manifesting "a culture of the death drive". What phenomenologically characterizes the death drive is its deafening silence. It is so mute that it could go unnoticed and make Freud doubt his own dualistic thesis:

> Over and over again we find, when we are able to trace instinctual impulses back, that they reveal themselves as derivatives of Eros. If it were not for the considerations put forward in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and ultimately for the sadistic constituents which have attached themselves to Eros, we should have difficulty in holding to our fundamental dualistic point of view. *But since we cannot escape*

46 Freud, "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," p. 2964.

47 Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 24.

> *that view*, we are driven to conclude that the death drives are by their nature mute and that the clamour of life proceeds for the most part from Eros.[48]

Freud is therefore on the lookout for instances where the death drives emerge, in his search for tangible proof to support his hypothesis. This is what is at stake in *Civilization and Its Discontents* and in the bringing to light of an instinct of destructiveness:

> The manifestations of Eros were conspicuous and noisy enough. It might be assumed that the death drive operated silently within the organism towards its dissolution, but that, of course, was no proof. A more fruitful idea was that a portion of the drive is diverted towards the external world and comes to light as a drive of aggressiveness and destructiveness.[49]

In this book, Freud returns to the general theory of drives in order to clarify and support it. The model of what I would venture to call the "death principle" from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* continues to make Freud wonder after 1920, as he believes that his theoretical elaborations largely remain conjectures[50]—whether they be applied to cell biology—and still require tangible proofs to provide especially to the analytic community, to convince it of the validity of his hypothesis. *Civilization and Its Discontents* can be read as a continuation of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, as the attempt at an anthropological justification of the thesis of the death drive. Drawing from some of the conclusions of *Totem and Taboo* about the killing of the father of the horde and of the totem-feast, as well as from the developments of *Group*[51] *Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), Freud intends to find in the social field the means of a demonstration whose stake ul-

48 Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, p. 3980; my emphasis.

49 Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, p. 106.

50 It does not escape Freud that "the assumption of the existence of the instinct is mainly based on theoretical grounds" *Ibid.*, p. 110—grounds that he attempts to apply to a practical context in order to render intelligible its operation and to demonstrate the relevance of the assumption: "Some readers of this work may further have an impression that they have heard the formula of the struggle between Eros and the death instinct too often. It was alleged to characterize the process of civilization which mankind undergoes but it was also brought into connection with the development of the individual, and, in addition, it was said to have revealed the secret of organic life in general." *Ibid.*, p. 139.

51 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. *Freud – Complete Works*. Compiled by Ivan Smith. Web. 31 March 2019. www.valas.fr/IMG/pdf/Freud_Complete_Works.pdf.

timately is metapsychological in nature: in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, the question is nothing less than one of founding the general theory of drives on anthropological grounds.

Even if in conclusion to *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud denies having sought to simply align the irreconcilable tendencies between Eros and the death drive on the one hand and the individual and the society on the other, and concludes that "it is a dispute within the economics of the libido"[52] that is not analogous to the conflict that governs the economics of drives brought to light in parallel, the fact still remains that a significant part of his intention consisted in accounting for the hostility towards culture, from an explanation of an instinctual kind, that is present all the way up to and including in the decisive argument of "instinctual sacrifice" that is characteristic of any cultural institution. The very notion of the economics of the libido that he mobilizes cannot be understood without the schema of the death drive.

The case of the destruction drive

Civilization and Its Discontents reserves a special place for a particular drive: the destruction drive presented as an avatar of the death drive[53] whose analysis echoes the developments surrounding the sadistic drive. The category of the destruction drive as it is formulated in *Civilization and Its Discontents* is not without consequences on the entire theoretical edifice, and especially on the conception of the dominance of the death drive in the economy of drives. For Freud, it is an epistemological discovery, one that strategically supports his hypothesis of the death drive. Why? Because the destruction drive is recognizable among all the drives of the world. If, as Freud writes in conclusion of his essay, limping is not sinning, destroying is not exactly dying. The death under which the destruction drive falls is the death drive that deviates from its self-destructive course and turns against the outside world.

52 Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, p. 142.

53 It may be noted in passing that the death drive is not the only one to split into a destruction drive : to respond to the objections that would not fail to be expressed, Freud winds up distinguishing the pleasure principle from the principle of Nirvâna, the economic principle of reduction of tensions to zero, entirely enslaved to the death drive.

The origin of the destruction drive is to be searched for in the ego. However, in 1914, in *On Narcissism: An Introduction*, Freud brings to light that the ego can be the object of investment of sexual drives. From the moment the ego ceases to be the exclusive seat of the drives of self-preservation, but becomes, as he writes in 1922 (1917), "a great reservoir from which the libido that is destined for objects flows out and into which it flows back from those objects,"[54] the general theory of the drives is disrupted. For this reason, the study of the ego constitutes the hub, the pivot point of the drive theory as the highlighting of the libido of the self-preservation drives as the narcissistic libido.[55]

The drive, as Freud discovers it, is fundamentally marked by the seal of impurity, of a vicissitude determined by a partial and mixed becoming. This is the sense of the notion of entanglement that he retains in order to characterize the vicissitude of the drive. The drive is doubly impure: firstly because as far as the death drive is concerned, it is silent enough so that it can hardly ever be revealed, and thus let itself be distinguished in its pure state. More fundamentally, because the destruction drive, that has affinities with the sadistic drive that do not escape Freud, is a drive that has undergone a shift, in this case a displacement in relation to the object, which results in the modification of valence which Freud recognizes is proper to all drives:

> At the same time one can suspect from this example that the two kinds of drive seldom—perhaps never—appear in isolation from each other, but are alloyed with each other in varying and very different proportions and so become unrecognizable to our judgement.[56]

Let us note that for Freud, the turning outwards of the death drive into aggression drive, however, does not constitute an economic remedy for the self-destruction that threatens the ego: "Conversely, anything restriction of this aggressiveness directed outwards would be bound to increase the self-destruction, which is in any case proceeding."[57]

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54 Sigmund Freud, "A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis." *Freud – Complete Works*. Compiled by Ivan Smith, p. 3610. Web. 31 March 2019. www.valas.fr/IMG/pdf/Freud_Complete_Works.pdf.

55 Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, p. 142.

56 *Ibid*., pp. 106–107.

57 *Ibid*., p. 106.

The destruction drive therefore conciliates two tendencies: that of death understood in the sense of a return to the inorganic, and that of hate of which Freud says, as early as 1915 in "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes", that it is "older than love": "Hate, as a relation to objects is older than love. It derives from the narcissistic ego's primordial repudiation of the external world with its outpouring of stimuli. As an expression of the reaction of unpleasure evoked by objects, it always remains in an intimate relation with the self-preservation drives [...]."[58] What constitutes the motive of hate relies on the power of excitation, the force of the instinctual call derived from the object, the stimulus that pulls the individual from their homeostatic passivity, from their energetic quasi-nothing. It is from this defense against the object, against *das Ding* of which Lacan deduces the structural positions, that hate merges with the death drive.

In sadism, Freud seems to have recognized early at the level of the object of love an *analogon* and a prefiguration of the destruction drive: a partial sexual drive with which "we should have before us a particularly strong alloy of this kind between trends of love and the destructive drive"[59]. The one could, if we may say so, be understood as the translation of the other: in sadism, the death drive "twists the erotic aim in its own sense"[60]. Freud treats both drives as almost synonymous, as economic equivalents, translating one drive in the language of the other, qualifying the destruction drive as the death drive inhibited about the sexual purpose: "But even where it emerges without sexual purpose, in the blindest fury of destructiveness, we cannot fail to recognize that the satisfaction of the drive is accompanied by an extraordinarily high degree of narcissistic enjoyment, owing to its presenting the ego with a fulfillment of the latter's old wishes for omnipotence."[61]

In these conditions of alloying and vicariance, how can one explain why Freud supported against all odds the dualist thesis, despite the difficulty in identifying pure expressions of the drive? Because the entanglement and the displacement of the drive make sense only if they are of a distinct nature and of different origin, because only a dualistic model can account for the experience of life under-

58 Freud, "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," p. 2974.
59 Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, p. 107.
60 Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 110.
61 Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, p. 110.

stood in the double sense of psychic life and somatic life, from what Freud calls in Laplanche's rephrasing and translation the "*pulsating factor*". The conflict remains the explanatory model of the drive economy and the psychic conflict requires the maintaining of the dualistic hypothesis. Freud insists on continuing to distinguish, in order to differentiate, what he calls "the energy of the death drive" and "manifestations of the power of Eros."[62] Eros is noisier, but in Freud's conception, even if the death drive is only ever perceptible as a trace, as "something in the background,"[63] it is nonetheless indisputably involved in an economy, which could not possibly be accounted for otherwise.

Of what kind of dualism is the drive economy a part? One might be tempted to regard it as a dualism with one prevailing term, or more accurately, a dualism dominated by a principle: that of death understood as tendency, as irreducible and irresistible temptation of a return to an inorganic state. The drive economy that Freud brings to light, proceeds from a dualism with one term prevailing without sublation.

There is, in the cold examination of the death drive, an almost Promethean gesture, a *hubris* of whose danger Freud is not unaware: this "third step in the theory of the drives"[64] made after broadening the concept of sexuality out of the drive and the examination of its participation in narcissism, is a decisive step and by far the more risky that he has ever leaped. As Freud acknowledges at the end of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the theory of drives is open to criticism, as is the case with any theory of "ultimate things": "Unfortunately, however, people are seldom impartial where ultimate things, the great problems of science and life, are concerned. Each of us is governed in such cases by deep-rooted internal prejudices, into whose hands our speculation unwittingly plays."[65]

Whatever may have been the nature for Freud of his insidious and idiosyncratic preferences, the fact still remains that in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, just as in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, which slightly attenuates, as if to correct downwards, the beyond into a below, out of the hypothesis of drive entanglement and

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62 *Ibid.*, p. 109.
63 *Ibid.*
64 Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 71.
65 *Ibid.*, p. 72.

the bringing to light of a struggle between drives, Freud wished to expose that with which and against which the clinic has to work, that to which the analyst has to do, whether he/ she likes it or not. In no way is it for Freud a question of discouraging clinic; rather, it is a question of reinforcing it with a knowledge that is necessary for the work of establishing a prepositional and syntactic – grammatical – relationship that the cure represents.

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Jelica Šumič Riha*

Transference: From *Agalma* to *Palea*[1]

The power of the ego and the powerlessness of psychoanalysis

The triumph of narcissism that we have been witnessing of late is the emblematic pathology of our time and it is not an accident that this contemporary pathology is coincidental with the rise in the power of images. Our world is a world swarming with images to such a degree that one is tempted to state that we are living in an "empire of images". The world we are living in today is a world that itself has been transformed into an image or, rather, into "a wall of screens," to borrow a term introduced by Géreard Wajcman, a mosaic of myriad images that constitute "a single yet unlimited image."[2] An image inevitably refers to the gaze that stands for the gaze of the Other. If the omnipresence of images signals a momentous shift in the history of civilisation this is because, as Wajcman has rightly remarked, "the desire to See All" that dominates and animates every human activity announces the emergence of a new figure of the gaze: the gaze that sees all at once, breaking thereby with the structuring role of the frame which could be summarised as "seeing is framing". From this perspective, the empire of images, insofar as it implies that "the visible world has been entirely seen and has become all-seeing," is only possible as "a creation of the civilization of the gaze."[3] Our world, as Wajcman's argument goes, is global not only because it is the reign of the single market, but also because it is under the dominance of the gaze that has become one as it knows no perspective and therefore no limitation or obstacle. What characterises the new regime of the gaze is precisely the absence of such a frame that would constitute a window looking out onto the world. In the new regime of the gaze, the point from which the subject is looked

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[2] Gérard Wajcman, "Wall of Screens," *lacanian ink*, no. 40, p. 99.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 107.

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on, is not simply hidden, but radically unlocatable. Omnipresent, yet nowhere to be found, the gaze is incarnate in the visible itself. With the elimination of the frame, the limit separating the subject from the scene of the world in which s/he could appear likewise disappears. Thus, according to Wajcman, in a world in which there is no preconceived distribution of places, a world without places, the place of the subject is also erased. Therefore, a theory of the hypermodern gaze, as Wajcman conceives of it, is a theory of "the placeless subject" in a "placeless world"[4]. Seen from this perspective, the current ubiquity of images clearly indicates that the gripping power of the image cannot be simply reduced to the imaginary, one of the three realms that, according to Lacan, constitute human experience. Rather, the spreading empire of images renders all the more obvious the distinction, indeed, the disparity, of reality (constituted through the imaginary and the symbolic) and the real that is excluded from reality.

The pervasiveness of the image, but even more so the grip that the image has on us, has never been so manifest and intensified as today. It can be viewed as a clear sign of a modification in the dialectic that determines the relationship between the agency of the imaginary (the ego) and the agencies of the symbolic (the subject of the unconscious and the Other) in which psychoanalysis is grounded: the rise of the image is accompanied by the rise of the ego and the corresponding declines of the subject and the Other, of precisely that function which is constitutive of the formation of the ego. It is then hardly surprising that in the era of the empire of images, which is in fact the empire of the gaze, an era characterised by what Joyce designated as "the ineluctable modality of the visible,"[5] psychoanalysis seems to be strangely out of sync with the zeitgeist. This is hardly surprising insofar as in psychoanalysis, in which the symbolic prevails over the imaginary, "the ineluctable modality" is rather the modality of the sayable rather than that of the visible. But the current powerlessness of psychoanalysis also results from the "weakness of words" themselves. Due to the inconsistency of the Other, words are increasingly becoming vague, floating, and thus ineffective for responding to the deregulation of the speaking bodies. The widespread practice of submitting bodies to what Éric Laurent has termed "surplus excess" or "surplus deficit,"[6] a kind of oscillation between bulimia (as

4 *Ibid.*, p. 102.

5 James Joyce, *Ulysses*, Folio Edition, London 1988, p. 37.

6 Éric Laurent, "The Reverse of the Hysterical Symptom," *lacanian ink*, no. 40, p. 86.

seen in "the exacerbation of sight," with the omnipresence of screens and images) and anorexia (as exemplified in the asceticism of modern art, of which Malevich's white square could be an illustration) is manifest in all forms of human activity.

While the prospect of the non-contemporaneity of psychoanalysis was the focus of much of Lacan's teaching, its present apparent non-contemporaneity has yet to receive sustained attention in psychoanalysis itself. Some of the key elements of a possible response to this question can be found in Lacan's theory of the four discourses. According to that theory, psychoanalysis is not possible if its other side, the master's discourse, is inoperative as it is precisely that discourse which allows the speaking being to attain his/her symbolic existence by being represented by the master signifier. Once the master's discourse is replaced by the capitalist's discourse, the subject is no longer represented by the master signifier, which has marked the subject with an irreducible singularity. Rather, in the capitalist's discourse the subject is pinned down by a swarm of signifiers that, because they are countable, indifferent, and therefore replaceable, erase the subject's singularity. Thus, what characterises the dominant social experience today is the installation of the inexistence of the Other through the combined efforts of the discourses of science and capitalism that strive to foreclose the unconscious by transforming subjects into ones-all-alone. We are now confronted with the tyranny of the surplus jouissance governed by the logic of the market. As testified by the variety of modalities of addictive behaviour proliferating today, contemporary subjects, caught in the autistic, repetitious jouissance of the One (exemplified by bulimia, anorexia, toxicomania, etc.), appear to be incapable of changing the mode of their enjoyment and thus of breaking with their deadly solitude.

If the role of psychoanalysis, as Freud and Lacan conceived it, remains that of guiding the subject through the evolution of the semblants of civilisation to the extent precisely that the mutation of the Other of civilisation leads to a modification of the mode and usages of jouissance, one cannot help but wonder about the curious powerlessness of psychoanalysis in guiding the subjectivity of our time once the latter is enslaved by the power of the image. Could it then be claimed that the main goal of psychoanalysis today is none other than to undo this irrepressible power of the image? In order to address this problem it is therefore necessary to start by taking into account that there is a certain correlation

between the installation of the empire of the image and what Lacan called "the rise to the zenith of the object a."

The object a that is in question here is the object surplus jouissance that implies an approach to the question of jouissance beyond the relation to the Other. Within the new paradigm, the paradigm of the object surplus jouissance, the object a becomes something that can be calculated, evaluated. This also explains why mass-produced objects, a variety of gadgets that have become indispensible in our life, rather than a part of the body, could become a model for the object surplus jouissance. And to the extent that the object surplus jouissance is governed by the logic of the capitalist market, which means that it is considered from the point of its value on the market of jouissance, the object surplus jouissance can only bring about an autistic, asexual jouissance that no longer involves the Other. As a result, the jouissance that such an object brings about is no longer marked by a lack and the demand for love. Rather, jouissance designated as the satisfaction of the drive gives rise only to the demand for more, for *Encore!*, to borrow Lacan's proper term, for Again! to be taken in the sense of "more and always more", outside any relation to the Other. What the installation of the inconsistent Other thus signals is that the object a no longer functions as the cause of the Other's desire destined to fill in the subject's lack of being. Worse, it is the subject's lack of being that seems to be inoperative today: with the mass-production of the object surplus jouissance, the lack of being only appears as a "being-in-excess" with respect to what is wanted. As a consequence, if the subject's lack of being is not articulated to the Other's response, the subject him-/herself turns into an object a of a special kind: waste to be eliminated.

Clearly, the current fascination for the image, in particular for that of one's own body, stems from the dominance of one particular figure of the object a: the gaze, its main function being that of incarnating the point of view attributed by the subject to the Other, the perspective that allows the subject to be "seen in a satisfactory light."[7] In giving rise to a frenetic quest for jouissance, the current fascination for the image cuts the link between words and bodies, thereby rendering contemporary subjectivity particularly unresponsive to the analytic treatment whose main tool remains speech. In the culture of the image, what brings words

7 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI: Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis,* trans. A. Sheridan, Penguin, London 1977, p. 268.

and bodies together, despite their current disjunction, is paradoxically the generalised narcissism. The latter promotes the regulation of the relationship between bodies and words through spectacle, thereby giving rise to the industry of narcissism in a variety of modalities, an industry that thrives on what Laurent designates as "the paradoxes of the uniformizing tyranny of the narcissism of increasingly small differences,"[8] a veritable mass reproduction of narcissised bodies that occupies the vacated place of the Other. For psychoanalysis, in contrast, what brings bodies and words together is the symptom. Defined as a mark of the Other on the body, the symptom manifests itself in the disturbance of the body, indicating thereby the emergence of an always contingently fixated mode of jouissance to which the subject will remain enslaved.

It is no doubt true that psychoanalysis is today no longer the same as it was in Lacan's time, and still less in Freud's time, because the status of the Other has changed to the point that we can even speak of its inexistence. It nevertheless remains the case that the necessity of addressing the question of the regulation of bodies and words via the symptom results today, as in the past, from an impasse, indeed, from what could best be termed the unresponsiveness of the subject of the unconscious to the psychoanalytic treatment. An illuminating example of such interrogation can be found in *Seminar II*, in which the Freudian notion of the ego in psychoanalysis is re-examined. On this reading, the second topography was introduced as a response to what Lacan termed "the 1920 turning point," a time of a "real crisis," because "this new *I*, with whom one was meant to enter into dialogue, after a while refused to answer."[9] However, for psychoanalysis to account for this strange unresponsiveness of the subject of the unconscious to the analytic treatment, this amounts to taking into account the effect that the analytic discourse itself has on the discourse of the unconscious. And conversely, the neglecting of the effects of the analytic discourse on the unconscious, as Lacan clearly notes, "necessarily leads to a new crystallization of unconscious effects that renders the latter discourse more opaque."[10] Paradoxically, it is because of the impact of the analytic discourse on the

8 Laurent, "The Reverse of the Hysterical Symptom," p. 87.

9 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, trans. S. Tomaselli, W. W. Norton, New York, London 1991, p. 10.

10 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VIII: Transference*, trans. B. Fink, Polity, Cambridge 2015, p. 334.

discourse of the unconscious that the unconscious closes again and the analytic treatment "no longer has the same effects as it did before." Worse, "these effects make the subject beat a retreat; they immunize or inoculate him with respect to a certain discourse. They impede us from leading the subject [...] to his desire."[11]

Following Lacan, it could then be argued that the issue of the ego is put on the agenda of psychoanalysis whenever analysands appear to be immune to the cure, which is to say, whenever the effects of speech in analysis wear off. As a consequence, this inevitably ends up in confusing the subject of the unconscious with the individual, while the task of psychoanalysis is rather to "wipe away the subjective from this subject."[12] Taking up the Freudian notion of the ego, designated as an organ outside of the body, yet invested with libido, Lacan – for whom the function of the ego is to ensure the consistency of the speaking being – recognises in the Freudian notion of the ego the matrix of the mirror stage. Ultimately, as Lacan would state later, if there is something that puts into relief the fact that "the relation of man, or what goes under this name, to his body is imaginary, it is the importance taken on by his image."[13] Lacan could then conclude that, to the extent that the longed-for unity of the ego comes from the image of the body, "the body is what is most imaginary."[14] This also explains why the speaking being remains enslaved to the (narcissised, libidinised) image. Once "the body enters the economy of jouissance through the image of the body,"[15] as Lacan insists, the body of the mirror stage would remain the matrix of the ego. And Lacan could thus claim that the ego is the idea of oneself as a body: "The idea of the self, the idea of the body, carries weight. This is what is called *the Ego*."[16]

Yet what is at stake in the mirror stage is not simply that the nullity that the subject appears to be at this stage cannot see him-/herself anywhere except, as

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11 *Ibid*.

12 Jacques, Lacan, "Proposition of 9 October 1967 of the Psychoanalyst of the School", *Analysis*, no. 6, p. 4.

13 Jacques Lacan, "La troisième," *La cause freudienne*, no. 79, p. 22.

14 Jacques Lacan, "Conférences et entretiens dans des universités nord-américaines," *Scilicet*, nos. 6–7, p. 54.

15 Lacan, "La troisième," p. 22.

16 Jacques Lacan, *The Sinthome, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XXIII*, Polity, Cambridge 2016, p. 129.

Lacan clearly points out, in seeing "his form materialised, whole, the mirage of himself, outside of himself"[17] as an image in the mirror, that is to say, an other. Lacan's point is, rather, that to attain some kind of consistency, to see him-/herself as something, the intervention of the Other is necessary as the purely specular image cannot ensure the unity of the ego. On the other hand, however, it is "on the basis of the Other's gaze" that the ego "presents itself and sustains itself qua problematic."[18] Confronted with his/her mirror image, the subject turns to the Other in order to receive from him/her "some sort of agreement or attesting," as Lacan notes. However, all that comes from this Other is a splitting of that very image insofar as it is "both desirable and destructive."[19] And it is due to a split that occurs at the level of the Other that the ego finds itself divided: desired or not by the Other.

This splitting is particularly relevant when in comes to dealing with one's fellowman, the small other, because one's mirror image is precisely what leads one to hate one's fellowman. Thus, "when faced with what is both himself and another," the subject seems to have no other solution than an either/or: "Either he has to tolerate the other as an unbearable image that steals him from himself, or he must immediately break him, knock him over, or annul the position across from him, in order to preserve what is at that moment the center and drive of his being."[20] It is precisely because, in the mirror, "I see myself as another," endowed with the longed-for completion, that the possibility of either self-fracturing or squashing the small other, Lacan notes, is always open to the subject: "he cannot see one of his counterparts without thinking that this counterpart is taking his place, and so, naturally, he loathes him."[21] At the same time, the very fact that the specular relationship is structured by the paranoid logic, indicates that for the mirror image to constitute the object with which the subject identifies in the scopic field, an object eternalised insofar as it transcends all movements and change, there must be room for a non-specular, non-reciprocal relation in which the Other occupies a position of "the third party" between the ego and the other. Because the image the subject sees in the mirror is "lacking in

17 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique,* trans. J. Forrester, Norton, London & New York 1988, p. 140.

18 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VIII: Transference,* p. 354.

19 *Ibid.,* p. 353.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 352.

21 Lacan, "La troisième," p. 22.

consistency, incomplete,"[22] Lacan insists, it follows that no truly effective imaginary regulation can be set up without the intervention of the symbolic relation that determines "the position of the subject as seeing."[23] The guiding instance that allows the subject to determine his/her position in the imaginary can only be situated at a transcendent point, beyond the imaginary, outside the specular relationship, i.e., as the place of the ego-ideal. Thus, for the gaze of the Other to be internalised, the unary trait is enough to the extent precisely that the unary trait stands for the capital I and is as such considered as a "sign of the Other's assent."[24] Strictly speaking, the identification via the unary trait is not specular; it is rather its support inasmuch as "it supports the perspective chosen by the subject in the field of the Other, from which specular identification may be seen in a satisfactory light."[25]

Considered from the point of view of the mirror stage, narcissism could then be viewed as an attempt to regulate the gaze. Inasmuch as the mirror image allows the speaking being to "give himself some measure of consistency," it involves a libidinal as well as a defensive aim as it prevents the fusion that threatens the subject with dissolution. As the subject today remains in thrall to his/her image, it could be argued that the pre-eminence of the image of one's own body is reaffirmed in what is called a "culture of narcissism". But the question then becomes: to what extent does contemporary narcissism succeed in regulating the gaze if to attain jouissance by the ceaseless projection of the self-image necessarily involves the supposition of the gaze of the Other? Indeed, the dependence of the image returned from the Other is one of the essential traits of the ego of our time. Paradoxically, it is the exaltation of the image of the ego, a kind of "imaginary bulimia," that prevents the subject from separating him/-herself from the gaze of the Other. From this perspective, the exaltation of the image of the ego could then be seen as a sign of the weakness of one's own ego: in his/her attempt to satisfy the demands of an ideal Other that the social imaginary conveys, the contemporary subject is forced to "succeed" and enjoy in order to satisfy the greediness of the economic machine that instrumentalises the gaze

[22] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI: Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 267.

[23] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique*, p. 140.

[24] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VIII: Transference*, p. 355.

[25] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI: Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 268.

of the Other. The price to be paid for the ego's unstoppable quest for jouissance is therefore a desperate quest for the approval to be found in the Other's gaze, a quest that as such indicates the inability of the contemporary subject to control the excess of the gaze.

Regarding psychoanalysis, it is important to note that the rise of the object a to a social zenith implies the social reinforcement of this attachment of the subject to his/her image exactly to the extent that the symbolic order is inoperative. But this is precisely why contemporary narcissism could also be considered, from a different perspective certainly, as both a problem but also as a solution, as a sinthomatic solution, to be precise, a solution that each subject has to find out for him-/herself in order to counteract the failure of the symbolic Other to regulate jouissance. Thus, the ego, in contemporary narcissism, is not to be confused with the ego of the mirror stage. The ego of contemporary narcissism, as elaborated in Lacan's *Seminar XXIII*, relates namely to the subject's speaking position as an attempt to make up for the deficiency of the Name-of-the-Father, that agency whose principle function is to regulate jouissance. The case of Joyce is particularly instructive in this respect. The topology of knots allows Lacan to reintroduce the ego as the imaginary function in the Borromean knot as a suppletory device equivalent to the sinthomatic supplementation. As a result, the function of the ego radically changes: from being a veil of castration and of the subject's desire, to a supplement to the paternal lack. The new, "Joycean ego" thus takes up the function of a fourth ring to repair the Borromean knot as it is only through such a sinthomatic knotting provided by the ego that the imaginary (of the body's image), the symbolic (of the signifying inscription in the field of the Other), and the real (of the subject's singular mode of enjoyment) hold together.

Under the current dominance of the gaze and the resulting prevalence of the image, insofar as it is contaminated with jouissance, the new ego is no longer representable by the signifier. This is because the function of the image of the body is essentially articulated to some fundamental absence or lack situated either on the side of the subject (the lack of unity or the lack of being of the subject of the signifier), or on the side of the Other, whose principle function is to provide a guarantee of consistency in the imaginary and symbolic realms by regulating jouissance, the drive satisfaction, belonging to the realm of the real. The function of the image of the body, insofar as it is linked to some

fundamental lack, is therefore to fill it in or to cover it up. The speaking being in the era of the empire of images remains therefore submitted to his/her image, yet its function has changed: confronted with the lack in the Other and, consequently, its inability to regulate jouissance, the image of the body becomes the site of an utmost narcissistic jouissance. Hence, it is through images that the speaking being nowadays strives, paradoxically, to contain the excess of the jouissance that inundates the body and, in so doing, to cover up the lack in the Other. It is clear, however, that Lacan's highlighting of the function of the gaze implies that not all of the image is reducible to the mirror image of the body-one. As Lacan already points out in *Seminar X,* the imaginary function of the body image may well result from its being libidinised, but "[n]ot all of the libidinal investment passes by way of the specular image. There's a remainder."[26]

But to clarify this point it is necessary to bring into play the distinction between two incompatible bodies. On the one hand, there is the body of the mirror stage, i.e. the body reduced to its image, that is to say, to a "good" form, that provides the longed-for completion. On the other hand, however, there is the libidinal body, i.e., the body of drives that in some sense consists only of erogenous zones, the body that is in some radical sense formless. To account for this distinction, it is essential to bring into focus the ways in which the signifier and the drive affect the body. While the signifier cadaverises the body by cutting up its jouissance into parts that Lacan terms objects a that have a parasitical relation to the body as they appear to be shared by the subject and the Other, the drives in contrast turn the body into their battleground, an organism with indefinable limits. That the libidinal body should be considered as an organism, as Lacan suggests, rather than as a body, this is then due to the drives that take "the organism's being to its true limit, which goes further than the body's limit."[27] What the libidinal body, the body of drives, thus interrogates is the body as One, the evidence of its corporeal individuality, the evidence of the unity of the body.

At the same time, the change in the way in which the image of the ego is rendered operational in the current culture of narcissism calls attention to the sta-

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[26] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book X: Anxiety,* trans. A. R. Price, Polity, Cambridge 2014, p. 38.

[27] Jacques Lacan, "Position of the Unconscious," *Écrits*, trans. B. Fink, Norton & Company, New York & London 2006, p. 719.

tus of that object a that is structurally correlated to the image: the gaze. Defined as (an always failed) attempt to inscribe the drive in the scopic field, the gaze can only appear in the visible field due to some surplus jouissance contained in the perceptual image. As a libidinal object that cannot be seen in the mirror, as a kind of invisible *agalma*, the gaze could best be designated as a material incarnation of the object a. There is a clear distinction, namely, between the object a considered as a part of the body (the breast, the faeces, the phallus, the voice, and the gaze), and the object a considered as a logical function. Taking the libidinally invested parts of the body as a model for the object a, the function of these "natural" objects in their variety and multiplicity would seem to be to fill, with their "stuff", their substance, the emptiness of the subject, the subject being the lack of being. Considered, however, as a logical function, the object a is nothing but a semblant of being that does not exist; in fact, the object a, as defined by Lacan in *Seminar XI*, is nothing but a hole, a void, around which the drive circles.

The gaze can thus emerge as a perfect model for the object a, since, being a hole, the gaze itself, rather than being identified with the mirror, is precisely what cannot be captured in the mirror: by being extracted from the picture, the gaze constitutes the invisible frame or, rather, to use Lacan's own term, the "window onto the real,"[28] in order for something in the scopic field, the perceptual reality, to become visible. The end of an analysis would then mark a moment of seeing the window as such a frame in order to recognize oneself to be subject to the drive. In rendering visible the invisible frame the end of analysis would allow the analysand to situate him-/herself at the level of the object a, the hole around which the drive, this *acephalic*, headless agency, circles, while drawing an unaccounted for jouissance from this repetitive circling around a hole in a perpetual failure.

In the new regime of the gaze, it is precisely this extraction of the gaze as the object a enabling the re-installation of the "window onto the real" that has become problematic. As a result, the subject is left defenceless against the invasion of the surplus jouissance. It then follows that for the contemporary subject, the only way for him/her to regulate the invading jouissance is to "resurrect" the

[28] Lacan, "Proposition of 9 October 1967 of the Psychoanalyst of the School", p. 9.

gaze of the Other.[29] This perspective indicates what is at stake in psychoanalysis today, i.e. in the era of the one-all-alone: to lead analysands, one by one, to find the particular way to exit from the trap of narcissism and, thus, to break with the deadly solitude by establishing an impossible link with the Other, albeit only as fiction. The main difficulty today consists precisely in making possible the "resurrection" of the figure of the (inexistent) Other that would then allow the subject to wrench him-/herself from the repetitious, autoerotic jouissance of the One, that repeats his/her mode of jouissance *ad infinitum*, without any variation or change, and in so doing, allow for the emergence or rather creation of something new.

Thus, for psychoanalysis the taking into account of the profound transformation of the function of the ego today, i.e, in the era of the inexistent Other, inevitably raises the question of that leverage which makes psychoanalysis possible, that is to say, the question of transference. It is certainly not enough to simply stubbornly insist on its necessity for transference to remain the condition for the possibility of psychoanalysis. What is needed instead is a re-examination of the working of transference in analysis in the context of the current "culture of narcissism" and the effects obtained through its handling that would enable the modification of the jouissance of the subject.

Knowledge between love and jouissance

Lacan sets out to re-examine transference in his *Seminar VIII* in order to be able to write, as he puts it, "a new chapter on analytic action."[30] The question Lacan raises in this seminar is that of the analyst's place in transference, in particular as the analytic relationship itself is based on a misunderstanding since, as Lacan insists, there is no overlap between the place where the analysand situates the analyst and the place where the analyst must be "in order to suitably respond to him."[31] There is then an issue here, which is the unclarity over the

[29] While for Freud only virtue or modesty is able to preserve the Other's gaze, for Lacan, what brings the judging Other to life, as J.-A. Miller clearly points out, is "the Other's gaze as the bearer of shame." Jacques-Alain Miller, "On Shame," *Reflections on Seminar XVII. Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis,* J. Clemens and R. Grigg (eds.), Sic 6, Duke University Press, Durham and London 2006, p. 15.

[30] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VIII: Transference,* p. 334.

[31] *Ibid.,* p. 329.

analyst's function in the cure. If Lacan never stops interrogating the concept of transference, this is because the question of transference is not only a theoretical one, but also a technical one, that of its handling in the cure. It should be noted that, for Lacan, transference is to be considered as that which "directs the way in which patients are treated," since, Lacan continues, "the way in which [the analysands] are treated governs the concept." [32] This is why transference could be considered as a compass that signals not only the analyst's orientation, but also his/her blundering.

Setting out from Freud's contention according to which "[t]transference, which seems ordained to be the greatest obstacle to psychoanalysis, becomes its most powerful ally,"[33] Lacan goes on to show in what way the position of the analyst is decisive in how transference is handled. For Lacan, it is clear that this handling of transference does not consist in appealing "to some healthy part of the subject thought to be there in the real,"[34] as the ego is "precisely this part that is concerned in transference, [...] this part that closes the door."[35] As a consequence of this confusing of the subject of the unconscious, the symbolic function, with the ego, the imaginary function, the main question for the post-Freudian orientation in psychoanalysis became the question of the ego-ideal. For Lacan, in contrast, the clarification of the role of the ego-ideal in transference has particular bearing upon the possibility of the subject to exit from the narcissistic sphere, or, in Lacan's words, "to leave behind his narcissistic self-envelopment"[36]. The ego-ideal is for Lacan "the pivotal point of the kind of identification whose impact is fundamental in the production of transference,"[37] on the condition that psychoanalysis sets out from the Freudian distinction between the *Ichideal* and the *Idealich*, which allows the analyst "to make sense of what happens in analysis on the imaginary plane, which we call transference."[38]

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32 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI: Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 124.

33 Sigmund Freud, "A Fragment of a Case of Hysteria", SE VII, p. 117.

34 Lacan, "Proposition of 9 October 1967 on the Psychoanalyst of the School," p. 9.

35 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI: Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 131.

36 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VIII: Transference*, p. 348.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 346.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 141.

For there is a theoretical point here that is worth highlighting for discussion. Insofar as transference presents itself as a paradox – on the one hand, its emergence is a necessary condition for interpretation, and on the other, transference, as love, being always narcissistic, which means deceptive, inasmuch as the analysand expects to receive love in return for his/her love for the analyst, closes the door to the unconscious – it remains the site of a "permanent conceptual crisis [...] in analysis,"[39] a crisis that puts into question the very possibility of psychoanalysis. While Lacan himself may well designate the "initial infatuation" that inevitably emerges at the beginning of the treatment as "a pivotal role in the transference,"[40] this love-transference is nevertheless situated at the level of the imaginary. Thus, transference is viewed as love because it starts as a "narcissistic relation by which the subject becomes an object worthy of love. From his reference to him who must love him, he tries to induce the Other into a mirage relation in which he convinces him of being worthy of love."[41] Indeed, the function of this love is "[n]othing but to fill the emptiness of this standstill with a lure. But [...] this lure serves a purpose by setting the whole process in motion anew."[42] Hence, what is at stake, for Lacan, especially in *Seminar VIII*, in which he develops at length the issue of love, is to establish what place love has in the analytic treatment. While transference love is "triggered off almost automatically in the analysand/analyst relation," and moreover, "arises, one can say *even before* the analysis has started,"[43] but precisely as such, transference serves a very specific purpose: it is "constructed so as to give you the very image of your desire."[44]

In *Seminar VIII* Lacan takes a very important step in developing a radically different logic for love in psychoanalysis – a logic that interrogates the relationship between love and knowledge on the basis of transference. To include the function of knowledge means that it does not suffice to posit the state of being in love from the point of narcissistic satisfaction: "I only love you in order to

39 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI: Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 131.

40 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique*, p. 282.

41 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI: Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 276.

42 Jacques Lacan, "Presentation of Transference," *Écrits*, p. 184.

43 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique*, p. 142.

44 *Ibid.*

see myself as I love myself," but rather, "I love you for something that is in you, which is what I lack." Hence, for the subject to embody the Other for somebody else – this is one of the main theses in *Seminar VIII* – he/she must have what the subject has lost, a precious object, *agalma*, the object that the one in love always tries to re-find in the Other. It is this precious object that, according to the Lacan of *Seminar VIII*, is the cause of the love that one has for the Other: it is because the Other has what the subject has lost that his/her image acquires a consistency that the subject feels he/she lacks.

It is worth noting that in *Seminar VIII* Lacan situates this agalmatic object at the level of being. To the extent that the subject can come into being only by entering the field of the Other, i.e. by being represented by a signifier for another signifier, which is why the subject lacks being, s/he can regain some of his/her being through the object a, which will give him/her, in the imaginary register, the consistency that s/he lacks in the symbolic. The subject will therefore love the one who seems to hold the truth of his/her desire, of his/her being. This also explains why Lacan, at least from *Seminar VIII* onwards, insists on the link between love and knowledge, which is crucial to Lacan's reading of Socrates' position in Plato's *Symposium*. In his commentary on the miracle of love presented in *Symposium* – a miracle that consists in a kind of reciprocity: the *erómenos,* the beloved, in turn starts to love the *erastés* – Lacan elaborates on what he called "metaphor of love".

In the situation of love, the *erastés*, the lover or the one who loves, is at the same time the one who is lacking something, without knowing exactly what this something is, while the *erómenos*, the beloved, does not know what s/he has that makes him/her attractive to the lover any more than the lover knows what s/he lacks. Setting out from this happy encounter of two kinds of not-knowing, Lacan defines the metaphor of love as the substitution of one for the other: "It is insofar as the function of *erastés* or the person who loves, as a lacking subject, comes to take the place of, or is substituted for, the function of *erómenos*, the loved object, that the signification of love is produced."[45] This miraculous transformation, whereby the subject passes from being loved to loving, from desired object to desiring subject, is only possible because reciprocated love, "love as a response," as Lacan claims, "implies the domain of not having."

[45] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VIII: Transference,* p. 40.

Hence, "one cannot love without presenting oneself as if one does not have, even if one does."[46]

Now, this reciprocity of love is exactly what Socrates refuses. Thus, in his attempt to seduce Socrates, Lacan notes, Alcibiades wanted to "make him into someone instrumental and subordinate to what? To the object of Alcibiades' desire – ágalma, the good object."[47] In so doing, Alcibiades succeeds in rendering visible what Lacan calls "the central articulation of the transference."[48] The main point to recognise is that, for Alcibiades, "Socrates is nothing but the envelope in which the object of desire is found." But Alcibiades can only show that Socrates is "nothing but this envelope" by showing that "Socrates is desire's serf [...] enslaved to Alcibiades by his desire."[49] For what Alcibiades demands from Socrates is proof; he wants to see "Socrates' desire manifest itself in a sign, in order to know that the other – the object, ágalma, was at his mercy."[50] What Alcibiades clearly spells out, or, rather, the lesson an analyst should draw from Alcibiades' "coming out" is not simply that in transference love the ultimate aim is to obtain the agalma, i.e. exactly what Alcibiades believes "Socrates is the ungrateful container of."[51] In humiliating himself Alcibiades rather reveals what Lacan calls "the most shocking secret," namely, that "the ultimate mainspring of desire, which in love relations must always be more or less dissimulated, [...] is the fall of the Other, A, into the other, *a*."[52]

Several controversial corollaries follow from this stance. One of the lessons to be drawn from Lacan's reading of *Symposium* is that, for the object of desire to be overvalued, as it is, the Other, Socrates, who incarnates it, as can be seen in the case of Alcibiades, must be lowered to the level of object, what Lacan designates as "the fall of the Other, A, into the other, *a*". We have here the first formulation of the mutilation of the Other involved in desire as a mainspring of love that brings to the fore a hidden link between love and desire, which was elaborated in more detail in *Seminar XI:* "*I love you, but, because inexplicably I love in you*

46 *Ibid.*, p. 357.
47 *Ibid.*, p. 176.
48 *Ibid.*, pp. 699–700.
49 *Ibid.*, p. 176.
50 *Ibid.*
51 Lacan, "Proposition of 9 October 1967 on the Psychoanalyst of the School," p. 7.
52 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VIII: Transference*, p. 176.

something more than you – the objet petit a *– I mutilate you.*"[53] Without going to the extremes of desire, taken in its pure state, which is to say, desire that "culminates in the sacrifice, strictly speaking, of everything that is the object of love in one's human tenderness,"[54] Lacan nevertheless indicates here, *avant la lattre* so to speak, that due to the impossibility of the sexual relation, speaking beings, inasmuch as they are speaking, are subject to the phallic jouissance, which is universally valid regardless of their sex, a jouissance that prevents them from relating to the Other as such. Thus, instead of enjoying the body of the Other, they can only enjoy it in the guise of a part of it, the object a.[55]

On the other hand, however, it is exactly because Socrates refuses the reciprocity of love and in so doing proves that he is truly the one "who is knowledgeable in matters of love," more precisely, in the emergence of transference love, that Lacan recognises in him "the precursor of psychoanalysis." Indeed, "who knows better than Socrates," asks Lacan, "that he holds only the meaning he engenders in retaining this nothing, which enables him to refer Alcibiades to the actual addressee of his discourse, Agathon (as if by chance)."[56] Following Lacan's description according to which "what is at stake in an analysis is nothing other than bringing to light manifestations of the subject's desire,"[57] Socrates is a true precursor of the analyst for revealing to Alcibiades the ultimate paradox of the subject's desire, as Lacan puts the words in Socrates' mouth: "Everything you [Alcibiades] just did, and Lord knows it isn't obvious, was for Agathon's sake. Your desire is more secret still than all the unveiling you have just given yourself over to. It now aims at yet another. And I will designate that other – it is Agathon."[58]

We are dealing here with what could be called Socrates' *Versagung*, which essentially consists in leaving "empty the place he is called upon [by Alcibiades]

53 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI: Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis,* p. 268.

54 *Ibid.,* p. 275.

55 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XX: Encore,* trans. B. Fink, W. W. Norton & Company, New York 1998, p. 15.

56 Lacan, "Proposition of 9 October 1967 on the Psychoanalyst of the School," p. 7.

57 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VIII: Transference,* p. 238.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 177.

to occupy."[59] If Socrates' desire consists in leading "his interlocutors to *gnóthi seautón* (know thyself)," which is to say, to guide them on the path of desire, defined as the Other's desire, which implies that, for Socrates, too, as Lacan emphasises it, his desire is "unbeknown to him". But despite this Socrates can guide his interlocutor on the path of desire because he "makes himself into its [desire's] accomplice." In so doing, albeit "unbeknown to him," Socrates takes the place of the analyst at the tipping point at which Alcibiades' love for Socrates, who is knowledgeable in nothing except "in matters of love," should take a different path, that of an inquiry into his true desire. More exactly: "[t]o the extent to which Socrates does not know what he himself desires – it being the Other's desire – Alcibiades is possessed by what? By a love about which one can say that Socrates' only merit is to designate it as transference love, and to redirect him to his true desire."[60]

Here Lacan presents a second metaphor, different from the miracle of love: instead of the substitution of *erastes* by *eromenos*, we are dealing here with the substitution of the lack, the division of the subject, by the agalma. By refusing the reciprocity of love, by holding firmly to his own desire, his lack, Socrates becomes all the more agalmatic. For Lacan, this substitution of his division by the agalmatic object, is what transference is about, at least if we consider it from the side of love, and at this moment of his teaching. But it is precisely by emphasising the analyst's refusal of the reciprocity of love, a refusal that makes the analyst agalmatic, that Lacan opens a wholly different perspective on transference: that of the analyst's desire. In keeping the gap open between the ego-ideal and the object a, Lacan provides us, in the final part of *Seminar VIII*, with the first formulation of what he calls an "absolute point", which will be developed in *Seminar XI* in terms of the desire of the analyst, and which is in *Seminar VIII* modelled on Socrates' *atopia*. Just like the analyst's, Socrates' proper place is "that of pure desiriousness."[61] If Socrates is a precursor of the analyst, as Lacan claims, then the task for psychoanalysis is to conceptualise how a subject can "occupy the place of pure desiriousness – in other words, abstract or subtract himself, in the relationship to the other, from any supposition

59 *Ibid*., p. 368.
60 *Ibid*., p. 179.
61 *Ibid*., p. 368.

of being desirable."[62] Indeed, to support "the pure place of the subject qua desiring," the subject of desire, as Lacan goes on, "can say nothing about himself without abolishing himself as desiring."[63]

In a way, we are dealing here with an elaboration at two levels: at the level of the analysand in analysis and at the level of the analyst's response. On the one hand, the analysand elaborates knowledge of what s/he is as a subject, i.e. the subject of the unconscious as an effect of the signifier, namely, pure lack, pure loss, and which therefore cannot be hooked onto the signifier. Then, on the other hand, there is a theoretical subsumption of clinical experience: there is a lack in the Other, which is why the Other cannot, by definition, respond to the lack of the subject. Thus, whereas the analyst incarnates the barred Other, we have, on the side of the analysand, castration. At this precise point Lacan brings together what is at stake at the end of analysis and in the analyst's desire.

While (transference) love is no doubt an inevitable consequence of the analytic setting and, as such, a condition of the possibility of the cure, it can also disrupt an analysis if it is not elaborated logically. That is because, as a specular mirage, love, according to Freud and Lacan, is essentially deception because it is situated at the level of "that sole signifier necessary to introduce a perspective centered on the Ideal point, capital I, placed somewhere in the Other, from which the Other sees me, in the form I like to be seen."[64] Due to the presence of the subject that is supposed to hold the truth of his/her being, the analytic situation inevitably triggers transference love in the analysand: the latter loves his/her analyst because the analyst is supposed to hold something the analysand lacks, which is why it causes his/her desire. In the analytic setting, this desire takes the form of a desire articulated with the lack-of-being. The analysand wants to know something about him-/herself that will make him/her whole. The logic of transference love therefore needs to be elaborated so that the goal of analysis can now be stated as allowing the subject to reconcile him/-herself with the singularity of his/her subjective position. The focus of that effort, however, is to shift the analysand from identification with the ego ideal to the position of the

62 *Ibid.*, p. 369.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 370.

64 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI: Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 268.

subject of desire via identification with the object a. By refusing to give any indication as to his/her desire, the analyst leads the analysand to take up the path of the logic of the signifier in order to face what s/he is as the object of desire, that, namely,

> before which the subject sees himself being abolished when he realizes himself as desire. In order for the subject to accede to this point beyond the reduction of the ideals of the person, it is as desire's object *a*, as what he was to the Other in his erection as a living being, as *wanted* or *unwanted* when he came into the world, that he is called to be reborn in order to know if he wants what he desires.[65]

One can see here one of the first attempts to articulate the dialectics of alienation and separation: insofar as the subject, by being represented by the signifier, disappears in it, or, to be even more precise, is "erased" in his/her being and thus reduced to silence, unable to say anything about him-/herself, unable to designate him-/herself by a signifier that would be proper to him/her, it is precisely at this point that the subject confronting his/her "namelessness as a subject"[66] is encouraged to recognise him-/herself in the object a, the desire's object-cause.

The essential moment that, according to Lacan, is of particular relevance to the question of the analyst's ability to handle transference is the moment in which Socrates, by claiming "to know anything, except on the subject of Eros, that is to say, desire," sets up "the place of transference." There is transference, Lacan claims, as soon as "the subject who is supposed to know exists somewhere."[67] Yet in Socrates' case as well as that of the analyst, this supposition of knowledge is only operational, effective, if it incarnates what Lacan calls "an absolute point with no knowledge."[68] If Lacan insists on the absence of knowledge, this is precisely because there is no knowledge prior to the emergence of transference.

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65 Lacan, "Remarks on Daniel Lagache's Presentation: 'Psychoanalysis and Personality Structure'", *Écrits*, p. 571.

66 See Jacques-Alain Miller, "Presentation of Book VI of the Seminar of Jacques Lacan", www.lacan/actuality/presentation-of-book-vi-of-the-seminar-of-jacques-lacan/. I am indebted to Cindy Zeiher for drawing my attention to this text.

67 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI: Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 232.

68 *Ibid*., p. 253.

And, indeed, Lacan claims, "of the supposed knowledge, he [the analyst] knows nothing."[69] What is emphasised instead in the supposed knowledge attributed to the analyst is the structural function that the analyst has to assume, namely, to incarnate a point of non-knowledge in order to arouse in the analysand a desire for knowledge.

Taking the position of Socrates as a model for the analyst, the presence of the analyst should be considered from two radically different perspectives: transference love begins once the analysand falls prey to the illusion that the analyst is already in possession of the truth of his/her being, of his/her unconscious desire. That is why the analysand, like Alcibiades, strives to arouse the analyst's love in order to make him/her yield the longed-for knowledge that s/he lacks. By refusing to yield to the analysand the precious object, the agalma, that the analyst is supposed to incarnate, the presence of the analyst is a negative presence as it manifests itself in the analyst's restraint as a means to awaken in the analysand a desire for knowledge. Viewed from this perspective, the knowledge of the analyst as the supposed subject of knowledge is not to be confused with ignorance. It should be taken instead as an effort to keep knowledge in abeyance. What is crucial at this point is Lacan's distinction between referential knowledge, the linking of a sign to its referent, and textual knowledge, a knowledge that can be produced by following the logic of the signifier.[70] The subject thus becomes the signifier only by supposing the presence of the subject of knowledge. In slightly different terms, it is by following the logic of the signifier that we see "isolated [...] the pure aspect of the subject as free relation to the signifier, the one from which the desire for knowledge as desire of the Other can be isolated."[71]

We can see here how the so-called algorithm of transference that introduces the supposed subject of knowledge captures the paradoxical aspect of the onset of the transference formerly implied by the metaphor of love. The key factor is the analysand's willingness to impute knowledge about him-/herself that s/he lacks to the analyst. However, if the supposition of knowledge is equivalent to the agalma, the side of the signifier involved in knowledge, what Lacan termed

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69 Lacan, "Proposition of 9 October 1967 on the Psychoanalyst of the School," p. 7.

70 *Ibid.*

71 *Ibid.*

"textual knowledge", is, by contrast, the reverse of love. What makes the replacement of the metaphor of love with the algorithm of transference possible is the assumption according to which the algorithm is nothing but the application of the definition of the signifier according to which the signifier represents the subject for another signifier. Seen from this perspective, then, transference is not to be seen as a relation between subjects, it should instead be viewed as a relation between signifiers as the subject of the unconscious itself is nothing but an effect of the signifier. There are two signifiers involved in transference: the first signifier, S_1, also called the signifier of transference, is enigmatic insofar as it is all alone. Such an isolated signifier, cut off from the signifying chain, is constitutive of the analytic symptom insofar as it is based on the assumption that "it means something," which is why it is addressed to the supposed subject of knowledge, the analyst. But this also explains why the analyst has to be situated in the place of "any signifier,"[72] as Lacan calls it. In being implicated with the indifferent signifier, the enigmatic signifier emerges as a demand for knowledge, and it is this demand that brings about the supposed subject of knowledge. The "indifferent signifier", which is, strictly speaking, whatever is obviously not the knowledge that would solve the enigma addressed to it. Rather, insofar as it is incarnated by the analyst, the indifferent signifier is a stand-in for a mute, unresponsive corporeal presence as a site of jouissance, a presence that does not respond to the demand for knowledge.

The necessity of situating the analyst as a mute presence sheds light on the shift that has been taking place in the handling of transference: from the relation between knowledge and love, constitutive of the Freudian transference, to the relation between knowledge and jouissance that designates the novelty of the Lacanian elaboration of transference. As exemplified by the position of Socrates, the emergence of a desire for knowledge implies a certain restraint, a holding back on the part of the analyst that allows the production of the agalma as the cause of a desire to know. However, when the relation of knowledge and jouissance is at stake in transference the position of the analyst changes. This is because jouissance, insofar as it involves a living body, requires presence in the process of handling transference, one could even say a positivated presence. This shift in the conception of the analyst's position from a negative to a positive presence is already announced in *Seminar XI* with transference designated

[72] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

as "the enactment of the reality of the unconscious,"[73] thus allowing Lacan to separate transference from repetition. With the distinction between two modalities of repetition, *automaton* and *tyche*, the latter being the repeatedly missed encounter with the real, the focus of the new conception of transference becomes the impossible encounter with the real insofar as the real is an "impossible to say". The handling of transference would then consist in circumscribing the "impossible to say" as the very core of what is said.

The new version of the handling of transference already announces a new figure of the subject: instead of the subject of the signifier, the subject as a lack of being, impossible to pin down by one signifier, elusive and therefore changed each time it is represented by different signifiers, we now have what Lacan termed a "*parlêtre*", a speaking-being, a being of speech, or, even better, a speaking body. The emphasis shifts from the effect of the signifier to presence and substance as jouissance can only be experienced in the body. In bringing together knowledge and jouissance, the focus in the handling of transference now moves towards the corporeal presence as a stand-in for what is unsayable: that dimension of the speaking being that belongs to the body as real. The unsayable presence in the speaking being, for being unrepresentable by the signifier, can therefore be presentified by one of the four instances of the object a: the gaze, the voice, the breast, or the faeces. Hence, we are dealing here with the presentification of the speaking being via the materiality of the object instead of the representation of the subject of the unconscious via the signifier. In the new modality of handling transference, the goal is to isolate what is unsayable for the subject that can therefore take on the status of the object. Upon confronting that dimension of the speaking being that can only be designated as a mute, corporeal presence, the site of jouissance, the subject supposed of knowledge becomes inoperative, ineffective, precisely because knowledge itself comes up against an unsurpassable limit. This unsayable dimension of the speaking being can therefore only be presentified by the analyst's mute presence. Hence, what the analyst lends his/her body to is precisely this dimension of jouissance as a mute staging of the drive, a dimension that remains irreducible to the signifier, which can nevertheless be circumscribed in the handling of transference.

[73] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI: Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 146.

Hence, the analyst takes upon him-/herself the task of presentifying this "impossible to say". Beyond transference love, which, being love, is like any love deceptive and thus a misrecognition of this real, there is the analyst's desire that, by refusing the analysand's demand for love, guides the analysand to what is the true kernel of the demand for love, the object a around which the drive circulates. The end of analysis, seen from this new conception of transference, would then be designated as the separation from the object rather than identification with the analyst as the incarnation of the ego-ideal.

Transference love vs. the analyst's desire

The very fact that Lacan speaks of the handling of transference signals that transference during analysis and transference at the end of analysis is not the same thing. Which is why the thorny question for Lacan is none other than: What is it the analyst is supposed to know? Despite the fact that, as the subject supposed to know actually knows nothing about the analysand, the analyst should nevertheless know, having gone through actual experience, "what it is all *about*," that is to say, "*he* must know," as Lacan vehemently emphasises, "what it is around which [...] the process through which he guides his patient [...] turns."[74] In short, what the analyst is expected to know, according to Lacan, is that "transference is unthinkable unless one sets out from the subject who is supposed to know,"[75] but the analyst is also expected to know that this supposed knowledge is in itself the transference effect, the effect of love. The analyst, insofar as s/he assumes the responsibility to guide the analysand through analysis, is confronted with a particular difficulty, namely: "[i]n so far as the analyst is supposed to know, he is also supposed to set out in search of unconscious desire."[76] But to attain this goal, the analyst has to set in motion, render operational, the only weapon at his/her disposal: the desire of the analyst, which can only be articulated in the "relation of desire to desire," a relation which is itself based on the assumption that the speaking being's desire, precisely for being a being of speech, is the desire of the Other.

74 *Ibid.*, p. 230.
75 *Ibid.*, p. 253.
76 *Ibid.*, p. 235.

In *Seminar VII* Lacan broaches the question of the analyst's desire via the price to be paid by the analyst. Thus, for Lacan, "an analyst has to pay something if he is to play his role. He pays in words, in his interpretations. He pays with his person to the extent that through the transference he is literally dispossessed."[77] Just like Socrates, who makes himself into the accomplice of his interlocutor's desire that remains unbeknown to him, the analyst, too, has to pay "with a judgement on his action." Lacan can therefore boldly state that, "from a certain point of view, the analyst is fully aware that he cannot know what he is doing in psychoanalysis. Part of this action remains hidden even to him."[78]

To realise this, it suffices to ask with Lacan what it is actually that is demanded of an analysis: "What is demanded can be expressed in a simple word, *bonheur* or 'happiness,' as they say it in English."[79] That the analyst cannot simply ignore the analysand's demand for happiness results from a momentous historical change: once "happiness has become a political matter", as is the case since the French Revolution, this involves that for the modern subject "there is no satisfaction for the individual outside of the satisfaction of the all". Hence, in a certain sense, happiness is considered to be one of the essential rights of man. Or to state it with Lacan, it is "because happiness has entered the political realm" that the demand for happiness is situated "at the level of the needs of all men."[80] And it is exactly in such a context that "the analyst sets himself up to receive a demand for happiness."[81] Indeed, this is something that should be taken into account, Lacan warns,

> whenever the analyst finds himself in the position of responding to anyone who asks him for happiness. [...] To have carried an analysis through to its end is no more nor less than to have encountered that limit in which the problematic of desire is raised. That this problematic is central for access to any realization of oneself whatsoever constitutes the novelty of the analysis.[82]

77 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, trans. D. Porter, W. W. Norton & Company, New York 1992, p. 291.

78 *Ibid.*

79 *Ibid.*, p. 292.

80 *Ibid.*

81 *Ibid.*

82 *Ibid.*, p. 300.

In contrast to love, transference love included, which consists in giving what one does not have,

> [w]hat the analyst has to give, unlike the partner in the act of love, is something that even the most beautiful bride in the world cannot outmatch, that is to say, what he has. And what he has is nothing other than his desire, like that of the analysand, with the difference that it is an experienced desire. What can a desire of this kind, the desire of the analyst, be? We can say right away what it cannot be. It cannot desire the impossible.[83]

There is a tipping point here that announces a change in perspective, if not a paradigm shift. From *Seminar VII* onwards, Lacan posits that there is a lack in the Other and that the Name-of-the-Father fails to account for this lack. Hence, when the subject, through his/her question and desire, encounters this lack, precisely at this point s/he loses something. This is, as Lacan affirms, the great secret of analysis, and it is precisely at this point that he raises the question: What is the analyst's desire?

What highlights the unheard of novelty of psychoanalysis is not simply the discovery of the unconscious, but also its refusal to satisfy the analysand's demand to make him/her happy again by getting rid of the symptom, the cause of the analysand's suffering. In ignoring the analysand's futile pursuit of happiness, psychoanalysis nevertheless offers something precious in return: it seeks to arouse in the analysand the desire to know and to recognise in his/her symptom, this being the indelible trace of a contingent encounter with jouissance, the mark of his/her singularity. Refusing to promise the analysand the recovery of his/her happiness by helping reconcile him/her to civilisation, psychoanalysis promises the analysand something entirely different: the uncovering of the revolutionary potential of his/her very symptom.

To uncover this revolutionary potential it is essential to further elaborate the position of the analyst in transference. Thus, while transference love bears upon the knowledge that the analyst is supposed to hold, beyond this supposed knowledge, the analyst is also a corporeal presence, a body, or rather an object, whose main function is not to facilitate a dialogue with the analysand but in-

[83] *Ibid.*

stead to provide through its mute presence a corporeal support that enables the installation of the analysand's true partner, his/her symptom. The analyst has to draw a clear line of demarcation between offering his/her body to incarnate the agalmatic object that the analysand is desperately demanding, and guiding him/her to the real of his/her libidinal body, fragmented by the drives and, as a consequence, inundated by jouissance.

This also explains the curious dialectics of transference that consists of two diametrically opposed yet complementary operations: alienation and separation. If transference love marks the moment of the subject's initial alienation in the Other, the separation from this Other marks the resolution of transference and thereby the end of analysis. The Other is thus at the very heart of the analysand's symptom; one is almost tempted to state that the subject's symptom is none other than the Other. The reason for this can be found in the very production of the analytic symptom. For the symptom to be "read" and eventually eliminated, it is necessary that the symptom, just like the subject, originates in the field of the Other, more specifically, in that trait that brings the subject into his/her symbolic existence, the unary trait that by marking him/her with an indelible trait, sets him/her apart. What specifies the unary trait, which is why it has some affinities with the master's signifier,[84] is the link between the ideal and the symptom. It is through the unary trait that the symptom is rooted in the symbolic. However, the separation of the symptom from the Other is not the end of the story for that matter insofar as the symptom is also the drive satisfaction allowing the subject to draw some jouissance from his/her suffering caused precisely by the symptom.

The question then becomes how to bring the subject to the point of recognising in the symptom s/he complains about the very knot that holds him/her together: the imaginary unity attained through the image of the body which provides to the subject a sense of consistency, a symbolic existence as it is through the signifier that the subject finds a place in the field of the Other, and the real of his/her always unique, singular mode of jouissance. Or, rather, how to lead the

[84] As Lacan himself will note in *Seminar XVII,* considered as "the function of the simplest form of mark," the unary trait is "properly speaking [...] the origin of the signifier." Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis,* trans. R. Grigg, W. W. Norton & Company, New York, London 2007, p. 46.

subject to the point of being able to give a name to the real that designates the singularity of his/her subjective position, in short, to discover in the symptom a new unary trait as his/her true, that is to say, symptomal name? This new identification, the identification with the symptom, which is a true identification in the real, is to be distinguished from the imaginary and the symbolic identification. This is because the symptom, now situated as a kind of Archimedean point opens the horizon of the possible for the subject, yet against the background of the impossible, which, for psychoanalysis, is none other than the "There is no sexual relation." It could then be argued that, from the point of view of psychoanalysis, the symptom in its revolutionary, unruly capacity is precisely that which opens up for the analysand the possibility of escaping from the formatting imposed upon him/her by the dominant discourse and, in so doing, of enabling him/her to think otherwise, this being the only prospect for innovative action. The presence of the analyst may well be itself a "manifestation of the unconscious,"[85] as Lacan claims, but, by incarnating the agalmatic object for the analysand, the analyst is also present as the object a. Hence, what counts in an analysis is the analyst's being, not his/her lack thereof which would imply that the status of the analyst is that of the subject.

It is precisely at this point that Lacan situates the opposition between transference love and the analyst's desire defined as "a desire which intervenes when, confronted with the primary signifier, the subject is, for the first time, in position to subject himself to it."[86] It is by incarnating the agalmatic object for the analysand that the analyst raises the analysand's hope that s/he will regain what s/he has lost, whether the truth of his/her being or the mythical, yet unattainable jouissance that would make him/her whole again. The analyst's desire points in the opposite direction. It is precisely at the point where the analysand is confronted with the primary signifier to which s/he is initially submitted, where the analysand expects the analyst's response to his/her demand of love (of knowledge), that s/he encounters the analyst's desire, "a desire to obtain absolute difference" between the agency of alienation, the ego-ideal, the point I, and the agency of separation, and the object a. Using the terms from "Proposition", it could then be said that the analyst's desire becomes operative, effective, only

85 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI: Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 125.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 276.

to the extent that it "comes to the place of the *x* [...] whose solution delivers the psychoanalysand his being, and whose value is written [either] (-φ), the gap that, if one isolates it in the castration complex, is designated as the function of the phallus, or (*a*) for what obiturates it with the object that can be recognised in the function approximated by the pregenital relation."[87]

For transference to emerge, the analysand has to establish a relation with the analyst "at the level of the privileged signifier known as the ego ideal," as it is only from that point of view that the analysand will "feel himself both satisfactory and loved."[88] Yet for the analysand to be able to "read his/her (unconscious) desire" that will enable him/her to confront the mode of jouissance that singularises him/her, in a word, to wrench him-/herself from the alienating identification and to break with the autistic, repetitious jouissance that condemns the subject to his/her deadly solitude, another function is called for, one that "institutes an identification of a strangely different kind, and which is introduced by the process of separation."[89] This identification "of a different kind" is none other than identification with the object a that allows the subject to separate him-/herself, to exit the alienation that only brings about what Lacan calls "the vacillation of being."[90]

For there to be a way of avoiding the impasse of an approach whose ultimate goal is identification with the analyst, it is therefore important to indicate that there is "a beyond to this identification, and this beyond is defined by the relation and the distance of the *objet petit a* to the idealizing capital I of identification."[91] What characterises the position of the analyst is precisely a shift, a move, a passage from the place in which the analysand situates him/her: that of the ego-ideal, to that of the object a. But how exactly does the position of the analyst relate to the function of the object a?

In the closing chapter of *Seminar XI* Lacan designates the end of analysis as the operation of leading the analysand to the "point of lack that the subject has to

87 Lacan, "Proposition of 9 October 1967 on the Psychoanalyst of the School," p. 8.

88 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI: Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 257.

89 *Ibid.*

90 *Ibid.*, p. 258.

91 *Ibid.*, pp. 271–272.

recognize himself." The handling of transference, supported by the analyst's desire, would then consist in an operation that "maintains a distance between the point at which the subject sees himself as lovable – and that other point where the subject sees himself caused as a lack by *a* and where *a* fills the gap constituted by the inaugural division of the subject."[92] Seen from this perspective, the handling of transference is centred around the object a, a peculiar object "discovered by analysis" in the sense that it is the "object around which the drive moves," yet "whose very reality is purely topological."[93] There is, however, another, essential trait of "this privileged object": its "special status" is revealed in the handling of transference since it designates the place where the analyst must be in order to lead the process of transference to its resolution. It is precisely because "the fundamental mainspring of the analytic operation" consists in maintaining "the distance between the I – identification – and the *a*" that Lacan can circumscribe two pivotal points of the whole operation:

> if the transference is that which separates demand from the drive, the analyst's desire is that which brings it back. And in this way, it isolates the *a*, and places it at the greatest possible distance from the I that he, the analyst, is called upon by the subject to embody. It is from this idealization that the analyst has to fall in order to be the support of the separating *a*.[94]

Transference at the end of an analysis does not, properly speaking, amount to its liquidation. The encounter between the love of knowledge and the analyst's desire aims at a resolution, but a resolution that leaves a remainder.

Clearly, the analyst's desire viewed from the perspective of the ideal ego is entirely different from the analyst's desire seen from the perspective of the object a. But there is a price to be paid for this shift. Situated in the position of the object a, "the analyst," Lacan notes, "cannot help but think that any object whatsoever can fill it."[95] Which is why Lacan concludes *Seminar VIII* by claiming that the analyst must mourn love, since no object is more valuable than another. The analyst's desire is centred around this bereavement that reveals, as the logic of

92 *Ibid.*, p. 270.
93 *Ibid.*, p. 257.
94 *Ibid.*, p. 273.
95 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VIII: Transference*, p. 397.

drives does, that any object whatsoever will do. If the analyst vacillates when the question of what the analyst's desire involves, it is precisely because s/he must accept that s/he will no longer be agalmatic for the analysand, or, rather, s/he must accept losing his/her agalma, becoming nothing more than a waste product of the cure; s/he must consent to a radical mutation of the object a: from *agalma* to *palea*. In incarnating and veiling at the same time the disbeing, *désêtre*, of the supposed subject of knowledge, the agalma of the analysand's desire, the analyst must be from the outset "ready to pay for it through reducing himself, himself and his name, for any given signifier."[96] Hence, it is precisely the role that the analyst has to take on in order to sustain the analysand in his/her operation that makes him/her "destitute as subject," condemned in advance to become the remainder. Lacan can then claim that, for the analyst, his/her "[s]ubjective destitution is written on the entry ticket".[97] Paradoxically, only by accepting in advance that s/he will become a residue, *palea*, useless as dung – once the analysand, at the end of analysis, succeeds in producing knowledge about the being of his/her desire, agalma, the desire's cause, as a (structurally necessary) lure yet void of being – will the analyst succeed in guiding his/her analysand to the point at which s/he will reconcile him-/herself with the inexorable logic of the drive. But the price for making the analyst's desire operational is nothing less than to willingly accept being "the reject of humanity." Thus, what distinguishes the analyst, as Lacan somewhat provocatively claims in "Italian Note", is that "he knows that he is a reject."[98]

This very passage from *agalma* to *palea* indicates that the analyst's desire signifies "an a-subjective function," as Marie-Hélène Brousse designates "the result of a subjective operation," namely, that of an analysis which allows the analysand at the end of his/her analysis "to consent to and decide to operate under this function: thus a desire to take a specific place in the device and thereby contribute to its reproduction."[99] But then the question becomes how, exactly, is desire modified by analysis. Or, put differently, if the goal of every analysis is to reveal at the end the cause of desire, what then is the cause of the desire that supports the handling of transference and its resolution? That the cause of

96 Lacan, "Proposition of 9 October 1967 on the Psychoanalyst of the School," p. 10.
97 *Ibid.*, p. 8.
98 Jacques Lacan, "Note italienne," *Autres* écrits, Seuil, Paris 2001, p. 309.
99 Marie-Hélène Brousse, "A Desire without Cause?", *lacanian ink*, no. 40, p. 61.

the analyst's desire poses a problem can be seen in the fact that Lacan himself designates the desire of the analyst as an "unheard-of desire." If the unheard-of, unprecedented novelty of the analyst's desire relates to its very cause, and if this is the case, Brousse asks, "what new cause gives rise to an unheard-of desire?"[100] Or, more specifically, how are we to conceive of "the relationship between desire and the object-cause which a subject can incarnate for another subject?"[101] If the analyst's desire is without precedence or "unheard-of", as Lacan claims, this is first and foremost because it is a desire that is operational, effective, without the division of the subject since the analyst is placed in analysis as an object rather than a subject.

Taken as "the desire's function," the analyst is indeed situated as an object, yet, as Brousse rightly remarks, as "a de-phallicized object," an object that is not even lost because it remains as "an irretrievable waste"[102] at the end of analysis. So, either the analyst's desire is a desire literally without a cause, or its cause is unlike any other cause of desire known so far. If the analyst's desire is caused neither by the object of a drive, nor even by the object-nothing, then the only option that remains is that it is caused by an impossible, unsayable real, that renders the symbolic inoperative because the real cannot be written. The real in question here, the real for the speaking being, is encapsulated in the famous Lacanian formula: "There is no such thing as a sexual relation." Since the real specific to the speaking being is the impossibility of writing the sexual relation, what takes the place of the object a, this real-cause – the cause of the analyst's desire – is strictly speaking not an object. Rather, due to the impossibility of translating the real into the symbolic, the object that causes the analyst's desire is ultimately erased as an object.

It is then, to follow Brousse's suggestion, this "impossible that is placed in the position of the cause of the analyst's desire." This is because it is only by making this place void, that the analysand can place therein the object of his/her fantasy, whatever it may be.[103] In this sense, it is only by losing its "agalmatic value of surplus jouissance," that the object-cause of the analyst's desire can be

[100] *Ibid.*
[101] *Ibid.*, p. 65.
[102] *Ibid.*, p. 63.
[103] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

articulated to the senseless emergence of the real exactly at the point at which the Other as the guarantor of meaning used to be situated. The possibility of handling transference therefore depends – in order to mark the impossibility of the sexual relation for each and every analysand – on the effective voiding of the object. And it is precisely as such, i.e. void of all objectality, that the object-cause of the analyst's desire bears witness to the encounter with the impossible-real that every analysand brings to analysis and to the consequences to be drawn therefrom – as can be evidenced in the production of new knowledge. Therein we can see the object a, the object-cause of the analyst's desire.

Today, however, this path of knowledge seems to be unviable since, once knowledge is downgraded, devaluated, it is "no longer an object of love, but has become merchandise itself"[104]. Once there is a disjunction between knowledge and the Other, its guarantor, there inevitably arises the following question: What kind of relation does the contemporary subject have with knowledge and jouissance? In discovering transference Freud also discovered a link between love and knowledge. For Lacan, by contrast, what is at issue in transference is not only the secret connection between love and knowledge, since for him, beyond knowledge, there is the sexual reality of the unconscious, this being the real that love dissimulates. With the emergence of a new paradigm of surplus jouissance, when knowledge itself is evaluated from the point of view of its jouissance value, it appears to be devalued. Having lost its "agalmatic value,"[105] knowledge has become something quite indifferent. There is then an undeniable connection between "the rise to the zenith of the object a" and the devaluation of knowledge. For the paradigm of knowledge that dominates today is a knowledge cut from both the object and the subject, a knowledge reduced to an algorithmic technology. Just like the drive, circling blindly around the hole and therefore indifferent to the object that enables it to remain in circulation, algorithmic knowledge is an acephalic machine for the calculation and evaluation of everything, which means anything. With the current de-agalmisation of knowledge, there seems to be no room for the subject supposed to know, supposed to be in the possession of the precious truth about the subject's being. Contemporary subjectivity, being indifferent to knowledge, knows only of the various experiences of the object, its addictive and inexorable mode of jouissance, which from the start

[104] Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire : Livre XVI : D'un Autre à l'autre*, Seuil, Paris 2006, p. 39.

[105] See Jean-Claude Milner, *Le Juif de savoir,* Grasset & Fasquelle, Paris 2006.

prevents the onset of transference. Without the possibility of clarifying what his/her status is as an object of the drive, the subject nowadays is condemned to the unsayable, repetitive, and unchangeable jouissance.

From the perspective of the prevailing indifference to knowledge that renders transference difficult if not impossible, psychoanalysis, too, seems to be in danger of extinction. Hence, for there to be psychoanalysis, it is of paramount importance to re-examine the current possibility of transference in psychoanalysis. In the era of the tyranny of jouissance, as manifest in the current triumph of narcissism and indifference to knowledge, transference appears less to be a matter of supposed knowledge articulated to love, than a matter of knowing how to deal with the real of jouissance.

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Cindy Zeiher*

Lacan's Love for Socrates

> *The analyst's desire is not a pure desire. It is a desire to obtain absolute difference, a desire which intervenes when, confronted with the primary signifier, the subject is, for the first time, in a position to subject himself to it. There only may the signification of a limitless love emerge, because it is outside the limits of the law, where alone it may live.*[1]

> *That's how, long ago, the innate desire of human beings for each other started. It draws the two halves of our original nature back together and tries to make one out of two and to heal the wound in human nature. Each of us is a matching half of a human being, because we've been cut in half like flatfish, making two out of one, and each of us is looking for his own matching half.*[2]

Love is the core vocabulary for Lacanian psychoanalysis but it is also one of the greatest sources of confusion both within and outside Lacanian theorisation. Lacan picks up love where the philosophers left off and in so doing, is tantalised by philosophy's project to *think* love but as a category of the unconscious. There is something sublime about love which resonates but which cannot be captured purely by language; of course, we don't love everyone, neither do we fall in love with just anyone. Love does not necessarily come into existence simply because we articulate love for another subject, object or chosen cause. Certainly love can throw the subject-of-language into crisis but in doing so retains a dignity of its own beyond language.

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1 Jacques Lacan (1973), *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. A. Sheridan, Norton and Norton, New York 1981, p. 276.

2 Plato, *The Symposium*, Penguin, London, p. 29.

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The main problem with love is not only that it exists beyond language but also, because of its inherent unsayability, it is something which can throw us into chaos. Furthermore and in spite of its problematic transmission within language, love retains an agency of transformation. When we can say to our beloved 'I love you', this is always insufficient to completely capture the despair and terror of vulnerability as well as the comfort and realisation of love. As a result, we think of love conversely; if we did not love and declare love, many choices would not become apparent and insights not yielded. In spite of its strange obfuscation and eclipsing of language, love tends to make life more intelligible, even more grounded. Perhaps love is what Nietzsche calls the root of our metaphysical needs in that it allows us a vision in which desire, morality and what constitutes a good life are ordered. Lacan, however, is not interested in such visions, notwithstanding that in reality throughout his life he passionately loved many women. For the Lacanian subject love has a different function and role; love invites the subject of language into being, into a transference where it plays out as a transformational dynamic precisely *because* of the limits of language. Arguably, the singularity of love sets up the confrontation with the limits of language. Although love is a metaphysical need, it is also one which the Lacanian subject relies on as enabling a certain aphoristic discourse which is, as Badiou contends, a procedure towards truth. Although language might not survive love, it is where we must start because in declaring love, we are also declaring lack.

There is a metaphorical saying, 'we are all slaves to love' which perfectly captures the Lacanian position on love. To fully understand this, the obvious reference to Hegel is helpful. From the little fragments he wrote about love in the late 1790's, it is clear that Hegel locates love in the beyond, a "separateness beyond separation".[3] This is why later on he privileges Christianity as the religion of love in which the beyond comes down to earth, so to speak. That love is partially beyond language is the Hegelian crux Lacan seizes upon and takes a bit further. Love manifests as the external sublime object allowing for the emergence of consciousness as one who loves. But for Lacan there is more to be uncovered in the dialectic of love; neither the lover nor the beloved can completely ex-

[3] Todd McGowan wonderfully explicates Hegel's love and its inauguration as a revaluation of Christianity in 'Hegel in Love', *Can Philosophy Love?: Reflections and Encounters*, Rowman and Littlefield, London 2017. In a later chapter of the same volume, 'Love and the Apparatus: On a Hegelian Fragment', George Tsagdis pays close attention to how the Hegelian stakes love as fulfilling the law.

ternalise themselves to one another. To this extent they are both castrated and this is where, for Lacan, love emanates. In loving we volunteer ourselves to a sublime idea which cannot be fully articulated but which nevertheless promises that everything might well change for us.

Although Lacan never says as much, it appears that love possesses an emancipatory quality; certainly in the clinic it is the kernel of transference. But to get to this hidden point, we need to think about what Lacan himself says about love through his reading of *The Symposium* in which love is really put to work as a category, a permutation, a life force, a pleasure and an instinct. Love is really worth struggling to think through: if we are slaves to love, then *The Symposium* suggests that we are also slaves to thinking about love as a category which we can never master. Perhaps here is the very *jouissance* of thinking which itself becomes the desire from which a love of thinking springs. Lacan calls this "an apparatus of jouissance"[4], that is, it is not enough to be desired by our lover, but in addition the other "must hold the place of the cause of desire."[5]

In Seminar VIII, *Atopia of Eros,* Lacan continues his reading of *The Symposium* as a way of handling the complexities of love in terms of analytic transference. Lacan takes seriously Agathon's claim which side-line's philosophy's ability to address love; "the god [of love] is so skilled a poet that… Everyone becomes a poet".[6] From here Lacan quickly moves on to insist that in matters of love we need to back the unconscious more fully, claiming that we never really recognise love but instead only the definable traces it leaves which cannot altogether be articulated. Here love as an inner (or pure) sense is also, in a way, externally constituted. Lacan refers to this extimacy of love in terms of its signifying effects, these being recognition (in the Hegelian sense) and function (as in psychoanalytic transference). It is through its signifying effects that we grasp love.

The question of love is for Lacan twofold: firstly a matter of discovering what knowledge of love one does have consists of and how this knowledge substan-

4 Jacques Lacan, (1972–73), *Seminar XX. Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, trans. B. Fink, Norton and Norton Company, London and New York 1998, p. 55.

5 Jacques Lacan, (1966), *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. B. Fink, Norton and Norton Company, New York 2002, p. 691.

6 Jacques Lacan, (1960–61), *Seminar VIII. Transference*, trans. B. Fink, Polity, Cambridge 2015, p. 37.

tiates the object of one's will; secondly a matter of putting love to work as in a psychoanalytic praxis. We approach love in the same way as we enter the clinic, knowing that we know nothing. Yet at the same time at the back of our minds is the Socratic inquiry: how might what little I do know about love substantiate my own will towards it?; how can I put to the test what I think I know about love? Of course, by putting love on the couch, Lacan is not fully subscribing to Socrates' position that there is nothing to know, when he says, "Truth is nothing but what knowledge can learn that it knows merely by putting its ignorance to work."[7]

Nevertheless Lacan takes seriously the idea that *The Symposium* is much more than mythical opinion. Its focus on Eros as central to our relationship with the many different aspects of love: desire for wholeness, virtue, sexual pleasure, beauty, loyalty, violence, temperance, the divine, care, justice, nature, poetry, music and so on, provides a vivid background to Lacan's understanding of the illusive nature of love, its effects and its *jouissance*. However Lacan is not seduced by *The Symposium*'s different presentations of love as rationally comprehensible and predictable. For example, in the case of courtly love, he sees through signifiers such as a loyalty and faithfulness as no more than symbolic investment in the masquerade of love:

> In the final analysis, the 'person' always has to do with the master's discourse. Courtly love, is for man – in relation to whom the lady is entirely, and in the most servile sense of the word, a subject – the only way to elegantly pull off the absence of the sexual relationship.[8]

The Symposium begins with Agathon eagerly awaiting the arrival of Socrates who is standing outside to contemplate while dinner is served. When Socrates eventually comes inside Agathon *wills* a particular transference from him,

7 Jacques Lacan, (1961), "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious", *Écrits*, p. 675.

8 Lacan, (1972–73), *Seminar XX. Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, p. 69. However, further in *Encore* Lacan says that "the invention of courtly love is not at all the fruit of what people are historically used to symbolising with the 'thesis-antithesis-synthesis'. There wasn't the slightest synthesis afterward, of course – in fact, there never is. Courtly love shone as brightly as a meteor in history and afterward we witnessed the return of all the bric-a-brac of a supposed renaissance of stale antiquities", p. 86.

"Come and lie down beside me, Socrates, so that, by contact with you, I can share the piece of wisdom that came to you in the porch..."[9] Socrates finds this remark somewhat ridiculous, as if wisdom could in fact be transmitted by touch! It here becomes apparent that Agathon's signifier, the possession of wisdom, is not wholly shared by Socrates, who places more importance on the materiality of speaking as signification because this is where transmission results from transference.[10] Thus any dialogue about love in which love is perhaps revealed, is itself to will a "the change of discourse",[11] one in which love can indeed be realised through words, touch, myth and so on.

Lacan's interest in *The Symposium* (particularly in Seminar VIII on *Transference*) is largely oriented towards the discussion between Socrates and Alcibiades; it is here that love as a psychoanalytic question and praxis is pivoted. What attracts Lacan's attention is how *agalma* (*objet petit a*) is inserted into (psychoanalytic) discourse. At the end of the evening, after the speeches, a drunken Alcibiades arrives and insists on revealing to those present that Socrates is both the most precious and most treacherous of humans. In Lacan's account, Socrates' response to Alcibiades and then to Agathon not only exposes the differing natures of desire and love, but also questions the source of Socrates' wisdom as being the idea of wisdom *per se*. Thus it seems to Lacan that love springs from Socratic unconscious desire as a desiring presence:

> Socrates: When you say you desire what you've already got, ask yourself whether you mean that you want what you've got now to go on being there in the future...
>
> [Agathon said that he would.]
>
> Socrates: What someone is doing in these cases is loving something that isn't available to him and which he doesn't have, namely the continued presence in the future of the things he has now.
>
> Agathon: Certainly.

9 Plato, *The Symposium*, p. 6.

10 Perhaps Agathon is more *in touch* with reality than Socrates realised. Certainly, later on, Descartes noted that touch provided 'a sense of reality', and made us feel in contact with the external world.

11 Lacan, *Seminar XX. Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, p. 22.

> Socrates: So this and every other case of desire is desire for what isn't available and actually there. Desire and love are directed at what you don't have, what isn't there, and what you need.[12]

What *The Symposium* shows us is that there exist *loves* and *desires* in all their multiplicity, but although love is unsayable it is nevertheless demonstrative as a praxis, as an activity, whereas desire occupies the spaces in between such activity. Lacan maintains that no single conscious discourse, explanation or method can be a metalanguage of love. Instead there is a truth of the body that speaks a language of the Real, a language of symptoms (manifesting as the *objet a*) and love (manifesting as ideals):

> I have never said that the unconscious was an assemblage of words, but that the unconscious is precisely structured. I don't think here there is such an English word but it is necessary to have the term, as we are talking about structure and the unconscious is structured as a language. What does this mean? Properly speaking this is a redundancy because 'structured' and 'as a language' for me means exactly the same thing. Structured means my speech, my lexicon, which is exactly the same as a language. And that is not all. Which language? Rather than myself it was my pupils that took a great deal of trouble to give that question a different meaning, and to search for the formula of a reduced language. What are the minimum conditions …? There were also some philosophers … who have found since then that it was not a question of an 'under' language or of 'another' language, not myth for instance or phonemes, but language. It is extraordinary the pains that each took to change the place of the question. Myths, for instance, do not take place in our consideration precisely because they are also structured as a language … There is only one sort of language; concrete language … that people talk.[13]

To describe the palpable effect made by speech that materializes not only via the body, but in writing, thinking, desiring, and loving, Lacan initially employs the

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12 Plato, *The Symposium*, pp. 43–44.

13 In E. Ragland-Sullivan, The Limits of Discourse Structure: The Hysteric and the Analyst, *Prose Studies*, 1989, pp. 32–49. Also, Jacques Lacan, "Of Structure as the Inmixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever", *Lacanian Ink*. www.lacan.com/hotel.htm. Originally published in *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man: The Structuralist Controversy*, R. Macksey and E. Donato [eds.], Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore 1970.

word *écrit* and only later develops his concept of the *objet a* as that which drives and materializes language.

The Symposium's the first speaker Phaedrus claims that because "Love is the most ancient of the gods"[14], love is also "the source of our greatest benefits."[15] Actions on behalf of love rather than words are what define it; even if this entails self-sacrifice, love is the "most effective in enabling human beings to acquire courage and happiness, both in life and death."[16] That love is divine in origin, elevating it into something enigmatic, mystical, even ineffable, is nothing new; humans have always done this and will no doubt continue to do so.

The second speaker, Pausanias, suggests that discourse on love as a "single thing"[17] wrongly assumes that one can *know* love as an entity in itself, because there are different sorts of love, the heavenly which focuses on virtue and wisdom, and the common which is merely self-seeking gratification as a pathway to sex, wealth or power. What matters most is that the love affair is rightly conducted, meaning towards the flourishing of thought. Here the interest for Lacan is how Pausanias's two loves are always in contention.

While Aristophanes in suppressing his amusement, suffers a bout of hiccups, Eryximachus widens the concepts of right and wrong love beyond mutual human responses, to include the entire range of human endeavour: medicine, cooking, athletics, agriculture, music and so on, concluding that although love has total power it is *right* love whose "nature is expressed in good actions marked by self-control and justice" which is "the source of all our happiness.[18] Aristophanes then cures his hiccups by sneezing, commenting "it makes me wonder whether it is the 'well-ordered' part of my body that wants the kind of noises and tickles that make up a sneeze".[19] Lacan seizes upon this comic interruption, asking what can we glean from such joking about hiccups, because for Lacan what the body produces emanates from the unconscious and therefore speaks what the voice cannot; even the comic or fictional are expressions at

14 Plato, *The Symposium*, p. 13.
15 *Ibid.*, p. 10.
16 *Ibid.*, p. 13.
17 *Ibid.*
18 *Ibid.*, p. 25.
19 *Ibid.*

the Real of the body. For him Aristophanes' laughter and hiccups in response to Eryximachus' grandiose invoking of right love as a universal principal in nature from which happiness emanates, demonstrates how the body obstructs rhetoric, acting as a stumbling block to its meaning.

In his very different account of love, Aristophanes focuses on differentiation, describing how Zeus punished humans for trying to invade heaven by cutting them in half but then taking pity on them by moving their genitals around to enable the halves to have sex and thus fulfil their desire to be together, to become one instead of two. In this way love "is the name for desire and the pursuit of wholeness".[20] Lacan greatly admires this differentiation, noting in Seminar VIII Aristophanes' profound insight and later in *The Four Fundamental Concepts* where he speaks of the irony of the unconscious (driven by the libido) finding itself on the opposite side to love. Why is this ironic? Precisely because as Lacan reminds us again and again, we are subjects characterized by lack and loss. We can never be whole subjects in our speech, bodies, fictions, or sexualities. As individuals we try to compensate for a niggling sense of something missing in the relation between sex and love. But these two are not the other for each other, as Lacan observes, that there is no sexual relationship [*ca ne va pas entre les hommes et les femmes*] was intuited centuries ago by Socrates. Moreover, for Lacan, Aristophanes' focus on differentiation in the sexes strongly suggests the lack on which this myth is founded. Poking fun at himself and at the same time taking the injunction that *there is no sexual relationship* seriously, Lacan says in the *Four Fundamental Concepts*:

> Children, there is treasure buried here. I have given them [my listeners] the plough share [sic] and the plough, namely that the unconscious was made out of language, and at one point in time … three very good pieces of work have resulted from it. But we must now say – You can only find the treasure in the way I tell you. There is something comical about this way. This is absolutely essential in understanding any of Plato's dialogues, and especially when one is dealing with *The Symposium*. This dialogue is even, one might say, a practical joke. The starting-point [of the joke] is Aristophanes' fable. This fable is a defiance to the centuries, for it traverses them without anyone trying to do better. I shall try.… Aristophanes' myth pictures the pursuit of the complement for us in a moving,

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 31.

> and misleading way, by articulating that it is the other, one's sexual other half, that the living being seeks in love. To this mythical representation of the mystery of love, analytic experience substitutes the search by the subject, not of the sexual complement, but of the part of himself, lost forever, that is constituted by the fact that he is only a sexed living being, and that he is no longer immortal.[21]

Lacan's attention to desire maintains an ethical stance and traces both as a manifestation of the body as well as how, as an effect of the *Id*, it must be constituted so as to appear but without necessarily regulating the subject. Thus the *Id* (although for the most part hidden and notwithstanding its domestication by the super-ego) remains a powerful drive because it motivates and propels the subject. In this regard Lacan states that the function of the *Id* is "to save appearances" and is moreover a topology which defines images of desire, one which "signifies nothing [other] than wanting to reduce to forms that are supposedly perfect…"[22] Lacan is here reading Freud's anguish of identification robustly: the subject struggles with inserting itself into the relationship between its identification with the object of love and the very concept of identification which itself contradicts identification with the love-object. The upshot of this is that in order to identify with the love object, that is, to preserve its appearance, one also needs to remain individuated from it. We could conclude that according to Freud, the destiny of love is no more than a libidinal catharsis in which the love-object is a projection of the ego, a narcissistic echo-chamber. Love is imposed on *objet a* through recognition of the thing itself, for example, beauty, and further, such recognition relies on participation with, for example, the notion that beautiful things are an actuality, a consolidation of love.

Lacan uses the sparring match between Socrates and Alcibiades at the end of *The Symposium* to illustrate the function of the *agalma* (*objet petit a*) within transference. *Agalma* is the term Alcibiades used to comprehend the hidden and tantalising object he believed to be enclosed in the depths of Socrates' body. Alcibiades thought this was a mysterious gem whose preciousness he had first savoured as a young man during a privileged moment of revelation and which now provided the spark for his infatuation, serving to justify his

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21 Jacques Lacan, (1973), *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 197–198.

22 Jacques Lacan, (1960–61). *Seminar VIII. Transference*, trans. C. Gallagher, Unedited French Typescript, p. 87.

eulogy of Socrates' attractiveness. *Agalma* is not the same as desire but rather the hidden 'thing' from which desire springs. In Seminar VIII Lacan claims that the part played by *agalma* in the emergence of transference must be at least as important as that of supposed knowledge of it. During the course of the seminar he abandons the metaphor of *agalma,* eventually turning to love as the hidden thing in transference.

Socrates can be understood as the first to put love on the couch, under scrutiny, under analysis. Love assumes an image of itself and for Lacan, it is the subject who is more than willing to take up this image. In contrast with Lacan's linking of love with imbecility, everyone praises love as something to which we should be beholden because it seems to offer us truth. Lacan maintains that to inhabit the space of tragedy is also to occupy the space of concealment and lack. He cites Oedipus as an example of this topology, as "the locus of this fundamental conjecture"[23] insofar as the tragedy of Oedipus is his somewhat risible lack of recognition. Such a tragi-comedic dialectic is often played out in love, for the study of which Lacan uses *The Symposium* as an episteme. Here, for Lacan love is elevated to the conscious position of a Socratic science, to "the dignity of something absolute or the position of absolute dignity".[24]

However, it is a dignity which is bestowed not only upon love, but also upon philosophy, the task of thinking. For Badiou, philosophy produces no truths, which he claims come from elsewhere, for example from the condition of love. The task of philosophy is to think the condition itself as a way to grasp how and why it is, for the present, relevant. Badiou promotes such a condition as evental, and perhaps sometimes it is or at least we want it to be. In recognising Socrates' intellectual courage in stepping away from the hold of traditions and customs, we too might say 'I don't know and moreover, I admit that I don't even know enough about this thing which drives me.' We might then ask, what is Lacan's desire for Socrates?

For Lacan, the articulation of his desire for Socrates is the platform from which his topology of Socratic love springs. Lacan calls this an *atopia* of desire which is captured in transference: "Through analytic discourse, the subject manifests

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23 *Ibid*., p. 5.

24 *Ibid*., p. 6.

himself in his gap, namely, in that which causes his desire."[25] This is notably an imprecise discourse in a number of ways, yet it does provide a central point from which desire pivots the subject, the *place* of desire from which love might spring.[26] Lacan claims that the dialectic between love and desire is purely propositional because once it is introduced into the complexity of transference via enunciation, then desire becomes a desire for discourse. If I want the Other, what does the Other want, and do I want the same as my chosen Other? Here the disjuncture between the self and the Other provides an intersubjective relation which entangles the subject who does not want to lose either selfhood or Other. For Lacan, however, the dialectic of love and desire is guaranteed to continue because there is a third presence, the fantasy of the fullness of love, which constitute the fragments of desire punctuating love. Such a mythological suturing of desire with love is the very essence of love. This permeates *The Symposium* in which Socrates is both the love-object and the desired one. Here love is a struggle towards recognition embracing contradiction. This is what constitutes the fiction of love and provides Lacan with a strategy enabling the insight that an intersubjective relationship is necessarily never equal, because for love to endure it must be complicit in securing a fantasy third presence, namely that of desire.

For Lacan, the analyst's desire for insight begins with questions posed by another (the Other) concerning the fundamental fantasy and its effects. What mark does the analyst bear when delving into desire? The typology of desire is, for Lacan, the desire of the analyst who is distinctive for the analysand in standing in for the latter's *objet a*. This is the starting point from where the toleration of love as a discourse can be seriously considered as part of the clinic, in that the clinic brings to it the additional idea of Socratic love in which both the analyst and analysand love another beyond themselves. What remains in the clinic is the analytic love emerging from transference, which is distinctive from amorous love in producing knowledge of *jouissance*. Whereas for the Greeks, love is a signifying discourse between the gods and humanity, in the clinic it is one between consciousnesses and unconsciousnesses of both analyst and analysand. This is a tricky situation as Bruce Fink points out:

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[25] Lacan, *Seminar XX. Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, p. 11.

[26] This is even though Lacan says in *Encore* that "there is no genesis except on the basis of discourse", p. 11.

> In most instances, we do not even want to know our own unconscious 'conditions of love' – that is, what makes us tick, what makes us love one person instead of another, or what makes us love in one particular way rather than in another – we wish to ignore all of that. Some people worry that if they knew the unconscious determinants of their love, their love would dissipate; if they realised they had fallen in love with someone because of that person's similarities to a parent, they might stop loving him or her. Love, in such cases, does its job: it conveys its message without revealing to consciousness anything that is unconscious.[27]

This is both the miracle and the frustration of love in which we all participate and in which there is a dialectical distinction between amorous and transferential love. For the analysand, the analyst is not just another subject but one who, in standing in for the *objet a* is positioned to enforce the analysand's acceptance of castration. The will to fall in love is always already there and the analysand knows full well that that it is exactly what the analyst will keep at bay. This poignant aspect of transference is the unavoidable result of perverse love in the praxis of psychoanalysis, where the analysand submits to misery in the quest of handling the symptom. Inevitable resultant alienation is noted by Freud when he remarks that when the patient is confronted with the analyst not returning love, the analysand becomes disenchanted and tempted to end analysis as a procedure which is failing to give love a go. This indicates an altogether different level of love.

In order to understand the role of the transferential relation in the efficacy of the psychoanalytic clinic we should return to the concluding lines of Freud's *The Dynamics of Transference*:

> It is undeniable that the control of the transferential phenomena offers the greatest difficulties to the psychoanalyst, but one should not forget that it is precisely these phenomena which pay us the invaluable service of rendering actual and manifest the patient's hidden and forgotten love impulses – after all, it is impossible to liquidate someone in *absentia* or in *effigie*.[28]

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27 Bruce Fink, *Lacan on Love*, Wiley and Sons, New Jersey 2015, p. 176.

28 Sigmund Freud, (1911–1913), *The Dynamics of Transference, Freud – Complete Works*, Compiled by Ivan Smith. Wec. 9 December 2019, p. 2464. https://wee.valas.fr/I;G/pdf/Freud_Complete_Works.pdf.

Love is always unrealised in the sense that it is never fully realised. In the clinic this is all the more poignant because it is contained within transference between just two people. In this way transferential love transcends ontology and attends instead to the unconscious as part of the clinical setting. In transference love becomes not a position either analyst or analysand is a subject- supposed-to-know (about love), but rather one where love sustains transference in recognising the character and function of the symptom. This is the framework in which one's Otherness is contended with, the position of the analyst and precisely from where love can emerge, as Lacan observes:

> The analyst's desire is not a pure desire. It is a desire to obtain absolute difference, a desire which intervenes when, confronted with the primary signifier, the subject is, for the first time, in a position to subject himself to it. There only may the signification of a limitless love emerge, because it is outside the limits of the law.[29]

Transference is a procedure into love, but it is also one in which love is realised. This is the Socratic-psychoanalytic nature of love; that it manifests as a dialectic within the clinic, which has an effect. Thus transference involves a shift in discourse through its introduction of a signifier from outside of clinic, which is nevertheless intrinsic to it. In this way the structure of love is found within that of the clinic. *The Symposium* allows us to ponder the nature of love both within and outside the clinic. Love is to some extent self-evident; we say we know love because we encounter it, but does this mean we really know *about* it? We simply appreciate it, taking it for granted as something that happens to us. Socrates and his interlocuters consider love in its many manifestations as operative of something else; virtue, nature, beauty, sex and so on, purported within a context of the sexed subject. This is both the treachery and dignity of love, it always appears as a possibility yet it remains a problem which we have a responsibility to handle. This is more than just love's manifestation between moments of desire, in that love also presents as something that must be accomplished. To talk about love, one at the very least must have experienced it. As Freud notes, love seems so illogical and against reason that it is difficult to translate into analytical discourse, whether this is an intellectual question or transference in

[29] Jacques Lacan, (1973), *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 77.

the clinic.[30] Experiencing love enables one to think love as initially an ongoing existential crisis in which the sexed subject locates love as pivotal towards love as a truth. Love punctuates the clinic, just as the *The Symposium's* expression of love in its many forms and especially the love for Socrates, is never far from the enunciation of love and desire. Thus we might even say that in the clinic the analyst plays the role of Socrates, that the question of love is never resolved, because of the subject's desire for the Other's love, as with Aristophanes' love for Socrates. Is it not the case that one enters the clinic hoping that transferential love will yield an insight into love, yet knowing full well this will be submission to another idealisation?

Regarding Badiou's 'scene of the two' as love's procedure into truth, perhaps it is in the truth of the clinic that Badiou's thesis is most poignant because although love is here literally contended with, the one thing the analysand can count on is that the analytical procedure will come to an end. Love in the clinic is precisely where two become one, because if this does not occur, transference will not take place. At the same time, in being confronted as ultimately illusive, love is undone; here the subject-supposed-to-know comes into being as love underpins the 'talking cure'. There is always a difference between the lover and the beloved, just as there is between the analyst and analysand. Realisation of such difference revealing the desire of the analyst to analyse and the analysand to receive the love of the analyst, both confirm and at the same time undo the sexual relation. Is this not the very struggle or question of love in any context? None of us as sexed beings are beyond love as an existential longing (that is, being in-existence with another) but we can traverse transferential love and thereby give or receive the existential character of transformative, amorous love?

According to Lacan is this not what Socrates points towards, that all manifestations of love are particularised by one thing – transference – which needs to be continually recreated? Moreover, is not Socrates, like the analyst, in the position of *agalma*? In pursuing the intention of *agalma*, does not the subject panic or at least become anxious that the love object will not return love? Is it here that we can love the subject only as a partial object? It seems as if Socrates knows this

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30 For Freud, the nature of love is perplexing and not compatible with logic. Freud has a scientific approach to love, which suggests that it is a defence mechanism giving love more structure within psychopathology.

as certainly as does the analyst. In the clinic the subject shifts between *agalma* and analysand (that is, the subject's realisation that the object is missing), both being necessary conditions for analytical transference to take place and sustain itself, as Jacques-Alain Miller explains:

> This 'panic point' of the subject is the point, so says Lacan, at which the subject is 'effaced' [...] behind the signifier. This effacement should not be understood as an identification but as an erasure: it is the point at which he can no longer say anything about himself, at which he is reduced to silence. This is when he clasps onto the object of desire. It is the same object of the fantasy that is operative at the level of the unconscious where the subject has no possibility of designating himself, or where he is faced with his namelessness as a subject. This is when he turns to the fundamental fantasy, and it is in his relation to the object of desire that the truth of Being resides.[31]

In Seminar VIII Lacan contends with the impossibility of actualising the sublime *objet a* when he refers to Aristotle's concept of recognition as a reciprocity which, although circumscribed in the Symbolic, is still not a rational process:

> What Aristotle evokes represents the possibility of a bond (*lien*) of love between two of these beings, can also, manifest the tension toward the Supreme Being, and be reversed in the way in which I expressed it—it is in their courage in bearing the intolerable relationship to the Supreme Being that friends, recognize and choose each other.[32]

For Lacan, love is inscribed in the Real, an investable yet impenetrable location where love is realised. This dilemma presents both the comedy and the tragedy of love and this is exposed when Lacan takes seriously Agathon's revalorisation of love as *kedos*, a worthy relationship that, to some degree at least, invites desire as a necessary condition of love.

> Socrates: Now try to tell me about love... Is Love love of nothing or something?
> Agathon: Of something, undoubtedly!

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31 J.-A. Miller, *Presentation of Book VI of the Seminar of Jacques Lacan.* Accessed from www.lacan.com/actuality/presentation-of-book-vi-of-the-seminar-of-jacques-lacan/.

32 Lacan, (1960), *Seminar XX: Encore*, p. 85.

Socrates: For the moment… keep to yourself and bear in mind what is *of*. But tell me this much: does Love desire what it is love of or not?

Agathon: Yes…

Socrates: When he desires and loves, does he have in his possession what he desires and loves or not?

Agathon: He doesn't – at least probably not…

Socrates: Think about it. Surely it is not just probable but necessary that desire is directed at something you need and that if you don't need something you don't desire it? I feel amazingly certain that it is necessary; what do you think?

Agathon: I think so too…[33]

In the transferential relationship, the analysand trusts that in his or her contention with lack the analyst is able to bridge the gap, the analyst providing a much needed counterpart to reveal both the fantasy of and desire for love. From this position Lacan deliberates the distinction between courtly and passionate love as a response to Robin's *Théorie platonicienne de l'Amour*[34], in which *Eros* is more tragic than comic. He then jokingly considers the trouble love brings to be a symptom of love's disorder, yet insofar as the discourse of love is a comedy transmitted by "someone who wishes to amuse"[35], the joke is on those who take love too seriously. Lacan observes that one cannot ignore the context of speaking about love because although somewhat peripheral, context orients the event of love whilst remaining basically disorienting in its function.

Although Lacan introduces his formula for love in Seminar V (1958): *love is to give what one does not have to someone who does not want it,* this famous aphorism is not elaborated upon until Seminar VIII. Here he draws upon Socrates' recounting of Diotima's meditation of love as a spirit mediating people and objects.[36] Here love is undertaken as neither wise nor beautiful, but rather as a desire for these attributes which can be achieved through physicality or the exchange of ideas.

33 Plato, *The Symposium*, p. 42.

34 Léon Robin, *Théorie platonicienne de l'Amour*, Alcan, Paris 1908.

35 Lacan, (1960), *Seminar VIII. Transference*, Unedited French Typescripts, p. 98.

36 Plato, *The Symposium*, pp. 45–47.

Diotoma recounts to Socrates the origin of love as follows. Love (Eros) is the son of Penia and Poros. Penia, the mother, represents poverty at both a material and subjective level. She is an orphan, destitute and without resources. Poros, the father, stands for the exact opposite – resourcefulness which harbours a kind of wit and cleverness. To celebrate the birth of Aphrodite, Poros joins the Gods at a party. Penia, being but a beggar does not enter the party but instead waits outside. When Poros becomes drunk and falls asleep she enters and takes sexual advantage of him. What especially piques Lacan's interest here is that Poros, the resourceful man, is the one who is desired by Penia, the impoverished woman. It is she who instigates the drunken copulation which leads to the birth of their son, Love. "This is what is at stake here", Lacan says "as the poor Aporia, by definition, by structure, has nothing to give above and beyond her constitutive lack or aporia" [her nothingness]. She gives her lack, what she does not have. For Lacan, this is the essence of loving – the key to love, to being able to love, is to accept one's lack and to give it away: "That is, one cannot love except by becoming a non-haver, even if one has".[37]

In Lacanian terms the birth of love demonstrates the illusory nature of the Phallus and of castration in Symbolic relations. Here castration involves nothing more than the assumption that one lacks. 'Loving is to give what one does not have' means not only to locate and offer your castration to another subject but to also be willing to receive theirs. In this there is no support for love, it literally hangs on nothing.

In understanding Lacan's maxim, *loving is to give what one does not have to someone who does not want it*, we have to look at how Lacan distinguishes love from desire, a distinction which promises to bear the accurate representation of both one's lack as well as the lack of the beloved. Agathon's composition of love does not escape Lacan:

> Love is a good composer in, broadly, every type of artistic production, because you can't give someone else what you don't have or teach someone what you don't know yourself.[38]

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37 Lacan, *Seminar VIII. Transference*, Unedited French Typescripts, p. 13.

38 Plato, *The Symposium*, p. 37.

Lacan further observes that Socrates' response to Alcibiades' love is not with reciprocated love, but by reflecting Alcibiades' image of desire back to him.[39] For Lacan, love and desire are "two words of love... with contrary accents... [which] fall under the key of the same definition".[40] This is exactly Socrates' position.

For Lacan, loving involves accurately representing the loved one's lack, rather than simply returning their love, hence the phrase, 'loving someone warts and all'. A reflection of our lack is not really what we would prefer to receive back from our lover, regardless of such reflection being a condition for love:

> What we give in love, is essentially what we do not have and, when what we do not have returns to us, there is undoubtedly a regression and at the same time a revelation of the way in which we have failed the person (*manque a la personne*) in representing his lack.[41]

It is from his reading of *The Symposium* that Lacan invents the notion of the analyst's desire and of transference as interpretations of love which differ from Symbolic determinations. In this way, says Lacan, we are indebted to Socrates as the original analyst, who accepts the appearance of love to be a timeless and profound experience, a condition for knowing love, which is the essence of transference. This conception of love is implicitly linked to satisfaction, yet must also traverse cognition and rationality. On this *The Symposium* is clear: in order to release oneself from the power of an idea, one must have had an expe-

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39 Jacques Lacan, (1957–58), *Seminar V. Formations of the Unconscious*, trans. R. Grigg, Wiley, New Jersey 2017.

40 Jacques Lacan, (1964–65). *Seminar XII. Crucial Problems for Psychoanalysis*, trans. C. Gallagher, Unedited French typescripts 2014.
It is worth noting Owen Hewitson's (2016) interesting observation of Lacan's reading of Alcibiades: "Alcibiades' behaviour is, for Lacan, 'an attempt to make Socrates lose control, to show some emotional turmoil, and yield to direct corporal come-ons' (Seminar VIII, p. 24). Alcibiades loves Socrates, but Lacan notes how Socrates holds back from rising to Alcibiades' solicitations or declarations of love. Instead, Lacan says both in Seminar VIII and Seminar XXII that Socrates shows how, behind this love, is a desire on Alcibiades' part directed towards the host, Agathon (Seminar XII, 23rd June, 1965). In doing so, Socrates responds to Alcibiades' not with a reciprocated love, but to love with desire. He answers Alcibiades' love with a lack, denoted on the one hand by the lack of knowledge he professes of the nature of love, and on the other the metonymic deferral to Agathon." From: www.lacanonline.com/2016/06/what-does-lacan-say-about-love/

41 Jacques Lacan, (1962–63), *Seminar X. Anxiety*, J-A. Miller [ed.], Polity Press, Cambridge 2014.

rience of love. Freud later seizes upon this as recognition, which is particular to oneself through the love of another. We are stabilised and credible to one another as subjects when another subject acknowledges love for us. This acknowledgement is mediated and transformed by love into the encounter of love, a very different idea which includes both the body and desire. Love removes oneness in terms of its pragmatics because it requires at least two to embark on love; it further removes the oneness of demand because love encapsulates but is not dependent on desire. The oneness of love is simply not an inevitability, as Lacan points out in *Encore*:

> In truth, we will see that we must turn things around, and instead of investigating a signifier (*un signifiant*), we must investigate the signifier One(Un), but we haven't reached that point yet...[42]

That love is a desire for recognition is what is at stake in the struggle for love. Whereas love fantasises an ideal, desire not only gives rise to differences, but thrives on them.[43] In Lacan's reading of *The Symposium*, love and desire are a dialectic: love is comparable to desire in that both can never be satisfied yet both are based on an eagerness to be the object of another's love and desire.

In *The Symposium* Aristophanes offers a harmonious structure of love, a form of one-ness made of two. However a third term, *Eros* provides the intervention which in a loving experience one has to navigate. Lacan notes how Socrates parallels the task of philosophy with that of *Eros,* in the viability of their plurality and in philosophy's questioning of the notion that love is essentially a 'beautiful thing'. At the same time, prior to Socrates, five speakers shape the scope of thinking about love as *being with* another, an approach which entails satisfaction obtained from one's lover. Here *Eros* is the satisfaction rather than the mediator between lovers.

As Socrates points out, there is always detachment and asymmetry between the lover and beloved which maintain the love relationship and in this way inscribe love into the logic of what it means to be a speaking being, which is the desire to

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42 Lacan, *Seminar XX. Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, p. 20.

43 Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, Routledge, London and New York 1996.

name love as *love*. In his dialogue with Socrates, Diotima calls into question the ability of words and names to account for the holistic nature of love.

> Diotima: Do you think that this wish [to be happy] and this form of love are common to all human beings, and that everyone wants good things to be his own forever, or what is your view?
>
> Socrates: Just that… it is common to everyone.
>
> Diotima: In that case, Socrates… why don't we say that everyone is a lover, if everyone always loves the same things; why do we call some people lovers and not others?
>
> Socrates: That's something I've wondered about too.
>
> Diotima: It's nothing to wonder about… What we're doing is picking out one kind of love and applying to it the name ('love') that belongs to the whole class, while we use different names for other kinds of love.[44]

Here Diotima exposes love's limit, its misuses, its half-sense, the missing bit which nevertheless seductively enslaves us in the love relationship. Everything we say about love is *mi-dire*, falling short because although we don't want to unduly credit love with virtue, we act as if it includes virtue as an essential part of its name. For Socrates, being always willing to submit to love as virtue may not necessarily elevate love but instead brings us into the realm of *mi-dire par excellence*, in that we need the destiny of love as the cause of our desire. No doubt Lacan finds the linking of love with virtue frustrating, yet he nevertheless names Socrates as *agalma*, framing him as something mythical, unreachable and beautiful; a hidden jewel within the seemingly not so beautiful. For Lacan, Socrates holds a wisdom of love, a connection to love which reaches towards some hidden attribute of its essence of which neither the lover nor the beloved is entirely sure, but nevertheless goes along with. This unsureness is hidden as Lacan observes: "What the one is missing is not what is hidden in the other. This is the whole problem of love."[45] At the same time, knowledge remains desirable, a knowledge of love even more so.

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44 Plato, *The Symposium*, p. 51.

45 "*Ce qui manque à l'un n'est pas de ce qu'il y a, caché, dans l'autre. C'est là tout le problème de l'amour*": Lacan, *Transference*, Polity Press 2015, pp. 39–40.

What do we find in Lacan's reading of *The Symposium*? The most intriguing thing is that force which constantly alludes dialogue. For Lacan this force is desire sustained in the gaps constituted by the primacy of the signifying nature of love. In so far as Socrates stands in for Lacan's *objet a*, we might conclude that *The Symposium* is the very first love letter – rewritten by Lacan in Seminar VIII – and the first psychanalytic love practice for us all.

Lacan-War-Religion

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Arthur Bradley*[1]

Lacan's War Games: Cybernetics, Sovereignty and War in Seminar II

> What is the image in the mirror? The rays which return on to the mirror make us locate in an imaginary space the object which moreover is somewhere in reality. The real object isn't the object that you see in the mirror. So here there's a phenomenon of consciousness [*phénomène de conscience*], as such. That at any rate is what I would like you to accept, so that I can tell you a little apologue to aid your reflection.
>
> Suppose all men have disappeared from the world. I say *men* on account of the high value which you attribute to consciousness. That is already enough to raise the question – *What is left in the mirror* [*qu'est-ce qu'il va rester dans le miroir*]? But let us take it to the point of supposing that all living beings have disappeared. There are only waterfalls and springs left – lightning and thunder too. The image in the mirror, the image in the lake – do they still exist?
>
> It is quite obvious that they still exist. For one very simple reason – at the high point of civilization we have attained, which far surpasses our illusions about consciousness, we have manufactured instruments which, without in any way being audacious, we can imagine to be sufficiently complicated to develop films themselves, put them away into little boxes, and store them in the fridge. Despite all living beings having disappeared, the camera can nonetheless record the image of the mountain in the lake, or that of the Café de Flore crumbling away in total solitude.[2]

In a world where all human beings have mysteriously disappeared, an automatic camera takes pictures no-one will ever see of a mountain reflected in a

1 I am indebted to Boštjan Nedoh and to audiences at Lancaster University and the University of Manchester for helpful feedback on an earlier version of this essay.

2 Jacques Lacan, *Seminar II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-5*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller and translated by Sylvana Tomaselli, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1988, p. 46; hereafter referred to as *Seminar II*.

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lake. To recall Jacques Lacan's remarkable thought experiment in Seminar II, *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-5*, what is taking place in this uncanny posthuman tableau of camera, sky, mountain and lake is nothing less than a new "materialist" phenomenon of consciousness. It may well have seemed to his seminar participants, of course, that there was something crucial missing from this alleged representation of "consciousness" at work, namely, the "I", *ego cogito* or self-conscious being who, post-Cartesian philosophy repeatedly insists, must accompany every act of thought. As Lacan makes clear from the very first session, however, his omission of the ego from this schema is precisely the point: Seminar II takes as i ts immediate point of departure – and principal target – Heinz Hartmann's Ego Psychology.[3] If Ego Psychology seeks to re-assert the primacy of the autonomous or substantial ego, which is taken to be the subject of all consciousness, Lacan proposes that the ego is in fact only an *object* that exists at the level of the imaginary – and so consciousness can actually take place quite independently of any self-reflexive Cartesian *ego cogito*.[4] In Lacan's words, what is at stake in Seminar II is quite simply how to "free our notion of consciousness of any mortgage [*toute espèce d'hypothèque*] as regards the subject's apprehension of itself [*cette saisie essentielle du sujet par lui-même*]".[5] What, though, might a materialist theory of consciousness look like?

To illustrate this theory, Lacan constructs his provocative hypothesis for his audience: a camera can be said to be "conscious" of the image in its viewfinder in the same way that the human brain is conscious of the image of a real object in a mirror. For Lacan, this machine fulfils all the necessary criteria of consciousness – real, imaginary and symbolic – without any need for a "ghost in the machine" because it can just as easily represent an image on a reflective surface as any ego. If "[s]o-called Man, distinguished by his so-called consciousness, is unnecessary for this process", glosses Friedrich Kittler, it is "because nature's mirrors can accommodate these types of representation just as well as the visual centre in the occipital lobe of the brain".[6] In Lacan's materialist theory, what we

3 Lacan, *Seminar II*, p. 11.

4 *Ibid*., pp. 49–50.

5 *Ibid*., p. 57.

6 Friedrich Kittler, "The World of the Symbolic – A World of the Machine," in: *Literature, Media, Information Systems*, edited and introduced by John Johnston, OPA, Amsterdam 1997, p. 131.

call "consciousness" can thus actually occur on *any* material surface – a lake, a mirror, a camera lens, the occipital lobe – that is capable of reflecting an image:[7] "this is what I want you to consider as being essentially a phenomenon of consciousness, which won't have been perceived by any ego [*moi*], which won't have been reflected upon in any ego-like [*moïque*] experience – any kind of ego and of consciousness of ego being absent at the time".[8]

If Lacan's curious thought experiment clearly still belongs to the genre of the Cartesian or Husserlian meditation, it is thus paradoxically a phenomenological reduction that is not performed by any *ego cogito*. It might even be possible to read it as an ironic riposte to Husserl's famous claim in his *Cartesian Meditations* that the transcendental *cogito* would survive even a plague that wiped out the whole of humanity.[9] As the French psychoanalyst proposes, Husserl is quite right to say that there is something essentially "inhuman" about consciousness – which means that it can carry on quasi-automatically without us – but for the wrong reason: consciousness is material, not transcendental, which means that it survives even the extinction of the *cogito*. For Lacan, what is at stake in this materialist definition of consciousness is not whether machines can be as conscious as human beings – indeed the whole field of what will later be called "artificial intelligence" is one to which he is supremely indifferent – but rather whether our so-called "human" consciousness is *itself* a kind of machine: "The machine is simply the succession of little os and 1s, so that the question of whether it is human or not is obviously entirely settled – it isn't. Except, there's also the question of knowing whether the human, in the sense in which you understand it, is as human as all that [*si humain que ça*]".[10] In the inhuman mirror of the camera lens, Lacan implies, we must learn to recognize ourselves anew: we human beings never actually disappeared from the world at all, but only because we were never really there in the first place, because human consciousness is itself a species of automatic photography, because we are the camera.

In this essay, though, I would like to propose that Lacan's materialist theory of consciousness – of a consciousness that seems to run all by itself in the absence

7 Lacan, *Seminar II*, p. 49.

8 *Ibid*., p. 47.

9 Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, M. Nijhoff, The Hague 1960, pp. 92–3.

10 Lacan, *Seminar II*, p. 319.

of any human sovereign ego – may also be a materialist theory of *politics* or even a peculiar kind of "war game": "Yes, war itself, considered in its aspect as game, detached from anything which might be real".[11] It is my aim in what follows to read his thought experiment not simply as a modern Cartesian meditation, in other words, but as a belated contribution to that other distinguished early modern speculative genre: the political fiction of origins and ends. After all, his bucolic *mis-en-scene* – sky, lake, mountains – is as reminiscent of Rousseau's Alps as Descartes' Paris and his thought experiment performs the same heuristic anthropological function as the latter's celebrated fiction of the state of nature in the Second Discourse: we are invited to recognize ourselves in Lacan's *camera obscura* in the same way as we are in Rousseau's *beau savage*. To quickly outline my argument, I will contend that Lacan's thought experiment about the relation between the allegedly "sovereign" human subject and the self-moving machine both emerges out of, and feeds back into, a set of contemporaneous political debates about the relationship between sovereignty and governmentality, decision and norm, exception and rule and, ultimately, war and peace. If the classic machine metaphor obviously has a long and distinguished history in philosophical anthropology – which uses it to solve the problems of consciousness, free will, the difference between humans and animals and so on – I shall propose that it is also a *political* trope that is variously deployed to describe the birth of modern science, the rise of political liberalism and the end of history.[12] In what follows, I thus seek to politically "reverse engineer" Lacan's thought experiment by revealing its possible origins in a set of increasingly obscure post-war philosophical debates on the meaning of what was simply known as the "machine". What, then, are the political implications of Lacan's materialist theory of consciousness?

Cybernetics

In Seminar II, Lacan famously explores the entirely new science of cybernetics. It has been shown by Christopher Johnson, amongst others, that the cybernetic revolution in the post-war USA led, in turn, to the emergence of a peculiar

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11 *Ibid*., p. 300.

12 Arthur Bradley, In the Sovereign Machine: Sovereignty, Governmentality, Automaticity. *Journal for Cultural Research*, 22 (3/2018), pp. 209–223.

genre of "French Cybernetics" in the late 1940s and 50s.[13] As Lydia H. Liu also observes, Lacan rarely mentions Norbert Weiner and other theorists by name in Seminar II but he would likely have become familiar with their work from a number of seminar attendees who had an interest in the field: Jean Hyppolite, who engaged with Weiner upon the latter's visit to France, and the mathematicians Georges Guilbaud and Jacques Riguet who were members of the Cercle d'Études Cybernétiques.[14] To give a very schematic overview of his argument as it unfolds across this seminar, Lacan deploys a series of tropes from cybernetic theory (circuits, feedback, chance, homeostasis, entropy and so on) in a largely heuristic manner to re-describe classic themes like (1) the ego,[15] (2) the drives[16] and (3) the symbolic order.[17] In Lacan's public lecture of 22 June 1955 "Psychoanalysis and Cybernetics, or On the Nature of Language," which summarized the work of the seminar to date, he concludes with what Liu rightly calls a quasi-Heideggerian definition of the "cybernetic unconscious" into which the human is thrown [*Geworfen*]: "The human being isn't master of this primordial, primitive language," he declares, "he has been thrown into it [*jeté*], committed [*engagé*], caught up in its gears [*pris dans un engrenage*]".[18] What, though, is the contemporary context of Lacan's turn to cybernetics?

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13 Christopher Johnson, 'French' Cybernetics. *French Studies: A Quarterly Review,* 69 (1/2015), pp. 60–78.

14 Lydia H. Liu, The Cybernetic Unconscious: Rethinking Lacan, Poe, and French Theory. *Critical Inquiry*, 36 (2/2010), pp. 299–300.

15 Lacan, *Seminar II*, pp. 40–52.

16 *Ibid*., pp. 53–63.

17 *Ibid*., pp. 77–92. For prior readings of this seminar, see Jacques-Alain Miller, "An Introduction to Seminars I and II: Lacan's Orientation Prior to 1953," in: *Reading Seminars I and II: Lacan's Return to Freud*, edited by Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink and Maire Jannus, SUNY, New York 1996, pp. 3–38; Friedrich Kittler, "The World of the Symbolic – A World of the Machine," in: *Literature, Media, Information* Systems, edited and introduced by John Johnston, OPA, Amsterdam 1997, pp. 130–46; Mark B. N. Hansen, *Embodying Technesis: Technology Beyond Writing*, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor 2000; Ronan Le Roux, Psychoanalyse et cybernétique: Les Machines de Lacan. *L'Evolution Psychiatriqu*e, 72 (2/2007), pp. 346 –69; John Johnson, *Allure of Machinic Life: Cybernetics, Artificial Life, and the New AI,* MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., and London 2008; Liu, The Cybernetic Unconscious, 288–320; and Arthur Bradley, *Originary Technicity: The Theory of Technology from Marx to Derrida*, Palgrave, London 2011.

18 Lacan, *Seminar II*, p. 307.

To be sure, Lacan's second seminar remains a surprisingly obscure work within his corpus that has attracted little attention from scholars despite, or arguably because of, its inaugural status within the seminars as a whole. It is symptomatic here that arguably its most famous single session – the "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" (1956) – would first have been encountered by the vast majority of Anglophone readers retrospectively, and entirely out of context, in Jeffrey Mehlman's 1972 translation.[19] As is so often the case with "early" works, Seminar II thus tends to be read genetically – not least by the author himself – as little more than a theoretical precursor to, or antecedent of, the later, more prominent, corpus. For Jacques-Alain Miller, who offers one of the very few historical reconstructions of the seminars of the mid-1950s, they are chiefly remarkable because they mark the conceptual transition from the early "phenomenological" Lacan of the 1930s and 40s to the later "structuralist" Lacan of the 1960s and 70s: "Structuralism taught him that the Husserlian attempt to describe one's immediate intuition of the world – feeling one's own body or being in a perspective – is illusory because language is always already there".[20] In this orthodox reception history, Lacan's seminar on cybernetics thus signals at best the – embryonic – beginnings of the "canonical" Lacan of structuralism.

If we return to Seminar II on its own terms – rather than as merely a precursor to the larger engagement with structuralist linguistics via Saussure and Jakobson – then we encounter a Lacan who is arguably more materialist, and less linguistic, than his later reputation implies. It is enough to recall here the work of the small number of media theorists – principally Friedrich Kittler – who have returned to Seminar II to propose exactly such a materialist counter-genealogy of the Lacanian clinic. As Kittler contentiously argues, the triple media revolutions of the late 19th century – gramophone, film, typewriter – constitute what he calls the "historical a priori" of Lacan's own tripartite theory of the psyche in terms of the real, the imaginary and the symbolic.[21] To break out of what he sees as the linguistic or discursive straitjacket that continues to dominate critical theory of new media, science and technology up to the present, the media theorist Mark B. N. Hansen likewise advocates returning to Seminar II: Lacan's reading

[19] John Forrester, *The Seductions of Psychoanalysis: Freud, Lacan, and Derrida,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1990, p. 339; see also Liu, The Cybernetic Unconscious, p. 319.

[20] Miller, "An Introduction to Seminars I and II: Lacan's Orientation Prior to 1953," p. 12.

[21] Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, translated and introduced by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA 1999, p. 16.

of the symbolic order as a kind of cybernetic loop or circuit, rather than a set of signifiers, takes an important, if only ever partial, step towards liberating technology's "radical exteriority" from language and cognition more generally.[22] In a more historical vein, Lydia H. Liu's excellent reconstruction of Lacan's work in this period also criticizes the dominant structuralist and linguistic reception of the "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" – which leads both supporters like Miller and critics like Derrida to fetishize it as a kind of closed, self-reproducing textual system – by arguing that Seminar II is, rather, the product of a "political decision or intuition" about what she calls the "cybernetic unconscious" of the "postwar Euro-American world order".[23]

In such accounts of the Lacan of Seminar II, what we might call the question of "the political" looms large but, at the same time, it often remains frustratingly nebulous. It is very well documented that the cybernetic revolution already had its own disturbing political – and military – trajectory by the mid-1950s but the question of how far, precisely, Lacan's seminar engages with this history remains unanswered. As Kittler correctly observes, cybernetics was, empirically, "a theory of the Second World War":[24] Norbert Weiner famously began to construct his celebrated "Weiner Filter" when working on automatic anti-aircraft guns whereas the game theorist John von Neumann was recruited onto the Manhattan Project. To a remarkably prescient degree, Lacan grasped this ongoing "weaponization" of cybernetics – or informationalization of war – in Seminar II: "It is not for nothing that game theory is concerned with all the functions of our economic life, the theory of coalitions, of monopolies, the theory of war", he memorably observes in "Psychoanalysis and Cybernetics," "Yes, war itself, considered in its aspect as game [*dans ses ressorts de jeu essentiellement*], detached from anything which might be real [*détaché* de quoi que *ce soit qui s'y incarne de réel*]".[25] However, the psychoanalyst does not extrapolate upon the military-industrial politics of cybernetics – beyond one or two quasi-Heideggerian pronouncements about the dangerous becoming-symbolic of man – and this political lacuna arguably remains open in subsequent criticism of the seminar. If Kittler is able to argue that the Second World War is the origin of cybernetics,

[22] Hansen, *Embodying Technesis*, p. 182.
[23] Liu, The Cybernetic Unconscious, p. 289.
[24] Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, p. 259.
[25] Lacan, *Seminar II*, p. 300.

and that cybernetics is, in turn, the "historical a priori" of Lacan's psychoanalysis, it is surprising that he never triangulates this set of insights to consider whether the Lacanian clinic might also be, so to speak, a theory of war. For Liu, Lacan's cybernetic turn is undoubtedly a "political decision or intuition," rather than a purely conceptual shift or turn, but it is probably fair to say that her essay is concerned less with the "postwar Euro-American world order" than with the internal cultural politics of "French Theory." In order to gain a more precise purchase of what is at stake politically in Lacan's seminar, I thus want to begin by reading it in the context of the political history of the machine metaphor.

Materialism

In Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651), which was first published just over 300 years before Seminar II, we find an unlikely prototype for Lacan's thought experiment on the materiality of consciousness. To recall only Abraham Bosse's famous frontispiece to the original edition, which was apparently designed to the author's own specifications, Hobbes' political thought experiment clearly presents us with another tableau of a complex but soulless machine, running entirely by itself, in a peaceful world of mountains, sea and sky that is, once again, apparently devoid of human beings.[26] It is worth remembering here that Hobbes's text is also a direct reaction to, and radicalization of, Descartes' philosophical anthropology in the *Meditations* and elsewhere. After all, the French philosopher had already compared the human body to a spring-operated clockwork mechanism like a clock or watch little more than a decade before *Leviathan*.[27] For Hobbes, Descartes' new philosophical question – can an artificial body run all by itself independently of any animating soul? – is, however, transformed into the classic modern political question of whether an artificial

[26] To recall just one of the many curious details in Bosse's celebrated frontispiece, the city over which the mighty Leviathan presides is apparently entirely empty of people. For only the most recent attempt to decipher the significance of Bosse's engraving, see Giorgio Agamben, "Leviathan and Behemoth," in: *Stasis: Civil War as a Political Paradigm*, translated by Nicholas Heron, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA 2015, pp. 25–70.

[27] For Descartes: "I might consider the body of a man as a kind of machine equipped with and made up of, bones, nerves, muscles, veins, blood and skin in such a way that, even if there were no mind in it, it would still perform all the same movements as it now does in those cases where movement is not under the control of the will or, consequently, of the mind" (René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, translated by John Cottingham, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1986, p. 58).

body politic can function entirely autonomously of its animating sovereign demon or homunculus. In the celebrated opening to *Leviathan*, the English political philosopher asks: "For seeing life is but a motion of Limbs, the beginning whereof is in some principall part within; why may we not say, that all Engines that move themselves by springs and wheeles as doth a watch) have an artificiall life?".[28] What if Hobbes' materialist theory of politics is one possible origin of Lacan's materialist theory of consciousness?

To pursue this (admittedly speculative) hypothesis into the mid-20th century context of Lacan's seminar, I want to consider a very different, if broadly contemporary, attempt to recuperate Hobbes' political project: Carl Schmitt's *Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes* (1938). It is rarely observed that this essay – written to mark the 300th anniversary of Descartes' *Meditations* – is not only a study of Hobbes as a political theological mythographer but as a modern philosopher of technology. As the German jurist argues: "Hobbes transfers…the Cartesian concept of man as a mechanism with a soul onto the 'huge man', the state, made by him into a machine animated by the sovereign representative person".[29] For Schmitt, Hobbes' philosophy is thus a species of "political Cartesianism" that projects Descartes' dualist theory of man – where the human is composed of mechanical matter and immaterial mind – into a dualist theory of the state as composed of a mechanical body and sovereign personalist "soul." Yet, where Descartes argues that only the body of man is like a machine, Hobbes extends the analogy to the *soul* as well: Schmitt contends that the sovereign person at the centre of the state machine is *himself* the product of a formal process of representation. If Hobbes seeks to defend sovereign personalism, he thus ironically renders the state in its entirety a liberal *homo artificialis*: the "Leviathan" is "the first product of the age of technology, the first modern mechanism in a grand style, as a *machine machinarum*".[30] In a curious case of philosophical feedback, (1) Hobbes' politicization of (2) Descartes' philosophical anthropology is itself later re-anthropologized by (3) Julien de la

[28] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan or the Matter, Forme and Power of a Common Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil*, edited by Richard Tuck, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1991, p. 1.

[29] Carl Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes: Meaning and Failure of a Political Symbol*, translated by George Schwab & Erna Hilfstein, Chicago University Press, Chicago, IL 2008, p. 32.

[30] *Ibid*., p. 34.

Mettrie in his theory of man as a – soulless – machine:[31] "After the body and soul of the huge man became a machine, the transfer back became possible, and even the little man could become a *homme-machine*. The mechanization of the concept of the state thus completed the mechanization of the anthropological image of man".[32]

If Schmitt is correct to say that Hobbes' "Leviathan" is the original "*homme machine*" – because the body politic becomes totally mechanized, body and soul, for the first time in history in his work – then it follows that the classic philosophical machine metaphor was always and already a political trope from the very beginning. It is the *political* question of sovereign personalism versus liberal governmentality, in other words, that makes possible the seemingly a-political philosophical anthropological questions of consciousness versus automatism, free will versus determinism, the human versus the animal and so on. Accordingly, it is no coincidence that Schmitt's own political theology seeks to *re-politicize* the machine metaphor after its depoliticization at the hands of liberal modernity: what appears to be a neutral, positive mechanism is, upon his reading, the site of an obscure political *polemos*. To recall Schmitt's own dramatic claim from his classic earlier *Political Theology* (1922), for example, what takes place with the scientific revolution of the early modern period is not merely the "neutral" and a-political passage from Koyré's closed world of premodernity to the open universe of modernity, but a kind of political ontological *coup d'état* that violently overthrows the personal sovereignty of the premodern prince and replaces him with the – now fully mechanical, autonomous and automatic – juridico-political order of modernity: "The sovereign, who in the deistic view of the world, even if conceived as residing outside the world, had remained the engineer of the great machine, has been radically pushed aside," Schmitt writes, "The machine now runs by itself".[33] In Schmitt's own famous or notorious political theological critique of modern liberalism, of course, what is at stake is precisely the attempt to recuperate (or perhaps retroactively invent) the figure of the concrete sovereign person or decision-maker who presides over the – allegedly autonomous and self-regulating – *machine machinarum* of laws.

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31 See Julien de la Mettrie, *Man a Machine*, translated by G. C. Bussey, Open Court, Chicago, IL 1912.

32 Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, p. 37.

33 Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, translated by George Schwab, Chicago University Press, Chicago, IL 1985, p. 48.

In this historical context, I want to propose that Lacan's own thought experiment may not merely dramatize the phenomenological supersession of the sovereign ego by the "machine" of consciousness but the political overthrow of the premodern sovereign person by the *machine machinarum* of the modern liberal juridico-political order. It is impossible to separate philosophy from political theory, philosophical anthropology from artificial intelligence, Descartes' "little man" from Hobbes' "huge man" in Lacan's thought experiment because they are all part of the same closed circuit. As we will see presently, Lacan is thoroughly immersed not only in the philosophical history of the machine metaphor Schmitt is describing from Descartes to La Mettrie, but is also familiar with the post-Schmittean political critique of liberalism as the machine that runs by itself if only, perhaps, via key interlocutors such as Koyré, Kojève and Strauss. To re-read Lacan's description of the scientific revolution in this context, we might thus begin to detect not merely a philosophical or psychoanalytic revolution but, once again, an obscure kind of *political* revolution at work: "Here man isn't master in his own house [*maître chez lui*]. There is something into which he integrates himself, which through its combinations already governs [*et qui déjà règle par la loi de ses combinaison*]".[34] If Lacan's machine metaphor clearly has Freudian origins – "Everything fell into place, the cogs meshed", Freud writes in an early letter to Fleiss, "the thing really seemed to be a machine which in a moment would run of itself"[35] — I thus want to hypothesize that it might also belong to a classical political tradition describing the relationship between sovereignty and governmentality that stretches from Schmitt to at least as far back as Louis Adolphe Thiers famous formula that "the king reigns but does not govern [*le roi règne gouverne mais il ne gouverne pas*]." In order to pursue this political reading of Lacan's thought experiment further, I now want to read it alongside a set of specific debates about the philosophical, historical and political implications of the "machine" in post-war French thought by figures such as Schuhl, Koyré and Kojève.

34 Lacan, *Seminar II*, p. 307.

35 Sigmund Freud, *The Origins of Psychoanalysis: Letters to Wilhelm Fleiss, Drafts and Notes, 1887-1902*, edited by Marie Bonaparte, Anna Freud and Ernst Kris, Basic Books, New York 1954, p. 173.

Machine

In "Freud, Hegel and the Machine," one of the early sessions in Seminar II, Lacan offers a fragmentary genealogy of the philosophy of the machine from Descartes' *De Homine* (1662) through Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) up to Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1922). To briefly rehearse his argument here, Lacan begins by claiming that what leads Descartes to the conclusion that the human body is directly comparable to a machine is not actually a phenomenological meditation at all but the invention of a very specific machine: the clock.[36] It is with the creation of the clock, he argues, that we humans encounter not only something outside ourselves that also seems to run "all by itself" but also, and more significantly, a material embodiment of our own symbolic activity. After all, the clock is something intrinsic to our human subjectivity – we all must "know the time" in order to be in the world – but which nonetheless embodies a purely symbolic system of temporal precision that operates wholly independently *of* humans. For Lacan, and this is arguably the closest Seminar II comes to a "thesis," what is at stake in the machine called the clock is thus a materialization of the prior symbolic order out of which human subjectivity itself is constructed: "The machine embodies the most radical symbolic activity of man [*dans la machine est incarnée l'activité symbolique la plus radicale chez l'homme*]".[37] If the clock revealed to Descartes that human subjectivity is itself built out of symbols, so later thermodynamic machines like the steam engine likewise stand behind Freud's theory of the psyche as the site of a set of autonomous, self-regulating, energetic drives like the pleasure principle: "And later on, it dawned on people, something which was never thought of before, that living things look after themselves all on their own [*les êtres vivants s'entretiennent tous seuls*], in other words, they represent homeostats [*qu'ils représentent*

[36] Lacan, *Seminar II*, p. 73.

[37] *Ibid*., p. 74. If Seminar II is (at least to my knowledge) Lacan's first explicit discussion of the symbolic order in terms of the machine, he obviously returns to, and re-works, this analogy in later work such as the famous discussion of the relationship between *tuche* and *automaton* in Seminar XI: *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. In the earlier seminar, Lacan's interest is clearly in articulating the symbolic determinism that underwrites apparent acts of chance – such as the act of tossing a coin – but the later seminar is more concerned with exposing the "chance" encounter with the real that underlies and resists the automaton that is the symbolic order (Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller and translated by Alan Sheridan. W. W. Norton and Co., New York 1978, pp. 53–66; hereafter referred to as *Seminar XI*).

des homéostats]".[38] In this context, Lacan's materialist theory of consciousness merely represents the last iteration of this genealogy of the machine: what the human being recognizes in the clock, the steam engine and the automatic camera is that we are *ourselves* fundamentally machinic beings. What, again, might be the political implications of Lacan's philosophy of the machine?

To re-read Lacan's seminar within its contemporary philosophical context, we can perhaps begin to see that he is not simply engaging with such prominent figures as Heidegger but also carving out a niche for himself within a, now largely forgotten, debate about the – historical, sociological or epistemological – causality of technological evolution. It is possible to argue that his seminar emerges particularly out of a series of philosophical interventions in the immediate post-war period which seek to explain the – notoriously pervasive – use of slave labor in Ancient Greece. According to Aristotle's *Politics*, of course, Greek society was compelled to rely on the "living tool [*ktema ti empyschon*]" called the slave because of the absence of more highly evolved forms of self-moving technology.[39] Yet, pace Aristotle, the historian of the Ancient World Pierre-Maxim Schuhl argued that the Greek dependency on slavery was precisely what artificially *delayed* its technological evolution. For Schuhl, whose *Machinisme et philosophie* (1947) offered a new history of Ancient Greek technology, "we do not need to save manpower by resorting to machines when we have at our disposal numerous and inexpensive living machines [*machines vivantes*], as far removed from the free man as the animal: slaves".[40] If Schuhl offers a broadly positivist or sociological explanation of Ancient Greek technogenesis – where the existence of cheap and abundant slave labour rendered machines simply uneconomical – Alexandre Koyré rejects this account in favour of a historical epistemological position which insists that Greece lacked the kind of genuinely experimental theory of science that made modern technological innovation possible. In essays like "Les Philosophes et la machine" (1948), which is a review essay of Schuhl's book, Koyré proposes that "philosophy" – by which he means the phi-

38 Lacan, *Seminar II*, p. 75.

39 Aristotle, *Politics* in *Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, edited by Jonathan Barnes, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ 1984, 1253b.

40 Pierre-Maxim Schuhl, *Machinisme et philosophie*. PUF, Paris 1947, pp. 13–14. See also Giorgio Agamben, *The Use of Bodies: Homo Sacer IV, 2*, translated by Adam Kotsko, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA 2016. This is (to my knowledge) the only contemporary philosophical engagement with Schuhl's reading of slavery in *Machinisme et philosophie*.

losophy of science or, more strictly, theoretical physics – is what makes positive technology – or the "machine" – possible or necessary rather than *vice versa*: "Greek science could not give birth to true technology. In the absence of physics, such technology is strictly inconceivable".[41]

If contemporary French philosophy of technology seemed to offer a choice, crudely speaking, between sociology (Schuhl) and historical epistemology (Koyré), Lacan's psychoanalytic genealogy in Seminar II appears to navigate a kind of "middle way" that synthesizes elements of both positions. To be sure, Lacan's genealogy of the scientific revolution in "Psychoanalysis and Cybernetics" is clearly deeply indebted to Koyré's classic account of the passage from the "closed world" of premodernity to the "open universe" of modern science which he formulates in the later text of that name.[42] It also appears to draw directly on Koyré's claim that what enabled the technological invention of objects such as the clock was the prior philosophical invention of the mathematical universe of precision. Accordingly, we find Lacan's argument that Huyghens' isochronic clock is "a hypothesis embodied [*incarnée*] in an instrument"[43] is an almost verbatim reproduction of Koyré's earlier statement in "Du monde de l''a-peu-près' a l'univers de la précision" (1948) that the chronometric clock is "an *instrument*, that is to say, the creation of *scientific* thought or, better still, the conscious realization of a theory".[44] Yet, at the same time, Lacan cannot wholly embrace Koyré's theoretical idealism because he is at pains, like the more historicist Schuhl, to emphasize the extent to which the clock embodies something that necessarily both precedes and exceeds any gesture of philosophical knowledge or mastery. For Lacan, the philosopher can never be the idealist "master" of the machine because, as we will see momentarily, he is already the "slave" of the symbolic universe. In another complex feedback loop, Lacan argues that (1) the symbolic order "invents" man; (2) man, in turn, invents the machine and (3) the machine

41 Alexandre Koyré, "Les philosophes et la machine," in: *Études d'histoire de la pensée philosophique*, Gallimard, Paris 1971, p. 341.

42 Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe,* Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore 1957. For a comparative reading of Lacan and Koyré, see also Samo Tomšič, Mathematical Realism and the Impossible Structure of the Real. *Psychoanalytische Perspectieven,* 35 (1/2017), pp. 9–34.

43 Lacan, *Seminar II*, p. 298.

44 Alexandre Koyré, "Du monde de l''à-peu-près' à l'univers de la précision," in: *Études d'histoire de la pensée philosophique*, Gallimard, Paris 1971, p. 357.

retroactively embodies or materializes the originary becoming-symbolic of man: "I am explaining to you that it is in as much as he is committed to a play of symbols, to a symbolic world, that man is a decentred subject. Well, it is with this same play, this same world, that the machine is built. The most complicated machines are made only with words [*ne sont faites qu'avec des paroles*]".[45]

In this period, however, Lacan's single most significant political interlocutor within contemporary French philosophy of technology arguably remains Alexandre Kojève whose idiosyncratic philosophical anthropological re-reading of Hegel's master-slave dialectic had an incalculable impact on post-war French thought.[46] To re-read Lacan's constant references to the figure of the slave in Seminar II – whether it be Meno's slave in Plato's dialogue or Hegel's master-slave dialectic – we can begin to place his work within a long philosophical history of the slave, which stretches from Aristotle, through Hegel and arguably even up to Agamben, as *itself* the original form of technology: Kojève, in particular, famously reads Hegel's master-slave dialectic in anthropogenetic terms as the becoming-human of the animal through its transcendence of pure nature via labor or struggle.[47] It is very clear from Lacan's – otherwise impeccably Koyréan – account of the scientific revolution, for instance, that what is at stake in the birth of modern science is not simply the becoming-symbolic of the premodern universe but a more political becoming-slave of the humanist theory of sovereign man. As he narrates it in "Psychoanalysis and Cybernetics," "The order of science hangs on the following, that in officiating over nature [*d'officiant* à la nature], man has become its officious servant [*l'homme est devenu son officieux*]. He will not rule over it, except by obeying it [*Il ne la gouvernera pas sinon en lui obéissant*]. And like the slave, he tries to make the master dependent on him by serving him well [*il tente de faire tomber son maître sous sa dépendance, en le servant bien*]".[48] Yet, where Hegel's slave famously goes on to liberate himself from his master through his own symbolic labors, Lacan's exchange with Jean Hyppolite in Seminar II makes clear that the *Phenomenology of Spirit*'s account

45 Lacan, *Seminar II*, p. 47.

46 See Arthur Bradley, Terrors of Theory: Critical Theory of Terror from Kojève to Žižek. *Telos* no. 189 (Spring 2020), forthcoming.

47 Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, assembled by Raymond Queneau, edited by Allan Bloom and translated by James H. Nichols, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY 1969.

48 Lacan, *Seminar II*, p. 298.

of history's dialectical progression towards absolute knowledge is itself nothing more than an elaborate philosophical fantasy of mastery.[49] If we re-read Lacan's materialist thought experiment on consciousness in this neo-Hegelian context, we might thus interpret its vision of the human subject as a conscious machine running on an endless circuit or feedback loop, without ever achieving the short-circuit of self-consciousness, less as some kind of Kojèvean prophecy of the "end of history" than as a kind of literal dialectic at a standstill. For Lacan, pace Kojève, this subject is not so much post-historical as *pre-historical*, frozen in a pre-dialectical state of nature, trapped in a permanent and non-speculative state of "slavery" to the symbolic order. In drawing this essay to a close, though, I want to add one more contemporary political footnote to Lacan's thought experiment: nuclear strategy.

Bomb

In the admittedly few critical discussions of Lacan's materialist theory of consciousness, I am struck that one simple question has never been satisfactorily answered: why, exactly, do all the human beings disappear? It is tempting to speculate that Lacan's own psychoanalytic machine may also be starting to run all by itself here, above and beyond its maker's original intentions, because there is no obviously no logical need to annihilate the whole of humanity simply in order to prove the redundancy of the *ego cogito*. As a matter of fact, his radical move even risks disproving his larger argument because it seems to imply that there *is* something essentially "human" about the *cogito* after all. To answer the question of why all human beings must disappear, Lacan declares that his *reductio ad nihilum* is really just an exorbitant provocation to the presumed Cartesianism of his seminar participants for whom "man" and "consciousness" are indeed still synonymous: "I say *men* on account of the high value which you attribute to consciousness".[50] If he never really explains what has happened to the human race, it is curious that a seminar that consistently addresses the revolutionary implications of technological inventions from the clock to the steam engine for philosophy does not entertain one – brutally empirical – answer to

[49] *Ibid*., pp. 70–2. For an excellent overview of Lacan's complex engagement with the master-slave dialectic, and with Hegel's philosophy of history more widely, see also Justin Clemens, "The Field and Function of the Slave in the Écrits," in: *Lacan: The New Generation*, edited by Lorenzo Chiesa, Re:press, Melbourne 2014, pp. 193–202.

[50] Lacan, *Seminar II*, p. 46.

this question which will be famously pursued just a few years later in the explicitly post-nuclear philosophy of Günther Anders, Karl Jaspers and, later, Maurice Blanchot.[51] In the new atomic era inaugurated by the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Lacan's thought experiment of a world in which all living things could instantly be annihilated by an arbitrary sovereign decision was no longer simply a thought experiment. What if the machine that can run all by itself in the absence of all human beings is the atom bomb?

To return to Lacan's hypothesis in this military context, we might begin to see it as neither an exercise in Cartesian philosophical anthropology nor in Rousseauean political allegory but as a new and entirely literal kind of war game: "Yes, war itself, considered in its aspect as game, detached from anything which might be real".[52] It may be possible, in other words, to place Lacan's thought experiment within the long history of military "war games" that begins with chess matches in Ancient India and extends up to modern computer simulations. Yet, his materialist theory of consciousness is not quite a "theory" of war in the sense that it imitates or rehearses pre-existing "reality" in the manner of some military training exercise. For Lacan, on the contrary, this war game is rather an actualization of what we might call the becoming-real – or even becoming-war – of the symbolic itself. If the simple "adding machine" is "far more dangerous for man than the atom bomb",[53] as he claims earlier in the seminar, it is because the philosophical neutralization of man by the symbolic order has *already* prepared the ground for the literal neutralization of the human race by a nuclear weapon. In Lacan's account, cybernetics itself, not nuclear war, is the "real" killing machine.

If cybernetics was indeed "a theory of the Second World War", as Friedrich Kittler claims,[54] it had by the mid-1950s evolved to become a theory of the – seemingly imminent – Third World War as well. To be sure, Norbert Weiner

51 Günther Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen. Band I: Über die Seele im Zeitalter der zweiten industriellen Revolution*, München, C. H. Beck 1956; Karl Jaspers, *Die Atombombe und die Zukunft des Menschen*, Piper Verlag, Munich 1958; Maurice Blanchot, "The Apocalypse is Disappointing," in: *Friendship,* translated by Elizabeth Rottenberg, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA 1997, pp. 101–108.

52 Lacan, *Seminar II*, p. 300.

53 *Ibid*., p. 88.

54 Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, p. 259.

himself became a vocal opponent of the nuclear weaponization of information theory in the post-WW II era but, once set in motion, this new informational war machine would not so easily be stopped. It is worth recalling here that Lacan would by no means be the last cybernetic theorist to create a thought experiment predicated upon the annihilation of all human beings. As many scholars have documented, John von Neumann would himself become instrumental in formulating the famous or notorious nuclear deterrence theory of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD). In this post-nuclear context, we thus might begin to make sense of a curious embellishment at the end of Lacan's thought experiment on consciousness: "We can take things further. If the machine were more complicated, a photo-electric cell focused on the image in the lake could cause an explosion – it is always necessary, for something to seem efficacious, that an explosion takes place somewhere – and another machine could record the echo or collect the energy of this explosion".[55]

In a world where all human beings have been annihilated, then, machines will continue to talk to one another via a language of explosions that no-one will ever see or feel. To re-read his materialist theory of consciousness through the lens of nuclear strategy one last time, Lacan's machine – an automatic camera that carries on taking pictures even when there is no one left to operate it or to view its photographs – thus arguably even becomes a kind of perverse[56] psychoanalytic prototype for what nuclear theorists will later call a Secure Second Strike Retaliatory System (SSRS). It is an intriguing historical coincidence that Seminar II took place in the exact same period – the mid-1950s – that the USA began to implement President Eisenhower's foreign policy doctrine of "Massive Retaliation" by deploying its Strategic Air Command both domestically and in Europe as a permanent second strike capacity against the Soviet Union.[57] If a nuclear power possesses an SSRS (a system that has become automated or "fail-deadly" over time), then it always has the capacity to meet a first or "surprise" strike that destroys its command and control structures with a retaliatory second strike of its own – and so the theory of Mutually Assured Destruction becomes a technological dead certainty. What, and it is with this speculation that

55 Lacan, *Seminar II*, p. 47.

56 Boštjan Nedoh, *Ontology and Perversion: Deleuze, Agamben, Lacan*, Rowman and Littlefield International, London 2019.

57 Walton S. Moody, *Building a Strategic Air Force: The Official US Air Force History of the Strategic Air Command 1945-1953*, Air Force History and Museum, Washington, DC 1996.

I will conclude, if Lacan's materialist theory of consciousness ends up performing not simply the redundancy of the human *ego cogito* but the entire symbolic theory of war which reaches its logical end in the mutually assured destruction of the human race? In a world without us, Lacan's war games continue to play on all by themselves.[58]

[58] In coming to this conclusion, of course, I do not mean to suggest that Lacan "endorses" such a political position but rather that it is one possible and legitimate – if perversely literal – "use" for the machine he has set in motion. To the contrary, Lacan is already clear in this comparatively early seminar that there is something that *resists* or prevents the total integration of the subject into the symbolic order but, intriguingly at this stage of his work, it is not the real but the imaginary: "we come upon a precious fact revealed to us by cybernetics – there is something in the symbolic function of human discourse that cannot be eliminated, and that is the role played in it by the imaginary" (Lacan, *Seminar II*, p. 306). If Seminar II identifies this point of resistance to the symbolic wholly with the imaginary – even to the extent of speculating that the entire sphere of the symbolic may itself be nothing more than a second-order fantasy of the imaginary (*Ibid*., p. 307) – Seminar XI will, as we have seen above, posit that the real is what resists the pure functionality of the symbolic machine (Lacan, *Seminar XI*, pp. 53–66). In this context – which I do not have the time and space to explore in any detail here – we might also consider an intriguing addendum or post-script that Lacan gives to his thought experiment: the human race, having mysteriously disappeared, just as mysteriously *returns* to witness the photographic images the automatic camera has recorded in their absence (Lacan, *Seminar II*, pp. 46–7). Why must the humans return to in order to confirm their own redundancy?

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Working-Through Christianity: Lacan and Atheism[1]

§1 Indeed, not very catholic: subtle heresy, but heresy nonetheless

Jacques Lacan looks like an atheist. He talks like an atheist. But, do not be fooled: He really is an atheist.

Having to argue that Lacan is indeed atheistic might seem rather strange. Despite Lacan's background as a Jesuit-educated French Catholic, his biography reveals someone who, with a little help from Baruch Spinoza, very early on broke for good with the religious ethos of his childhood.[2] Anyone even minimally familiar with facts about his adult character and behaviors would have trouble maintaining with a straight face that he led the life and embodied the values of a devout Christian. Moreover, Lacan devoted his entire career to teaching and practicing psychoanalysis. He truly was, as he insisted, a tireless champion of Sigmund Freud, another "godless Jew" (along with Spinoza and Karl Marx).

Yet, other details about Lacan tempt the faithful. These include his taste for custom-tailored Yves Saint Laurent dress shirts with clerical-style collars, his Benedictine monk brother Marc-François (dubbed by Paul Roazen "Lacan's first disciple"[3]), and his overtures to the Vatican and visits to Rome.[4] Lacan's discourse is littered with references to Christian texts and traditions. Some of his key terms and images (*le Nom-du-Père*, the trinitarian Borromean knot, etc.) are

1 In part, this article is a result of the bilateral research project BI-US/19-21-004 "Religion, Atheism and Perversion: Between Philosophy and Psychoanalysis", which is funded by the Slovenian Research Agency.

2 Élisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan & Co.: A History of Psychoanalysis in France, 1925–1985*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1990, p. 104.

3 Paul Roazen, "Lacan's First Disciple," *Journal of Religion and Health*, 35 (4/1996), pp. 321–336.

4 Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan & Co.*, pp. 260–261; Élisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan: Outline of a Life, History of a System of Thought*, trans. Barbara Bray, Columbia University Press, New York 1997, pp. 204–206.

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taken directly from this religious legacy. He even designates his female followers as "the nuns of the Father" (*les nonnes du Père*).[5]

But, likely the most important feature of Lacan's version of psychoanalysis attracting the theologically minded is what appears to be a pronounced difference between him and Freud apropos their evident attitudes to religion. Freud's staunch commitments to the ideals of the Enlightenment and the *Weltanschauung* of the modern natural sciences render him implacably hostile to religiosity *tout court*.[6] In works such as "Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices" (1907), *Totem and Taboo* (1913), and *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), Freud establishes himself as one of the most virulently and uncompromisingly atheistic thinkers in history.

By seeming contrast, Lacan not only refrains from Freud's more bluntly combative style of anti-religiosity—he often comes across as somewhat sympathetic toward the religious materials he references. Lacan's careful invocations of the Bible, Saint Paul, Augustine, the Christian mystics, and so on gives the impression of an analytic theoretician who, despite his avowed fidelity to Freud, does not share with the founder of psychoanalysis a fierce animosity to all things religious. Similarly, the difference in manner between how Freud and Lacan each engage with religions leads some to suspect that the latter never really left behind the Catholicism surrounding him during his upbringing. As the title of a 2015 study by Jean-Louis Sous expresses this suspicion, *Pas très catholique, Lacan?*.[7] Others go even further, trying to lay claim to Lacan as an analytic theologian rendering Freudianism and Christianity fully compatible with one another. The Jesuit priest turned analyst Louis Beirnaert pins on Lacan his hopes for a rapprochement between psychoanalysis and faith.[8]

5 Stanley A. Leavy, "The Image and the Word: Further Reflections on Jacques Lacan," in: J. H. Smith, W. Kerrigan (Eds.), *Interpreting Lacan*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1983, p. 13.

6 Sidi Askofaré, "De l'inconscient au sinthome: Conjectures sur les usages et le renoncement possible au Nom-du-Père," *L'en-je lacanien*, No. 6 (2006), p. 30.

7 Jean-Louis Sous, *Pas très catholique, Lacan?*, EPEL, Paris 2015, pp. 15–16.

8 Louis Beirnaert, "Introduction à la psychanalyse freudienne de la religion," in: *Aux frontières de l'acte analytique: La Bible, saint Ignace, Freud et Lacan*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1987, pp. 57–58.

I can begin arguing against these various doubts about and denials of Lacan's atheism by pointing out the exaggerated, even false, contrast between Freud's and Lacan's fashions of relating to religions. Freud, despite his clear, unwavering atheism, nonetheless carries out sophisticated examinations of Christianity and Judaism especially. Indeed, his last major work is 1939's *Moses and Monotheism*, a project that consumed him for much of the 1930s. There is no substantial difference between Freud and Lacan in terms of one dismissing and the other attending to religious subjects.

Furthermore, Lacan repeatedly reminds his audiences of his own irreligiosity. In *Seminar VII* (*The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* [1959-1960]), during a discussion of Saint Paul's Epistle to the Romans, he observes, "We analysts… do not have to believe in these religious truths in any way… in order to be interested in what is articulated in its own terms in religious experience."[9] During a two-part lecture in Brussels summarizing much of his then-current seventh seminar, Lacan avers, "the least that one can say is that I do not profess any confessional belonging."[10] During this same lecture, he speaks of "earth" (*la terre*) and "heaven" (*le ciel*) as "empty of God" (*vides de Dieu*).[11] Likewise, in the contemporaneous 1960 écrit "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious," Lacan declares, "We need not answer for any ultimate truth, and certainly not for or against any particular religion."[12] One does not have to believe in religion to take it seriously. And, even if one denies the reality of other worlds, one cannot deny the all-too-real cultural and socio-historical presence of religions in this world. Jean-Daniel Causse, in his 2018 study *Lacan et le christianisme*, contends that Lacan is interested specifically in the secularizable form, rather than the doctrinal content, of "religious experience."[13]

9 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter, W. W. Norton and Company, New York 1992, pp. 170–171.

10 Jacques Lacan, "Conférence de Bruxelles sur l'éthique de la psychanalyse," *Psychoanalyse: La Revue de l'École Belge de Psychanalyse*, No. 4 (1986), p. 170.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 181.

12 Jacques Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious," in: *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink, W. W. Norton and Company, New York 2006, p. 693.

13 Jean-Daniel Causse, *Lacan et le christianisme*, Paris: Campagne Première, 2018, p. 148.

Sous, at one point in his above-mentioned book, asserts that, "Lacan always left in suspense the answer to the question of knowing if the analyst should make a profession of atheism or not."[14] As I just indicated, and as I will proceed to substantiate further, Sous's assertion here is highly contestable. But, even if one grants it, Lacan's alleged hesitancy about professions of irreligiosity arguably concerns the analyst-*qua*-practitioner, rather than the analyst-*qua*-theoretician. The analytic clinician should, with few if any exceptions, refrain from confessions of his/her beliefs (or lack thereof) to analysands. However, the analytic thinker addressing persons other than analysands on the couch is another matter altogether. Lacan, in his role as theorist and teacher of analysis, showed no hesitations about openly professing his atheism to various others.

In the opening session (December 1, 1965) of the thirteenth seminar (*The Object of Psychoanalysis* [1965–1966]), published separately in the *Écrits* as "Science and Truth," Lacan maintains that the truths of religions always amount to posited final causes.[15] Religion is centered around significance-sustaining teleologies, meaning-giving purposes. By contrast, both modern science and psychoanalysis as (partly) conditioned by such science immerse humanity in what is ultimately a meaningless material Real devoid of design, plan, or direction. Hence, analytic truths are, in essence, irreligious[16] (at least for Lacan's anti-hermeneutical rendition of analysis as oriented towards "the materiality of the signifier," instead of the meaningfulness of signs).

Also in "Science and Truth," Lacan pointedly repudiates religifications of analysis. He states, "As for religion, it should rather serve us as a model not to be followed, instituting as it does a social hierarchy in which the tradition of a certain relation to truth as cause is preserved."[17] He immediately adds, "Simulation of the Catholic Church, reproduced whenever the relation to truth as cause reaches the social realm, is particularly grotesque in a certain Psychoanalytic International, owing to the condition it imposes upon communication."[18] Religion generally, and Catholicism especially, with its truths as final causes, is said by Lacan to pose a great threat to and have deleterious effects upon the

14 Sous, *Pas très catholique, Lacan?*, p. 38.
15 Jacques Lacan, "Science and Truth," in: *Écrits*, p. 741.
16 Causse, *Lacan et le christianisme*, p. 201.
17 Lacan, "Science and Truth," p. 744.
18 *Ibid*.

integrity of psychoanalysis. Considering Lacan's disdain for the International Psychoanalytic Association (i.e., "a certain Psychoanalytic International"), made intensely bitter by his 1963 self-described "excommunication" from the Church of the IPA, his association of it with Catholicism speaks powerfully against attributing to him any desire to somehow or other Catholicize psychoanalysis. Close to the time of "Science and Truth," in 1967, Lacan characterizes analysis both metapsychological and clinical as involving the "most complete as possible laicization" of a "practice without idea of elevation."[19] Relatedly, in the 1974 interview "The Triumph of Religion" given in Rome, he vehemently repudiates any superficial association between the Catholic ritual of confession and the clinical practice of analysis.[20]

§2 The divine subject supposed to know: between the religious and the pseudo-secular

At one point in the *écrit* "The Youth of Gide, or the Letter and Desire" (1958), Lacan suggests that, "the psychoanalyst in our times has taken the place of God," coming to be viewed as "omnipotent," by being the addressee of persons' religious needs.[21] Quite obviously, this suggestion anticipates Lacan's subsequent identification of the "subject supposed to know" as the essential center of gravity of all transference phenomena. Unsurprisingly, Lacan goes on to depict God as the *Ur*-instantiation of the structural role of *le sujet supposé savoir*.[22] He consequently maintains that the figure of the analyst, in becoming the pivotal incarnation of the subject supposed to know thanks to analysands' transference neuroses, is positioned as occupying the "place of God-the-Father… that which I have designated as the Name-of-the-Father."[23] Lacan likewise depicts transference as inherently involving "idealism" and "theology."[24]

19 Jacques Lacan, "De la psychanalyse dans ses rapports avec la réalité," in: *Autres écrits*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 2001, p. 352.

20 Jacques Lacan, "The Triumph of Religion," in: *The Triumph of Religion, preceded by Discourse to Catholics*, trans. Bruce Fink, Polity, Cambridge 2013, p. 63.

21 Jacques Lacan, "The Youth of Gide, or the Letter and Desire," in: *Écrits*, p. 627.

22 Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XVI: D'un Autre à l'autre, 1968-1969*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 2006, pp. 280–281.

23 Jacques Lacan, "La méprise du sujet supposé savoir," in: *Autres écrits*, p. 337.

24 Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XVI*, p. 280; Adrian Johnston, *Prolegomena to Any Future Materialism, Volume One: The Outcome of Contemporary French Philosophy*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 2013, pp. 22–23.

For Freudian psychoanalysis, transferences are ubiquitous in human life off as well as on the analytic couch. Hence, the position/function of *le sujet supposé savoir* sustains omnipresent idealist and theological dimensions across vast swathes of humanity, including most of those who take themselves to be non-believers. From a Lacanian perspective, many people can and do believe in the subject supposed to know while not believing in any of the deities on offer from culturally recognized religions. Subjects supposed to know substituting for God include not only clergy and analysts, but also, for example, parents, doctors, scientists, politicians, professors, gurus, institutions, traditions, and experts and authorities of myriad stripes.

According to Lacan, so long as one transferentially invests in anyone as representing an unbarred big Other (in Lacan's mathemes, S(A)) possessing some sort of absolute knowledge about the ultimate meaning of existence, one remains a theist. Thus, "God is unconscious" for many self-proclaimed atheists. By itself, "God is dead" leaves in place and intact *le sujet supposé savoir*[25] (Jacques-Alain Miller speaks of the death of God as failing to kill "the power of the signifier 'one,'" namely, Lacan's "master signifier" [S_1][26]). In *Seminar XVI* (*From an Other to the other* [1968–1969]), Lacan observes that most supposed atheists, while disavowing God, still believe in some sort of "Supreme Being" (*l'Être suprême*), an ontological foundation of significance, lawfulness, and/or order.[27] As such, these believers are not really atheists. Just about everyone remains religious, even if only unconsciously.[28]

Also in the sixteenth seminar, Lacan at one point declares, "A true atheism, the only one which would merit the name, is that which would result from the putting in question of the subject supposed to know."[29] He echoes this a year later in the seventeenth seminar (*The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* [1969-1970]) when

25 Causse, *Lacan et le christianisme*, p. 45.

26 Jacques-Alain Miller, "Religion, Psychoanalysis," trans. Barbara P. Fulks, *Lacanian Ink*, No. 23 (Spring 2004), pp. 11–12.

27 Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XVI*, p. 176.

28 Jacques Lacan, "Conférences et entretiens dans des universités nord-américaines: Yale University, 24 novembre 1975," *Scilicet*, No. 6/7 (1976), p. 32.

29 Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XVI*, p. 281.

he states, "The pinnacle (*pointe*) of psychoanalysis is well and truly atheism."[30] Even Father Beinaert concedes that at least a momentary loss of faith is integral to the analytic experience.[31] Lacan furnishes a lengthier explanation of all this in *Seminar X* (*Anxiety* [1962–1963])[32]:

> Within what I might call the heated circles of analysis, those in which the impulse of one first inspiration (*le mouvement d'une inspiration première*) still lives on, a question has been raised as to whether the analyst ought to be an atheist or not, and whether the subject, at the end of analysis, can consider his analysis over if he still believes in God... regardless of what an obsessional bears out in his words, if he hasn't been divested of his obsessional structure, you can be sure that, as an obsessional, he believes in God. I mean that he believes in the God that everyone, or nearly everyone, in our cultural sphere (*tout le monde, ou presque, chez nous, dans notre aire culturelle*) abides by, this means the God in whom everyone believes without believing (*croit sans y croire*), namely, the universal eye that watches down on all our actions.[33]

Lacan soon adds that, "This is the true dimension of atheism. The atheist would be (*serait*) he who has succeeded (*aurait réussi*) in doing away with the fantasy of the Almighty (*Tout-Puissant*)."[34] He signals that this line of questioning apropos the atheism (or lack thereof) of analyst and analysand is to be taken seriously. He does so by attributing it to those who remain, like him, moved and impassioned (i.e., "heated") by Freud's original influence (i.e., "*le mouvement d'une inspiration première*"). Indeed, Lacan likely intends these remarks to be taken as friendly supplements to Freud's "Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices," a text in which the founder of psychoanalysis characterizes obsessional

30 Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XVII: L'envers de la psychanalyse, 1969-1970*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1991, p. 139; Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, 1969–1970*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg, W. W. Norton and Company, New York 2007, p. 119.

31 Louis Beirnaert, "Psychanalyse et vie de foi," in: *Aux frontières de l'acte analytique*, p. 138.

32 Johnston, *Prolegomena to Any Future Materialism, Volume One*, pp. 22–23.

33 Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre X: L'angoisse, 1962–1963*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 2004, p. 357; Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X: Anxiety, 1962–1963*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. A.R. Price, Polity, Cambridge 2014, p. 308.

34 Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre X*, p. 357; Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X*, p. 308.

"neurosis as an individual religiosity and religion as a universal obsessional neurosis" (*die Neurose als eine individuelle Religiosität, die Religion als eine universelle Zwangsneurose*).[35]

As Lacan indicates, "nearly everyone" (*tout le monde, ou presque*), if only unconsciously (as "believing without believing"), has faith in God as omniscient (i.e., the all-seeing "universal eye" as the fantasized locus of absolute-*qua*-infinite knowledge) and omnipotent (i.e., "the fantasy of the Almighty [*Tout-Puissant*]"). However, the qualification "nearly" (*presque*) is not to be overlooked here. On the one hand, theism, in the broader Lacanian sense as a belief in any instantiation whatsoever of the subject supposed to know, is virtually omnipresent and stubbornly persistent. As Lacan puts it in "The Triumph of Religion," religion is "tireless" (*increvable*).[36] That same year (1974), Lacan, in another interview, points to religiosity's contemporary revivals and describes religion as a "devouring monster."[37] As a Freudian would put it, transference (à la Lacan, investment in a subject supposed to know) is ubiquitous and recurrent.[38] *Le sujet supposé savoir*, this fantasmatic unbarred Other of thoroughly total knowledge, indeed is a relentless, all-consuming specter.

But, on the other hand, not all are theists. Or, at least, not everyone is doomed to what would be a universal, eternal, and invincible religiosity. In the material quoted from the tenth seminar above, Lacan does not say that uprooting an obsessional's neurotic "structure" is by itself automatically sufficient for transforming him/her into a true atheist. When speaking of true atheism, he does so conjugating in the conditional tense (*serait*, *aurait réussi*). Yet, in 1975, and dovetailing with claims I already quoted from the sixteenth and seventeenth

35 Sigmund Freud, "Zwangshandlungen und Religionsübungen," in: *Gesammelte Werke, Band VII*, Fisher Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1999, p. 139; Sigmund Freud, "Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices", in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. IX*, trans. James Strachey, Vintage, London 2001, pp. 126–127.

36 Jacques Lacan, "Le triomphe de la religion," in: *Le triomphe de la religion, précédé de Discours aux catholiques*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 2005, p. 79; Lacan, "The Triumph of Religion," p. 64.

37 Jacques Lacan, "Freud pour toujours: Entretien avec J. Lacan," November 21, 1974, http://ecole-lacanienne.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/1974-11-21.pdf.

38 Sigmund Freud, "The Dynamics of Transference", in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XII*, trans. James Strachey, Vintage, London 2001, pp. 101, 106.

seminars, Lacan muses, "Perhaps analysis is capable of making a true atheist."[39] How so, exactly?

The simplest and shortest preliminary answer is readily arrived at by doing as Lacan does and returning to Freud. On Freud's conception of analysis, the formation in the analysand of a "transference neurosis" is crucial to the therapeutic process.[40] Furthermore, the "dissolving" (*Auflösung*) of the transference is a major criterion for the successful termination of what could count as a satisfactorily completed analysis.[41] For Lacan, the Freudian dissolution of the transference (neurosis) is equivalent to a (transitory) disruption of the function of *le sujet supposé savoir* in the structure of the analysand's subjectivity.[42] Therefore, as seen, Lacan goes so far as to equate a thoroughly analyzed subject with someone who has, at least for a time, acceded to what would count as real, true atheism *qua* disbelief in any and every subject supposed to know.

François Balmès and Sidi Askofaré both highlight the specificity of Lacanian analytic atheism as disbelief in *le sujet supposé savoir tout court*, not just loss of faith in a religious God or gods.[43] Askofaré and Sous appropriately warn that the working-through of all fantasies of the Almighty (i.e., all configurations of the subject supposed to know) is a long, arduous process coextensive with the labor of analysis itself, namely, a hard-won achievement.[44] Causse adds to this that "psychoanalysis leads the subject to becoming an atheist" by enabling him/her to disinvest from neurotic symptoms that themselves are tantamount to Other-sustaining (self-)sacrifices.[45] Causse's addition fittingly suggests that neurotics become truly atheistic when analysis enables them to cease consciously and

39 Lacan, "Conférences et entretiens dans des universités nord-américaines: Yale University, 24 novembre 1975," p. 32.

40 Freud, "The Dynamics of Transference", p. 154.

41 Sigmund Freud, "Zur Einleitung der Behandlung," in: *Gesammelte Werke, Band VIII*, Fisher Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1999, p. 478; Sigmund Freud, "On Beginning the Treatment (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis I," in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XII*, trans. James Strachey, Vintage, London 2001, p. 143.

42 Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XVI*, pp. 388–389.

43 François Balmès, *Dieu, le sexe et la vérité*, Érès, Ramonville Saint-Agne 2007, pp. 27–30; Askofaré, "De l'inconscient au sinthome," p. 25.

44 Askofaré, "De l'inconscient au sinthome," p. 34; Sous, *Pas très catholique, Lacan?*, p. 93.

45 Causse, *Lacan et le christianisme*, p. 162.

unconsciously making themselves suffer in the name of shielding certain significant Others in their life histories from ignorance and/or impotence. If and when the specter of a flawless *Tout-Puissant* is exorcised, the analysand is free to stop martyring him/her-self in vain to preserve the illusory existence of this phantasm.

In a 1972 seminar session, Lacan coins one his many neologisms: "*incorreligionnible*."[46] That is to say, the religious are incorrigible in their religiosity. This neologism resonates with Lacan's above-cited remarks about religion's invincibility in 1974's "The Triumph of Religion." This prompts one to ask: Is radical analytic atheism a sustainable stance according to Lacan? Both Askofaré and Causse contend that it is not. For Askofaré, whereas religiosity is a curable symptom for Freud, it is an incurable *sinthome* for Lacan.[47] Causse says the same thing specifically in terms of the function of *le Nom-du-Père*.[48] Furthermore, for Causse, insofar as the structural place of the subject supposed to know cannot be entirely eliminated—in other words, transferences continue to arise for post-analytic subjects too—there is no sustainable atheism in the aftermath of even the most thorough analytic process.[49]

Apropos the alleged unsustainability of radical analytic atheism, I would caution against making the perfect the enemy of the good. As with the ego, so too with theism for Lacan: The related eclipses of the ego and theism during the concluding moments of the analytic process must be experienced and endured by the analysand for a complete analysis, although this is a fleeting event of passage rather than entrance into a thereafter persisting state of being. Identifications, transferences, defenses, and the like inevitably will reemerge on the hither side of the end of analysis. But, in Lacan's view, there is enormous value in the speaking subject passing through, if only momentarily, disappearances of ego-level identities and subjects supposed to know. Such traversals make a difference in relation to whatever post-analytic selfhoods and theisms (re)congeal for the analysand.

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46 Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XIX: Le savoir du psychanalyste, 1971–1972* (unpublished typescript), session of January 6, 1972.

47 Askofaré, "De l'inconscient au sinthome," p. 36.

48 Causse, *Lacan et le christianisme*, p. 240.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 48.

Another aspect of Lacan's substitution of "God is unconscious" for "God is dead" as "the true formula of atheism"[50] is crucial to appreciate at this juncture. The unconscious never disappears anytime during or after analysis; the analytic process does not result in a liquidation of the unconscious. Likewise, the spontaneous theism of conscious and unconscious transferential investments in subjects supposed to know does not vanish forever either.

So, analysis can and should instill a measure of lasting, persistent vigilance in analysands. Lacanian atheism thus amounts not to a permanently assumed and unchangingly occupied position. Rather, it involves a recurring distance-taking from theistic structures and phenomena. Such disbelief is an intermittent meta-level occurrence, instead of a constant and unfaltering first-order stance.[51] Its salutary disruptions are no less worthwhile for all that.

In the seventh seminar, Lacan stresses that, "desire… is always desire in the second degree, desire of desire."[52] The same might be said of belief. If so, Lacan's atheism perhaps is (dis)belief "in the second degree," namely, a second-order (dis)believing in first-order beliefs (with obdurate religious/theistic *sinthomes* perhaps being instances of the latter).[53] As I highlight elsewhere,[54] Lacan places himself in the same post-Hegelian lineage epitomized by Ludwig Feuerbach, among others. In a Feuerbachian-style inversion, Lacanian atheism is an ascension by a second-order subject over the first-order (resurrected) God, rather than an ascension of this God over the subject.

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50 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, 1964*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan, W. W. Norton and Company, New York 1977, p. 59.

51 Balmès, *Dieu, le sexe et la vérité*, pp. 13–15, 169–170; Adrian Johnston, *Adventures in Transcendental Materialism: Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2014, pp. 219–221; Adrian Johnston, "Lacan's Endgame: Philosophy, Science, and Religion in the Final Seminars," *Crisis and Critique* (special issue: "Lacan: Psychoanalysis, Philosophy, Politics", ed. Agon Hamza and Frank Ruda), 6 (1/2019), pp. 180–184; Adrian Johnston, "The Triumph of Theological Economics: God Goes Underground," *Philosophy Today* (special issue: "Marxism and New Materialisms") (2019, forthcoming).

52 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, p. 14.

53 Johnston, "Lacan's Endgame," p. 180–184.

54 Adrian Johnston, "Lacan and Monotheism: Not Your Father's Atheism, Not Your Atheism's Father," *Problemi International* (ed. Simon Hajdini), 3 (1/2019), pp. 109–141.

Lacan's analytic atheism amounts to non-belief in the very position of the subject supposed to know. And, insofar as *le sujet supposé savoir* represents for Lacan an unbarred big Other, the Lacanian atheist holds to the barring of any such Other. Therefore, this atheism's emblem is nothing other than Lacan's matheme of the signifier of the barred Other, S(Ⱥ).[55]

§3 Transference doth make believers of us all: true and false atheisms

Yet, can more be said, particularly without excessive reliance on Lacanian technical jargon, about the features that distinguish properly analytic atheism from non-analytic (i.e., garden-variety) atheism? Lacan indeed is convinced that there is a drastic distinction here.[56] But, in what does it consist?

Lacan, during his 1971–1972 seminar on *The Knowledge of the Psychoanalyst*, dismissively depicts ordinary, commonplace atheism as mere "drowsiness" (*somnolence*).[57] Such disbelief allegedly would be due to a mere thoughtlessness about the issues and concerns animating religious belief systems. It definitely would not be due to a focused, conscientious thinking through of theological concepts. This explains Lacan's provocative remarks to the effect that only theologians can be true atheists.[58] Yet, I would note that one need not be a card-carrying professional theologian to qualify as a Lacanian "theologian" *qua* someone who has seriously worked-through theological ideas. That noted, even if, for Lacan, religious answers to certain questions are not to be accepted, the questions themselves are still important to ask.

In addition to drowsy atheism as intellectually indefensible in its thoughtlessness, there is the naturalistic atheism of the scientific *Weltanschauung* appealed to by Freud. Lacan dismisses this variety of atheism too. He does so because,

55 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, pp. 192–193; François Balmès, *Le nom, la loi, la voix*, Érès, Ramonville Saint-Agne 1997, p. 145; Causse, *Lacan et le christianisme*, pp. 46–47.

56 Causse, *Lacan et le christianisme*, pp. 20–21.

57 Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XIX*, session of January 6, 1972.

58 Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XII: Problèmes cruciaux pour la psychanalyse, 1964–1965* (unpublished typescript), session of March 3, 1965; Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: Encore, 1972–1973*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink, W. W. Norton and Company, New York 1998, pp. 45, 108; Askofaré, "De l'inconscient au sinthome," p. 34.

by his lights, it is not really atheistic. As Lacan observes in *Seminar XII* (*Crucial Problems for Psychoanalysis* [1964-1965]), these sorts of "atheistic arguments… are often much more theist than the others."[59]

In fact, modernity's empirical, experimental sciences of nature, from their very inception onwards, arguably rely upon something along the lines of the Cartesian-Einsteinian God guaranteeing the knowability of reality by not being a game-playing trickster.[60] Likewise, by at least presupposing an omnipotent and absolute knowledge of a unified, at-one-with-itself physical Real, the natural sciences remain theistic in the sense of continuing to be invested in a version of the subject supposed to know.[61] Moreover, Lacan, however fairly or not, accuses the scientistic worldview of subscribing to a pseudo-secular theodicy. He charges that, "scientific discourse is finalist,"[62] namely, teleological *qua* oriented by final causes. Specifically, this Lacan sees Freud's favored *Weltanschauung*, including as it does certain perspectives on the implications of Darwinian evolutionary theory, as wedded to a grand-scale teleology and metaphysical hierarchy valorizing human consciousness as the crown jewel of all creation, the ultimate *telos* of the entire history of nature.[63] In a similar vein, Lacan derisively associates naturalism with an organicist harmonization of micro- and macro-spheres of existence and a related Jungian-type religiosity anathema to any true Freudian.[64]

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59 Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XII*, session of March 3, 1965.

60 Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XV: L'acte psychanalytique, 1967-1968* (unpublished typescript), session of February 21, 1968.

61 Jacques Lacan, "On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis," in: *Écrits*, p. 480.

62 Jacques Lacan, "Du discours psychanalytique," *Lacan in Italia, 1953–1978*," La Salamandra, Milan 1978, p. 45.

63 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954–1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli, W. W. Norton and Company, New York 1988, p. 48; Lacan, "Conférence de Bruxelles sur l'éthique de la psychanalyse," p. 165; Lorenzo Chiesa and Alberto Toscano, "Ethics and Capital, in: A. Skomra (Ed.), *Ex Nihilo*," *Umbr(a): A Journal of the Unconscious—The Dark God*, State University of New York at Buffalo, Buffalo 2005, p. 10; Lorenzo Chiesa, "Psychoanalysis, Religion, Love," *Crisis & Critique* (special issue: "Politics and Theology Today," ed. Frank Ruda and Agon Hamza), 2 (1/2015), p. 63.

64 Lacan, "Conférence de Bruxelles sur l'éthique de la psychanalyse," pp. 166, 176; Beirnaert, "Introduction à la psychanalyse freudienne de la religion," p. 53.

There also are Lacan's arguments, spelled out in "The Triumph of Religion" and directed against Freud, upending the Enlightenment progress narrative about the victory of science over religion. In 1974, Lacan contends that the advances of the sciences, instead of compelling a withering away of religions, provoke intensifications of religiosity, spiritualism, idealism, and the like. This is so because, as the material universe is scientifically rendered ever-more foreign and indifferent to human experience, intentions, significances, and so on,[65] humans seek compensatory refuge in the religious. Such refuge provides a seemingly secure little boat of oriented meaning on science's sea of senselessness. Science (re)vivifies and sustains, rather than corrodes and destroys, religion—hence religion's invincibility despite, or rather because of, science.[66]

In the *écrit* "In Memory of Ernest Jones: On His Theory of Symbolism" (1959/1960), Lacan speculates about the "elimination" of God from the natural sciences.[67] Lacan's repeated observations about the theism subsisting within these ostensibly secular, if not atheistic, disciplines implicitly call for efforts to detheologize them fully.[68] He prompts one to wonder: What would the sciences be like without presupposing or positing any variant whatsoever of God? Could there be a new scientific *Weltanschauung* that is really, instead of speciously, atheistic?

Relatedly, whereas Freud considers his atheism and scientism to be of a piece, Lacan indicates that Freud's Godlessness is undercut by his fidelity to what he takes to be the scientific worldview. Adherents of this view are those Lacan has in mind when, in *Seminar XVII*, he provocatively maintains that, "materialists are the only authentic believers."[69] Lacan gives to this a further counter-intuitive twist: Not only is the scientistic *Weltanschauung* embraced by Freud theistic—Christian theology furnishes key resources for a genuinely atheistic materialism. Lacan's privileged "Exhibit A" for this assertion is the theologi-

65 Lacan, "Conférence de Bruxelles sur l'éthique de la psychanalyse," p. 181.

66 Lacan, "The Triumph of Religion," pp. 56, 64, 67, 71–72, 77–78; Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXIV: L'insu que sait de l'une-bévue s'aile à mourre, 1976–1977* (unpublished typescript), session of May 17, 1977; Miller, "Religion, Psychoanalysis," pp. 16–19; Causse, *Lacan et le christianisme*, p. 47; Johnston, *Prolegomena to Any Future Materialism, Volume One*, pp. xiii, 32–33, 37, 175–176; Johnston, *Adventures in Transcendental Materialism*, pp. 187–188); Johnston, "The Triumph of Theological Economics".

67 Jacques Lacan, "In Memory of Ernest Jones: On His Theory of Symbolism," in: *Écrits*, p. 596.

68 Johnston, *Prolegomena to Any Future Materialism, Volume One*, pp. 13–38.

69 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII*, p. 66.

cal conception of creation *ex nihilo*.[70] The idea here is that, despite its religious provenance, only this conception allows for thinking the existence of things without a God or a God-like substance as their origin. It permits replacing the Other-as-creator with a void.

It must be asked: How is (Christian) theology atheistic? What does Lacan mean when he says things such as "atheism is tenable/bearable (*soutenable*) only to clerics?"[71] I already have mentioned one response to this line of questioning, a response that can be summarized here in the form of a syllogism: One, true atheism can be arrived at only via the arduous working-through of religious concepts; Two, anyone who arduously works through religious concepts is a "theologian" in the sense of a thinker who thinks about theological matters; Therefore, true atheists are also theologians. This argument dovetails with *Seminar XI*'s "God is unconscious." A conscious atheism arrived at without the costly effort of critically scrutinizing theological ideas and arguments will remain haunted by unscrutinized remainders of religiosity (i.e., God as unconscious).

However, there are two more senses to Lacan's paradoxical equation of theology with atheism. One of these arguably harks back to Blaise Pascal's reactions specifically to René Descartes and generally to philosophical attempts at rationally proving God's existence.[72] In "The Subversion of the Subject," Lacan speaks in passing of "the proofs of the existence of God with which the centuries have killed him."[73] From a Pascalian perspective, philosophers and rational(ist) theologians debase God by turning Him into merely one entity among others to be judged before the tribunal of human (all-too-human) rationality. God is made subservient to reason in a hubristic, blasphemous inversion of the

70 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, p. 261; Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX*, pp. 41, 43; Chiesa and Toscano, "Ethics and Capital, *Ex Nihilo*," pp. 10–11; Lorenzo Chiesa and Alberto Toscano, "*Agape* and the Anonymous Religion of Atheism," *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 12 (1/2007), p. 118; Causse, *Lacan et le christianisme*, p. 35.

71 Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XX: Encore, 1972–1973*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1975, p. 98; Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX*, p. 108.

72 Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A.J. Krailsheimer, Penguin, New York 1966, §142 (p. 73), §190 (p. 86).

73 Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious," p. 694.

proper order of things. Rendering the divine the object of a *logos* is to betray this divinity. Making God's existence depend upon reason's proofs is to nullify His very being (as the just-quoted Lacan indicates). This entails that not only philosophy, but any and every rational theology, is inherently antithetical to *theós* itself. Rational theology is deicide. Another sense in which theology is atheistic according to Lacan surfaces in the twentieth seminar. He states there:

> God (*Dieu*) is the locus where, if you will allow me this wordplay, the *dieu*—the *dieur*—the *dire*, is produced. With a trifling change, the *dire* constitutes *Dieu* (*le dire ça fait Dieu*). And as long as things are said, the God hypothesis will persist (*l'hypothèse Dieu sera là*).[74]

Lacan immediately remarks, "That is why, in the end, only theologians can be truly atheistic, namely, those who speak of God (*ceux qui, de Dieu, en parlent*)."[75] He then proceeds to assert:

> There is no other way to be an atheist, except to hide one's head in one's arms in the name of I know not what fear, as if this God had ever manifested any kind of presence whatsoever. Nevertheless, it is impossible to say anything without immediately making Him subsist in the form of the Other.[76]

Lacan, consistent with other pronouncements of his I already referenced earlier, maintains a broad definition of "theologians" as "those who speak of God" (*ceux qui, de Dieu, en parlent*). Linked to this speaking (*parler*), he coins here another neologism: "*dieur*," a combination of "*dire*" (saying) and "*Dieu*" (God). This neologism emphasizes that "*le dire ça fait Dieu*," that God is created through being spoken about (whether by theologians or others).[77]

Lacan's claims at this moment during *Seminar XX* cannot but call to mind the Feuerbach for whom the secret of theology is anthropology[78] (although, of

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74 Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XX*, p. 45; Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX*, p. 45.

75 *Ibid.*

76 *Ibid.*

77 Causse, *Lacan et le christianisme*, p. 208.

78 Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot, Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1989, pp. xvii–xviii, xxiii, 17–18, 29–30, 336–339.

course, Lacan does not endorse a Feuerbachian anthropology with its humanism). Indeed, two sessions later in the twentieth seminar after introducing "the God hypothesis," Lacan indicates that this manner of linking the divine to the socio-symbolic big Other "was a way, I can't say of laicizing, but of exorcising the good old God."[79] When he proclaims that "*le dire ça fait Dieu*," it sounds as though he is deliberately echoing the young Marx when the latter declares that, "The foundation of irreligious criticism is: *Man makes religion*, religion does not make man."[80] Restated in Lacan's terms, analytic atheism affirms that the speaking subject makes God through its saying (*dire*), rather than God making the speaking subject through His Word; in the beginning was not God's Word, but, instead, that of the *parlêtre*. Again, the neologism "*dieur*" is designed to condense and convey this thesis. Although Lacan makes no references to Feuerbach by name that I know of, he seems to entertain some very Feuerbachian ideas (and, he rightly credits G.W.F. Hegel as the forefather of such atheistic insights[81]).

At this juncture, I wish to draw attention to a tension within these just-quoted statements from the twentieth seminar, a tension that marks one of Lacan's divergences from Feuerbach and a certain Marx. On the one hand, Lacan underscores his own thoroughgoing atheism when suggesting that God has never "manifested any kind of presence whatsoever." This God is feared only by those drowsy, thoughtless atheists who, in their half-hearted disbelief still haunted by (unconscious) theism, are vulnerable to reconversion by such sophistical priestly cons as Pascal's wager.

Yet, on the other hand, this same Lacan, in his resignation to "the triumph of religion," maintains that "the God hypothesis will persist" (*l'hypothèse Dieu sera là*).[82] There is a socio-symbolic structural place (i.e., a "locus") where the inevitable God-effect of *dieur* comes to be. Any and every instance of speaking/

79 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX*, p. 68.

80 Karl Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction," in: *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton, Penguin, New York 1992, p. 244.

81 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, pp. 178, 193; Louis Beirnaert, "De l'athéisme," in: *Aux frontières de l'acte analytique*, pp. 128–129; Chiesa, "Psychoanalysis, Religion, Love," p. 63; Causse, *Lacan et le christianisme*, pp. 221, 245; Johnston, "Lacan and Monotheism".

82 Roazen, "Lacan's First Disciple," p. 331.

saying (*parler*/*dire*) conjures up the divine, at least in the form of a hypothesized (and hypostatized) *grand Autre* ("it is impossible to say anything without immediately making Him subsist in the form of the Other"). What does it mean for an atheist such as Lacan to concede these points apropos theistic phenomena?

The Symbolic, in Lacan's register theory, is a condition of possibility for speaking subjectivity. And, as just seen, this register also inevitably secretes "the God hypothesis" through any and every speaking/saying as involving *dieur*. Therefore, it would not be much of a stretch to connect Lacan's account of divine Otherness in the twentieth seminar with Immanuel Kant's doctrine of transcendental illusion (*transzendentalen Schein*) in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.[83]

Kant carefully distinguishes between a phenomenon being "defective" (*mangelhaft*) and its being "deceptive" (*trüglich*).[84] Once Kantian critique has identified a transcendental illusion as illusory, the illusion ceases to risk being deceptive to the critic, but still continues to be defective. As a flawed and initially misleading experience, the illusion continues to be experienced. This is because, as transcendental, it is generated and sustained by the subject's own possibility conditions. It thus is transcendental as well as illusory.

Nonetheless, through Kant's comparisons of transcendental illusions with those optical illusions viewers learn to judge as deceptive (such as distortions of objects' sizes and shapes due to the effects of refractions of light rays), he indicates that subjects can be taught through critique to treat transcendental illusions similarly to how they do such optical illusions.[85] At the same time, Kant urges eternal vigilance:

[83] Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft, 1, Werkausgabe, Band III*, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968, A293/B349-A298/B355 (pp. 308–311); Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, A293/B349-A298/B355 (pp. 384–387); Marc De Kesel, "Religion as Critique, Critique as Religion: Some Reflections on the Monotheistic Weakness of Contemporary Criticism," in: *Umbr(a): A Journal of the Unconscious—The Dark God*, pp. 121–122, 126–127.

[84] Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft, 1*, A293/B349-350 (p. 308); Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A293/B349-350 (p. 384).

[85] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A296-297/B353-354 (p. 386).

> ...there is a natural and unavoidable dialectic of pure reason, not one in which a bungler might be entangled through lack of acquaintance, or one that some sophist has artfully invented in order to confuse rational people, but one that irremediably attaches to human reason, so that even after we have exposed the mirage it will still not cease to lead our reason on with false hopes, continually propelling it into momentary aberrations that always need to be removed.[86]

Lacan's "God is unconscious," as "the true formula of atheism," likewise counsels being perpetually on guard against the inexorable phantom of "*l'hypothèse Dieu*." This hypothetical God arises on the basis of the register of the Symbolic as itself a possibility condition for both the speaking subject and the unconscious-structured-like-a-language. Hence, Lacan's God hypothesis would appear very much to qualify as a case of transcendental illusion à la Kant. As such, Lacan in no way compromises his atheism in conceding the inescapability and necessity of the God illusion, just as Kant in no way compromises his critical epistemology in conceding to "pure reason" that its dogmatic transgressions are encouraged by transcendental illusions.

However, Lacan goes beyond the conscious-centric horizon of Kantian critical epistemology. As a Freudian psychoanalyst, the unconscious is central to Lacan's perspectives as regards various issues, theosophical ones included. Even if a transcendental illusion is corrected and compensated for consciously, this illusion *qua* defect may continue to deceive unconsciously.

Again, if God (or the God hypothesis) is a transcendental illusion, "God is unconscious" signals that a mere adjustment of one's conscious cognitive attitude to and judgments about the illusory divine is not necessarily enough. Additional working-through of cognitive-ideational, emotional-affective, and motivational-libidinal investments in God at unconscious levels too is absolutely requisite. Lacan further complicates this labor by, through his concept of *le sujet supposé savoir*, revealing the multitude of pseudo-secular or speciously atheistic incarnations of the divine. The God hypothesis/effect persists unconsciously in part through manifesting itself in the guises of things other than the monotheistic God, in forms that do not appear to be theological in any received sense.

[86] *Ibid*., A298/B354-355 (pp. 386–387).

Furthermore, Lacan can and should be construed as subscribing to a post-Kantian line of thought laid down by both Hegel and Marx. With Hegel's "concrete universality" and Marx's "real abstractions," both Hegelianism and Marxism contend that the notion of the concrete apart from the abstract is itself the height of abstraction.[87] Similarly, as Lacan emphasizes against the May '68 slogan "structures don't march in the streets," his structures have legs; rather than being lifeless abstractions, they walk about.[88] For Hegel, Marx, and Lacan alike, even if the concepts of monotheisms are illusory conceptual-symbolic constructs, they nonetheless are far from being merely epiphenomenal. Lacan's God hypothesis, if it is a Kantian-style transcendental illusion, is also, although illusory, nonetheless a very real abstraction with the most concrete of consequences. No tenable atheism can or should deny this.

§4 Monotheism's *passe*: towards a new *père-version*

During the sixteenth seminar, Lacan contends that subjectivity itself is made possible by the barred status of the big Other—with this barring epitomized by, among other things, the unprovable, unknowable existence of God.[89] In relation to this in the context of the present discussion, it must be asked: Does confronting the atheistic truth that "the big Other does not exist" (*le grand Autre n'existe pas*) always and unavoidably require passage through monotheism's immanent-critical negation of a transcendent divine Father (as per a Hegelian reading of Christ's crucifixion[90])? *Seminar XXIII* (*The Sinthome* [1975-1976]) seems to

[87] Karl Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State", in: *Early Writings*, p. 161; Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, trans. Martin Nicolaus, Penguin, New York 1973, pp. 85, 88, 100–102, 104–105, 142–146, 157, 164, 331, 449–450, 831–832; Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I*, trans. Ben Fowkes, Penguin, New York 1976, pp. 739, 909; Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume II*, trans. David Fernbach, Penguin, New York 1978, p. 185; Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume III*, trans. David Fernbach, Penguin, New York 1981, pp. 275, 596–597, 603.

[88] Adrian Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 2008, pp. 43–44, 281–283; Johnston, *Adventures in Transcendental Materialism*, pp. 13–22.

[89] Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XVI*, pp. 59–60.

[90] G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995, p. 145; Ernst Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity*, trans. J.T. Swann, Herder and Herder, New York 1972, pp. 129, 169, 171, 257; Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2003, pp. 91, 101–102, 138, 171; Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View*, MIT Press, Cam-

propose that a viable atheism engages with theism (a proposal Causse imputes to Lacan[91]):

> Presupposing the Name-of-the-Father, which is certainly God, is how psychoanalysis, when it succeeds, proves that the Name-of-the-Father can just as well be bypassed. One can just as well bypass it, on the condition that one make use of it.[92]

On the one hand, the later Lacan on this occasion reaffirms the atheistic *telos* of the analytic experience itself. A "successful" analysis "bypasses" (or, at a minimum, makes explicit the option of bypassing) anything along the lines of the Judeo-Christian paternal divinity. On the other hand, such bypassing still must pass through (or "make use of") *Dieu comme le Nom-du-Père*. Why? And, what does this mean?

Does the precondition of analysis somehow or other utilizing "God" entail that, for Lacan, the clinical process must traverse a form of monotheism? Is working through Judeo-Christianity specifically an integral part of the Lacanian analytic process? I would argue against reaching such conclusions on the basis of moments like the one quoted above from the twenty-third seminar. On what do I base myself in arguing thusly?

As I underscored earlier, Lacan operates with an analytically broadened conception of theism. On this conception, God, instead of being limited to what goes by that name in established, received religions, is equivalent to the structural function of the subject supposed to know. If this is the essence of the *theós*, then it can appear in any number of guises: not only God, but parent, analyst, leader, expert, nature, society, etc. According to the later Lacan particularly, this God as the Name-of-the-Father would be any "master signifier," any S_1,[93] designating the place of a *sujet supposé savoir* (and/or *sujet supposé jouir*).

bridge 2006, p. 352; Slavoj Žižek, "The Fear of Four Words: A Modest Plea for the Hegelian Reading of Christianity," in: C. Davis (Ed.), *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2009, pp. 39–40, 48–49; Johnston, "Lacan and Monotheism".

91 Causse, *Lacan et le christianisme*, pp. 245–246.

92 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXIII: The Sinthome, 1975–1976*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. A.R. Price, Polity, Cambridge 2016, p. 116.

93 Paul Verhaeghe, "Enjoyment and Impossibility: Lacan's Revision of the Oedipus Complex," in: J. Clemens and R. Grigg (eds.), *Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanaly-*

One must connect the immediately preceding with two other claims. First, for Lacan, the subject supposed to know generates transference. Second, for both Freud and Lacan, working through the transference is essential labor in the analytic experience. Therefore, with Lacan's equivalence between theism and investment in *le sujet supposé savoir*, working through the transference could be redescribed as passing through or "making use of" *Dieu comme le Nom-du-Père*.

Transference doth make believers of us all. Thus, with the dissolution of transference being a criterion for analytic termination, atheistic unbelief indeed is the "pinnacle of psychoanalysis" (as Lacan puts it in *Seminar XVII*). Such disbelief goes much further than what ordinarily counts as atheism, withdrawing not only from God, but from all instances of the subject supposed to know.

Yet, Lacan's paraphrase of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, according to which "if God is dead, then nothing is permitted,"[94] seems to convey the sense that permanent radical atheism is undesirable as per the strict Lacanian definition of *désir*. Marc De Kesel claims that, for Lacan, religion enjoys the virtue of sustaining desire.[95] If so, does Lacan's version of analysis really seek to do away with theism, religiosity, and the like?

Similarly, the Lacanian alteration of the line from Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* can be taken as insinuating an ambivalent stance *vis-à-vis* core aspects of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy. On the positive side of this ambivalence, Lacan looks as though he agrees with Nietzsche that "untruth" can be de-

sis: Reflections on Seminar XVII, Duke University Press, Durham 2006, pp. 30, 44–45; Dominiek Hoens, "Toward a New Perversion: Psychoanalysis," in: *Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, p. 100.

94 Jacques Lacan, "A Theoretical Introduction to the Functions of Psychoanalysis in Criminology," in: *Écrits*, pp. 106–107; Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book V: The Formations of the Unconscious, 1957–1958*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg, Polity, Cambridge 2017, p. 470; Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII*, pp. 119–120; Lacan, "Conférence de Bruxelles sur l'éthique de la psychanalyse," p. 173; Jacques Lacan, "Discourse to Catholics," in: *The Triumph of Religion, preceded by Discourse to Catholics*, p. 25; Miller, "Religion, Psychoanalysis," p. 36; Balmès, *Le nom, la loi, la voix*, p. 94; Adrian Johnston, *Time Driven: Metapsychology and the Splitting of the Drive*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 2005, p. 286; Johnston, *Adventures in Transcendental Materialism*, pp. 219–220.

95 De Kesel, "Religion as Critique, Critique as Religion," p. 128–129.

sirable, that falsehoods, fantasies, fictions, illusions, etc. can be life-affirming.[96] On the negative side, Lacan, unlike the vehemently anti-Christian Nietzsche,[97] appears to flirt with the idea that Judeo-Christian monotheism is precisely such a desirable untruth, a life-affirming lie.

Correlatively, Lacan repeatedly indicates that Nietzsche's anti-Christianity falls prey to the libertine delusional belief according to which if God is dead, then everything indeed is permitted.[98] In fact, in 1950's "A Theoretical Introduction to the Functions of Psychoanalysis in Criminology," Lacan, when referencing *The Brothers Karamazov*, invokes the "modern man... who dreams of the nihilistic suicide of Dostoevsky's hero or forces himself to blow up Nietzsche's inflatable superman (*la baudruche nietzschéenne*)"[99] (thereby hinting that the Nietzschean happy pagan lord of antiquity is nothing more than a very recent dream of modernity). Likewise, in the seventh seminar, he responds to Nietzsche, among others, with the proclamation, "Great Pan is dead."[100] This arguably is a retort to Nietzsche's declaration of the death of the Judeo-Christian God, a declaration the Lacan of *Seminar XI* describes as Nietzsche's "own myth" akin to that of Freud's myth of the death of the father.[101]

Lacan's "Great Pan" is to be associated with Nietzsche's romanticization of antiquity's "master morality" and its pagan hedonism. The Nietzschean Great Pan and *Übermensch*, on Lacan's judgment, both are permutations of Freud's always-already dead *Urvater*. On a Lacanian interpretation, this deceased father himself represents, *contra* Nietzschean libertinism, the fact that uninhibited, uncastrated Dionysian enjoyment is not to be found anywhere, including in

96 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Vintage, New York 1989, §1 (p. 9), §4 (p. 11), §24 (p. 35).

97 Friedrich Nietzsche, "Attempt at a Self-Criticism," in: *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Vintage, New York 1967, §5 (p. 23); Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §46 (p. 60); Friedrich Nietzsche, "Twilight of the Idols", in: *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, Penguin, New York 1990, pp. 52–53, 55–56, 120.

98 Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XIII: L'objet de la psychanalyse, 1965-1966* (unpublished typescript), session of May 25, 1966.

99 Jacques Lacan, "Introduction théorique aux fonctions de la psychanalyse en criminologie," in: *Écrits*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1966, p. 130; Lacan, "A Theoretical Introduction to the Functions of Psychoanalysis in Criminology," p. 106.

100 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, p. 198.

101 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, p. 27.

the pre-Christian world of ancient Greece (something Lacan indicates against Nietzsche in the nineteenth seminar [*...ou pire*][102]).

Maybe the preceding apropos Nietzsche is another implication of Lacan's "God is unconscious": The libidinal economy of the unconscious, centered on *désir* with its fundamental fantasies involving *objet petit a*, is sustained by the Law of God as the dead father and/or Name-of-the-Father. If this God dies, then the entire economy He supports collapses (i.e., "nothing is permitted"). In *Télévision*, Lacan, speaking of matters Oedipal, remarks, "Even if the memories of familial suppression weren't true, they would have to be invented, and that is certainly done."[103] Paraphrasing this remark, one might say that, by Lacan's lights, if God is dead, then, at least for libidinal reasons, he would have to be resurrected—and that has certainly been done.

Yet, as I already stressed, Lacan is a staunch atheist and identifies his proposition "God is unconscious" as "the true formula of atheism." Under the shadow of the immediately preceding, it now would look as though Lacan's atheism is a particularly perverse sort. What I will proceed to argue is that the later Lacan places the post-Hegelian thesis of atheism-in-Christianity in relation to his very precise psychoanalytic conception of perversion as a diagnostic category.

At least as early as the tenth seminar, Lacan begins portraying perversion as involving placing oneself at the service of a certain version of the big Other. Specifically, as he says in *Seminar X*, "the perverse subject... offers himself loyally to the Other's jouissance."[104] Subsequent years of *le Séminaire* echo this characterization of the pervert.[105] Perverse subjectivity devotes itself, through its conformist transgressions, to keeping up appearances to the effect that there really exists somewhere a locus of absolute knowledge, enjoyment, and/or authority.

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[102] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XIX: ...or worse, 1971–1972*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. A. R. Price, Polity, Cambridge 2018, pp. 148–149.

[103] Jacques Lacan, "Television", trans. Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson, in: J. Copjec (ed.), *Television/A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, W. W. Norton and Company, New York 1990, p. 30.

[104] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X*, p. 49.

[105] Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XII*, session of June 16, 1965; Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XIV: La logique du fantasme, 1966–1967* (unpublished typescript), sessions of February 15, 1967, May 31, 1967.

In the sixteenth seminar, Lacan identifies his matheme for the signifier of the unbarred Other, S(A), as the veritable "key" to perversion.[106]

Seminar XVI also links perversion to monotheism in general and Christianity in particular. Through this linkage, Lacan is not just making the point that speciously atheistic libertines and superficially blasphemous hedonists (or a Nietzsche for whom God is dead rather than simply non-existent) need the divine big Other as an implicit or explicit point of reference lending their pseudo-transgressive actings-out an aura of titillating defiance. He additionally maintains that this monotheism's God-the-Father, Christ-the-Son, and community of believers (i.e., the Holy Spirit) all are figures of perversion themselves.

In Lacan's Freudian eyes, all parties to Christianity's Trinity are at least as perverted as the anti-Christian provocateurs whose cheap thrills rely upon permanent impotent rebellion against this theistic triumvirate. God is grounded in the fantasmatic figure of the *Urvater*, the obscene paternal *jouisseur* whose excessive enjoyment tries to blot out his own barred, castrated status. Christ sacrifices himself so as to save not only humanity, but also so as to cover and compensate for the supposed transcendent Father's ignorance, impotence, evil, and/or other imperfections. The Holy Spirit, especially as the social institutionalizations of organized religion, often involves repressing those moments within Judeo-Christianity when it comes perilously close to atheistic realizations within its own contents and confines. Lacan emphasizes the especially intense perversity of the strictest literalists of paternal monotheism.[107] And, in *Seminar XXI*, he directly associates Christianity with perversion[108] (likewise, the sub-title of Slavoj Žižek's 2003 book *The Puppet and the Dwarf* is *The Perverse Core of Christianity*). In the sixteenth seminar, Lacan observes that, "the pervert is he who consecrates himself to plugging the hole (*boucher le trou*) in the Other… he is, up to a certain point, on the side of the Other's existence. He is a defender of the faith."[109] This observation is reiterated several sessions later.[110] Also in *Seminar*

[106] Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XVI*, p. 292, 382, 401.

[107] Jacques Lacan, "Introduction to the Names-of-the-Father Seminar," trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, in: *Television/A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, p. 89.

[108] Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXI: Les non-dupes errent, 1973–1974* (unpublished typescript), session of December 18, 1973.

[109] Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XVI*, p. 253.

[110] *Ibid.*, p. 302.

XVI, Lacan asserts of the perverse subject that, "He gives to God His veritable plenitude."[111] Similarly, in the twenty-third seminar, he describes the pervert as a "redeemer" (*rédempteur*).[112]

Given the preceding, the figure of Jesus Christ counts as a Lacanian perverse subject. He explicitly functions within Christianity as the redeemer *par excellence*. On Lacan's account, Christ-the-Son's primary redemption, as perverse, is of the big Other (i.e., God-the-Father).[113] His life and, particularly, His death are meant to restore the lawful reign of S(Ⱥ). By extension, all those Christian believers (i.e., "defenders of the faith," the earthly community of the Holy Spirit) who seek to emulate Christ come to operate as little redeemers, as copycat perverts.

The paradoxical status of Christianity as the religion of atheism, a status Lacan joins everyone from Hegel to Žižek in assigning to this monotheism,[114] is integral to what makes it perverse in the strictest of senses by Lacan's reckoning. The Lacanian pervert plays a double game. On the one hand, he/she registers, at least unconsciously, the signifier of the barred Other, S(Ⱥ), namely, indications that there is no locus of omniscience, omnipotence, perfection, and the like. On the other hand, the pervert repeatedly sets about, in reaction to this registration of S(Ⱥ), trying in one or more ways to plaster over the cracks in *le grand Autre* (i.e., "plugging the hole in the Other").

As the religion of atheism, Christianity simultaneously both reveals that "*le grand Autre n'existe pas*" ("Father, why hast Thou forsaken me?," etc.) as well as conceals this revelation through various means (denying God's death, deifying/fetishizing Jesus as Christ-the-God, and so on). Octave Mannoni, one of Lacan's analytic followers, famously depicts the fetishist, the paradigmatic perverse subject, as living according to the logic of "*je sais bien, mais quand même*..." (I know full well, but nonetheless...).[115] Christianity, including the *Christian*

111 *Ibid*., p. 292.

112 Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXIII: Le sinthome, 1975–1976*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 2005, p. 85; Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXIII*, p. 69.

113 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX*, p. 108.

114 Johnston, "Lacan and Monotheism".

115 Octave Mannoni, "*Je sais bien, mais quand même*...," in: *Clefs pour l'Imaginaire ou l'Autre Scène*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1969, pp. 12–13, 32.

atheism of the likes of G.K. Chesterton, indeed plays the double game of "I know full well that God is dead, but nonetheless..."

However, Lacan insinuates in multiple fashions that even the most thoroughly analyzed person, on the other side of concluding an exhaustive (and exhausting) analysis, cannot but lapse into this same double game of "*je sais bien, mais quand même...*"—albeit perhaps now with a little more occasional self-conscious awareness of doing so. In Lacan's view, analysis does not rid the analysand of his/her unconscious or, for that matter, his/her ego either (and the latter despite Lacan's lifelong, vehement critiques of ego psychology). Passage through a concluding experience of "subjective destitution," in which ego-level identifications as well as points of reference such as big Others and subjects supposed to know vacillate or vanish altogether, indeed is an essential, punctuating moment of the Lacanian analytic process.

Nevertheless, Lacan does not consider it possible or desirable to dwell permanently in such an analysis-terminating destitute state. He sees it as both appropriate and inevitable that egos, big Others, subjects supposed to know, and the like will reconstitute themselves for the analysand in the aftermath of his/her analysis. Hopefully, the versions of these reconstituted in the wake of and in response to analysis will be better, more livable versions for the analysand. But, in their unavoidability, persistence, and resilience, they arguably are *sinthomes* rather than mere symptoms.

For reasons I have delineated at length above, the structural *sinthomes* of *le grand Autre* and *le sujet supposé savoir* bring with them (mono)theism as a *sinthome* too. Another of Lacan's neologisms, one he coins starting in *Seminar XXII* (*R.S.I.* [1974-1975]), is connected to what I have just been discussing: "*père-version*" as associating perversion with paternity.[116] As Lacan puts it the following year in the twenty-third seminar, *père-version* is perversion as the "version towards the father."[117]

[116] Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXII: R.S.I., 1974–1975* (unpublished typescript), session of January 21, 1975.

[117] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXIII*, p. 11.

I view it as no accident that Lacan introduces this particular neologism in a seminar (the twenty-second) whose title, *R.S.I.*, is intended, in its original French pronunciation, to evoke the word "*hérésie*" (heresy). In *Seminar XXIII*, Lacan indeed heretically depicts Christianity as entailing sadomasochistic *père-version*.[118] Christ and Christians *père*-versly serve a God who, according to Freudian psychoanalysis, is modeled on a *père-vers* (obscene, brutal, etc.) primal father.[119] These servants/redeemers seek to prop up and render consistent this *père-vers* Other, as Himself really barred, as S(Ⱥ).

In the twenty-second seminar, while discussing Freud's theory of religion and God as *père-vers*, Lacan reminds his audience of just how monotonously repetitive and rigidly unimaginative perverts are.[120] Perversions exhibit pronounced mechanical, stereotyped characteristics, as anyone familiar with the Marquis de Sade's writings, pornography website categories and taxonomies, or various types of fetishisms readily can attest. Instead of being thrillingly subversive and mind-bendingly transgressive, perversions are, in fact, profoundly boring formulaic spectacles ultimately laboring to sustain the authority of some form of *grand Autre*.[121] Just as Freud famously compares the rituals of obsessional neurotics to religious practices, so too does Lacan compare perverse practices to theistic rites.

Similarly, in *Seminar XXIII*, Lacan complains aloud that psychoanalysis has not invented, at least not yet, "a new perversion."[122] In light of this lack of inventiveness, he proclaims analysis to be "a fruitless practice" (*quelle infécondité dans cette pratique*).[123] Analysis itself originates in part with Freud's identification of the inherently perverse nature of human sexuality starting in 1905's groundbreaking *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. As Lacan indicates, despite this, neither the theory nor the practice of analysis has (yet) prompted the gen-

118 Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXIII*, p. 85; Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXIII*, p. 69.

119 Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXII*, session of April 8, 1975; Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXIII*, p. 130.

120 Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXII*, session of April 8, 1975.

121 Jacques Lacan, "Monsieur A.," *Ornicar?*, No. 21–22 (Summer 1980), p. 20.

122 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXIII*, p. 132.

123 Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXIII*, p. 153; Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXIII*, p. 132.

esis of novel, previously-unseen perverse phenomena. Although Freud's self-styled Copernican revolution revolutionizes thinking about sexuality, it does not seem, on Lacan's assessment, to revolutionize sexuality itself.

Lacan's 1976 complaint about the analytic failure to invent a new perversion directly applies also to his contemporaneous reflections on the *père-version* of monotheisms. It is no coincidence that the God hypothesis, *dieur*, the *sinthome*, and *père-version* all surface during the same period of Lacan's teachings. The Lacan of this later era additionally evinces pessimism at times about analysts, analysands, and humanity as a whole, so as to sustain livable lives of desire, coming up with anything other and better than the old gods or these gods' thinly-veiled substitutes and disguises. These would be lives that are livable through at least something being permitted to desire.

Again, if God is dead—this God comes in the myriad fantasmatic guises of the omniscient and omnipotent subject supposed to know and enjoy—then nothing is permitted. This God stubbornly remains a *sinthome*. Even well-analyzed subjects promise nevertheless still to perseverate in respecting the stale, stereotyped images of religious and pseudo-secular theisms whose styles and contents are properly perverse/*père-vers*. These subjects' libidinal economies, on the other side of their completed analyses, continue to require leaning upon fantasies of transcendent all-enjoyers and unbarred big Others, prohibited Elsewheres of speciously possible absolutes. How else to avoid being crushed by the trauma of the second of Oscar Wilde's "two tragedies" ("There are only two tragedies in life: one is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it")?

In the twenty-fourth seminar (*L'insu que sait de l'une-bévue, s'aile à mourre* [1976-1977]), the very late Lacan speaks somewhat enigmatically of striving "towards a new signifier."[124] In terms of Lacan's interlinked theories of signifiers and mathemes, perversion involves, for him, the perverse subject attempting to turn S(Ⱥ), the signifier of the barred Other, back into S(A), the signifier of the unbarred Other. This leads to the idea of an analysis that possibly could assist in inventing an alternative to *père-version* in which new signifiers tied to S(Ⱥ), rather than to

[124] Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXIV: L'insu que sait de l'une-bévue, s'aile à mourre, 1976–1977* (unpublished typescript), session of May 17, 1977; Johnston, "Lacan's Endgame".

S(A), become the nodal anchors of transformed libidinal economies, the *points de capiton* of renewed *désir*.

Lacan's atheism hence points to an anti-Heideggerian "only we can save God." More exactly, only we can save ourselves through inventing a new *sinthome* for our desiring lives instead of staying stuck in theistic *père-versions*. Once earthly as well as heavenly fathers have been demystified,[125] can another figure different-in-kind from them take their places? Can we move in a direction other than one "from Dad to worse" (*du père au pire*), as the later Lacan described it?[126] Is our only choice really between, to paraphrase Friedrich Engels, paternalism or barbarism? Are we condemned to the perverse game of continuing to buttress the paternal *imago* during its long decline?[127]

One of the final Lacan's hopes is that a desirable, rather than desire-extinguishing, atheistic alternative to *le Nom-du-Père* and its ilk, a fundamentally new S_1, just might arrive at some point. This strain of Lacanianism would involve, like Marxism, a messianic atheism: We at last will be redeemed from our redeemer—without, for all that, falling into (self-)condemnation. One fine day, God finally no longer will arrive. We will have transubstantiated Him into something else… *a*-men.

125 Johnston, "Lacan and Monotheism".

126 Jacques Lacan, *Télévision*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1973, p. 72; Lacan, "Television," p. 46.

127 Jacques Lacan, "Les complexes familiaux dans la formation de l'individu: Essai d'analyse d'une fonction en psychologie," in: *Autres écrits*, pp. 60–61.

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On Lacan's *The Triumph of Religion* and Related Matters[1]

In what follows, I will try to point out some themes related to Lacan's theses put forward in his press conference with Italian journalists on 29 October 1974 and later published under the title *The Triumph of Religion*[2]. I think that some of Lacan's claims there are not only intriguing as regards our topics here (The End(s) of Political Theology[3]), but have a much wider scope. It is true that Lacan tackles many things at once and that I will not be able to follow him properly – to do it right, one would need months or even years, and there are already many competent commentators that have done it. On the other hand, I have to confess that my title is in fact misleading insofar as it implies that I am going to be preoccupied here mainly with the problematics of Lacan's relation to religion,[4]

1 This article is a result of the research programme P6–0014 "Conditions and Problems of Contemporary Philosophy" and the research project J6–9392 "The Problem of Objectivity and Fiction in Contemporary Philosophy", which are funded by the Slovenian Research Agency.

2 See: Jacques Lacan, *Le triomphe de la religion précédé de Discours aux catholiques*, Paris: Seuil 2005 and Jacques Lacan, *The Triumph of Religion, preceded by Discourse to Catholics*, trans. by Bruce Fink, Cambridge: Polity Press 2014. The first version of the text was published in the internal bulletin of École freudienne de Paris *Les Letttres de l'École,* No. 16, 1975, pp. 6–26.

3 This article is a rewritten version of a paper presented at the conference "End(s) of Political Theology" organised by ZRC SAZU and Lancaster University held in Ljubljana at ZRC SAZU on 6 June 2018. Many thanks to the organisers for inviting me and for organising such an event in the first place, especially Boštjan Nedoh and Arthur Bradley.

4 There is no comprehensive commentary on *The Triumph of Religion* yet, or on Lacan's views on religion. Unsurpassable remains François Regnault, *Dieu est inconscient*, Paris: Navarin 1985, but I rely here also on Alexandre Leupin, *Lacan Today. Psychoanalysis, Science, Religion*, Other Press, New York 2004, especially pp. 105–124, and on two chapters in the recently published *Theology after Lacan* (Cascade Books, London 2014): "Secular Theology as Language of Rebellion" by Noëlle Vahanian and "The Triumph of Theology" by Clayton Crockett. I consulted for these purposes also all three recently published books on these topics: Aron Dunlap, *Lacan and Religion,* Acumen, Durham 2014, Jean-Louis Sous, *Pas très catholique, Lacan?*, Epel, Paris 2015, and Jean-Daniel Causse, *Lacan et le christianisme,* Campagne-Première, Paris 2018.

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which I will tackle in passing, but I will be interested in many other things as well. Although Lacan's 'text', if one may use this word in connection with it, is centred mainly on psychoanalysis and its place in this world, on its relation to science and religion, the scope of the text, in my view, is much broader and wider; the text relates to politics and capitalism and is centred – at least the way I understand it – on nothing less than the category of negativity as one of the central categories of critical thinking, dialectics and politics. For what is described therein by Lacan as "religion" is in broad terms actually nothing but an arrival, a triumph of a dystopian situation where negativity, "something that goes wrong" (a symptom, psychoanalysis, the Real), is "no more." So, despite the fact that Lacan is concerned here with psychoanalysis, with its status in the world, with its definition of the symptom, and with the question of whether psychoanalysis itself is such a symptom, I think it is pertinent to ask some other questions, for instance: "What does the 'triumph of religion' mean for a society and its critique?"; "What is negativity in (destitute) times like these?"; etc. That is also the reason why I put "related matters" in my title, i.e. to point out some of the themes that are, at least for me, related to the topics that Lacan talks about in *The Triumph of Religion*.

The two sides

To say that *The Triumph* is actually about negativity is at the same time helpful and yet quite misleading. Lacan is, if we compare him to our other contemporaries, of course not the only one interested in the category of negativity[5]. But it would be a big mistake to see in these topics just a Hegelian, a Marxian, a Heideggerian,[6] or even a Lacano-Hegelian "deviation". On the contrary, themes of dysfunction, malfunction, and of "what goes wrong" can be found among

[5] Another name for the latter is also "resistance". See an illuminating paper of Rebecca Comay: "Resistance and Repetition: Freud and Hegel", in: *Research in Phenomenology*, 45 (2/2015), pp. 237–266.

[6] Via §16 of *Being and Time*, where Heidegger speaks about a situation when something becomes unusable, when its normal use becomes disturbed and broken. He even makes very brief allusion to the German prefix *Un-* that so bothered Lacan in Freud's word for the unconscious (*Un*bewusste) via mentioning German privative terms such as *Unauffälligkeit*, *Unaufdringlichkeit*, and *Unaufsässigkeit* (translated into English as "inconspicuousness", "unobtrusiveness", and "non-obstinacy", respectively). Heidegger, however, was far from Freud. Even when dealing with the latter explicitly, as in his later Zollikon Seminars, he completely (mis)understood Freud and referred to his work critically because of its sup-

many other contemporaries,[7] even among notoriously self-professed anti-Hegelians/Lacanians/Heideggerians such as Deleuze and Guattari: "It is *in order to function* that a social machine must *not function well* [...]. The dysfunctions are an essential element of its very ability to function, which is not the least important aspect of the system of cruelty."[8] And while it seems that for Deleuze and Guattari dysfunctions are here not proper negativities, and that what really matters here are "the desiring-machines" or what functions, produces, and flows, for Lacan, psychoanalysis is primarily about something that *does not function* or does not *function well*: "The unconscious consists entirely in the repetition of cracks, deadlocks and conflicts, which throw thinking out of joint. Lacan brought this to the point in his later teaching, when he translated the German *das Unbewusste*, the unconscious, with the French homophony *une bévue*, meaning precisely error, mistake, overlooking, for which Lacan specifies that it stands for 'the very texture of the unconscious'."[9] Or, as Lacan put it already in his XI seminar, what really matters is discontinuity, gap, obstacle, impediment, failure, split, rupture: "In short, there is cause only in something that doesn't work."[10]

And if this is one of the crucial things that psychoanalysis is all about, in *The Triumph of Religion* Lacan wonders whether psychoanalysis itself can resist being absorbed into culture and society. His conclusion there seems to be a pessimistic one, since for him what he calls "religion" *will* "eventually" *triumph* or will triumph "in the end." But what exactly is here meant by "religion" and what will it triumph over? Lacan equates "religion" here simply with anything "that confers meaning." As such, it will eventually triumph over psychoanalysis, however, it will triumph "over lots of other things too." First of all – how and

posed biologisation of Man and because for him Freud had insufficient (metaphysical) philosophical foundations.

7 For an overview of these topics in Derrida, Deleuze, Latour, and Badiou, see: Benjamin Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative. A Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2010.

8 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, Continuum, London and New York 2004, p. 166.

9 Samo Tomšič, "Better Failures: Science and Psychoanalysis", in: *Lacan contra Foucault. Subjectivity, Sex and Politics*, ed. by Nadiou Bou Ali and Rohit Goel, London, New York, Oxford, New Delhi, Bloombsury, Sydney 2019, p. 91.

10 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar, Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis, 1964*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Alan Sheridan, W. W. Norton & Co., New York 1998, p. 22.

why? How it will triumph and what does it mean to speak about triumph and victory? Does this mean that we have a fight or a struggle here? Who is fighting? What is the fight about? How many parties are there, in the first place?

Lacan introduces these topics in *The Triumph of Religion* by departing from the fact that there are all kinds of distressing things in each person's life, especially in our time, in which science reigns. However:

> Religion, above all the true religion, is resourceful in ways we cannot even begin to suspect. One need but see for the time being how the place is crawling with it. It's absolutely fabulous. It took some time, but they [Christians] suddenly realized the windfall science was bringing them. Somebody is going to have to give meaning to all the distressing things science is going to introduce. And they know quite a bit about meaning. They can give meaning to absolutely anything whatsoever. A meaning to human life for example. They are trained to do that. Since the beginning, religion has been all about giving meaning to things that previously were natural. It is not because things are going to become less natural, thanks to the real, that people will stop secreting meaning for all that. Religion is going to give meaning to the oddest experiments, the very ones that scientists themselves are just beginning to become anxious about. Religion will find colourful meaning for those.[11]

Religion (and "above all true religion," but we will return to this later) is for Lacan something that goes together with (historical) progress, which is governed by science and permeated with all kinds of anxieties. The situation Lacan describes here is in fact a strange mixture of Freud's "future of an illusion" and his "discontents in civilization," with a sip or two from Nietzsche, Heidegger, and many others. We could use here a plethora of interpretations of how to understand "religion" here, but let us quote a very recent description of the situation from a famous contemporary:

> The true expertise of priests and gurus has never really been rainmaking, healing, prophecy or magic. Rather, it has always been interpretation. A priest is not somebody who knows how to perform the rain dance and end the drought. A priest is somebody who knows how to justify why the rain dance failed, and why we must

[11] Lacan, *The Triumph of Religion*, pp. 64–65.

> keep believing in our god even though he seems deaf to all our prayers. [...] Yet it is precisely their genius for interpretation that puts religious leaders at a disadvantage when they compete against scientists. Scientists too knowhow to cut corners and twist the evidence, but in the end, the mark of science is the willingness to admit failure and try a different tack. That's why scientists gradually learn how to grow better crops and make better medicines, whereas priests and gurus learn only how to make better excuses. Over the centuries, even the true believers have noticed the difference, which is why religious authority has been dwindling in more and more technical fields. This is also why the entire world has increasingly become a single civilization. When things really work, everybody adopts them.[12]

Be as it may, let us go back to Lacan. In essence, Lacan somehow cuts everything down to two sides: religion is equated with meaning, world, and "cure": "Religion is designed for that, to cure men – in other words, so that they do not perceive what is not going well."[13] On the other side, psychoanalysis is equated with symptom, the Real and with "what isn't going well." Therefore the two sides are: religion=meaning=world=going well *versus* psychoanalysis=symptom=the Real=not going well. The first side will eventually triumph, whereas the other side will never triumph, it simply cannot win. It might even disappear since Lacan says that "it will survive or it won't."

So, the two sides are in principle not equal in power: the first side will always prevail, dominate, win, and will never perish or die. Lacan even says that in that sense religion is "invincible."[14] The French original is even stronger, "*increvable*," and it refers to something that simply *cannot die* or be washed away (it is interesting, by the way, that Badiou uses this expression in connection with Becket[15]). "*Increvable*" is not only invincible, it also resists its own death and its annihilation, even its "second death" since what is "truly *increvable*" for Lacan is animality. Humanity and science might namely produce their own destruction and Lacan quite cheerfully describes these grim prospects. The scientists namely:

> have begun to get the idea that they could create bacteria that would be resistant to everything, that would be unstoppable. That would clear the surface of the

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12 Yuval Noah Harari, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, Vintage, London 2019, p. 119–120.

13 Lacan, *The Triumph of Religion*, p. 71.

14 *Ibid*., p. 64.

15 See: Alain Badiou, *Beckett. L'increvable désir*, Hachette, Paris 1995.

> globe of all the shitty things, human in particular, that inhabit it. And then they suddenly felt overcome with pangs of responsibility. They put an embargo on a certain number of experiments. Perhaps it is not such a bad idea; perhaps what they are doing could be very dangerous. I don't believe so. The animal world is indestructible. Bacteria won't get rid of all of that for us. But the scientists had a typical anxiety attack, and a sort of prohibition, at least provisional, was announced. They told themselves that they must think twice before going further with certain experiments involving bacteria. What a sublime relief it would be nonetheless if we suddenly had to deal with a true blight, a blight that came from the hands of the biologists. That would be a true triumph. It would mean that humanity would truly have achieved something – its own destruction. It would be a true sign of the superiority of one being over all the others. Not only its own destruction, but the destruction of the entire living world.[16]

The main rhetorical value of the picture presented here lies in it introducing another level, a higher level, a level of truth. There is namely for Lacan "a triumph," but there is also "a true triumph" in the same vein as there is "a religion," and there is "a true religion," "a destruction" and "a true destruction" as the destruction of the entire living world. By differentiating between the two levels, Lacan seems to imply that there are many ways of understanding of what he tries to say. He tries to highlight the fact that he is deadly serious about what he is saying, yet he is far from desperate. He seems to be pessimistic and cheerful at the same time while speaking about the fate/end of psychoanalysis and about a possible fate/end of the world itself. World might perish or not, however, psychoanalysis in Lacan's view is not "increvable". In this vein in his lecture in Rome from 1967, "*La psychanalyse. Raison d'un échec*" he says: "It is when psychoanalysis will have been vanquished by the growing impasses of our civilization (a discontent which Freud foresaw) that the indication of my Écrits will be taken up again. But by whom?"[17] On the other hand, it has to be noted that in an interview from roughly the same period as *The Triumph*[18] in which

[16] Lacan, *The Triumph of Religion*, p. 60. For a good overview of animals and animality in contemporary, thought see: Oxana Timofeeva, *The History of Animals: A Philosophy*, Bloomsbury, London 2018.

[17] Jacques Lacan, *Autres écrits*, Paris: Seuil 2001, p. 348.

[18] See his interview with Emilio Granzotto for the Italian magazine *Panorama* "*Il ne peut y avoir de crise de psychanalyse*", republished in: *Magasin litteraire*, No. 428, Paris 2004, pp. 24–29.

he put forward similar claims regarding the return of religion and the triumph of science he stressed that, faced with this situation, he is neither pessimistic nor anguished. And he is there much more optimistic regarding psychoanalysis, since he explicitly says that there can be no crisis of psychoanalysis at all. Psychoanalysis, he claims, is still something new, something young, which can and has to be rethought; however, there is no necessity here that that will happen. It might not happen, precisely because of religion. The latter will somehow prevail, that is sure.

This conviction is something very persistent in later Lacan. In his seminar from 18 March 1980 he stresses: "You have to know that religious sense will experience an explosion [*va faire une boom*] which you cannot imagine at all. Religion is namely the original site of sense [*c'est le gîte originel du sens*]. And this certainty imposes itself."[19] So, without going into detail, we can safely say that this talk about the "triumph of religion" is in later Lacan something constant and persistent. However, we can also safely say that Lacan is *not simply against* religion as such: "[...] there is nothing doctrinal about our role. We need not answer for any ultimate truth, and certainly not for or against any particular religion."[20]

But the triumph of what? Kojève, the Latin Empire, evaluation, and operationability

Although Freud warns us that sometimes cigars are simply just cigars, it is first of all clear that religion in *The Triumph of Religion* is *not* (only) religion – what is it then? What is meant by "religion" here and what does it mean that it "will triumph"? Why does Lacan use this word – "triumph" – in the first place? Why does he not choose some other word, such as victory, prevalence, achievement, success, or conquest? It has to be noted that Lacan is never reckless with words: "I use terms sparingly, I am careful about what I say."[21]

In general, we could say that the word "triumph" was abundantly used in the 18th and 19th centuries, after that its use slowly declined. The very word derives

[19] Jacques Lacan, "Monsieur A.", *Ornicar*, Nos. 21–22, Paris 1980, p. 19.

[20] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*. The First Complete Edition in English, trans. by Bruce Fink, W. W. Norton & Co., London and New York 2006, p. 693.

[21] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar, Book XVII, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Russell Grigg, W. W. Norton & Co., New York 2007, p. 114.

from the Greek word *thriambos*, 'hymn to Bacchus', and refers to a competition, to a struggle, even to an ongoing struggle between two parties and to the celebration when the fight is over. The Cambridge English dictionary defines "triumph" as "a very great success, achievement, or victory (= when you win a war, fight, or competition), or a feeling of great satisfaction or pleasure caused by this." Triumph, in short, is a decisive, great victory accompanied by great joy.

It is not unimportant in this context that Lacan frequently used term "triumph" in his early days to define the joy and satisfaction of a young infant upon discovering his image in the mirror: "What is involved in the triumph of assuming the image of one's body in the mirror is the most evanescent of objects, since it only appears there in the margins."[22] Triumph goes together with the "mirror's stage," with the Imaginary in Lacan's sense, with a struggle and a competition with our double, with the Hegelian struggle between Lord and Bondsman, with the narcissism and with the Ego: the latter is for Lacan nothing but "a function of mastery, a game of bearing, and constituted rivalry."[23] Another occasion that Lacan uses word 'triumph' is also a telling one. When in his XI seminar he talks about a competition between the two Greek painters Zeuxis and Parrhaios[24] he underscores the end of the story with the following words: what we have here is "a triumph of the gaze over the eye."[25] Here the very word 'triumph' designates a change, a victory that has permanent consequences. The word, therefore, for Lacan carries with it a sense of reversal, a turn that "ends something" and which puts an end to something. In this sense, Lacan in his XVI seminar mentions Lenin's belief that Marxist theory will triumph in the end, because it is true.[26] So, to summarise Lacan's use of the word, we could say that in general for him 'triumph' refers to the end of a struggle between two parties, a decisive end that destroys, eliminates, one of the parties.

22 Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 55.

23 *Ibid*., p. 685.

24 In this classical tale of two painters, Zeuxis has the advantage of having made grapes that attracted birds. The stress is placed not on the fact that these grapes were in any way perfect grapes, but on the fact that even the eye of birds was taken in by them. This is proved by the fact that his friend Parrhasios triumphs over him by having painted on the wall a veil, a veil so lifelike that Zeuxis, turning towards him, said, well, and now show us what you have painted behind it.

25 Lacan, *The Seminar, Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, p. 103.

26 See: Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre XVI. D'un Autre à l'autre*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, Seuil, Paris 2006, p. 172.

But before we proceed further, just one additional point. A narrative about struggle, competition, and recognition, together with the Imaginary and with a specific reading of Hegel, is, of course, omnipresent in (early) Lacan. However, as Judith Butler has shown in her *Subjects of Desire* from 1987, the Hegelian struggle between Lord and Bondsman decisively influenced not only Lacan, but also a very large part of contemporary French philosophy. The main reason for this are the lectures on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* by Alexandre Kojève in the 1930s, which Lacan (together with Queneau, Aron, Bataille, Merleau-Ponty, Leiris, Breton, Weil, Corbin, and others) attended, and which were, as Butler shows, important influence on posterity, on Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida and our contemporaries.

Here, I will not go into the quite complex relationship between Kojève, Hegel, and Lacan,[27] but I would like to point out another side of Kojève, which is perhaps not so present to us now, but which, I am sure, Lacan himself was very much aware of precisely when he talks about "the triumph of religion." The general story through which Kojève interprets Hegel is historic teleology and the emergence of the wise man at the end of history. In other words, for Kojève the Sage *is* the telos of history. But this teleology is not as Hegelian or as Marxian as one would perhaps expect. It is something else, and yet also something very precise. After WWII Kojève stopped his philosophical career and became a diplomat fiercely engaged in what is today known as the European Union! His text from 1946, "Outline of a Doctrine of French Policy", represents in this regard a strange historical twist regarding his reading of Hegel, for the end of history and the emergence of the Sage coincides for him now with the birth of a new empire.[28] The Latin countries, writes Kojève, cannot easily cohabit in a world dominated by communist USSR, on one side, and Protestant USA, on the other. The only solution for them was to create a new empire, a kind of Latin Empire, a union between France, Italy, Spain, and the Maghreb countries (a sort of Mediterranean Union), which would have only one goal: to defend and to protect the specific way of life of Latin, Catholic, or post-Catholic countries. The

[27] See: Mladen Dolar, "Hegel as the Other Side of Psychoanalysis", in: Clemens and Russell, *Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis: Reflections on Seminar XVII*, Duke University Press, Durham 2006, pp. 129–155.

[28] I am relying here on the excellent paper by Boris Groys, "Contemporary Europe: In Search of Cultural Biotopes", in: *The Final Countdown: Europe, Refugees and the Left*, ed. by Jela Krečič, Irwin and Wiener Festwochen, Ljubljana and Vienna 2017, pp. 33–48.

mission of this empire (which Napoleon had already dreamt of) is to ensure the propagation of this way of life. In a way, we could say that all of Kojève's talk about Desire as the essence of man, all his talk about Desire as the Desire of the other, all his talk about intersubjectivity and about the struggle for recognition, in an ironical twist of History, coincides for him here with the creation of a Latin Empire (today: the EU) as a defensive project whose basic aim is to ensure the reproduction of a certain way of life, call it Catholic or not. So this is ironically the end of history that Kojève engaged in and fought for until the end of his life in 1968, however, it has to be noted that there are also other, yet unknown sides to Kojève as a thinker too[29].

For the purposes of our topic here we can say that the irony is that the EU project, at least for much of the European Right toady, is a kind of "triumph of religion"; just recall in this context the disputes about the candidacy of Turkey for EU membership and also recall the recent discourse in Europe about migrants, about the crisis of the European project, which echoes the discourse about the crisis of the Western World that (Springer) began already at the end of the 1920s. In this context, "the triumph of religion" coincides with the project "Fortress Europe".

Moreover, the EU does not stand only for that, it does not stand only for rightist politics and policies, for it also stands for the project of the biggest market in the world, and for a specific type of neoliberal governance as the rule of knowledge in the guise of a vast system of bureaucracy. And in this sense, it also somehow stands for what Lacan calls "the triumph of religion," since this rule is ever more opposed to anything that "goes against the grain," anything that is not compatible with it. In what sense? This new empire in the guise of the EU is based on the rule of what Lacan called "University Discourse" in which (certain) knowledge rules. What kind of knowledge, what sort of knowledge? Only "a true one," one could say. It is not an accident, then, that this empire constantly revises, checks,

[29] I am well aware that things, here, with Kojève as the "most unusal man" as Love puts it (p. 3), are far from being simple. For Kojève is an original and provocative thinker, to say the least, influenced by Hegel, but also Dostoyevsky, Fedorov and Soloviev, ambivalent to European cultural heritage, for him the end of history coincides with the abandoning of the individual self, etc. See Jeff Love, *The Black Circle. A Life of Alendre Kojève*, Columbia University Press, New York 2018; Stephanos Geroulanos, *An Atheism that is not Humanist emerges in French Thought*, (ca:9. Stanford University Press, Stanford 2010, pp. 130–172; Boris Groys, *Introduction to Antiphilosophy*, Verso, London & New York 2012, pp. 145–168.

and authorises what "true knowledge" is in the first place. For these purposes, various protocols, checks, and filters are in use which when put together form a new type of power and control called "the power of evaluation," to use the expression of Jacques-Alain Miller and Jean-Claude Milner.[30] Although in their description of this new power they refer primarily to Lacan and Foucault, it was Lyotard who saw it coming a long time ago. He was well aware that this kind of power "entails a certain level of terror, whether soft or hard: be operational (that is, commensurable) or disappear"![31]

What it means to be operational today for psychoanalysis soon became clear when in France in 2003 the so-called Accoyer Amendment tried to impose an assessment of and to legalise uniform standards for all kinds of psychotherapies, which would have destroyed psychoanalysis and irreparably damaged its praxis. But due to the general revolt of psychoanalysts of different theoretical orientations under Miller's initiative and guidance, and because of the support of the general public for their "cause," the attempt to "make psychoanalysis more operative" and "to make it more commensurable" did not succeed (at least not yet). The danger, however is still there and threatens not only psychoanalysis, but science in general and critical thinking in particular. The irony is that the system that Kojève fought for and which triumphed in the end does not need any true critique, any dissensual science or any negative sounding voices. It does not need, it seems, any reference to dialectics and negativity, and in that way it does not need philosophy as critical theory, but it does not need psychoanalysis either. It needs, at least it seems so, only conformism and operationability. This is especially visible in recent trends in European financing of scientific projects of all kinds, and in the massive changes that science itself has undergone in the last couple of decades, not only in Europe[32]. So, to be operational and to be commensurable today, forty years after Lyotard's grim prediction, and forty-five years after Lacan's declaration of "the triumph of religion," means, in this era defined by general neoliberal commodification, monetisation, financialisation, and marketisation, something very particular: the only way to go with the flow

30 See: Jacques-Alain Miller and Jean-Claude Milner, *Voulez-vous être évalué? Entretiens sur une machine d'imposture*, Grasset, Paris 2004.

31 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1984, p. xxiv.

32 See: Phillip Mirowski, *Science-Mart. Privatizing American Science*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London 2011.

is to produce more value, to bring into play more money and to bring about more profit. In order to do so one has to be functional and this demands more fluidity, flexibility, to go together with "what really works," and not the other way around.

It is in that sense that we could understand the crucial opposition for Lacan. The opposition between the Real and the world namely for him entails the opposition between "what works" and "what doesn't work": "The Real is the difference between what works and what doesn't work. What works is the world. The Real is what doesn't work. The world goes on, it goes round – that is its function as a world."[33] This emphasis on something negative, by the way, is not an isolated case in Lacan, but central to his whole endeavour and for him central for psychoanalysis, if the latter deserves to survive at all. Psychoanalysis is all about negativities, and as such it was endangered by "religion". Lacan was constantly aware of that. He attempted to point out this connection between psychoanalysis and negativity many times, for instance with his definition of the unconscious in the XI seminar as discontinuity and gap (or *bévue* – this was reworked later in the XXIV seminar entitled *L'insu que sait de l'une-bévue s'aile* à mourre, which presents a homophony: *L'insuccès de l'Unbewusst c'est l'amour*); recall his definition of the cause as something that "does not work": "*il n'y a pas de cause que de ce qui cloche*"; and recall that for Lacan his own invention – and a contribution to psychoanalysis he was proud of – the *objet petit a*, in a form of a miscarriage "displays the fact that it is an effect of language" and points out that "there is in every case a level at which things do not work out."[34] Precisely because of all that one can say together with Badiou: "Lacan is a condition of the renaissance of philosophy. A philosophy is possible today only if it is compossible with Lacan."[35]

Psychoanalysis, science. And "a true religion".

But we cannot say that Lacan emphasised only "what goes wrong," because he was quite attentive to "what goes along," to put it like this. In other words, it

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33 Lacan, *The Triumph of Religion*, p. 61.

34 Lacan, *The Seminar, Book XVII, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, p. 55.

35 Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. by Norman Madarasz, State University of New York Press, Albany 1999, p. 84.

would be wrong to say that Lacan is either for (historical) progress or against it. And it would be even more wrong to present him as somebody who is against (modern) science, as many contemporaries following in the footsteps of Husserl or Heidegger were. On the contrary, Lacan constantly refers to modern science and to Descartes. In his "Science and Truth", for instance, he famously says: "To say that the subject upon which we operate in psychoanalysis can only be the subject of science may seem paradoxical."[36] Things are, however, not only paradoxical, but also quite complicated at this point.[37] But one thing is clear and one can only agree with Alexandre Leupin at this point: "Even if psychoanalysis as a cure for psychic ills disappears from the face of the earth, Lacanian epistemology will endure and remain his crowning achievement"[38].

But what is Lacan's stance towards science? To say this in the shortest way possible – Freud taught that there is Ideal science, whereas Lacan (despite his reliance on linguistics, logics, and mathematics) had a much more complex relation to science: "Before allowing psycho-analysis to call itself a science, therefore, we shall require a little more."[39] But soon Lacan turned the tables – the question is not how psychoanalysis should align itself with science, but what is a science that is compatible with psychoanalysis? Science as such namely sutures the subject and it is blind to this special object psychoanalysis deals with. Science is, as Lacan said in his interview in 1974 for Panorama, unbearable, untenable; it is the fourth impossible profession (together with Freud's educating, governing, and analysing). Science goes together with anxiety and here religion steps in, religion as conferring meaning, i.e. "meaning to all the distressing things science is going to introduce." Psychoanalysis, however, does not go together with meaning and with what Lacan calls "hermeneutic demand" and in this "respect, we see, at least, a corridor of communication between psychoanalysis and the religious register."[40] Who is targeted here? None other than Paul Ricoeur, a philosophical inspiration and spiritual mentor of current French

36 Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 729.

37 The relation between science and Lacan's psychoanalysis has been dealt with many times by many authors, but the unsurpassable work for me is still Jean-Claude Milner's *L'Oeuvre claire* (Seuil, Paris 1995). For a good general overview in English, see: *Lacan & Science*, ed. by Jason Glynos and Yannis Stavrakakis, Karnac, London and New York 2002.

38 Leupin, *Lacan Today*, p. 32.

39 Lacan, *The Seminar, Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, p. 8.

40 *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.

president Macron! Lacan is always very strict at this point: "Psychoanalysis is not a religion. It proceeds from the same status as Science itself."[41] But although here, with hermeneutics, there lurks a danger, a certain danger for psychoanalysis, one cannot say that this is a true (religious) danger since this is not "a true religion." But what is it and what is (a true) religion for Lacan then?

Before we answer that question, we should perhaps point out that "religion" does not stand for church, i.e. the dogmatic psychoanalytic organisation known as the IPA, with which Lacan had a longstanding fight before he was finally expelled therefrom. In the first lecture of his XI seminar he refers to it ("I am not saying – although it would not be inconceivable – that the psycho-analytic community is a Church"[42]) and later in his *Televison* names it – SAMCDA (*Société d'assurance mutuelle contre le discours analytique*: Society of Mutual Assurance against Analytical Discourse), which in French sounds close to "sancta" and perhaps implies "sancta simplicitas". IPA relies heavily on ego-psychology, while for Lacan ego is far from something to rely upon, to say the least. The IPA is not exactly the "religion" Lacan speaks about in the *Triumph of Religion*, for it is too weak in itself let alone something that Lacan would describe as a winning side. However, the IPA is an ally to "religion" as it is definitively conformist; it collaborates in ensuring that "all goes well." The IPA and ego-psychology are in the service of goods, as Lacan put it, and it is not surprising that Lacan in this context defines ego as "the theology of free enterprise."[43]

But what is religion then, and what is "a true religion"? We should note here that Lacan frequently plays religion against religion in the name of "a true religion": "I am speaking of religion in the true sense of the term – not of a desiccated, methodologized religion, pushed back into the distant past of a primitive form of thought, but of religion as we see it practiced in a still living, very vital way."[44] In his interview for *Panorama* he speaks about a revival of (true) religion: "What is a better devouring monster than religion?"[45] In *Triumph* he speaks about Christianity or Catholicism as "true religion," but before I get into that, perhaps just a couple of biographical notes concerning Lacan and his personal relation-

41 *Ibid*., p. 265.
42 *Ibid*., p. 4.
43 Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 301.
44 *Ibid*., p. 7.
45 Lacan, "*Il ne peut y avoir de crise de psychanalyse*", p. 29.

ship to Catholicism. Lacan was born into a Catholic family, was schooled at the Jesuit College Stanislas from 1907 to 1919, his first marriage was Catholic, and his brother Marc became a monk at the monastery Abbaye de Hautecombe, where he spent the rest of his long life (1908-1994). Jacques was always protective of his younger brother and even dedicated his doctoral thesis from 1932 to him: "To the Reverend Father Marc-François Lacan, Benedictine of the Congregation of France, my brother in religion," but he allegedly visited him only once there, on the occasion of his brother's ordination. "At one point in 1953, convinced that these innovative psychoanalytic theories could have a special meaning for the Roman church, Jacques even asked his brother if he could secure him an audience with the Pope. Unfortunately Marc did not have quite the necessary connections for that."[46] Lacan did not hide his Catholic origins or his general political orientation. In his XVII seminar, for instance, he tells the public that he is not leftist – "I am not a man of the left,"[47] but there he also "confesses": "I can't say that I was brought up on the Bible, because I was raised a Catholic. I repel it. But then, I don't regret it, in this sense that when I read it now [...] it has a fantastic effect upon me. This familial delusion, these entreaties by Yahweh to his people, which contradict one another from one line to the next, it makes you sit up and take note."[48] When Jacques died in 1980 Marc celebrated a mass in honour of his brother, whose open and unashamed atheism precluded a Catholic funeral.

But here, at the point of Lacan's "atheism" perhaps an additional clarification is needed. What is atheism and how to be an atheist at all? In contrast to Freud's self-declaration as a man of the Enlightenment and as a man of science, and in contrast to seeing in religion, as Freud did, a mere illusion, Lacan was more prudent. Even more, for him Freud was closer to religion than Freud himself ever realised. In general, our relationship with religion is for Lacan more complicated than we think, even if we proclaim to be atheists. If Nietzsche pointed out that "God is dead," Lacan warns us that he might be dead, but we have to add here "the next step [is] [...] that God himself doesn't know that."[49] Atheism is complicate since "the true formula of atheism is not God is dead – even by basing the origin of the function of the father upon his murder, Freud protects the father –

[46] Aron Dunlap, *Lacan and Religion*, p. 10.

[47] Lacan, *The Seminar, Book XVII, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, p. 114.

[48] *Ibid*., p. 116.

[49] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar, Book VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Dennis Porter, W. W. Norton & Co., New York 1992, p. 184.

the true formula of atheism is God is unconscious."[50] Lacan does not say that God is the Unconsicous, but that God belongs to the Real. Gods, as Lacan points out in the same seminar, "belong to the field of the real,"[51] a point that he accentuated frequently and in other seminars, including the VII and IX seminars.

Is it even possible to be an atheist, can we do away with God? In one word, it is possible, but it is hard to do so and perhaps only psychoanalysis can do it. In seminar VII Lacan points out that only a creationist perspective would do away with God:

> I have already indicated the necessity of the moment of creation *ex nihilo* as that which gives birth to the historical dimension of the drive. In the beginning was the Word, which is to say, the signifier. Without the signifier at the beginning, it is impossible for the drive to be articulated as historical. And this is all it takes to introduce the dimension of the *ex nihilo* into the structure of the analytical field. The second reason may seem paradoxical to you; it is nevertheless essential: the creationist perspective is the only one that allows one to glimpse the possibility of the radical elimination of God.[52]

The creation *ex nihilo* is opposed to the hypothesis of the demiurge in Plato's *Timaeus*, and to the God of philosophers in general, and it means that creation is never just a simple extension of the creator.

There are two other challenges for atheism in Lacan's view and they concern God's power and God's knowledge. The first concerns (according to Koyré) the most important feature of the God of philosophers, *immense potestas*, Almightiness, and in his X seminar, *Anxiety*, Lacan speaks about "the true dimension of atheism": "The atheist would be he who has succeeded in doing away with the fantasy of the Almighty."[53] The second challenge concerns God's omniscience. In seminar XVI, *From the Other to the other,* Lacan even equates the subject supposed to know with God: the "[s]ubject supposed to know, this

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50 Lacan, *The Seminar, Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, p. 45.

51 *Ibid*., p. 59.

52 Lacan, *The Seminar, Book VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p. 213.

53 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar, Book X. Anxiety, 1962–1963*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by A. R. Price, Polity Press, New York 2014, p. 308.

is God."[54] Therefore: "The true atheism, the only which deserves its name, is the one that would result from questioning the subject supposed to know."[55] This is practically impossible. Namely, insofar as we speak, we always presume some subject supposed to know and that is why for Lacan God goes together with *dire*, with saying. The *dire* constitutes *dieu* in Lacan's wordplay *dieur*: "That is why, in the end, only theologians can be truly atheistic, namely, those who speak of God. There is no other way to be an atheist, except to hide one's head in one's arms in the name of I know not what fear, as if this God had ever manifested any kind of presence whatsoever. Nevertheless, it is impossible to say anything without immediately making Him subsist in the form of the Other."[56] Speaking goes together with the hypothesis about God, so that, finally, as Lacan states in his lectures in North America in 1976, "everybody is religious, even the atheists," and only "psychoanalysis would be capable of making a viable atheist, that is, one that would not contradict himself all the time."[57]

There is therefore no easy triumph *over* religion or God for Lacan and that is why, perhaps, religion is invincible and why it can triumph. But what is "the triumph of religion"? It seems to me that this triumph is not connected to any religion, but only "a true one," which for Lacan is Christianity. But to say that Christianity is "a true religion" has at least three meanings: 1. Christianity is a true religion because it is no longer a religion: "I just wanted to emphasize the fact today that there is a certain atheistic message in Christianity itself, and I am not the first to have mentioned it. Hegel said that the destruction of the gods would be brought about by Christianity."[58] Or, as he puts it in the same seminar: "Christianity, in effect, offers a drama that literally incarnates that death of God."[59] 2. To be qualified as "a true religion" is for Lacan not something good *per se*. As he puts it in his seminar XX: "That it is the true religion, as it claims, is not an excessive claim, all the more so in that, when the true is examined closely, it's the worst

54 Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre XVI: D'un Autre à l'autre*, p. 280.

55 *Ibid*., p. 281.

56 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar XX, Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Bruce Fink, W. W. Norton & Co., New York 1998, p. 45.

57 Jacques Lacan, "*Conférences et entretiens dans des universités nord américaines*", *Scilicet*, Nos. 6–7, Seuil, Paris 1976, p. 32.

58 Lacan, *The Seminar, Book VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p. 178.

59 *Ibid*., p. 193.

that can be said about it. Once one enters into the register of the true, one can no longer exit it. In order to relegate the truth to the lowly status it deserves, one must have entered into analytic discourse."[60] 3. To say that Christianity is the true religion is to connect it with truth, but to deal with truth properly one has to enter into analytic discourse. What does that mean? What is truth for Lacan?

Lacan's only condition that we can say about truth is that we connect it to speaking. No speaking, no truth, we could say – the truth for Lacan is somehow related to speaking and to language. But how? For Lacan, man is not only a speaking being, a "*parlêtre*," "a being that speaks," but also "a spoken being," a being that (others/the Other) constantly speak about, spoke about even before his/her birth, a being that cannot master its own speech, which is why it does not speak, but it is spoken. In the same manner, for Lacan truth primarily speaks. Or, as he put it in "Freudian Thing", the truth speaks in the first person singular, there is a prosopopeia of truth: "I, truth, speak."[61] Although the later Lacan changes his relation to truth and introduces the opposition between the truth and the Real, he never changed his view that truth is connected to speaking. Or, as he put in his *Television* from 1974: "I always speak the truth. Not the whole truth, because there's no way, to say it all. Saying it all is literally impossible: words fail. Yet it's through this very impossibility that the truth holds onto the real."[62] The later Lacan emphasises that "where it speaks, it enjoys"; however, it still reveals something. What? If truth is revealed, what is revealed by it? Here Lacan points out "that Christians – well, it's the same with psychoanalysts – abhor what was revealed to them."[63] The relationship to truth, the connection to truth, is not something easy. And that is why Lacan in his XXI seminar (the lecture from 9 April 1974) perhaps changed his main emphasis: now truth is linked with religion, whereas psychoanalysis is strictly linked with the Real, the Real as something impossible, as a deadlock, as something that "does not go well," whereas religion is now connected with conferring meaning, the cure and with "what goes well."

60 Lacan, *The Seminar XX, Encore*, pp. 107–108.

61 Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 340. For more on these topics, see Mladen Dolar's excellent *Prozopopeja*, DTP, Ljubljana 2006.

62 Jacques Lacan, *Television. A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, trans. by Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, Annete Michelson, Jeffrey Mehlman, ed. by Joan Copjec, W. W. Norton & Company, New York and London 1990, p. 3.

63 Lacan, *The Seminar XX, Encore*, p. 114.

And while for Lacan meaning was always connected with symptom, in later Lacan symptom is more and more equated with *jouissance*, with enjoyed meaning as *jouis-sense*, which does not make sense. In his XVIII seminar Lacan emphasises the following: "The dimension of the symptom is that it speaks, it speaks even to those who do not know how to hear; it does not say everything even to those who know it. This promotion of the symptom is the turning point that we are living through in a certain register, which, let us say, was pursued, rumbling quietly through the centuries, around the theme of knowledge."[64] And in that sense he emphasises now in *The Triumph of Religion* that psychoanalysis itself is a symptom: "psychoanalysis is a symptom. But we have to understand what it is a symptom of. It is clearly part of the discontents of civilization Freud spoke about. What is most likely is that people won't confine themselves to perceiving that the symptom is what is most real."[65] So, we are back to our two sides again: 1. religion=meaning=world=goes well *versus* 2. psychoanalysis=symptom=the Real=not going well.

These two sides could, of course, be understood in many ways, the task is endless. If we stay within psychoanalysis, they could be presented by the pair of fantasy and symptom. In the final section of this paper, however, I will try to illustrate them via some thoughts on contemporary capitalism. One could say that the first of our two sides coincides with what Lacan describes as "fantasy" – all we always understand are our fantasies – and the second with a symptom. Jacques-Alain Miller, who devoted one year of his "Orientation lacanienne" (1982-1983[66]) to the topics of fantasy and symptom, emphasised, among other things, the opposition between symptom and fantasy: while one does not want to speak about one's fantasies (one simply enjoys one's own fantasy), one also constantly complains about one's symptoms, about what does not go well, about what does not work. However, the fundamental fantasy is perhaps our fantasy that "things will always go smoothly and well," that we are indispensable and that things cannot go on out there without us. Everything works out for us in this fundamental fantasy and the gap between cause and effect (which is another

64 Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre XVIII: D'un discours qui ne serait pas de semblant*, Seuil, Paris 2006, p. 24.

65 Lacan, *The Triumph of Religion*, p. 70.

66 See: Jacques-Alain Miller, "From Symptom to Fantasy and Back", trans. by Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, *Symptom*, No. 14: www.lacan.com/symptom14/from-symptom.html. (Last accessed 31 May 2019).

name for us as subjects) is simply eliminated, erased. In that way, everything can be understood, mastered, and controlled. The only trouble is that this is only a fantasy. Perhaps the fantasy of the Master and of those in power that they are in control, handling and managing things, relying on a fantasy that there is no gap between cause and effect, a fantasy that things can and will always run like this, i.e. more or less smoothly and well. This is the fundamental fantasy of any power, and here we could leave strict psychoanalytical waters and move towards contemporary ideology using a suggestion by Clayton Crockett that if religion for Lacan triumphs in his *The Triumph of Religion*, it does so only "as ideology, not as theology itself."[67]

Capitalism and the cult without what?

So, the triumph of religion can also be understood as the triumph of ideology. Which ideology? Perhaps the dominant ideology of today is the ideology of "the end of ideologies", ideology of "the only game in town," of capitalism and its triumph. It is capitalism that for Walter Benjamin (in his short fragment "Capitalism as Religion" from 1921) serves to satisfy the same worries, anguish, disquiet that were formerly addressed by religion. So in a way, surprisingly, we get – despite the different terminology – a similar result as in Lacan: what triumphs is a "kind of religion." But of what kind of religion? A celebration of a cult, or better, of "the permanence of the cult. Capitalism is the celebration of the cult *sans rêve ET sans merci* [without dream or mercy]. There are no 'weekdays'. There is no day that is not a feast day." So, for Benjamin, capitalism is first of all very similar to what Lacan describes as "world": "The world goes on, it goes round – that is its function as a world."[68] It goes around and turns around in the same manner as capitalism does for Benjamin – without ever meeting any impossibility or limit, without rest and without end: there are no weekdays. And if there are no "weekdays" in capitalism, if every day is a feast day and a holiday, there is also no final day of capitalism. There is no end of capitalism (yet); it seems that capitalism is here forever.

Here, of course, a lot could and should be said concerning the limits of the system and its main conviction not only that "the show must go on," but that it will

67 Clayton Crockett, *Theology after Lacan*, Cascade Books, London 2014, p. 251.

68 Lacan, *The Triumph of Religion*, p. 61.

go on forever by itself, naturally. But without going into that, I will try to present three different variations on these same topics presented by different authors. One of them, of course, is Lacan and his (optimistic) insistence on the Real as impossible; the second is Jonathan Crary, who tackles the topics of endlessness in his work on 24/7; and the third is Laurent de Sutter with his claim that all capitalism is narcocapitalism.

Since for Benjamin capitalism is a cult without dreams, it is perhaps interesting to see how Lacan relates the Real to dreams in his XI seminar, where he dealt with famous dreams analysed by Freud in *Interpretation of Dreams*. A father dreamt "that his child was standing beside his bed, caught him by the arm and whispered to him reproachfully: 'Father, don't you see I'm burning?' he awoke and noticed a bright glare of light from the next room, hurried into it and found that the wrappings and one of the arms of his beloved child's dead body had been burned by a lighted candle that had fallen on them." This, for Freud, proves that dreams are the realisation of the dreamer's unconscious desire as well as that dreams are the protector of sleep, so they sometimes include even outside noises, smells, or other outside occurrences (as in the case of the unfortunate father). Lacan, however, pointed out something different. For him, the father does not awaken himself when the external irritation became too strong, but for other reasons. As Žižek puts it: the sleeper "constructs a dream, a story which enables him to prolong his sleep, to avoid awakening into reality. But the thing that he encounters in the dream, the reality of his desire, the Lacanian Real – in our case, the reality of the child's reproach to his father, 'Can't you see that I am burning?', implying the father's fundamental guilt – is more terrifying than so-called external reality itself and that is why he awakens: to escape the Real of his desire, which announces itself in the terrifying dream. He escapes into so-called reality to be able to continue to sleep, to maintain his blindness, to elude awakening into the Real of his desire."[69] If for Freud dreams protect sleep, for Lacan they try to avoid the Real or that which "does not work." In order to do that, we are even prepared to not fall asleep (and to meet the Real in our dreams), but to continue to sleep awake, so to speak, to sleep in reality. Reality and the Real are opposed, one does everything to escape the Real, the impasse, or what "goes wrong."

[69] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Verso, London and New York 1989, p. 45.

Even if Lacan is not speaking explicitly about capitalism here, let alone about contemporary capitalism, it is clear that the latter's (neoliberal) dreams follow the same logic: they are stubbornly here just to protect "our sleep" and "our dreams" that this is the only possible system, that its growth is here forever, that the system is invincible (and even "*increvable*") and that it somehow "knows" how to deal with troubles. However, these dreams are not dreams about a perfect world without catastrophes and negativities; on the contrary, the negativities are here, but sterilised, tamed and even incorporated into dreams. In these (neoliberal) dreams some parts of the world might even be burning, but dreamers continue to dream their dreams, because they want to simply sleep further: although they *know* (that capitalism/neoliberalism is a system with antagonisms and contradictions), they nonetheless *believe* that this system works (or better, that it is the only system that, more or less, works).

But this sleep and these dreams are perhaps not to be taken literally or taken in the usual sense; here Benjamin is right – capitalism does not want to dream or sleep, it wants to run forever, without end. As Jonathan Crary has shown, capitalism as religion and cult *sans rêve* should be understood literally: capitalism operates constantly, it operates 24/7 and as such needs sleepless workers and/or sleepless consumers. "Nothing is ever fundamentally 'off' and there is never an actual state of rest [...]. More importantly, within the globalist neoliberal paradigm, sleeping is for losers."[70] However, sleep – despite the pharmaceutical industry and its drugs – cannot be eliminated and "sleep will always collide with the demands of the 24/7 universe."[71] For Crary, sleep is our last refuge from the affront of neoliberalism and the uncompromising interruption of the theft of time from us by capitalism. Crary argues that under late capitalism even the notion of everyday life – long a bastion of habits and rhythms beyond and beneath the regimentation of time by work and other institutions – has been thoroughly occupied by the logic of participation in an unremitting globalised economy. Today, he writes, "no moment, place, or situation now exists in which one can *not* shop, there is a relentless incursion of the non-time of 24/7 into every aspect of social or personal life. There are, for example, almost no circumstances

70 Jonathan Crary, *24/7. Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*, Verso, London and New York 2014, pp. 13–14.

71 *Ibid*., p. 10.

now that can *not* be recorded or archived as digital imagery or information."[72] In order to boost productivity and to intensify 24/7 consumption, in order to be numbed and awake at the same time, or, as Pink Floyd put it, to be "comfortably numb," one also needs a "global market in psychoactive drugs, both legal and illegal, including the growing blurred area between them (painkillers, tranquilizers, amphetamines, and so on)."[73] Perhaps this market of psychoactive drugs is not something marginal, but central,[74] as Laurent de Sutter claims in his recent book: "Every capitalism is, necessarily, a narcocapitalism – a capitalism that is narcotic through and through, whose excitability is only a manic reverse of the depression it never stops producing, even as it presents itself as a remedy. [...] Narcocapitalism is the capitalism of narcosis, that enforced sleep into which anaesthetics plunge their patients so as to unburden them from everything that prevents them from being efficient in the current arrangement – which means, work, work and more work."[75] In this sense, one can speak about the (capitalist) economy as a "Prozac economy," as Franco Bifo Berardi has suggested.

Sutter's thesis relies on the actual historical invention of anaesthesia, patented in 1844, continues in the same century with Freud's infamous popularisation of cocaine, and ends in the contemporary misuse of Prozac and other drugs. This led to the pharmaceutical mass production of all kinds of antidepressants and relaxants, whose purpose was less to calm than to extinguish the person or personality, to artificially eliminate all symptoms positive or negative. The key factor here is anaesthesia, which shuts down every motor of being: the libido, sensibility, excitement, rebellion, dark thoughts, sunny thoughts, and so on. Anything that is disturbing or troubling has to be silenced, anything that "goes wrong" or that might go wrong. In that sense, all of capitalism is narco-capitalism, and in that sense it tries to be what Lacan has called "the triumph of religion."

I said "it tries," because "the triumph" as a "final victory" is (for now) just imagined; it is but a pure fantasy, perhaps *the* fantasy of the system and of its advo-

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72 *Ibid*., pp. 30–31.

73 *Ibid*., p. 54.

74 Here, I cannot go into other troubling aspects of these topics. For a recent analysis of the drug epidemic in the USA, see: Sam Quinones, *Dreamland. The True Tale of America's Opiate Epidemic*, Bloomsbury, London and New York 2015.

75 Laurent de Sutter, *Narcocapitalism*, trans. by Barnaby Norman, Polity Press, Cambridge 2018, pp. 43–44.

cates. On the other hand, capitalism as a system is amazingly resourceful and stubbornly resilient; it is constantly inventing new techniques and new methods of control and surveillance. This is, of course, a long and a complicated story that I cannot go into further here. But we should eventually tackle it, since, as Deleuze succinctly put it, there "is not a question of worrying or of hoping for the best, but of finding new weapons."[76] And of retaining – I would add – some of the old ones, too. One of them certainly is – Deleuze would of course disagree – Lacan's version of psychoanalysis with its emphasis on the Real as "what does not work." The fight with "religion" is not over, not yet.

[76] Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies", in: *Negotiations. 1972–1990*, trans. by Martin Joughin, Columbia University Press, London and New York 1995, p. 178.

Melancholy/Metonymy

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Art Between Affect and Indifference in Hegel, Adorno, and Rancière[1]

When Hegel asserts fine art in its autonomy as the proper object of aesthetics, he takes great care to unbind the understanding of art's self-determination from any kind of affective heteronomy. The introduction to his *Lectures on Aesthetics* makes it clear that the philosophy of art should not be interested in the way art stimulates, expresses, or represents feelings or affects. Art should rather be discussed in terms of "its free independence," which allows it to convey "the most comprehensive truths of the spirit."[2] Even though these truths are indeed meant to be felt (art presents them primarily "to feeling," *die Empfindung*[3]), they are independent of what the contingencies of subjective feelings might make of them. Hegel's point, however, is not that our experiences of artworks should thus be characterised by Kantian disinterestedness. It is rather the artwork that is indifferent in itself, with indifference being the crucial characteristic of its free, independent form of appearance. Artistic autonomy thus radiates the indifference of a self-sufficient divinity: "The ideal work of art confronts us like a blessed god."[4]

Since Hegel, the autonomy of art has been contested from a variety of positions that have uncovered different kinds of hidden economies – affective or otherwise – beneath the indifferent surface of aesthetic appearance or challenged art to step down from its ivory tower to tackle the social realities it is entangled with. What we will be interested in, however, are the ways in which such concerns have been addressed by two thinkers who have – in the context of aesthetic theory of the last 50 years – perhaps most strongly *reaffirmed* the autonomy

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2 G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art, Vol. I*, trans. T. M. Knox, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1988, p. 7.

3 *Ibid*., pp. 8, 101.

4 *Ibid*., p. 157.

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of art along with the indifference of its form of appearance, namely Theodor W. Adorno and, more recently, Jacques Rancière. Both have, in their own ways, reaffirmed artistic autonomy precisely by acknowledging its immanent moment of heteronomy. I will focus on what this entails in terms of the affectivity related to the artistic form of appearance. For Adorno, as we will see, aesthetics should still focus on the truths conveyed by artworks, although the truths in question can no longer be defined by their free independence. Any truth should now be understood historically as an expression of suffering caused by social antagonisms. Yet the only means art has of expressing this suffering is the autonomous aesthetic form, which is ultimately indifferent to (and even complicit in) suffering. This presents us with a fundamental antinomy of art. Rancière, on the other hand, fully reaffirms the indifference of artistic appearance. He does not, however, set this indifference in opposition to social suffering, but presents it precisely as the displacing power of art to intervene in the politically charged field of sensible experience (in what he calls "the distribution of the sensible"). In this way, the indifference of appearance can be seen precisely as the properly artistic power to affect.

These considerations allow us to recalibrate the terms of the discussion. Instead of thinking art as placed between affective heteronomies and indifferent autonomy, we can now observe not only how a moment of affective heteronomy is a crucial part of the dialectics of artistic autonomy, but also how the indifference of artistic appearance is itself affective. Returning to Hegel, we can now notice that the divine indifference of the artwork is not to be understood as the absence of any affect, but precisely as a specific affected state: the ideal artwork exists as "sensuously blessed in itself, enjoying and delighting in its own self."[5] This raises the question of whether beyond the affects involved in the creation, reception, and content of artworks there is an affectivity related to art itself, to the very form of its indifferent appearance.

Below, I will first discuss the ambiguous role Hegel assigns to indifference in his *Lectures*. What is the difference between the divine bliss of indifference that he so vehemently affirms and the indifference of subjective feeling he initially denounces? I will then discuss the dialectics of artistic autonomy in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* through the antinomy of expression (of suffering) and the (in-

5 *Ibid*.

different) form it takes. We will see how despite his belief that form neutralises suffering, he nevertheless identifies two affective states immanent to form itself: its melancholy and its promise of happiness. Finally, I will discuss Rancière's reaffirmation of indifference (which is partly derived from his reading of Hegel) and the way he describes its affectivity and effectivity in what he calls "the aesthetic regime of art."

The bliss of indifference

On the very first page of his *Lectures* we find Hegel expressing his doubts regarding the way the relatively new philosophical discipline of aesthetics has been established. As a science of sensation and feeling, aesthetics was invented "at the period in Germany when works of art were treated with regard to the feelings they were supposed to produce, as, for instance, the feeling of pleasure, admiration, fear, pity, and so on."[6] If we are to properly establish aesthetics as the philosophy of art, as Hegel intends to, the way art affects us should not be considered essential – art should rather be thought of as independent in its end and means. Neither should we consider the proper content of art to be "the whole gamut of feelings which the human heart in its inmost and secret recesses can bear," for this only gives us an "empty form" for any kind of content.[7] Even as the origin of the creative act, feelings are denied their importance since artistic expression originates in man as "a *thinking* consciousness."[8]

Why is it that feeling in terms of creation, reception, or content cannot be considered important by the philosophy of art? Hegel describes feeling as "the indefinite dull region of the spirit."[9] As such, feeling is no guarantee of concreteness or authenticity. On the contrary, it is an affair of subjectivity in its most abstract, empty form. Feelings depend on the specificities of each individual subject and have nothing to do with the thing itself – in this case, art: "Feeling remains a purely subjective emotional state of mind in which the concrete thing vanishes, contracted into a circle of the greatest abstraction."[10] In short, feeling is all subjectivity and no substance.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 1.
7 *Ibid.*, pp. 46–47.
8 *Ibid.*, p. 31.
9 *Ibid.*, p. 32.
10 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

Philosophy is rather concerned with art in its freedom and the truth it immanently conveys. As such, art belongs to the highest region of the spirit and touches upon substance itself. Having "the absolute Idea" as its content, art is the "sensuous presentation of the Absolute itself."[11] In contrast to religion and philosophy, the other two forms of presenting the Absolute, artistic presentation nevertheless still operates in the realm of appearance and remains aimed at our capacity to sense and to feel.[12] Art presents the Idea as appearance, but this is "a special kind of appearance," of *Schein*, which goes beyond the immediacy of the external world of the senses and the internal world of feelings.[13] This is a form of appearance that is "itself essential to essence," since it shows how essential it is for the truth to appear.[14] Art thus has the task of delivering adequate sensuous presentations of the absolute Idea – presentations in which the Idea and its appearance are one. Artistic beauty or "the Ideal" will thus be defined by "the immediate unity and correspondence" between "the Idea and its configuration as a concrete reality."[15]

The story of the conceptual and historical development of art that Hegel presents in his *Lectures* is the story of the establishment and dissolution of the Ideal through different forms of art: in the symbolic form of art, the relation between the Idea and its appearance is still external; in the classical form, the correspondence between the two is then fully achieved; finally, in the romantic form, their unity disintegrates, which signals the infamous "end of art." How, then, does the fully achieved Ideal appear? Following Schiller, who in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* modelled the aesthetic form of free appearance on an ancient statue of the Roman goddess Juno, the serenity of ancient gods carved in stone also serves Hegel as the perfect embodiment of the Ideal, i.e. the aesthetic appearance adequate to the absolute Idea. After having banished feelings from aesthetics, Hegel nevertheless describes the artistic Ideal in terms of the affective state radiated by ancient statues of Olympic gods. What characterises their ideality is first and foremost a certain kind of affective indifference: "In this respect, amongst the fundamental characteristics of the Ideal we may put at the top this serene peace and bliss, this self-enjoyment in its own achiev-

11 *Ibid*., p. 79.
12 See *ibid*., p. 101.
13 *Ibid*., p. 8.
14 *Ibid*.
15 *Ibid*., p. 73.

edness and satisfaction."[16] The gods are withdrawn into themselves, indifferent to the interests and concerns related to the particularities of the finite world. This allows them their tranquillity, which, however, is not defined as the absence of affect. On the contrary, it is their indifference itself that they enjoy. The affect proper to art itself, objectively inscribed in the artistic form of appearance, would therefore be this bliss of indifference.

With the disintegration of the classical form of art, however, "the serenity of the Ideal is lost," meaning that in the romantic form that succeeds it "the distraction and dissonance of the heart" prevail.[17] The subjective feeling in its dull indefiniteness returns as part and parcel of art itself and thus has to be accounted for by aesthetics. In the early forms of romantic art, the portrayed "suffering and grief" could still be transformed into a kind of "delight in agony," which came close to the Ideal.[18] As romantic art developed further, however, the feelings became unrestrained and intensified towards romantic irony, in which empty subjectivity reigns supreme. For the ironic ego, "nothing *is treated in and for itself*"; everything is drawn into the sphere of subjective moods, where it "proves to be inherently dissoluble."[19] As an artistic principle, irony brings the "annihilation [of] everything inherently excellent and solid," which means that the basic requirement for the Ideal, the "inherently substantive content," is now lost to complete indifference.[20]

At this point, the question of the difference between the blissful indifference of the Ideal and the dissonant indifference of irony arises. It turns out that the ironic ego, "for which all bonds are snapped," can – just like a Greek god – "live only in the bliss of self-enjoyment."[21] Hegel himself notices the uncanny proximity of this ironic subjective annihilation of the outside world to the Ideal's own self-enjoyment and indifference towards anything external. Just as "irony implies the absolute negativity in which the subject is related to himself in the annihilation of everything specific and one-sided," it is also true for the Ideal

16 *Ibid*., p. 157.
17 *Ibid*., p. 158.
18 *Ibid*.
19 *Ibid*., pp. 64, 595.
20 *Ibid*., p. 160.
21 *Ibid*., p. 66.

that "everything *purely* external in it is extinguished and annihilated."[22] Of course, Hegel's dialectical arsenal has the means to resolve this difficulty: the Ideal is based on "inherently substantive content," while irony dissolves any substantiality; it can achieve its outer determinacy, while irony wallows in the indeterminate; and it only negates the pure externality of the particular in order to manifest its own substantiality, while the ironic ego becomes "hollow and empty."[23] For the Ideal, negativity is only a moment in the dialectical process, while for irony it is confused with the whole.[24]

It is therefore the substantiality of content that provides legitimate grounds for indifference, and gods, indeed, provide plenty of it. The affectivity of the artistic form of appearance is thus put in relation to its subject matter. The ironic dissolution of substantiality also entails the downfall of the Ideal as the romantic form of art brings about the "complete contingency and externality of the material which artistic activity grasps and shapes."[25] The romantic artist is absolved of any substantiality of content, which means that "every material may be indifferent to him."[26]

Indifference, however, again turns out to be involved on both sides of the fence. The indifference toward the subject matter not only brings about the dissolution of the substantive content required by the Ideal, but it also proves to be the Ideal's condition of possibility. Hegel claims, astonishingly, that the special kind of appearance that allows art to present the Absolute – the spiritually produced appearance as distinguished from the immediate appearance of natural materiality – is best observed where art takes as its subject matter the most irrelevant things:

> In contrast to the prosaic reality confronting us, this pure appearance, produced by the spirit, is therefore the marvel of ideality, a mockery, if you like, and an *ironical* attitude to what exist in nature and externally. [...] Now, consequently,

22 *Ibid*., p. 160.
23 *Ibid*., p. 66.
24 See *ibid*., p. 69.
25 *Ibid*., p. 594.
26 *Ibid*., p. 605.

> through this ideality, art at the same time exalts these otherwise worthless objects which, despite their insignificant content, it fixes and makes ends in themselves.[27]

To illustrate his point, Hegel refers to 17th century genre painting in which such insignificant objects are on marvellous display. The indifferent appearance that is coupled in the classical form of art with the substantiality of the content to constitute the aesthetic Ideal thus seems dialectically subverted from two sides. On the one hand, as it turns out, the precondition for the Ideal is the emergence of the ironic appearance essentially unchained from any substantiality of content. On the other, the purity of appearance can best be shown on an example taken deep from the romantic form of art: the style of painting that fully embraced precisely "the complete contingency and externality of the material," in which Hegel in other sections sees an indication of the end of art.

Furthermore, it is among the otherwise worthless things portrayed by genre painting that Hegel rediscovers precisely the gods of Olympus. The indifference of the subject matter takes us back to what is most substantial: appearance affected by the bliss of its own indifference. In a passage brought into the spotlight by Rancière,[28] Hegel expresses his enthusiasm for a couple of paintings by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo that he saw at the Central Gallery in Munich. These genre paintings portray beggar boys, who, despite being "ragged and poor," are "almost like the gods of Olympus":

> But in this poverty and semi-nakedness what precisely shines forth within and without is nothing but complete absence of care and concern – a Dervish could not have less – in the full feeling of their well-being and delight in life. This freedom from care for external things and the inner freedom made visible outwardly is what the Concept of the Ideal requires."[29]

Against the grain of his own grand scheme, Hegel rediscovers the bliss of indifference far from the ancient statues of Olympic gods, deep in the romantic form of art, just when it gives up all substantiality of content in favour of the complete contingency of the subject matter. This entails a major doubt in "the substanti-

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27 *Ibid*., p. 163. (My emphasis.)

28 Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, trans. Zakir Paul, Verso, London and New York 2013, pp. 21–37.

29 *Ibid*., p. 170.

ality of content," which was supposed to separate the divine indifference from the ironic one. It seems that the bliss of indifference as the affect objectively inscribed in aesthetic appearance can thus be evoked by any represented subject matter whatsoever and can as well become compatible with a variety of moods opened up by the romantic "dissonance of the heart."

The silencing echo

Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* remains an heir of the Hegelian philosophical conception of aesthetics by focusing on the "truth-content" (*der Wahrheitsgehalt*) of art in its autonomy. On the other hand, his aesthetics also has to be understood within the wider frame of his reconsideration of the further possibility of philosophical speculation after the political events of the mid 20th century – the project of "negative dialectics" that Adorno sets up in contrast to "the overly positive Hegelian one."[30] Without entering into the complicated matter of Adorno's reading of Hegel, I would like to draw attention to what this implies in terms of the relation between affect and truth. For Adorno, there is an affectivity that does not pertain to the empty form of subjectivity, but rather gives subjectivity its substance, something objective: the suffering that the subject faces in an antagonistic society. In the introduction to *Negative Dialectics* we thus read: "The need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth. For suffering is objectivity that weighs upon the subject; its most subjective experience, its expression, is objectively conveyed."[31] If art is to be considered capable of conveying truth, the expression of (social, historical) suffering should be recognised as the condition of this truth.

It is not, however, its only condition. For what makes art art is not just any kind of expression, but the specific form this expression takes – the specific form of *Schein*, of appearance or semblance.[32] The form of appearance that defines art is autonomous – it is art's very separation from empirical immediacy.[33] Contrary

30 Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton, Routledge, London and New York 1973, pp. 15–16.

31 *Ibid*., pp. 17–18.

32 While T. M. Knox translates "*der Schein*" in Hegel's *Lectures* as "pure appearance," R. Hullot-Kentor uses "semblance" in his translation of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*.

33 See Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, Continuum, London and New York 1997, p. 103.

to what some commentators have claimed, Adorno's point is not to subvert autonomous aesthetic form in the name of affective heteronomy.[34] The aim of aesthetics for Adorno – and "the legitimation of [art's] truth depends on this" – is rather "the redemption of semblance," of the autonomous form of appearance.[35] If we want to preserve art's capacity for truth, therefore, the reaffirmation of aesthetic appearance is just as necessary as expressing suffering.

The Hegelian autonomy of artistic appearance is at once materialistically subverted and idealistically reaffirmed by Adorno. The materialist subversion of art's autonomy starts by identifying its emergence and complicity in an antagonistic society. It should be understood as historically produced in the context of the rise of capitalism and the domination of the bourgeoisie: "The artwork's autonomy is, indeed, not a priori but the sedimentation of a historical process that constitutes its concept. [...] The idea of freedom, akin to aesthetic autonomy, was shaped by domination, which it universalized."[36] Its idealist reaffirmation, on the other hand, starts by acknowledging how the illusory aspect of artistic appearance has the capacity to subvert its real origins and provide the expression of what domination represses: "Without the synthesis, which confronts reality as the autonomous artwork, there would be nothing external to reality's spell."[37] If we let its autonomy vanish, art surrenders to the immediate social reality it is supposed to protest against, succumbing to its demands of total identity and communicability. Art's capacity for truth, its ability to express suffering, should therefore not be sought by challenging art's autonomy, infusing it with social content, or making it serve political purposes. It is only made possible by the further development of what in art is its autonomous element,

34 I specifically have in mind here the view of Alain Badiou, who claims that Adorno's aesthetics is all about renouncing form in the name of affect. (See Alain Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, trans. S. Spitzer, Verso, London and New York 2010, pp. 27–54.) Badiou, however, misses the crucial role form has for Adorno in establishing the truth-content of art. For a comparative reading of Badiou's and Adorno's accounts of artistic form, see my chapter "Form and Affect: Artistic Truth in Adorno and Badiou", in: J. Völker (ed.), *Badiou and the German Tradition of Philosophy*, Bloomsbury, London 2019, pp. 197–216.

35 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 107.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

37 *Ibid.*, pp. 234–235.

namely its form: "Only in the crystallization of its own formal law and not in a passive acceptance of objects does art converge with what is real."[38]

In order to distil its form of appearance, however, the autonomy of art needs to be understood dialectically, acknowledging social and affective heteronomy as its immanent moment. As *expression*, affect becomes immanent to art – and "expression is scarcely to be conceived except as the expression of suffering."[39] As such, expression is art's own "rebellion against semblance, art's dissatisfaction with itself."[40] In line with the "negative" character of Adornian dialectics, the opposed terms do not find reconciliation in a final synthesis, but remain caught up in an antinomy. The two conditions of art's capacity for truth should thus be understood as irreconcilable: "Expression and semblance are fundamentally antithetical. [...] [E]xpression is the element immanent to art through which, as one of its constituents, art defends itself against the immanence that it develops by its law of form."[41] The expression of suffering thus functions as the immanent transcendence of art: it is the heteronomous element within its autonomy. The question is not simply how to find an adequate aesthetic appearance for the expression of suffering – it is the very form of artistic appearance that is fundamentally indifferent to suffering:

> [A]esthetic autonomy remains external to suffering, of which the work is an image and from which the work draws its seriousness. The artwork is not only the echo of suffering, it diminishes it; form, the organon of its seriousness, is at the same time the organon of the neutralization of suffering. Art thereby falls into an unsolvable aporia.[42]

Being indifferent to the very thing it is supposed to give expression to, the artistic form of appearance is the silencing echo of suffering.

From this perspective, it might almost seem as if autonomous appearance is the only and therefore the unavoidable – if undesirable and completely unfitting –

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38 Theodor W. Adorno, *Notes to Literature, Vol. 1*, trans. S. Weber Nicholsen, Columbia University Press, New York 1991, p. 224.

39 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 110.

40 *Ibid*.

41 *Ibid*.

42 *Ibid*., p. 39.

form of the artistic expression of suffering. Yet this would go against the "redemption of semblance" that Adorno states as the goal of his aesthetic theory. The autonomous appearance is also *the* form of expression that suffering deserves. It is a way to "break the spell" of identity and domination that society imposes. The artistic form of identity actually "seeks to aid the nonidentical, which in reality is repressed by reality's compulsion to identity."[43] But how can it do that if it is completely indifferent? How can it be completely external to any affectivity if it is an "image" of an affect and "the organon" for transmitting its seriousness? It seems that just as in Hegel, affectivity returns in Adorno from within the very indifference of the artistic form of appearance. In Adorno, however, this affectivity proves to be deeply ambivalent, since the relation of artistic form to its material is a relation to something lost or non-existent. On the one hand, form is endowed with melancholy, while on the other, it becomes the carrier of a Stendhalian *promesse de bonheur*.[44]

According to Adorno, form should be understood as a process of formalisation, of form-making. Not only does he place the invention of autonomous aesthetic form within the social antagonisms of a certain historical moment, Adorno also understands form itself, in its ideality, as a process that proceeds in a dissonant relation to what it forms. This is where what he calls "the melancholy of form" comes into the picture:

> Form inevitably limits what is formed, for otherwise its concept would lose its specific difference to what is formed. This is confirmed by the artistic labor of forming, which is always a process of selecting, trimming, renouncing. Without rejection there is no form, and this prolongs guilty domination in artworks, of which they would like to be free.[45]

The Hegelian process of establishing the aesthetic Ideal required the annihilation of everything purely external. The same goes for form in Adorno, although this process is now seen as full of irresolvable mourning and guilt. Since form is guilty of enforcing identity on the heterogeneous material, the desired freedom is never fully achieved. Nevertheless, as we have already seen, form is also

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43 *Ibid*., p. 4.

44 I analyse this aspect in more detail in my chapter mentioned in footnote no. 34.

45 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 144.

the only means art has of striving for freedom, of aiding the nonidentical. Form should thus not be denounced despite the suffering it reproduces: "Spirit does not identify the nonidentical: It identifies with it. By pursuing its own identity with itself, art assimilates itself with the nonidentical."[46] Even though the production of aesthetic form is itself an act of identification, it does not merely produce the loss of everything that does not fit within an identity, but manages to *identify directly with what is lost – with the nonidentical itself*.

Even though Adorno makes no reference to it, "the melancholy of form" thus brings us close to Freud's famous definition of melancholia as identification with a lost object. What distinguishes melancholia from mourning, according to Freud, is the unconscious character of the loss and thereby the unidentifiable nature of the lost object.[47] It can never be made clear what it was that was actually lost and therefore there is no closure to the work of mourning. The lost object of the melancholic is, strictly speaking, something nonidentical. Going back to Adorno, the loss form produced in the act of forming – "the process of selecting, trimming, renouncing" – could still be considered as the identifiable loss acknowledged by the work of mourning. Its identification *with* the nonidentical, on the other hand, gives a properly melancholic aspect to artistic form – the unsurpassable identification with a lost but unidentified object. It also reveals the truly immanent aspect of such affectivity. The melancholy of form is no longer a question of the relation between form and the material that it forms, but rather concerns form's identity to the nonidentical – its other that the process of formalisation itself produces.

With this in mind, we can understand how form is not only a violator, but also a protector. By assimilating itself with the nonidentical, artistic form provides the appearance of the latter – of something that cannot exist in a world ruled by identity and domination. And with appearance, Adorno claims, also comes a promise of realisation: "By its form alone art promises what is not; it registers objectively, however refractedly, the claim that because the nonexistent appears it must indeed be possible."[48] By making what cannot exist appear, art's prom-

46 *Ibid*., p. 134.

47 Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia", in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XIV*, trans. James Strachey, Hogarth Press, London 1957, p. 245.

48 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 82.

ise is "bound up with the sensual" and "fused with an element of sensuous happiness."[49] Adorno thus expands Stendhal's definition of beauty as the promise of happiness to artistic appearance as such. The promise does not, however, delay happiness – art as promise is itself an "image of bliss" and therefore immediately affective.[50]

Adorno's introduction of affective heteronomy thus goes hand in hand with a reaffirmation of artistic autonomy. The antinomy of expression and semblance ends up drawn into the dialectics of autonomy itself. Even though Adorno first sets the need to lend a voice to suffering in opposition to the indifference of the autonomous form of artistic appearance, it turns out not only that it is precisely such form that has the ability to lend the voice, but also that this ability of form stems from it being immanently affected. It is finally its very indifference, its very separation, that immanently affects form and thereby makes indifferent semblance the organon of affective expression.

From indignation to curiosity

Compared to Adorno, Rancière's work provides a different view of the formation and destiny of aesthetic autonomy. Even though he would agree that autonomy cannot be properly understood if we miss the element of heteronomy that cuts through it, for Rancière the issue is not confronting autonomy with heteronomy. Rather it is artistic autonomy itself that is established precisely as the heteronomisation of art. Instead of developing a dialectics of their intertwinement, Rancière thus posits their relation as a direct unity of opposites: "In sum, the aesthetic autonomy of art is only another name for its heteronomy. The aesthetic identification of art is the principle of a generalized disidentification."[51] Art became autonomous in a moment when it could no longer be clearly defined by the specificity of its practice and its objects, when the dividing line between fine and applied arts became blurred, and when the distinction between substantial

[49] *Ibid*., p. 277.

[50] *Ibid*. Such bliss can, however, no longer really be enjoyed since the culture industry started to exploit it. An element of falseness clings to all images of happiness in an antagonistic society, which is why art must avoid producing them and therefore "break its promise in order to stay true to it" (*Ibid*., p. 311).

[51] Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, trans. Steven Corcoran, Polity, Cambridge and Malden 2009, p. 67.

and insignificant subject matter collapsed. The paradox of autonomous art is that it is only "recognisable by its lack of any distinguishing characteristics – by its indistinction."[52] It is no longer clear how it is supposed to be produced and who or what may or may not take part in it.

The establishment of the autonomy of art was a part of the "aesthetic revolution" that from the end of the 18th century onwards introduced new ways of identifying, perceiving, understanding, and making art, i.e. what Rancière calls "the aesthetic regime of art."[53] The revolution subverted the principles of the previously dominant "representational regime," which defined various representational forms of producing certain kinds of objects specific to individual arts. This regime also presupposed a range of distinctions and hierarchies between noble and base subject matter and the adequate forms of their artistic representation. In contrast to this, the aesthetic regime identifies artistic objects and practices in terms of a specific form of sensible experience they give rise and belong to – the kind of free, autonomous appearance acknowledged and theorised by the likes of Kant, Schiller, and Hegel. On the one hand, this autonomous "sensorium," personified by Schiller's and Hegel's accounts of the idleness and indifference of the gods, is "foreign to the ordinary forms of sensory experience."[54] On the other hand, art only exists "as a separate world since anything whatsoever can belong to it," affirming the intrusion of "the prose of the world" and its indifference rather than distinguishing something substantial as its proper content.[55] While the representational regime relied on the correspondences between various subject matters and adequate forms of their artistic representation, with the aesthetic regime anything can, in principle, be the subject matter of art, with the manner of representation becoming a matter of invention rather than a matter of adequacy. The aesthetic indifference is thus also defined by Rancière as "the rupture of all specific relations between a sensible form and the expression of an exact meaning."[56] What for Hegel was a sign of art's demise – the indifference of the subject matter no longer in unity with its form of representation – is actually the emergence of a new regime of art according to Rancière. And yet Rancière

52 *Ibid*., p. 66.

53 *Ibid*., p. 10. See also Jacques Rancière, "The Aesthetic Revolution", *Maska* 32 (185–186/2017), pp. 24–31.

54 Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, p. 27.

55 Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis*, p. x.

56 *Ibid*., p. 18.

assigns to Hegel an important place in the genealogy of the aesthetic regime. In *Aisthesis*, he dedicates a chapter to Hegel's rediscovery of the aesthetic Ideal in Murillo's paintings: the beggar boys appear as "little gods of the street" calling for a future in the midst of what is, for Hegel, art as a thing of the past.[57]

According to Rancière's view, it is a misunderstanding to set the indifference of the artistic form of appearance in opposition to the substantiality of the content it is supposed to present or express – be it the Hegelian Absolute or the Adornian objective suffering. The aesthetic appearance is free precisely because it "suspends the ordinary connections not only between appearance and reality, but also between form and matter, activity and passivity, understanding and sensibility."[58] Rather than the imposition of form upon matter, it is the suspension of this very imposition. It is a form of experience that opens up to the prose of the world – again, just as Hegel feared.

Far from making art apolitical, however, it is precisely "as an autonomous form of experience that art concerns and infringes on the political division of the sensible."[59] It is therefore in its separation and indifference and not in its content or commitment that the politics of art resides. Rancière explains how Schiller, long before Adorno, recognised how the aesthetic "power of 'form' over 'matter' is the power of the class of intelligence over the class of sensation, of men of culture over men of nature."[60] Its suspension therefore implies for Schiller a revolution of experience that could go further in the direction of abolishing domination than the French revolution could. In its separation as an autonomous sphere, the aesthetic sensorium thus threatens to revolutionise what it separated itself from.

There is thus a (meta)politics of indifference inscribed in the artistic form of appearance via its very separation from the social world. This explains why the work of an author such as Gustave Flaubert, by no means a revolutionary, whose ideal was to write a book about nothing, a book made of absolute style from the standpoint of which the subject matter becomes a matter of indifference, could

57 *Ibid*., pp. 21–37.
58 Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, p. 30.
59 *Ibid*., p. 32.
60 *Ibid*., p. 31.

be accused by his contemporaries of being overly democratic. Rancière explains how, due to their indifference, his novels achieve a democratisation of sensory experience: "The work that desires nothing, the work without any point of view, which conveys no message and has no care either for democracy or for anti-democracy, this work is 'egalitarian' by dint of its very indifference, by which it suspends all preference, all hierarchy."[61] For Rancière, this implies that the autonomous artwork is political, but not in the same way as it was for Adorno, since there is no social disharmony to express and no promises to keep. What the artwork achieves politically, it achieves in the immediacy of its displacement of the relations that permeate the established forms of sensory experience. Does this mean that the only true political art is the apolitical one – the position taken by Adorno? Just as Rancière does not simply repoliticise art, but acknowledges a politics of its indifference, so too he does not dismiss political art. If there is a politics of the indifferent, we may ask ourselves what its implications are for art that actually touches on the political, that gives explicit expression to social suffering, and that aims to affect its spectators or readers. According to Rancière, the problem of political art – i.e. art that evokes its capacity to affect the audience politically – is that it cannot do away with the indifference of the artistic form of appearance. The question is rather how it engages with it. The classical strategy of political art is based on "a straight line between perception, affection, comprehension and action," the assumption that the expression of suffering will affect spectators in a way that will make them aware of the situation and motivate them to change it.[62] But over time, a weakened belief in this causal chain led to a reversal of the critical discourses surrounding art: expressions of suffering were now understood in the context of the spectacle of images imposed on us by society. According to this new understanding, perception still leads to affection, but actually diverts us from comprehending and acting. What we should thus be aware of is finally that extreme suffering cannot and should not be represented and that it is this shock of unrepresentability that art should ultimately try to evoke.[63]

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61 *Ibid*., p. 40.

62 Rancière Jacques, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott, Verso, London and New York 2009, p. 103.

63 In this context, it is interesting to have a look at Rancière's intervention in the debates on the unrepresentability of suffering, related specifically to concentration camps and Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*. According to Rancière, it was the old, representational regime that defined the limits of what is representable and what kind of representation

For Rancière, the problem of such forms of artistic politics is that they try to "sidestep the incalculable tension between political dissensuality and aesthetic indifference."[64] While the classical form of artistic politics calls for art to step down from its ivory tower to a make a difference, its critical reversal draws its strength from shattering art's indifferent form of appearance against the unrepresentable. Yet the aesthetic regime of art offers another way of understanding the political capacity of art, one that passes through the aesthetic indifference itself: "the aesthetic rupture arranges a paradoxical form of efficacy, one that relates to a disconnection."[65] The line is neither straight nor broken; it is simply disconnected or interrupted. Rancière thus draws our attention to artworks and artistic practices that make use precisely of the irreducible tension between dissensus and indifference.

One such work Rancière presents is a photograph by the French artist Sophie Ristelhueber. The photograph from her 2005 *WB* series shows a figureless rocky landscape crossed by a straight country road. What draws our attention, however, is not the road itself and the abstract composition it instils, but a pile of rocks that blocks it and suggests, at the same time, the continuity with the surrounding landscape and the discontinuity of the road that crosses it. On the one hand, the pile is thus "harmoniously integrated into an idyllic landscape"[66] and thereby into the artistic form of appearance in all its indifference. On the other hand, the indication of a disturbance within this harmony that the rocks present is enhanced by the meaning they gain in the context of Ristelhueber's series of photographs. *WB* stands for West Bank, which is also the location where the photograph was taken: the pile of rocks on the road turns out to be an Israeli

is adequate to a specific subject matter. In the aesthetic regime, however, there are "no longer any inherent limits to representation" and therefore nothing is inherently unrepresentable. (Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, trans. Gregory Elliott, Verso, London and New York 2007, p. 137.) Artistic representations of the Shoah, Rancière shows, actually rely on the fictional means invented within the aesthetic regime (*ibid*., pp. 123–130). The problem is not whether such events can be represented by images and fictions, but how such images and fictions configure or reconfigure the "relations between the visible and the invisible, the visible and speech, the said and the unsaid," etc. (Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 102.)

64 Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Steven Corcoran, Continuum, London and New York 2010, p. 151.

65 *Ibid*., p. 139.

66 Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 103.

roadblock on Palestinian territory. Instead of representing suffering or relying on the recognisable emblems of the Middle East conflict, the artist focused on the traces the conflict leaves on the landscapes. The result is an image fully inscribed in the indifferent aesthetic form of appearance, which entails that its "meaning or effect is not anticipated" by the image itself.[67] Even the object that draws our attention by indicating a difference – the interruption of the straight line of the road – does not introduce political heteronomy to the image, but itself takes place within the same aesthetic apparatus of appearance.

What Ristelheuber thus achieves, according to Rancière, is "a displacement of the exhausted affect of indignation to a more discreet affect, an affect of indeterminate effect – curiosity, the desire to see closer up."[68] Instead of relying on the affect provoked by inscribing suffering in the image, the photograph makes use of the indeterminacy of aesthetic appearance, which makes us confused but curious as to what exactly it is that we are looking at and how to understand it. Moving from suffering to indifference does not neutralise the politics inscribed in the image, but rather suggests another kind of politics, one "based on the variation of distance, the resistance of the visible and the uncertainty of effects."[69] The indifference of artistic appearance thus also constitutes its specific form of efficacy.

While both Hegel and Adorno affirmed the autonomy of the artistic form of appearance in its indifference, they also attempted to ground it in some kind of substantiality. In Hegel, the appearance of the Absolute manifests its substantiality by enjoying its own indifference. In Adorno, indifferent form earns its truth-content in a dialectical confrontation with objective suffering. We have seen, however, that the self-enjoyment of the Absolute can flourish just as well among child beggars as it does among Olympic gods. We have also seen how, in the final instance, it is its immanent affectivity that enables indifferent form to accommodate suffering in the medium of its neutralisation. What these findings entail – and we have found some of these consequences already laid out in Rancière's work – is that instead of looking for something that would redeem the aesthetic form of appearance from its frivolity, we should rather take seriously its very indifference. It is there that the affective capacity of aesthetic appearance ultimately resides.

67 *Ibid*.
68 *Ibid*., p. 104.
69 *Ibid*., p. 105.

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Lea Kuhar*

Materialism of Suffering and Left-wing Melancholia[1]

The works of Karl Marx were often inspired by real attempts at social revolution. One of his most famous analyses was based on the French *coup d'état* of December 1851 in which Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte assumed dictatorial powers. In a series of essays that were eventually published as *The Eighteen Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852)[2] Marx tried to distinguish his own interpretation of the event from the interpretations given by his contemporaries, mainly Victor Hugo's *Napoléon le Petit* and Proudhon's *Coup d'Etat*. While the former understood Bonaparte's coup as a violent act of a single individual that could not be foreseen, the latter claimed it was an inevitable result of a foreseeable historical development. Marx diverged from both interpretations by focusing on the concrete circumstances created by the class struggle in France that "made it possible for a grotesque mediocrity to play a hero's part."[3] He claimed that Bonaparte's *coup* was the result of the struggle between the parliamentary republic constituted by the French bourgeoisie and Bonaparte's attempt to overcome the existing social relations that regressed into the sediments of the old dictatorial society. Marx ridiculed Bonaparte for being a farcical repetition of his uncle, Napoleon I,[4] and used this example not so much to claim that his coup was a reactionary event, but to clarify what a real revolutionary movement would look like. In one of his conclusions he argues: "the social revolution in the nineteenth century cannot

1 This article is a result of the research programme P6–0014 "Conditions and Problems of Contemporary Philosophy", which is funded by the Slovenian Research Agency.

2 Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte", in: *Marx & Engels Collected Works 1851–1853, Volume 11*, Lawrence & Wishart, London 2010.

3 Karl Marx, "Preface to the Second Edition of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonapart*", in: *Marx & Engels Collected Works 1867–1870, Volume 21*, Lawrence & Wishart, London 2010, p. 57.

4 This is also the reason why the eighteen Brumaire he uses in the title is not the date of Bonaparte's coup (2 December 1981) but the coup after which his uncle became the First Council of the French Republic (9 November 1799, according to the Gregorian Calendar).

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draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped off all superstition about the past."[5]

If the revolutions in Marx's time had to overcome the social boundaries set by their bourgeois predecessors, revolutions in our time also need to overcome the experience of their own failure, i.e. the failure of the socialist projects of the 20th century. It therefore seems that Marx's insight from the *Eighteen Brumaire* is still relevant to contemporary revolutionary movements, especially those that are unable to surpass their troubled past and "are living in a long winter of melancholy."[6] Walter Benjamin was one of the first philosophers to analyse such a phenomenon. He claimed that *left-wing melancholia* is caused by a certain fixation upon one's political past that traps used-to-be progressive movements in a paradoxical state between a past they cannot get rid of and a future they cannot re-invent.[7] Even though Benjamin never developed a precise formulation of the given term, his idea had a significant influence on subsequent interpretations of this phenomenon. One of them was given by Wendy Brown, who on the basis of Benjamin's insights equated left-wing melancholia with a state of self-observation and self-reification that turns emancipatory struggles into something anti-revolutionary, anti-communitarian, and even anti-political.[8]

Herein, I offer a new interpretation of left-wing melancholia, and claim that it designates a specific state of action that does not draw its poetry from the past, but from the future. I argue that left-wing melancholia is neither a nostalgic remembrance of past revolutionary ideals, nor a mourning of their failures. It is rather *a form of fidelity to future actions, the content of which remains unknown*. I believe that connecting Marx with a moment of melancholia – a moment that seems to be in direct contradiction with his revolutionary theory – can be beneficial for both parties. While Marx's critical theory enables one to better un-

5 Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte", p. 106. By "poetry", Marx does not mean a form of literature but *poiesis*, which is a word deriving from the ancient Greek verb *poiein* and means 'to produce' in the sense of bringing something into being.

6 Srećko Horvat, *Poetry from the Future: Why a Global Liberation Movement Is Our Civilization's Last Chance*, Penguin Books, London 2019, p. 23.

7 Walter Benjamin coined the term *left-wing melancholy* in his critique of Erich Kästner, a left-wing poet from the Weimar Republic. Walter Benjamin, "Left-Wing Melancholy", in: *Selected Writings, Vol. 2, Part. 2, 1931–1934*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2005, pp. 423–428.

8 Wendy Brown, "Resisting Left Melancholy", *Boundary 2*, 26 (3/1999), pp. 19–27.

derstand the materialist part of the object produced by left-wing melancholia, the functioning of the latter enables one to better understand the progressive moment of Marx's critical endeavour.

In the first part I form the conceptual apparatus that I believe is necessary to comprehend the paradoxical relation between left-wing melancholia and its object. I base this apparatus on the *symptomatic reading* of classical political economy constructed by Marx in his later works. I believe that this symptomatic reading introduces new conceptions of truth and knowledge that can be used to constitute a new kind of materialism, the one that Davide Tarizzo calls the *materialism of suffering*.[9] I argue that a materialism of suffering based on Marx's critical endeavour can show how the exploitative system of the capitalist mode of production is a specific resolution of the fact that there is no such thing as an ontologically pre-determined social relation. Focusing on social non-relation enables Marx to discover class struggle as the materialist part of the suffering produced by the capitalist mode of production.

In the second part I focus more specifically on left-wing melancholia. I argue that this peculiar phenomenon cannot be simply explained as a process of mourning, but as a process of *impossible mourning*. Proceeding from Freud's and Agamben's investigations of the topic of melancholia, I show that this impossibility comes from the fact that the object of melancholia's sorrow is not something that was lost but something that was produced as being lost, that is, as an *object-loss*. I use Marx's materialism of suffering, developed in the first part, to transfer Freud's and Agamben's insights onto the subject of left-wing melancholia. I argue that left-wing melancholia is a specific kind of social suffering constructed as recognition of the social non-relation.

In the last part I focus on the implications of the object-loss produced by left-wing melancholia for future revolutionary struggles. I claim that the paradoxical form of its existence enables one to comprehend left-wing melancholia as a progressive state. My argument is twofold. On the one hand, I claim that the object-loss of melancholia is not something individual but rather *has a social*

9 Davide Tarizzo, "True Fictions: Biopolitics, Critical Theory and Clinical Materialism", *Paragraph*, 39 (1/2016), p. 11.

character. On the other hand, I argue it does not exist merely as recognition of the social non-relation, but *as a form of fidelity* to this fact.

Materialism of suffering

In the *Eighteen Brumaire* Marx distinguishes the revolutions of the previous centuries from the yet-to-come revolutions of the 19th century. According to his analysis, earlier revolutions needed to recall past historical events in order to form a description of their future acts. They needed to "resurrect the dead," which served the purpose of "glorifying the new struggles."[10] In order to invent new content, the revolutions of the 19th century had to, on the contrary, let the dead bury their dead. This means that they should not use past events as the models for their future acts since neither the content nor the form of past actions are sufficient for achieving true revolutionary change in the capitalist mode of production. Marx describes the distinction between past revolutions and the revolutions of his own time as follows: "there the words went beyond the content; here the content goes beyond the words."[11]

The distinction between the "words beyond the content" and the "content beyond the words" reflects the distinction between the *operational* and *clinical approach* to studying social phenomena posed by Davide Tarizzo.[12] Both approaches belong to critical theory and both attempt to explain the functioning of society. They differ in the way they approach their task. In considering social phenomena, the operational approach uses descriptive and normative analyses, which means that it tries to explain how society works or how society should work. For a clinical approach, knowledge of the supposedly proper, normal functioning of society is not needed since it suffices to acknowledge human suffering. In order to detect social illnesses, one does not need to know the secret of social health. "The need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth,"[13] to use Adorno's words. However, this does not mean that when applying a clinical approach, one does not need to know anything about the given

[10] Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte", p. 105.

[11] *Ibid*., p. 106.

[12] Davide Tarizzo, "True Fictions: Biopolitics, Critical Theory and Clinical Materialism", pp. 10–11.

[13] Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton, Seabury Press, New York 1973, p. 17.

situation. It means that knowledge of the given situation can only be produced by proceeding from its dysfunctioning. Truth can be found only in the wounds and cracks deeply embedded in the social structure and visible in the traces of collective and individual suffering. A different kind of materialism can emerge from the suppositions of the clinical approach, "the materialism of suffering, or the materialism of social, political and historical disorders."[14]

Tarizzo believes that the future of critical theory depends on using the materialism of suffering. However, there are not many theories that can meet the criteria established for this task. According to Tarizzo, Marx's critical theory presents an almost sufficient conceptual framework, but it still operates in a way that is somewhat in between the operational and clinical approaches. On the one hand, it proceeds by investigating individual and social suffering as it focuses on the systematic exploitation of the workers in the capitalist mode of production. On the other hand, its critique of the capitalist form of exploitation is rooted in communism as a conception of a true and therefore necessary form of society that will sooner or later be realised. Tarizzo therefore argues that the conceptual apparatus produced by Marx's critical theory does not allow one to reach the "content beyond the words" and is therefore not able to develop a true materialism of suffering.

Contrary to Tarizzo's theses, some studies of Marx's critical theory can be seen as establishing the fact that Marx did develop a sort of clinical approach in his critique of the capitalist mode of production. I believe Louis Althusser was one of the first philosophers to show this. In *Reading Capital,* he claims that the aforementioned criticism does indeed apply to Marx's early works, which are non-scientific for this same reason, while it is not valid for his later, scientific works, such as *Grundrisse* and *Capital*. In these works, Marx establishes a new form of critical theory based on a *symptomatic reading*, which represents a completely new method of critical investigation. A symptomatic reading shares many similarities with Tarizzo's quest for a clinical approach. It enables Marx to take the concepts produced by the conceptual apparatus of classical political economy and understand them as a cluster of symptoms that need to be decoded. These symptoms (labour, money, capital, etc.) do not indicate a more general truth of society, but a certain *lack* in the existing knowledge thereof produced by classical political economy.

[14] Davide Tarizzo, "True Fictions: Biopolitics, Critical Theory and Clinical Materialism", p. 11.

Samo Tomšič makes a similar point in his Lacanian reading of Marx's critical theory. He underlines the fact that for Marx truth "has no other form than that of the symptom," which was later emphasised by Lacan as the *Marxian turn in the history of truth*.[15] According to Tomšič, Marx's notion of the symptom combines two dimensions. The first one is *epistemological*, the other is *political*. In its epistemological dimension, the symptom subverts a certain regime of knowledge. In his theory Marx does not claim that he speaks the truth. His conception of truth rather manifests the conflictual nature and incompatibility of truth and knowledge. For him, speaking the truth means to disrupt a regime of knowledge by pointing out not only something that cannot be expressed therein, but also something that goes beyond its comprehension. In its political dimension, the symptom unveils the truth as class struggle.[16] Marx's analyses of the capitalist mode of production indeed presuppose a certain truth. This truth, however, does not designate a hidden reality beneath the surface of the capitalist mode of production, but rather *the form of its existence*. Truth returns as *a form of the very dysfunctioning* of the capitalist system. Marx's primary consideration was to build a conceptual apparatus that would be able to comprehend this form in a sufficient way. His value-form analysis is a product of this task, since it enables Marx to see how the various contradictions existing in the capitalist mode of production are merely different forms of one fundamental contradiction, i.e. *class struggle*.

Class struggle determines the social structure *in the last instance*, to use Althusser's expression. This means that it can be grasped only in the effects of its workings and cannot be comprehended as such. It does not designate a lack, but a void. Tomšič explains the distinction between the two terms as following: "[l]ack still implies an empty place, which can be occupied by an object, which veils, or mystifies, as Marx would put it, the radical implication of the lack, namely the void, which stands for the abolition of the logic of places altogether."[17] Class struggle does not offer a neutral position that would enable one to objectively grasp the whole of society, but designates the impossibility of such a posi-

15 Jacques Lacan, *Le Seminaire, livre XIV, La logique du fantasme*, unpublished, 10 May 1967; quoted in Samo Tomšič, *The Capitalist Unconscious: Marx and Lacan*, Verso, London 2013, p. 185.

16 *Ibid*., 186.

17 Samo Tomšič, "Toward a Materialist Ontology", *Continental Thought & Theory*, 2 (2/2018), p. 112.

tion. It designates the fact that "being is neither One nor Multiple, but non-all."[18] Arguing that history is the history of class struggles or saying that communism is the real movement that abolishes the present state of things designates the antagonistic moment of every social formation and has nothing to do with "the humdrum music of the dominant positivism and reassuring odes to progress."[19]

Class struggle represents the void, i.e. the "non-all" part of every society. The non-all is a point of impossibility, since it designates the fact that society as such is fundamentally split and that this split is inherent in every concrete social formation. Class struggle therefore designates that "there is no such thing as a social relation,"[20] or that "the foundation of social links is a structural non–relation."[21] Its function was best described by Alenka Zupančič, who argued that it functions as a *concrete constitutive negativity*.

> To put it differently: it is not that there is (and remains) a fundamental non-relation which will never be (re)solved by any concrete relation. Rather: every concrete relation de facto resolves the non-relation, but it can resolve it only by positing ("inventing"), together with itself, its own negative condition/impossibility. The non-relation is not something that "insists" and "remains," but something that is repeated—something that "does not stop not being written" (to use Lacan's expression).[22]

For Marx, the capitalist mode of production resolves the problem of the structural non-relation of every society by excluding social relations from the production process.[23] Since the fundamental non-relation never stops being written, the primary exclusion repeats itself throughout the whole structure, thus riddling the whole of society with antagonisms. The value-form is the symptom of the return of the truth, which is class struggle. As a concrete constitutive negativity, class struggle is the point of impossibility of every critical theory and

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18 *Ibid*., p. 109.

19 Daniel Bensaïd, *A Marx for Our Times: Adventures and Misadventures of a Critique*, trans. G. Elliott, Verso, London/New York, 2002, p. 4.

20 Samo Tomšič, *The Capitalist Unconscious*, p. 9.

21 *Ibid*., p. 186.

22 Alenka Zupančič, *What is Sex?*, The MIT Press, Massachusetts 2017, p. 146.

23 I develop this point in more detail in my forthcoming article, "Object-Oriented Critique of Political Economy", *Filozofski vestnik* 40 (3/2019).

could be read as the material part of Marx's materialism of suffering. By developing a conceptual apparatus that allows one to see social symptoms as the effects of class struggle, Marx's critical theory enables one to grasp a point in the all-encompassing capitalist reality where one is able to meet something more than what currently exists therein, without positioning this "something more" as the ontological truth of communism. By understanding class struggle as social non-relation, as the most material part of social suffering in existence, he can determine the absolute necessity of the capitalist mode of production without positing anything as absolutely necessary. Even though in his value-form theory Marx analyses how the social non-relation (class struggle) is resolved in the capitalist mode of production through economic antagonisms, he does not posit them as its necessary form.

Marx develops his critical theory from the position of a symptom that enables him to conceptualise social reality through the paradigm of a social non-relation. As such, Marx's critical theory can meet all of Tarizzo's criteria for a clinical approach and can be identified as a *materialism of suffering*. Its conceptual apparatus can also help one better understand his thesis from *The Eighteen Brumaire* and shed new light on the topic of contemporary social movements. For Marx, the content of the truly revolutionary social movements "goes beyond words" since it is not built upon a pre-existing vision of how society should function. On the contrary, it would be more accurate to say that it is built on its *concrete constitutive negativity*, entailing that every concrete social relation is a specific way of comprehending the social non-relation.

Left-wing melancholia

The revolutions of the 21st century face a certain challenge that the revolutions from Marx's time did not need to face. When the revolutions of the 19th century faced the challenge of overthrowing the all-encompassing relations of the capitalist mode of production, they did not – as contemporary revolutionary movements do – also need to overcome the failure of the really existing socialist projects of the 20th century. This double task traps many of them in a difficult situation. Following Enzo Traverso,[24] one could argue that many of the contemporary

[24] Enzo Traverso, *Left-wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory*, Columbia University Press, New York 2016.

left-wing movements[25] are stuck between a past that they cannot get rid of and a future that they cannot reinvent. They are victims of a *left-wing melancholia*, meaning that they are incapable of forming a new strategy for their actions. As already mentioned in the introduction, such a state of affairs was often understood as unsurpassable. Authors such as Walter Benjamin and Wendy Brown claimed that left-wing melancholia is essentially the product of a narcissistic tendency towards one's past political engagements and inability to let go of political analyses and ideas that turned out to be a failure. In this sense, it was comprehended as an anti-revolutionary and even anti-political stance.

Even though this may be the most popular explanation, the interpretations of left-wing melancholia are far from unambiguous. I believe this is due to the fact that the quest for understanding left-wing melancholia reflects many of the problems that have emerged in the attempts to comprehend melancholia as such. These problems have usually been a consequence of the challenge to recognise its symptoms and determine its object. This is emphasised in Ilit Ferber's extensive analysis.[26] Ferber shows how, on the one hand, throughout history melancholia has been recognised via a cluster of its mostly positive effects, such as enabling deeply creative processes and the occasional bursts of genius. On the other hand, these positive effects have essentially been tied to their negative counterparts, e.g. disabling sadness, feelings of hopelessness, despair, and isolation. One of the biggest transformations in comprehending melancholy was made by Freud, who no longer saw it as a mood or normal inclination, but rather as something of an entirely pathological nature. He understood melancholy as melancho*lia,* as a pathology disabling the individual from making decisions or acting upon them.[27]

[25] Traverso defines the left in the following way: "The left I will deal with is not defined in merely *topological* terms (the parties on the left of the political and institutional space), according to the conventional viewpoint of political science, but rather in *ontological* terms: as movements that struggled to change the world by putting the principle of equality at the center of their agenda." (*Ibid*., p. xiii.)

[26] Ilit Ferber, *Philosophy and Melancholy: Benjamin's Early Reflections on Theater and Langua*ge, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2013.

[27] Ilit Ferber describes the long history of melancholy in the following way "in the fluctuating movement of its internal history melancholy has been described as a somatic condition (a humeral imbalance resulting in the excess of black bile) brought on by the melancholic's sins (sloth or *acedia*, in the religious context of the Middle Ages); an inclination or mood (in the Renaissance); the consequence of demonic undertakings or witchcraft (in the se-

For Freud, melancholia is the result of a mourning process that cannot be completed. The mourning process becomes impossible when, unlike the object-loss of mourning, the object-loss of melancholia is not conscious. In his text "Mourning and Melancholia", Freud argues that the melancholic "knows *whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost" with that person, etc.[28] The work of mourning is completed after the ego invests its libido in a new object, meaning it becomes free and uninhibited again. This is not, however, how things turn out for the melancholic. The free libido cannot be displaced onto a new object since the melancholic does not know what it is that needs to be replaced. That is why the process of mourning turns into a process of impossible mourning. When love (libidinal investment) for the object cannot be given up, even though the object itself has been given up, it takes refuge in a narcissistic identification. In other terms, since the melancholic does not know what it is that has been lost, he takes the loss itself as an object and identifies with it. Hence, the *object-loss* is transformed into *ego-loss*.

Following Freud, the identification of the object-loss and ego-loss is the reason why the melancholic patient represents himself as "worthless, incapable of any achievements and morally despicable; he reproaches himself, vilifies himself and expects to be cast out and punished."[29] These symptoms cannot be simply dismissed as a delusion. When the melancholic describes himself as petty, egoistic, dishonest, lacking in independence, etc., he is not engaging in self-pity. According to Freud, he has "a keener eye for the truth," which means that he correctly reflects, although not consciously, what is happening to him.[30] After equating his ego with the object-loss, the super-ego starts producing hate, resulting in the abuse of the ego, debasing it and making it suffer.[31] Hate is the final attempt to break all ties with the object-loss, which is also the reason why melancholia can culminate in deep depression and suicidal tendencies.

venteenth century); a desirable state inducing productivity and genius; and, finally, a pathology (in the nineteenth century)". (*Ibid*., p. 2.)

28 Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia", in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV*, trans. J. Strachey, The Hogarth Press, London 1957, p. 245.

29 *Ibid*., p. 246.

30 *Ibid*.

31 *Ibid*., p. 251.

Agamben offers a different interpretation of the paradoxical status of melancholia's object. In *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture* he claims that "melancholia is not so much a regressive reaction to the loss of the loved object as the imaginative capacity to make an unobtainable object appear as if lost."[32] Agamben therefore goes one step further than Freud. According to his analyses, melancholia does not produce merely an identification between the ego and the object-loss, but the object-loss itself. What happens is that the libido behaves *as if* a loss had occurred although nothing has in fact been lost. The libido stages a simulation where what cannot be lost, because it has never been possessed (and has never even existed), appears as if lost. For Freud, the work of melancholia cannot be executed, since the melancholic cannot comprehend the object that was lost, while for Agamben the work of melancholia consists precisely in *producing the object-loss*. For Freud, melancholia is a pathology that acquires some traits from mourning and others from narcissism, while for Agamben it is a mixture of mourning and fetishism. For Agamben, the object produced by the melancholic exists merely as a fetishisation of a present absence, which is also the reason why it has a paradoxical status.

It is neither appropriated nor lost, but both possessed and lost at the same time. And as the fetish is at once the sign of something and its absence, and owes to this contradiction its own phantasmatic status, so the object of the melancholic project is at once real and unreal, incorporated and lost, affirmed and denied.[33] The melancholic therefore produces a certain lack and turns this lack into a surplus object that gains an existence that seems to be more important to the melancholic than the existence of all other objects. The object-loss is a special kind of object. As a pure presence of something that is missing, its existence is indeterminate, fragmentary, and alien to the world. It does not fully belong to this world. According to Agamben, it is located in a "no-man's land"[34] that is neither purely a phantasm nor the indifferent world of natural objects.

I believe it is possible to apply Freud's and Agamben's insights regarding the paradoxical status of the melancholic's object-loss to the phenomenon of left-

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32 Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, University of Minnesota Press, trans. R. L. Martinez, Minneapolis/London 1993, p. 20.

33 *Ibid*., p. 21.

34 *Ibid*., p. 25.

wing melancholia. While Freud's theory can help one better understand the identification between the object-loss and the ego-loss, Agamben's theory can help one understand how the object-loss occurs in the first place. Following this reading, one could argue that left-wing melancholia is neither a nostalgic remembrance of the old struggles nor a mourning of their failure. It does not designate a loss, but the state of a present absence. For this reason it should be comprehended not as mourning, but as *impossible mourning*.[35]

Marx's materialism of suffering offers a crucial insight into left-wing melancholia comprehended as a state of impossible mourning. The "no-man's land," from which the object-loss emerges, can only be detected by means of Marx's critical theory. The no-man's land is not simply *a lack*, something that is missing from the currently existing social structure, but *the void* as the social non-relation. To put it differently, the object-loss produced by left-wing melancholia does not come from a lack of any specific thing, but is deeply intertwined with the void of the social structure. By producing the object-loss, left-wing melancholia insist that there is something more deeply traumatic than the punishment of the super ego. It affirms the fact that there is no relation, no possible symmetry between the subject and the Other that could be predisposed. In this way, it fetishises the social non-relation. The object-loss produced as an effect of such a fetishisation exists purely as *recognition of the social non-relation*.

By emphasising the fundamental non-relation as what determines every social relation, left-wing melancholia ratifies the basic principle of Marx's critique. It ratifies the fact that society is neither One nor multiple, but non-all, and it functions as a confirmation of the fact that every relation comes with non-relation. By constantly producing the object-loss as a fetishisation of the social non-relation, left-wing melancholia completely dissolves the way in which the social non-relation is resolved in the capitalist mode of production.

Poetry from the future

In the previous chapters I argued that left-wing melancholia designates a process of impossible mourning. Its mourning is impossible due to the paradoxical status of its object. Left-wing melancholia does not mourn an object that was

35 Enzo Traverso, *Left-wing Melancholia*, p. 45.

lost but creates the very object it is not able to surpass. Its object is unsurpassable since it functions as recognition of the fact that every social relation is a specific way of resolving the social non-relation. In the previous part I focused on the way in which the object-loss is produced. In this part I want to analyse more closely the form of its existence. By taking a closer look at the object-loss of left-wing melancholia, I want to defend a thesis that may seem to be paradoxical at first glance. What I have in mind is the thesis, already put forward in the introduction, that left-wing melancholia is not necessarily a conservative force, but can also be understood as a progressive state. My argument is twofold. On the one hand, I claim that the object-loss of melancholia is not something that belongs to the individual but rather *has a social character*. On the other hand, I argue that it does not exist merely as recognition of the social non-relation, but it exists *as a form of fidelity* to this fact.

The claim regarding the social character of the object-loss produced by left-wing melancholia was already implied in the previous two chapters. Left-wing melancholia does not *suffer* a loss but *produces* its object-loss. The way in which the melancholic produces the object-loss imbues the whole act of production with a social character. Why? Because recognition of the social non-relation is able to grasp (in a indeterminate manner) the *concrete constitutive negativity* of every society, it is more universally transmittable than any other individual act. This argument is very well summarised by Klaus Mladek and George Edmondson in their text "A Politics of Melancholia":

> The melancholic, without necessarily meaning to in any active way, shows that nonrelation is the one thing that the social cannot do without, that it is the one Thing that concerns the social above all. The melancholic is thoroughly social in that, like the social, he cannot get past antagonism.[36]

Left-wing melancholia may be seen as an individual act or an act of a small group and therefore as isolated from the rest of the society. However, this is not the case. From the perspective of Marx's materialism of suffering, the produc-

[36] Klaus Mladek and George Edmondson, "A Politics of Melancholia", in: C. Strathausen (ed.), *A Leftist Ontology: Beyond Relativism and Identity Politics*, The University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2009, p. 214.

tion of the object-loss is the most social act possible since it is formed in relation to the "thing" that is indispensable for the constitution of every society.

The argument regarding left-wing melancholia as a form of fidelity is a little more complicated. Since the object-loss is something that was produced, there is a subjective desire inscribed into its form of existence. To put it differently, the object-loss exists merely as a subjective desire to grant existence to something that cannot exist in the world of other objects. Due to this fact, the object-loss can be described as *fictitious* (Benčin)[37] or *phantasmatic* (Agamben). However, it is important to emphasise that due to the way in which the object-loss is produced, it is not merely a work of fiction, but a fiction that touches upon something real. Since it is connected to the social non-relation, it opens up a certain *infinity* of possibilities of other words. In the words of Benčin, "the properly melancholic loss of the world entails a desire for other worlds, which, however, remain unrealised. The fictional object generated in the loss is the object of this melancholic desire."[38] To put it differently, as a fictional object, the object-loss induces neither activity nor passivity, but a rupture. As a rupture, it marks the point in social reality where the loss of reality is staged as a refusal of the currently existing world and at the same time as an opening of the possibilities for other worlds, which is produced as a direct consequence of the melancholic's dissolving of the currently existing world.

Since there is an infinity of other possible worlds inscribed into the paradoxical existence of its object-loss, left-wing melancholia cannot simply be dismissed as a conservative craving for a lost utopian dream; neither does it imply the cynical claim that "nothing can be done," which disables one's capacity for emancipatory action. Mladek and Edmondson argue that the rupture opened up by the impossible mourning of left-wing melancholia implies something that *cannot be counted as one*, to use Badiou's expression.[39]

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37 Rok Benčin, "Melancholy, or the Metaphysics of Fictional Sadness", *Filozofski vestnik*, 37 (1/2016), p. 112.

38 *Ibid*., p. 114.

39 Badiou is not a philosopher that would support a melancholic stance in any way. In his already mentioned article, however, Rok Benčin argues that Badiou's *metaphysics of real happiness* could be supplemented by melancholy as the *metaphysics of fictional sadness*. (*Ibid*., p. 110.)

> The melancholic assumes the burden of what we carry on our back; he counts with what is not counted, what remains unnamed and drops out of symbolic representation. The scandal that the melancholic presents to a political activism rooted in modes of the not-yet is that one cannot count on him. Melancholia disrupts the tally-taking done in the accounting books of history and politics.[40]

Following Mladek and Edmondson, there is a moment of fidelity inscribed in the melancholic's quest to count with what is not counted. This moment of fidelity can be also understood through Badiou's *ethics of truths*.[41] For Badiou, the ethics of truth is a principle that enables the continuation of a truth-process. It designates a certain moment of persistence that operates according to only one law, which is "[D]o all that you can to persevere in that which exceeds your perseverance. Persevere in the interruption. Seize in your being that which has seized and broken you."[42] In order to submit to this law, one needs to constantly pose to oneself this practical question: "how will I, as some-one, continue to exceed my own being? How will I link the things I know, in a consistent fashion, via the effects of being seized by the not-known?"[43]

The moment of fidelity is a moment that gives seemingly non-political events or objects an immanently political charge. It is the moment that can transform the apparently passive stance of left-wing melancholia into an active stance. As a form of fidelity, left-wing melancholia can be understood as an ethical stance. Melancholia, in the manner of fidelity, refuses to give up on the political Thing. It will not move forward just because. This is not the same as wallowing in the past. It is, rather, to anticipate the yet-to-come as radically different from the not-yet. Melancholia, like fidelity, declares that our past is not done, that it can never be done, that the dead cannot be killed.[44]

When the melancholic produces the object-loss, he at the same time *i.* recognises the social non-relation; *ii.* produces a fictional object that functions as an opening of the possibility for other worlds; *iii.* claims allegiance to the fact that these possible worlds cannot be realised in the currently existing one. Following

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40 Klaus Mladek and George Edmondson, "A Politics of Melancholia", p. 215.

41 Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, Verso, London 2013, p. 45.

42 *Ibid*., p. 47.

43 *Ibid*., p. 50.

44 Klaus Mladek and George Edmondson, "A Politics of Melancholia", p. 227.

this line of argument, left-wing melancholia is not merely recognition of the social non-relation. It is rather *a form of fidelity to future action, the content of which remains unknown.* In this way, it does not draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future, even though, for the time being, it can produce merely "content beyond the words."

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"Something remains to be said": On the Metonymic Ontology of the Platonic *Chora*

1. Introduction

The history of the *chora* – the third kind of reality (*triton genos*) introduced by Plato in the middle of the *Timaeus* – and of its[1] interpretations[2] is that of a constant fluctuation and undecidability between its different meanings, in particular between that of matter and space, substance and place – one *or* the other, or both one *and* the other.[3] It is, that is to say, the history of the attempts to translate it (without, as far as possible, leaving anything out), of the efforts to turn the mythical discourse on the *triton genos*, along with its metaphors and figures – nurse (*tithene*), shapeless (*amorphon*) receptacle (*hypodoché*), mother (*meter*), space (*chora*), place (*hedra*), bearer of imprints (*ekmageion*) –, into a logical sequence, following at least in part the familiar Platonic principle of ensuring a consistent nexus between the discursive, epistemological, and on-

[1] In the literature, the name *chora* is sometimes treated as a feminine noun and sometime in the neuter. Here I will treat it as the latter in order to stress its thirdness (*triton genos*).

[2] The debate on the nature of the third kind of reality introduced by the *Timaeus* begins with Aristotle and the Ancient Academy, continues throughout mid- and Neoplatonism, and up to modern and contemporary scholars. On the history of this debate, see in particular Luc Brisson, *Le Même et l'Autre dans la structure ontologique du* Timée *de Platon. Un commentaire systématique du* Timée *de Platon*, Academia Verlag, Sankt Augustin 1998, pp. 221–253.

[3] For an interpretation of the third kind of reality as space, see Keimpe Algra, *Concepts of Space in Greek Thought*, E.J. Brill, Leiden 1995, pp. 72–120; Jean-François Pradeau, "Être quelque part, occuper une place. Τόπος et χώρα dans le Timée de Platon", *Les Études philosophiques*, 3/1995, pp. 375–399. For an interpretation of the third kind as matter, see in particular Carlo Diano, "Il problema della materia in Platone: la chora del *Timeo*", *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana*, 49 (1979), pp. 321–335; Mary Louise Gill, "Matter and Flux in Plato's *Timaeus*", *Phronesis* 32 (1987), pp. 34–53. For an interpretation of the third kind as an intermediate nature between space and matter, see Luc Brisson, *Le Même et l'Autre*, pp. 208–221; Barbara Botter, "Il ricettacolo di materia e spazio in *Timeo* 48e–53b", in: C. Natali, S. Maso (eds.), *Plato Physicus, cosmologia e antropologia nel Timeo*, Hakkert, Amsterdam 2003, pp. 165–187; Francesco Fronterotta, "Introduzione" in: Platone, *Timeo*, Rizzoli, Milano 2003, pp. 51–70; Dana R. Miller, *The Third Kind in Plato's* Timaues, Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2003.

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tological planes. This principle clearly states that "true opinion" can never be separated from the *logos* and while things without the *logos* "are unknowable," things with the *logos* "are knowable."[4] I am not concerned here with examining how diverse readings of the *Timaeus* arrange the order of these terms, sometimes giving priority to the philological concerns, then to the logical issues, and sometimes to the ontological inquiry into the kinds of being. Whether the focus is placed on the text and its philological coherence or on the diachronic consequentiality of Plato's thought, it is the same criterion (although less cogent) as unveiling the structural similarity between an object, its knowledge, and the surrounding discourse that guides most attempts at unravelling the "myth" of the *chora* – or, rather, its "myth within the myth,"[5] i.e. the "probable myth" of the third kind of reality, within the cosmological *mythos* of the *Timaeus*.

Such a *mythos* is much harder to decipher in so far as it is carried out under the sign of a "bastard reasoning" (*logismós nothos*),[6] the only kind of reasoning appropriate to such a "difficult and obscure kind of thing"[7] (*chalepón kai amydrón eidos*), which "the argument seems to demand"[8] (*eisanankazein*) as a result of the "wandering cause"[9] (*planomene aitia*) – i.e. the "necessity"[10] that, together and against the "intellect" (*nous*), accounts for the universe and its movements –, and which can be known only in a "dreamlike"[11] fashion (*oneiropolein*). The rigorous and well-ordered series *episteme-being-logos* that organises ancient philosophy in general (and that of Plato in particular),[12] as well as its "weak" version *doxa-sensible-mythos*, is replaced within the discourse on the *chora* by the "irregular" and aporetic one *triton genos-dream-bastard reasoning*. Leaving aside the problems concerning each of these terms, it is worth noting that all the issues raised by the *chora* – the difficulty of comprehending it, the question of its role in the Platonic theory of ideas, even the possibility of its rigorous philosophical translation – relate to the gap between these two series. Therefore, the

4 *Theaet*. 201d1-3, translated by John Mcdowell, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014, p. 94.
5 Jacques Derrida, *On the Name*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1995, p. 113.
6 *Tim*. 52 b2, translated by Robin Waterfield, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2008, p. 45.
7 *Tim*. 49 a3, p. 40.
8 *Ibid*.
9 *Tim*. 48 a7, p. 39.
10 *Tim*. 48 a4, p. 39.
11 *Tim*. 52 b3, p. 45.
12 See in particular *Crat*. 439 b-440 c; *Resp*. VII 533 e-534 a; *Phaedr*. 247 c-e.

third kind of reality ends up being at the same time the negative correlative of the eidetic principle, the weakest point (on account of its passive indifference) of the ontological order, and the most reluctant to allow for any identification, in so far as it constantly and inevitably "slips" on the sequence of transpositions ordered by the *logos* series.

In fact, this resistance to the *logos* is what made the *chora* the central figure of the constellation of the "theories of difference" that have sought and are still seeking to rethink Western philosophy and culture by questioning its tradition. Among those, especially Derrida's analysis of Western logocentrism and Continental feminist thought (particularly Kristeva's and Irigaray's philosophy)[13] have drawn attention to this Platonic concept, marking it as the sign of the difference, of the alterity and criticism of the ontological, logical, and symbolic order of the *logos*.

Therefore, instead of undertaking a definitory challenge that would risk running around in circles – with the terms bouncing between different series of concepts (space, void, bodies, elements) and systems (philosophy, physics, mathematics, geometry) –, this article aims at investigating the features of the *triton genos* within the framework of the philosophies of difference, not only by analysing its capacity to *deconstruct* the logocentric model, but also (and foremost) by focusing on its ability to *construct*, i.e. outline, a different way of organising the linguistic and ontological order of reality. Such an investigation, however, must go back to the letter of the Platonic text. In fact, my thesis is that Timaeus's exposition of the third kind already contains the clues to an understanding of the *chora* as a *function*, reorganising ontology, language, and experience, which is able to resonate with the themes of contemporary philosophy.

This return to the Platonic text should be understood in two ways. (1) It is the result of a twin aspiration, both genealogical and "anachronistic," that has guided the various theories of difference; an aspiration rooted in the desire of both drawing another "lineage" of the history of philosophy, and, at the same time, breaching its traditional chronological (and logical) order. Such a revolutionary

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13 Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Columbia University Press, New York 1984, in particular pp. 25–30; Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1985, in particular pp. 243–343.

drive tests itself first and foremost in the philological and philosophical deconstruction of the texts of the tradition. This double aspiration thus leads to a rethinking not just of the history of philosophical concepts, but also, before that, of its words and language; i.e., it leads to the identification of the traces of other ways of speaking and talking that make it possible to say what is left unsaid by the *logos*, therefore questioning both the absoluteness of its order and the image it draws of what exceeds it. In this context, the reading of the *Timaeus* represents (2) an attempt at finding one of the many possible genealogical threads of such linguistic and theoretical otherness.

Within this general hermeneutic framework, the article aims, more specifically, at (i) recognising in the *triton genos* the figure of a different way of naming things and their mutual relations, a way that can already be labelled a *metonymic* one – with specific reference to the theoretical meaning given to the term by the feminist thought of difference[14] –, as opposed to the *metaphorical* one of the classic *logos*. However, according to the aforementioned principle of ancient philosophy's entangled nexus between language and being, this metonymic mode of signifying and naming necessarily follows directly from the way in which the argument of the *chora* redefines the classic scheme of Platonic ontology. Based on this, the article will (ii) try to bring to light the eccentric form of connection between ontology and language set up by the *triton genos*, and the central role of this reconfiguration of Platonic theory for the contemporary philosophy of difference. This implies, however, a rethinking of the classic series epistemology-language-ontology seen above. Such a rethinking proceeds from the recognition of the onto-metonymic order of the *chora*, the renunciation of the "logical" translation of the figures that describe its characters and functions, and finally the acceptance of both the impossibility of a "science" of the *triton genos* and the possibility of a different way of knowing and perceiving.[15] The third aim of the article is therefore (iii) to track down the terms of another series, different from that of epistemology-language-ontology, which is able to give an account

[14] See in particular Luisa Muraro, "To Knit or to Crochet. A Political-Linguistic Tale on the Enmity between Metaphor and Metonymy", in: C. Cesarino, A. Righi (eds.), *Another Moher: Diotima and the Symbolic Order of Italian Feminism*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis-London 2018, pp. 67–119.

[15] On the knowledge of the *chora*, see in particular Luc Brisson, *Le Même et l'Autre*, pp. 197–208.

of the nexus between the onto-linguistics of the *chora* and its peculiar kind of knowledge and perception.

In this context, I shall start this line of reasoning with a quotation from Luce Irigaray's *Speculum* and, in particular, from the chapter entitled *La mystérique*, in which she writes about the difficulties of thinking and speaking in a different language from that of the *logos*:

> Words begin to fail her. She senses something remains to be said that resists all speech, that can at best be stammered out. All the words are weak, worn out, unfit to translate anything sensibly. For it is no longer a matter of longing for some determinable attribute, some mode of essence, some face of presence. What is expected is neither a *this* nor a *that*, not a *here* anymore than a *there*. No being, no places are designated. So the best plan is to abstain from all discourse, to keep quiet, or else utter only a sound so inarticulate that it barely forms a song.[16]

"Neither a *this* nor a *that*," highlighted by italics, echoes the *Timaeus*'s syntagma *tode kai touto*, which is central to the understanding of the *triton genos*, in so far as it raises one of its main hermeneutic issues: that of what kind of linguistic "substance" the third kind confers on the sensible.

2. Metonymic ontology

2.1 Introducing the third kind

As is well known, the *Timaeus* is the only Platonic dialogue about nature (*perì physeos*), a mythical treatise[17] about the origin and the organisation of the universe. Within this "physical" context, and with particular reference to the "wandering cause," the "necessity" opposed to the order of "reason,"[18] Timaeus introduces a new kind of reality, a "third" after that of ideas and phenomena, "difficult

16 Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, p. 193.

17 On the mythical discourse of the *Timaeus*, see in particular Leonardo Taran, "The Creation Myth in Plato's *Timaeus*" in: J. P. Anton, G. Kustas (eds.), *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, Sate University of New York Press, Albany 1971, pp. 372–407; Luc Brisson, *Platon, les mots e les mythes*, Maspéro, Paris 1982; Thomas Kjeller Johansen, *Plato's Natural Philosophy: A Study of the* Timaeus-Critias, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, pp. 48–68.

18 *Tim*. 48 a4-c 1, p. 39.

and obscure," the nature of which is, first of all, to be "the receptacle (or nurse, if you like) of generation" (*pases einai geneseos hypodochén autén hoion tithenen*).[19] The *triton genos* is immediately linked to the theme of generation, one of the main problems of Platonic philosophy, in so far as the need to preserve at any cost the separateness of the ontological planes makes it impossible to give an account of the participation of the phenomena in the ideas (and vice versa), and, consequently, of the existence of something as a sensible world, subject to becoming. This is, in fact, the aporia of the *Parmenides*: what kind of nexus can exist between objects so ontologically heterogeneous that any relation between them is impossible? The *Timaeus* (which follows the composition of the *Parmenides*) seems to be an attempt to find an answer to this puzzle by introducing, in the general scheme of Platonic ontology, two new figures: the demiurge, which shapes the universe according to the eidetic paradigm, and the *chora*.[20] The latter, in so far as it is described as the nurse and the receptacle of generation, seems able to give an account of the generative processes that rule the phenomenal world – i.e. the world of becoming – and, therefore, to solve, at least in part, the problem of the participation of *phainomena* and ideas (*eide*). However, the nourishing and "receptive" role of the *chora* (which has so many consequences for the Platonic ontological model) is not explored here, immediately giving way to the linguistic "awkwardness" that becomes apparent as soon as Timaeus's argument focuses on the elements of the sensible. Such linguistic difficulty depends on the impossibility of defining them with precision, an impossibility that depends in turn on their ontological inconstancy. Therefore, after introducing the third kind of reality and connecting it to the theme of generation, Timaeus adds:

> This [i.e. the fact that the third kind is the receptacle and the nurse of generation] is a true statement, but it doesn't tell us everything we need to know about it. That degree of clarity is difficult, however, and not least because achieving it necessarily requires the raising of a prior problem about fire and its companions. The point is that it's hard to say, with any degree of reliability and stability, that any of them is such that it should really be called 'water' rather than 'fire', or that any

[19] 49 a6, p. 40 (translation slightly modified).

[20] On the relation between the *Parmenides* and the *Timaeus* see Francesco Fronterotta, "Introduzione" in: Platone, *Timeo*, pp. 30–51 and Luc Brisson, "Comment rendre compte de la participation du sensible à l'intelligible chez Platon?", in: J.-F. Pradeau (ed.), *Platon: les forms intelligibles*, P.U.F., Paris 2001, pp. 55–85.

> of them is such that it should be called by any particular name rather than by all four names, one after another.[21]

Thus, the comprehension of the third kind of reality seems to depend directly on an understanding of the linguistic issue connected to the phenomenal world. Moreover, it was the need to define the uncertain nature of the elements that led to the reconfiguration of ontological dualism: "What we have to do is see what fire, water, air, and earth were like in themselves before the creation of the universe, and what happened to them then. No one before has ever explained how they were created,"[22] says Timaeus immediately before referring to the third kind of reality, the introduction of which is therefore enclosed between two references to the linguistic-definitory problem of the nature of the sensible. The images describing the *chora* are therefore deeply linked to the linguistic and ontological problem of becoming, for which the doctrine of the ideas was able to only partially account.

2.2. Organising the argument: the onto-linguistic circle

Experience, says Timaeus, shows how the elements tend to transform into each other in an inexorable circle of modifications and mutual production.[23] Therefore, "since it seems, then, as though none of them ever retains its identity, how could one insist without qualms and without making a fool of oneself that any of them is 'this' rather than something else?"[24] In order to solve the problem of the impossibility of any deictic designation of the phenomena connected to the ontological inconsistency of their elements, Timaeus proposes the well-known pronominal distinction between the permanent entities of being and the unstable ones of becoming:

> By far the safest course is to treat them and speak about them as follows. Whenever we see something — fire, for instance — that is constantly changing, we should not label it 'this' fire, but 'something of this sort'. Likewise, we should never say 'this' water, but 'something of this sort', and the same goes for everything else that we indicate by means of expressions such as 'that' and 'this', under the impression that we're designating some particular thing and that these things have

[21] *Tim*. 49 a7-b5, pp. 40–41.
[22] *Tim*. 48 b3-6, p. 39.
[23] *Tim*. 49 c6, p. 41.
[24] *Tim*. 49 d1-3, p. 41.

> the slightest stability. The point is that they run away rather than face expressions such as 'that' and 'this' and 'just so', and every form of speech that makes them out to be stable entities. We had better not speak of any of them like that. Instead, it would be safest to say 'something of this sort', an expression which can be used to describe each and every one of them, and is similarly applicable at every stage of the cyclical process. So, for example, we should refer to fire as 'something that is regularly of this sort' and so on for everything that is subject to creation.[25]

This is an extremely problematic passage of the text, starting with the fact that, depending on how we translate the Greek text, the philosophical meaning changes radically.[26] However, what is important to emphasise here are two issues: 1. the close connection (as already seen above) linking Plato's theory of language and his ontology, according to which different levels of being imply a different linguistic "bond"; 2. the peculiar way in which this connection – which in other Platonic dialogues is developed within the eidetic doctrine – is here entangled in a strange conceptual knot, which makes it impossible to isolate the sequence of images that describe the *chora* from the problem of what kind of language can name the elements of the sensible. These two considerations stress how the structure of the argument highlights both the *triton genos's* link with the ontological and linguistic issues of Platonic philosophy, and its radical difference from the way in which these are dealt with in the doctrine of ideas.

In fact, the importance of the linguistic role of the third kind,[27] along with its generative nature, is brought to light by the way in which the text specifies that "the only safe referent of the expressions 'this' and 'that' is that within which each created thing comes into existence and puts in an appearance, and from which it subsequently passes away, but anything that is of such-and-such a quality – warm or white or any of the opposites, or any combination of opposites – should never have that terminology used of them."[28] The *chora* is entitled

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25 *Tim*. 49 d5-e7, pp. 41–42.

26 On this, see Luc Brisson, *Le Même et l'Autre*, pp. 180–197 and Francesco Fronterotta, note No. 193 to the Greek text of Platone, *Timeo*, Rizzoli, Milano 2003, pp. 261–263.

27 On this, see Jacques Derrida, *On the Name*, p. 64: "The latter [i.e. the *chora*] figures the place of inscription of *all that is marked on the world*. Likewise, the being-logical of logic, its essential *logos* whether it be true, probable, or mythic, forms the explicit theme of the *Timaeus*."

28 *Tim*. 49 e7-50 a4, p. 42.

to the same deictic determination that elsewhere Plato ascribes to ideas.[29] This attribution is all the more extraordinary if we consider the dizzying sequence of heterogeneous images through which the *triton genos* is described, which seems to contradict the acknowledgment of its stability. Indeed, to clarify the sense of its deictic determination, Timaeus immediately compares the third kind to the gold used by artisans to shape different figures, restating the difference between the latter, which are "something of this sort," since they are all modifiable, and the former, which is always the same throughout the productive process.[30] Moreover, he compares it to "the stuff from which everything is moulded — to be modified and altered by the things that enter it, with the result that it *appears* different at different times."[31] Such an appearance, however, does not change the "essence" of the "receptacle of all material bodies" (*dechomeme somata physis*)[32], the main feature of which is to "only ever ac[t] as the receptacle for everything," and to "never com[e] to resemble in any way whatsoever any of the things that enter it."[33] The argument moves forward by accumulating different images of the third kind: it resembles a mother, next to the ideas-father and the sensible-son; it is shapeless (*amorphon*), since it must receive the *schemata* of the *eide*, and lacks any kind of attribute, just like the odourless substances that are used for the production of perfumes, or like "the soft materials" or the "base staff" made "as uniform and smooth as possible" by artisans in order to create different figures.[34]

We shall return to the series of comparisons used by Timaeus to describe "the mother and receptacle of every created thing, of all that is visible or otherwise perceptible,"[35] as well as to the problem of the way in which it "somehow" receives the ideas. For now, it is important to note how this sequence of images describing the *triton genos* is enclosed between two segments of the text concerning the problems of denomination and the nature of the elements – both segments relating to the *stoicheia*'s onto-linguistic alterity as compared to the *chora*, and to the nexus that links them to it. The argument thus proceeds as follows:

29 See *Tim*. 52 b5-d1, p. 45.
30 *Tim*. 50 b1-5, p. 41.
31 *Tim*. 50 c2-4, p. 42.
32 *Tim*. 50 b6, p. 42.
33 *Tim*. 50 b8-c2, p. 42.
34 *Tim*. 50 c7-51 a1, p. 43.
35 *Tim*. 51 a4-5, p. 43.

> In so far as we can use what we've been saying to arrive at a conception of its nature with some degree of accuracy, the best we can do is say that fire is the impression we receive when some part of it has been ignited, and water is the impression we receive when some part has been moistened, and earth and air are the impressions we receive in so far as it is the receptacle for copies (*mimemata*) of earth and air.[36]

Leaving again aside the issue of the *mimemata* (i.e. the elements) and the following *excursus* on the connection between the phenomena and the ideas within the narrative context on the *triton genos* (to be discussed below), we find – along the line that connects the descriptive series of the *chora* and the definitory issue of the elements – another sequence of images of the third kind designating, this time, its spatial nature. In fact, while summing up for the third time the kinds of reality, Timaeus uses the term *chora* to describe the *triton genos*:

> Then, third, there is space (*chora*), which exists for ever and is indestructible, and which acts as the arena for everything that is subject to creation. It is grasped by a kind of bastard reasoning, without the support of sensation, and is hardly credible. In fact, when we take space into consideration we come to suffer from dreamlike illusions, and to claim that every existing thing must surely exist in some particular place and must occupy some space.[37]

After another brief interlude about the connection between dreams, figures of the *chora*, and *eide*,[38] the argument continues with yet another general ontological summary restating the link between the *triton genos* and the elements entering and leaving it:

> As if it were not enough that the nurse of creation presents a complex appearance (as a result of being moistened and heated, of assuming the characters of earth and air, and of acquiring all the qualities that follow from all this), it is also thoroughly imbalanced (as a result of being filled with dissimilar and imbalanced powers), and not only is it shaken by the things it contains, so that it lurches haphazardly all over the place, but its motion in turn further shakes them. This stir-

36 *Tim.* 51 b2-6, p. 43.
37 *Tim.* 52 a8-b5, p. 45.
38 *Tim.* 52 b5-d1, p. 45.

> ring causes them to be constantly moving in different directions and to become separated. It's like when things are shaken and sifted by sieves or other devices for cleaning grain: the heavy, dense material goes one way, while the light, flimsy material goes and settles elsewhere. Likewise, when these four were shaken at that time by the receptacle (which was itself in motion, like an implement for shaking stuff), the least similar among them ended up the furthest apart, and those that were most similar were pushed the closest together.[39]

If we combine all these paragraphs, what emerges is something like a spiral path – with a series of interruptions as regards the link between the three kinds, which constitute another thematic sequence, which we will see below – where the ontological-definitory problem of the elements entails the introduction of the third kind, and where the series of figures outlining its characters – (1) receptacle-nurse, (2) mother-shapeless-moulded staff, (3) space-place – is always followed by a new exposition of the linguistic and ontological problem of the sensible, or, more precisely, of its *stoicheia*, defined as (1) "something of this sort;" (2) a part (*meros*) of the third kind, and as (3) the series of movements of aggregation and disintegration that happen inside the *chora*. Therefore, each one of these descriptions deals with the onto-linguistic dimension of the sensible from a new perspective, linked more or less directly to the sequence of images of the *triton genos* that precedes it.

At this point, the identification of this scheme allows for three theoretical moves: highlighting the onto-linguistic function of the *chora*; underlining its character of *function* instead of seeking its correct conceptual translation – matter and/or space and/or mother etc.; and, finally, recognising the peculiar features of this function, emphasising its discontinuity and its radical heterogeneity to the nexus of similarity that the doctrine of ideas institutes between language and being.

2.3 Metonymy and metaphor

In fact, this analysis of the text sketches out an image of the *triton genos* as a criterion ordering the problematic definition of the elements ("as though none of them ever retains its identity, how could one insist without qualms and without making a fool of oneself that any of them is 'this' rather than something

[39] *Tim*. 52 d4-53 a7, p. 46.

else?"[40]) and giving partial reliability to the substantial instability ("looks as though there's a cyclical process whereby they generate one another"[41]) of the sensible. At the same time, the *triton genos* is in turn defined by the ontological and linguistic relation it establishes with the things it comes into contact with. Indeed, the *chora* makes it possible to name the elements on the basis of the way in which its peculiar ontological consistency allows for and organises their coexistence: its spatial (*chora*, *edra*, *hypodoché*), material (*ekmageion*, *chrysos*), and generative (*meter*, *tithene*) nature arranges the elements according to a nexus of conjunction, proximity, and combination, which determines – in agreement with, once more, the general rule of connection between language and being – a linguistic organisation consistent with the peculiar ontological form.
Such an onto-linguistic relation between the *chora* and the elements is based on a principle that can be defined as a *metonymic* one. In fact, through a series of operations entailing the "concatenation," "combination," "contiguity," and "alignment"[42] of the elements, the *triton genos* signifies the same as that which in linguistics describes the metonymic signification. Such operations are both the effect and the denomination of the variety of its way of being. Thus, 1. fire is nothing other than the burning part (*meros*) of the *chora*, which is in turn made visible and nameable as such just as long as the relations of contiguity and proximity do not transform it into water (i.e. the liquid part of the *chora*), air (i.e. the aerial part of the *chora*), or earth (i.e. the earthy part of the *chora*); 2. the expression "something of this sort" can now be understood as an indication of the metonymic modality of language, which signifies on the basis of a nexus of spatial and material contiguity and proximity, and which is always modifiable according to the combinatory possibilities deriving from the peculiar way in which the elements are brought together in the *chora*; 3. between the movements of the aggregation and disaggregation of the elements and those of the *chora* there is a mutual implication, in so far as it is the same onto-metonymic principle that guides the processes of the composition and disruption of the former and organises the *partial* and transitory figures of the latter.

40 *Tim*. 49 c7-d4, p. 41.

41 *Tim*. 49 c6-7, p. 41.

42 Roman Jakobson, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances", in: Roman Jakobson, Moris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language*, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin-New York 2002, pp. 73–75.

Thus, in this brief exposition of the third kind in the *Timaeus* we get a glimpse of an alternative to the classic order of being and *logos*, which works, on the contrary, according to the metaphorical criterion of similarity – i.e. phenomena as imitations of ideas – and substitutability – i.e. phenomena in place of ideas. The difference in the metonymic signification and ontology manifests itself here "negatively" as a lack of those definitory criteria that rule the eidetic nexus between ontology and language and, "positively," as the multiplication of the figures that describe its equivocity. In fact, it is worth noting that this difference does not present itself as a pure otherness or as a simple denial of the metaphorical order of the *logos*, i.e. as an antagonism that expresses itself as absence of form (*amorphon*) and qualification – which instead characterise the world of the eidetic order. The *chora*'s "positive" onto-linguistic – i.e. metonymic – ability to signify and organise the sensible acts as a counterpart to such a privative dimension (which does exist, as the sequence of the third kind's attributes prove).

Therefore, the *triton genos* and its signification find themselves close to, or, rather, *in the middle* of the metaphorical operations of the *eide*, the description of which interrupts, as mentioned above, that of the third kind and its connection with the elements, sketching out a different thematic sequence, i.e. that of the metaphorical semantic operation. The outcome is a complex and almost inextricable "twine of threads" – both metaphorical and metonymic – that weave the ontological and "linguistic fabric of reality." However, it is far from a homogeneous fabric: the *chora* is an irregular figure, in which the elements constantly aggregate and disaggregate as a result of the connections of similarity as well as of spatial, "material, and causal"[43] proximity, in which the "likenesses of real existences" are "modelled after their patterns in a wonderful and inexplicable manner"[44] and which, in an equally "mysterious way, partakes of the intelligible."[45] Those two ontological and linguistic axes stand together, in the same fashion in which metaphorical and metonymic signification are bonded: that is, as stated by Muraro, "in a relation that is not one of pacific complementarity but one of competitive rivalry."[46] The difficulty understanding and naming the *chora*, its connection with the ideas and the sensible, its thirdness, the multiplicity

43 Luisa Muraro, "To Knit or to Crochet", p. 54.

44 *Tim*. 50 c4-5, p. 42.

45 *Tim*. 51 a4-b2, p. 43.

46 Luisa Muraro, "To Knit or to Crochet", p. 69.

of its figures, all the stumbling, the hesitations, and the involuted forms of its exposition depend, therefore, on the conflictual coexistence of these two different kinds of signification and ontological organisation. Indeed, one reshapes experience "as an ideal representation," by "defining things" and "duplicating the world in a representation";[47] while the other "articulates experience into its parts"[48] and signifies things through "what accompanies them, in natural sequences or human usage."[49] With regard to the latter, i.e. natural sequences or human usage, it is not by chance that the descriptive series of the *triton genos* are equally distributed between generative images, on the one hand, and techno-poietic ones, on the other. We need now examine these images in order to better understand the problem of the perception and knowledge of the chora.

3. Three kinds of aesthetics

As seen above, the series of spatial, generative, and poietic figures of the third kind depends on its metonymic ontology, the mechanism of which such figures describe:[50] space and place, mother and nurse, the receptacle of generation, and at the same time the material-surface of inscription and the production of the figures of the phenomenal world destined to be endlessly modified on the basis of the combinatory and "syntactic" character of the *chora*. This in turn owes its onto-linguistic feature to the sequence of images outlining its work of reconfiguring the sensible and its peculiar "exchange" therewith. Thus, between the metonymic language through which the *chora* makes it possible to name the elements (and through which these in turn make the *chora* visible) and its different figures, there is a reciprocal relation, in so far as the former cannot be understood without the latter and vice versa. The connection that we have analysed between the exposition of the elements' denomination mechanisms, on the one hand, and the descriptive series of the *chora*, on the other, not only recognises the onto-metonymic function of the third kind, but also explains the untranslatability of its figures into rigorous philosophical terms. In the ontologically and linguistically suspended space of the description of the *triton genos*, the criteria of translation and conceptual adaptation that can usually be applied to the mythical word

47 *Ibid*., p. 71.

48 *Ibid*.

49 *Ibid*.

50 Hans Blumenberg, *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 2010, p. 64.

(*mythos*) – and particularly to the Platonic *eikotoi mythoi* – do not apply, this despite the fact that "the cosmo-ontologic encyclopedia of the *Timaeus* presents itself as a 'probable myth', a tale ordered by the hierarchized opposition of the sensible and the intelligible, of the image in the course of becoming and of eternal being,"[51] which would seem to frame the argument of the *triton genos* as a "myth within the myth [...], an open abyss in the general myth."[52]

The particular onto-linguistic nature of the *chora* determines the heterogeneity of its exposition as compared to both the "true *logos*" and the probable *mythos*,[53] therefore advising against any purpose of translating it into logical terms as well as of converting its mythological form. In fact, "the thought of the *chora* exceeds the polarity [...] of the mythos and the logos."[54] Thus, its thirdness represents an alternative to the "*scala naturae*" of classic metaphysics and to its polarisations – *logos-mythos*, truth-probability, sensible-intelligible, *doxa-episteme*, etc. However, such an alternative is not just a pure otherness, or a simple eccentricity compared to the order of being. The discourse on the third kind does not simply suggest the existence of something behind the series of being and its *logos*. It actually reveals the "secret" of its inner mechanism, that of a metonymic ontology that is usually subordinate to the metaphorical one and that here, on the basis of its generative, linguistic, and poietic ability, lays out an organisation of the sensible that is parallel and opposite to that of the metaphorical ontology.

The generative, spatial, material, and techno-poietic images of the *chora* therefore do not represent a series of attributes of a single theoretical object (whether it be space, matter, or a hybrid of the two), or different manifestations of a mythological character (some sort of mother-uterus receiving both the semen of the ideas and the poietic order of the demiurge), or a link between the mythical and logical words. That is, they are neither "*fundamental elements*, 'translations' that resist being converted back into authenticity and logicality,"[55] nor "absolute metaphors,"[56] nor Ur-metaphors of the metaphysical and physical order; and, finally, they cannot be understood literally, as their material heaviness

51 Jacques Derrida, *On the Name*, p. 113.
52 *Ibid*.
53 *Ibid*.
54 *Ibid*, p. 92.
55 Hans Blumenberg, *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, p. 4.
56 *Ibid*.

and spatial hindrance would describe an external existence to the absolute and unique order of metaphorical ontology.[57]

Rather, these are figures of metonymy. They represent "pieces" of its peculiar linguistic ontology, aspects of the sensible world that is organised by it, and technical modalities of this organisation and of its modification. The maternal gestation and generation (*meter* and *tithene*), the modelling procedures of the "soft materials" and the rules of their figurative composition (gold, *ekmageion*), the cycles of physical transformation (the shift from fire to air, to water, to earth, and back), and spatial modification (the gathering and division of the elements): all of these figures name portions of the phenomenal world, variable ways of being, according to criteria of spatial, material, causal, and temporal proximity. The metonymic functioning of the *chora* is indeed further clarified as a mechanism for the combination and recombination of parts of the sensible; an operation conflicting with that of the eidetic metaphorical ontology which, in so far as it establishes standards of recognition and similarity, as well as of appointing identities and defined characters, allows the *fixing* of the order of the phenomenal world by *marking* the positions within it.[58]

In this sense, the processes of the decomposition and reconfiguration of the parts of the *chora* acquire an aesthetic dimension. Contrary to the organisation of the sensible by means of determinations and crystallisation, the third kind describes the procedures through which the sensible is rearticulated, as well as the "corresponding forms of visibility"[59] of this rearticulation. In this regard, the metonymic function of the *chora* takes the form of what Rancière calls an "aesthetic ac[t],"[60] i.e. an act that opens "new possibilities" and new "modes of transformation"[61] of the sensible world. Such an aesthetic dimension of the *chora* thus assumes three different deeply intertwined forms:

57 See Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy", in: Id., *Margins of Philosophy*, The Harvester Press, Brighton 1982, pp. 207–271.

58 On this, see Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, Continuum, London-New York 2004, pp. 9–19.

59 *Ibid*., p. 10.

60 *Ibid*., p. 9.

61 *Ibid*., p. 10.

1. The first form can be labelled as mimetic-generative aesthetics, which is particularly evident in the connection between the *triton genos* and the *eide*. In fact, the nature of *chora*, says Timaeus, "is to act as the stuff from which everything is moulded – to be modified and altered by the things that enter it, with the result that it appears different at different times. And whatever enters it and leaves it is a copy of something that exists for ever, a copy formed in an indescribably wonderful fashion."[62] Such a wonder, linked as it is to the problem of the participation of the ideas in the *chora*, can be explained in light of the unusual manner in which metonymic and metaphorical ontology are brought together in this passage of the *Timaeus* that describes how both of them – each in its own way – constitute the sensible. The copies (*mimemata*), which in the context of the doctrine of ideas are the result of a complex series of equivalences and analogies between the paradigms and their imitations, become here the "intermediate" form consequent to a double generative process – on the one hand, the figure of the mother and the receptacle "nourishing" and giving an account of the becoming, and on the other, the figures of the father and the paradigms that, in so far as they leave (even though feeble and temporary) traces of their existence, make it possible to (re)shape the forms and the images of the phenomena. The *mimemata* are therefore the result of the coming together of these two processes of production-generation, the effect of a combinatory *mimesis* of ideas-paradigms-father and receptacle-nurse-mother,[63] each one carrying out its autonomous way of "modelling" the sensible.

2. A second form of aesthetics, which can be referred to as a poietic-mimetic one, is sketched out by the series of "handcrafted" images that describe the third kind, as in the case of gold that can be moulded into "all the shapes there are" while remaining always the same,[64] or as in the case of "liquids which are to receive the scents" that are made odourless by artisans, or, again, as materials that, in order to be able to receive all kind of impressions, must be smoothed over by craftsmen.[65] Therefore, the third kind's lack of form, on which all these figures insist, must not be understood as a condition of existence, or as a substantial property of the *triton genos*. On the contrary, it is described as the result of the poietic pro-

62 *Tim*. 50 c2-6, p. 42.
63 *Tim*. 49 a6-50 d3-4, pp. 40–42.
64 *Tim*. 50 a5-b5, p. 42.
65 *Tim*. 50 e8-51 a1, p. 43.

cesses and techniques of the "anesthetisation" of the materials, i.e. as the result of a series of procedures that make it possible to remove all forms, along with all primary and secondary qualities, in order to ascribe new ones. Thus, these figures of the *chora* do not describe the negative nature of a passive substance or matter, but rather the poietic-aesthetic process, which consists of the constant manipulation of the forms of the sensible, the outcomes of which do not depend on the classic rules of *mimesis* – i.e. the imitative canon, based on the nexus of similarity linking the copy to the model – but instead on the handcrafted work of the modification of sensible objects, one whose repeatability and transformative power determines the (transitory) arrangements of the sensible.

3. A third configuration of the aesthetics of the *chora* relates to its peculiar form of knowledge, similar to the eccentric gnoseology of the dream. In fact, when we "take [...] into consideration" the third kind of reality, which can be "grasped by a kind of bastard reasoning, without the support of sensation," and "is hardly credible,"

> we come to suffer from dreamlike illusions, and to claim that every existing thing must surely exist in some particular place and must occupy some space, and that nothing exists except what exists on earth or in the heavens. This dreaming keeps us asleep and makes it impossible for us to determine the truth about these and other related matters; we find it impossible to speak the truth even about the realm of true being, where illusion plays no part. And the truth is this: since even the conditions of an image's occurrence lie outside the image itself — since it is an ever-moving apparition of something else — it has to occur in something other than itself (and so somehow or other to cling on to existence), or else it would be nothing at all.[66]

The third kind is both what makes it possible for the images to exist, in so far as it offers them a space for their manifestation, and what confers on them their transitory and mutable characteristics, i.e. what makes them *phantasmata*, residual images lingering in the visual memory. What it does is to transform such images into dreams (along with the "mnestic" materials of the eidetic world) and *phantoms*, "erratic" figures wandering through different ontological and temporal planes of being, moving between the fixed and eternal existence of

[66] *Tim*. 52 a8-c5, p. 45.

ideas and the unstable and temporary plane of experience. In so doing, these images "measure" the ontological, aesthetic, gnoseological, and *chronological* distance that separates the time of dreams from that of wakefulness. In fact, in so far as they are traces and sensible memories of the eidetic paradigm, they make visible the gap between being and becoming, i.e. between ideas and *mimemata*; a gap that is, first and foremost, a temporal one, marked as it is by their phantasmatic existence, which makes them *anachronistic* signs of the ontological articulation of being, or, rather, signs of its anachronism. The *chora* is, indeed, "anachronistic; it 'is' the anachrony within being, or better: the anachrony of being. It anachronises being,"[67] in so far as it receives, produces, and records the traces of the ideas, of the passage of their phantasmatic images, of the constant movements of the poietic-mimetic processes of the combination and recombination of the sensible. To this anachronistic ontology there corresponds a likewise anachronistic aesthetics, the representations of which are always "out of time," offset, misaligned from the ideal model; an anachronic and phantasmatic aesthetics, which outlines an epistemological and perceptual framework closer to that of dreams than to that of truth (or even opinion).

Therefore, the metonymic ontology of the third kind allows for a composite aesthetics that illustrates at the same time the process of the modification of the sensible, its possible taxonomies (linguistic, poietic, mimetic ones), the anachronism of its representations and the oneiric mechanism of its "bastard" knowledge. Thus, in the brief exposition of the *triton genos*, the series ontology-*logos*-epistemology is replaced by that of chorology[68]-*taxis*[69]-aesthetics. Or, rather, both series are brought together – next to and in opposition to each other – to describe the weaving process of the fabric of the sensible.

4. Conclusion

Everything said so far applies only to the few pages that the *Timaeus* devotes to discussion of the third kind of reality, which ends, not by accident, with the return of the demiurge:

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67 Jacques Derrida, *On the Name*, p. 94.

68 On the ontological meaning of this term, see John Sallis, *Chorology: On the Beginning in Plato's* Timaeus, Indiana University Press, Bloomington-Indianapolis 1999.

69 The term refers here to all different kinds of operations of linguistic conjunction (hypotaxis, parataxis, syntaxis).

> This explains, of course, how they [i.e. the elements] came to occupy different locations even before they had become the constituents of the orderly universe that came into existence. Not only were they disproportionate and erratic, however, before that event, but even when the organization of the universe was first taken in hand, fire, water, earth, and air, despite displaying certain hints of their true natures, were still wholly in the kind of state you'd expect anything to be with no god present. Finding them in that condition, then, the first thing the god did, when he came to organize the universe, was use shapes and numbers to assign them definite forms.[70]

The demiurge fixes and inscribes the eidetic order – which until then had existed "somehow" next to that of the *chora* – through the shaping of the universe, starting (again) from the elements. Such a work of shaping is conducted according to the rules of the *logos*, i.e. by "measuring" the sensible on the ideal model and, in so doing, immobilising it through proportions and arranging it into numeric-geometric figures that *arrest* the metonymic transitions of the *chora*.[71] The introduction of the god-artisan, the second father after the ideas, makes it possible to affirm and enforce the priority of the ontological order of the *logos* through the submission of metonymy and its ontology to the logical and ontological signification of metaphor. In so doing, it establishes what Muraro calls the "hypermetaphoricity regime,"[72] in which the oppositional balance between metonymy and metaphor is broken in favour of the latter. Here, in this passage of the *Timeus*, the dominion of the *logos* that will rule most of the history of metaphysics – thus becoming the main polemical target of the philosophies of difference – is instituted. The Platonic argument of the third kind therefore represents, by virtue of its heteronomy, equivocity, and anachrony, the always available possibility of another genealogical beginning and the point of "catastrophe" of the (historical, logical, and epistemological) traditional order. That is, it represents the possibility of a metonymic reconfiguration of the sensible – and thus of a different language – that is able to give ontological, linguistic, and aesthetic form to what remains to be said.

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70 *Tim.* 53 a4, p. 46.

71 Here I am referring to Lacan's well-known theory of language, metonymy, and the signifying chain. Luisa Muraro deals with the Lacanian interpretation of Jakobson's linguistic theory in "To Knit or to Crochet" (see in particular pp. 82–89).

72 *Ibid.*, p. 112.

Povzetki | Abstracts

Isabelle Alfandary
An Irresistible Death Drive?
Key words: Freud, death drive, drives, death

In what Freud identifies as the third phase of the theory of drives, he makes the death drive the pivot of the economy of drives. The end of the dominance of the pleasure principle, and the taking over by the death drive, remain no less profoundly puzzling. It is precisely the question of death in the death drive that I addressed in the article, by taking and following to the letter, as much as possible, Freud's hypothesis-turned-thesis. The article examines the status of the death drive within the Freudian economy of instincts, in order to ultimately establish the signification and the sense of death—or at least what Freud means by that—in his theory of drives.

Isabelle Alfandary
Neustavljivi smrtni gon?
Ključne besede: Freud, smrtni gon, goni, smrt

V Freudovi opredelitvi tretje faze teorije gonov je smrtni gon postavljen v središče ekonomije gonov. Konec prevlade načela ugodja in nadvlada smrtnega gona ne ostajata nič manj globoko enigmatična. V svojem članku bi rada obravnavala ravno vprašanje smrti v smrtnem gonu, in sicer tako, da kolikor je le mogoče in kar se da natančno sledim Freudovi hipotezi, ki je postala teza. V svojem članku se bom osredinila na preučitev statusa smrtnega gona znotraj freudovske ekonomije nagonov, zato da bi končno ugotovili pomen smrti – ali vsaj tisto, kar Freud s tem misli – v svoji teoriji gonov.

Jelica Šumič Riha
Transference: From *Agalma* to *Palea*
Keywords: transference, narcissism, image, transference love, the analyst's desire

Lacan choose to re-examine transference in Seminar VIII in order to write "a new chapter on analytic action." Setting out from Freud's contention according to which "transference, which seems ordained to be the greatest obstacle to psychoanalysis, becomes its most powerful ally," Lacan goes on to show how the position of the analyst is decisive in the handling of the transference. This commentary explicates why transference could be considered as compass that signals not only the analyst's orientation, but also his blun-

dering. If Lacan is constantly interrogating the concept of transference, this is because the question of transference is not only a theoretical one, but also a technical one, that of its handling in the cure. And, though transference is to be considered as that which "directs the way in which patients are treated," for Lacan, it is not the analysand who is to be guided, rather, as Lacan goes on, "the way in which" [the analysands] are treated governs the concept.

Jelica Šumič Riha

Transfer: od *agalma* do *palea*

Ključne besede: transfer, narcizem, podoba, transferna ljubezen, analitikova želja

V Seminarju VIII, posvečenem specifično vprašanju transferja, Lacan preiskuje transfer, zato da bi lahko napisal »novo poglavje o analitičnem delovanju«. Izhajajoč iz Freudove teze, da je transfer, ki naj bi bil največja ovira za psihoanalizo, postal njen največji zaveznik, Lacan pokaže, da je analitikov položaj odločilen pri vodenju transferja. V pričujočem komentarju transfer obravnavamo kot kompas, ki pokaže ne le, kakakšna je analitikova usmeritev, marveč opozori tudi na njegove napake. Če Lacan neutrudno preiskuje koncept transferja, je to zato, ker problem transferja ni zgolj teoretski, marveč je tudi tehničen, saj zadeva vodenje zdravljenja. Toda čeprav je iz rokovanja s transferjem razvidno, kako so analizandi obravnavani, po Lacanu ni mogoče reči, da gre v analizi za vodenje analizandov, pač pa gre vse prej za to, da način, kako so analizandi obravnavani, določa koncept transferja.

Cindy Zeiher

Lacan's Love for Socrates

Key words: love, desire, Lacan, Socrates, transference

Plato's *Symposium* puts love to work via the tasks of thinking and speaking about it, the very intention behind that night of drinking and feasting. Lacan however puts *The Symposium* to work via the praxis of psychoanalysis. He does this for two reasons, firstly, in order to examine closely philosophy's potential to think love in relation to desire, and secondly, to enable the dimension of the unconscious to become a part of philosophy. In Lacan's consideration of *The Symposium* love is both thought and written, being neither fully inclusive of nor wholly outside language. Here love is a way of handling the unconscious and in particular the illusory nature of *agalma*. For Lacan, *The Symposium* allows a space for desire and love to coexist in a tragic transference which is why we can think of Lacan's eighth seminar, *Transference* as a love letter to his beloved Socrates.

Cindy Zeiher

Lacanova ljubezen do Sokrata

Ključne besede: ljubezen, želja, Lacan, Sokrat, transfer

Platonov *Simpozij* mobilizira ljubezen s tem, ko si zastavi nalogo misliti in govoriti o ljubezni, kar je bil tudi namen tiste noči pitja in gostije. Lacan pa mobilizira *Simpozij* s pomočjo psihoanalitične prakse. To stori iz dveh razlogov. Prvič, da bi natančno preučil zmožnost filozofije, da misli ljubezen v razmerju do želje, in drugič, da bi omogoči razsežnosti nezavednega, da postane del filozofije. V Lacanovem premisleku o *Simpoziju* je ljubezen hkrati predmet mišljenja in pisanja, saj ni niti popolnoma vključena v govorico, niti ni popolnoma zunaj nje. Tu je ljubezen način rokovanja z nezavednim, predvsem pa z iluzorno naravo agalme. Za Lacana *Simpozij* odpira prostor, v katerem želja in ljubezen sobivata v tragičnem transferju, zato lahko Lacanov osmi seminar Transfer mislimo kot ljubezensko pismo njegovemu dragemu Sokratu.

Arthur Bradley

Lacan's War Games: Cybernetics, Sovereignty and War in Seminar II

Key words: Lacan, cybernetics, Schmitt, Koyré, Schuhl, Kojève

This essay offers a new reading of Lacan's materialist definition of consciousness in Seminar II: *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-5* which interprets it as a work of political, or even military, theory. To summarize the argument, I seek to position Lacan's thought experiment seminar within the historical context not only of the emergence of post-war cybernetic theory but within the longer history of the philosophy of the "machine" that stretches from Descartes and Hobbes up to contemporary philosophers like Koyré, Schuhl and Kojève. If the machine metaphor has a long history within philosophical anthropology – where it is variously used to solve the problem of free will, consciousness and so on – I argue that it is also an enduring political trope which has, from the beginning, been deployed to describe the relationship between sovereignty and government, rule and exception and even war and peace. In conclusion, I argue that Lacan's thought experiment does not merely dramatize the phenomenological supersession of the sovereign ego by the "machine" of consciousness, but the political overthrow of the premodern sovereign person by the "machine" of the modern juridical, political – and even military – order.

Arthur Bradley

Lacanove vojne igre: kibernetika, suverenost in vojna v Seminarju II

Ključne besede: Lacan, kibernetika, Schmitt, Koyré, Schuhl, Kojéve

Članek ponuja novo branje Lacanove materialistične definicije zavesti iz Seminarja II: *Jaz v Freudovski teoriji in psihoanalitični tehniki 1954–1955*, ki ga interpretira kot delo politične, celo vojaške, teorije. Če povzamemo argument, članek poskuša umestiti Lacanovo predavanje o miselnem eksperimentu v zgodovinski kontekst ne zgolj pojava povojne kibernetske teorije, temveč v daljšo zgodovino filozofije »stroja«, ki se razteza od Descartesa in Hobbesa vse do sodobnih filozofov kot so Koyré, Schuhl in Kojève. Če ima metafora stroja dolgo zgodovino znotraj filozofske antropologije, kjer je različno uporabljena za rešitev problemov svobodne volje, zavesti itd., pa avtor trdi, da je metafora stroja tudi dolgotrajen politični trop, ki je bil vse od začetka razvit za opis razmerja med suverenostjo in vlado, med pravilom in izjemo ter celo med vojno in mirom. Avtor v zaključku sklene, da Lacanov miselni eksperiment ne dramatizira zgolj fenomenološke nadomestitve suverenega jaza s »strojem« zavesti, temveč politično strmoglavljenje predmoderne suverene osebe s strani »stroja« modernega pravnega, političnega in celo vojaškega reda.

Adrian Johnston

Working-Through Christianity: Lacan and Atheism

Key words: Freud, Lacan, psychoanalysis, religion, Christianity, atheism

Whereas Sigmund Freud's rapport with religious content seems unambiguously antagonistic, Jacques Lacan's relationship with religion generally and Christianity particularly appears to some to have a different, more ambivalent character. This apparent ambivalence has led to readings of Lacan according to which he is either a principled agnostic on (anti-)philosophical grounds or even an especially subtle (Christian) theological thinker. Herein, I argue against both of these types of readings by exhaustively establishing Lacan's atheist credentials. In so doing, I seek, first, to elucidate the distinctive Lacanian conception of the essential features of true atheism and, second, to distinguish atheism *à la* Lacan from other varieties of irreligiosity. Moreover, I revisit the later years of Lacan's teaching with an eye to asking questions about belief and disbelief pushing off from crucial points Lacan makes primarily during this period: Is atheism an indispensable aspect of the analytic experience? Can analysis produce subjects fully divested of any trace of theistic commitments? Is it possible and/or desirable for persons to abandon entirely everything associated with religiosity? What might the consequences of such abandonment be for subjects' libidinal, desiring lives? If certain theistic dimensions are inescapable horizons for speaking subjectivity, is there any prospect for the invention,

perhaps aided by psychoanalysis, of historically unprecedented forms of what religion has covered throughout history hitherto?

Adrian Johnston

Predelava krščanstva: Lacan in ateizem

Ključne besede: Freud, Lacan, psihoanaliza, religija, krščanstvo, ateizem

Medtem ko je Freudov odnos do religiozne vsebine nedvoumno antagonističen, pa se nekaterim zdi, da ima Lacanovo razmerje do religije nasploh in do krščanstva posebej drugačen, bolj ambivalenten značaj. Ta navidezna ambivalenca je vodila do branj, v skladu s katerimi je Lacan bodisi iz (anti-)filozofskih temeljev izhajajoč načelen agnostik, bodisi je celo posebej subtilen (krščanski) teološki mislec. Avtor se v članku zoperstavi obema navedenima tipoma branj, in sicer tako, da izčrpno razvije Lacanova ateistična priporočila. Na ta način poskuša, prvič, pojasniti specifično lacanovsko pojmovanje bistvenih potez resničnega ateizma, ter, drugič, razločiti ateizem *à la* Lacan od drugih različic nereligioznosti. Nadalje, avtorja Lacanovo pozno poučevanje zanima z vidika vprašanj verovanja in neverovanja, ki nas odvračajo od ključnih točk, ki jih Lacan primarno artikulira v tistem obdobju: je ateizem nepogrešljiv vidik analitičnega izkustva? Lahko analiza proizvede subjekte, ki so popolnoma oropani vseh sledi teistične zaveze? Je mogoče in/ali zaželeno, da osebe v celoti opustijo vse, kar je povezano z religioznostjo? Kakšne bi lahko bile posledice take opustitve za libidinalna, želeča življenja subjektov? Če so določene teistične razsežnosti neizogibni horizonti govoreče subjektivnosti, ali obstaja kakšen obet za invencijo, morda s pomočjo psihoanalize, zgodovinsko neprecedenčnih oblik tistega, kar je skozi zgodovino do sedaj pokrivala religija?

Peter Klepec

On Lacan's *The Triumph of Religion* and Related Matters

Key words: Lacan, psychoanalysis, religion, negativity, atheism, capitalism, Benjamin, 24/7, narcocapitalism

The points of departure of the article are theses from Lacan's *The Triumph of Religion*. The text attempts to provide elements for an understanding thereof by relating it to Lacan's own work as well as some other contexts. Although Lacan's position can be elucidated by different conceptual pairs (psychoanalysis/religion; symptom/world; "what does not go well"/"what goes well"; psychoanalysis /religion) and related to contemporary anxiety and discontent with scientific and technological advancement/progress, the text first points out the context of the word "triumph" in Lacan. It pertains to the Imaginary in Lacan's sense, which is also related to Kojève's Hegel and to "the end of the history" (Kojève). This particular "triumph of religion" is exposed by a rather unknown Kojève's

text from 1946, which defines the need for a Latin Empire, a project that Kojève was engaded in and which is now known as EU. The contemporary European relation to science and critical theory, the demand for their operationability, the omnipresence of evaluation procedures, and the Accoyer affair from 2003 in relation to psychoanalysis put Lacan's claim as to the "triumph of religion" in a rather different context. The second part of the text points out some of Lacan's key claims about science and religion, his thesis on "a true religion", Christianity and atheism. The final part of the text presents yet another context for *The Triumph* and puts the latter in the context of Benjamin's claim about capitalism as religion defined by its tendency to supress sleep and rest (Crary). This can be achieved only artificially and with the help of pharmacology, drugs and of what Laurent de Sutter names "narcocapitalism".

Peter Klepec

O Lacanovem *Triumfu religije* in o nekaterih z njim povezanih rečeh

Ključne besede: Lacan, psihoanaliza, religija, negativnost, ateizem, kapitalizem, Benjamin, 24/7, narkokapitalizem

Tekst izhaja iz tez v Lacanovem tekstu *Triumf religije*. Podati skuša elemente za njegovo razumevanje, postavlja ga v kontekst Lacanovega opusa ter nekaterih drugih kontekstualnih umestitev. Čeprav je Lacanovo izhodišče mogoče opredeliti skozi celo kopico pojmovnih parov (psihoanaliza/religija; simptom/svet; »tisto, kar ne gre«/»kar gre dobro«; psihoanaliza/znanost) in ga umestiti glede na sodobno tesnobo ter nelagodje ob znanstvenem napredku, tekst najprej izpostavlja, kaj za Lacan sploh je »triumf«, tega naveže na Imaginarno, Kojèvega Hegla in »konec zgodovine« (Kojève). Ta je določen kot »triumf religije«, kakor ga izpostavi Kojèvov tekst iz leta 1946, ki opredeljuje potrebo po ustanovitvi Latinskega imperija, kar je predstavljal tudi Kojèvov povojni angažma za ustanovitev tega, kar je danes EU. Sodobna evropska situacija v razmerju do znanosti in kritične teorije, zahteve po njuni operacionabilnosti, vseprisotnost postopkov evaluacije, afera Accoyer iz 2003 v povezavi s psihoanalizo, v nekoliko drugačen kontekst postavljajo Lacanovo tezo o »triumfu religije«. V nadaljevanju tekst izpostavi ključne Lacanove postavke v razmerju do znanosti in do religije, teze o »resnični religiji«, krščanstvu in ateizmu. V zadnjem delu tekst predlaga še nek drugačen kontekst za razumevanje obravnavanega Lacanovega teksta, kontekst kapitalizma kot religije (Benjamin), ki ga opredeljuje težnja po nenehni ukinitvi spanca in počitka (Crary), kar je mogoče umetno vzdrževati le s pomočjo farmacevtske industrije, drog in tega, kar Laurent de Sutter imenuje »narkokapitalizem«.

Rok Benčin

Art between Affect and Indifference in Hegel, Adorno, and Rancière

Key words: aesthetics, philosophy, affect, indifference, autonomy of art, political art, Hegel's aesthetics, aesthetic regime of art

What role can aesthetics as the philosophy of autonomous art assign to affect? Since Hegel, artistic autonomy has manifested itself as an indifferent form of appearance that "confronts us like a blessed god." Is thinking art through affect thus necessarily the introduction of a heteronomy, a hidden economy that subverts the indifferent surface of autonomous appearance? The paper goes in the opposite direction by exploring the affectivity immanent to art's very indifference. It discusses Hegel's struggle to distinguish the divine indifference of the ideal artwork from the ironic indifference that indicates the end of art, Adorno's observation that art is obliged to express suffering but can only do so in a medium that is essentially indifferent to it, and Rancière's reaffirmation of indifference as the specifically aesthetic power to affect by displacing the coordinates of sensible experience. Hegel and Adorno both affirmed the indifference of art, but also attempted to ground it in some kind of substantiality. For Rancière, on the other hand, indifference is the only substantiality art can have.

Rok Benčin

Umetnost med afektom in indiferenco pri Heglu, Adornu in Rancièru

Ključne besede: estetika, filozofija, afekt, indiferenca, avtonomija umetnosti, politična umetnost, Heglova estetika, estetski režim umetnosti

Kakšno vlogo lahko estetika kot filozofija avtonomne umetnosti pripiše afektu? Od Hegla naprej se avtonomija umetnosti manifestira kot indiferentna oblika videza, ki »nam stoji nasproti kot blažen bog«. Ali mišljenje umetnosti skozi afekt potemtakem nujno pomeni vnos heteronomije – skrite ekonomije, ki spodkoplje indiferentno površino avtonomnega videza? Članek gre v nasprotno smer in razišče afektivnost, notranjo sami indiferenci umetnosti. Obravnava Heglove težave pri razločitvi božanske indiference idealne umetnine od ironične indiference, ki napoveduje konec umetnosti, Adornovo opažanje, da je umetnost zavezana izražanju trpljenja, ki pa ga lahko izrazi le v do njega bistveno indiferentnem mediju, ter Rancièrovo reafirmacijo indiference kot specifično estetske moči afekcije skozi premestitev koordinat čutnega izkustva. Hegel in Adorno sta zagovarjala indiferenco umetnosti, a jo vseeno poskušala utemeljiti na nečem substancialnem, po Rancièru pa je indiferenca edina substancialnost, ki jo umetnost lahko ima.

Lea Kuhar

Materialism of Suffering and Left-wing Melancholia

Key words: left-wing melancholia, Marx, object-loss, materialism of suffering, fidelity

Left-wing melancholia is usually perceived as a state of self-observation that turns emancipatory struggles anti-revolutionary, anti-social and even apolitical. In the article I attempt to delineate a possible line of defence against these accusations, claiming that left-wing melancholia is neither a nostalgic remembrance of past revolutionary ideals, nor a mourning of their failures, but rather *a form of fidelity to future actions, the content of which remains unknown*. Following Freud and Agamben, I argue that melancholia rather not a reaction to a loss of any specific object but is an active stance that produces its object as something that is lost, as an *object-loss*. I claim that in the case of left-wing melancholia this object-loss has a triple function: it functions as a recognition of the social non-relation; it produces a fictional object that functions as an opening of the possibility of other worlds; it claims allegiance to the fact that these possible worlds cannot be realized in the currently existing one.

Lea Kuhar

Materializem trpljenja in melanholija levice

Ključne besede: melanholija levice, Marx, objekt-izguba, materializem trpljenja, zvestoba

Melanholija levice je običajno pojmovana kot stanje samoopazovanja, ki emancipacijske boje sprevrača v protirevolucionarne, protidružbene in celo apolitične. V članku ponudim branje, ki melanholijo levice obrani danih obtožb. Trdim, da melanholija levice ni nostalgično spominjanje preteklih revolucionarnih idealov, niti ni žalovanje za njihovimi neuspehi temveč je *zvestoba prihodnjim dejanjem, katerih vsebina ostaja neznana*. Izhajajoč iz Freuda in Agambena trdim, da melanholija ni reakcija na izgubo določenega predmeta temveč je aktivna drža, ki proizvede lastni predmet kot nekaj, kar je izgubljeno, kot *objekt-izgubo*. Moja teza je, da ima v primeru leve melanholije objekt-izguba trojno funkcijo: deluje kot pripoznanje družbenega ne-razmerja; ustvari fiktivni objekt, ki odpira možnost obstoja drugačnih svetov; vztraja na tem, da drugačnih svetov ni mogoče uresničiti znotraj trenutno obstoječega sveta.

Anna Montebugnoli

"Something remains to be said": On the Metonymic Ontology of Platonic *Chora*

Key words: Plato, *chora*, metaphor, metonymy, ontology

The concept of *chora* stands in the Platonic *corpus* as a peculiar philosophical puzzle: introduced in the *Timaeus* in order to account for the elements' cycles of transformation, it seems to represent a hybrid nature, combining the notions of space and that matter. Most scholars have tried to solve the *chora's* riddle by translating its indistinct character in a well-defined philosophical concept – or a set of concepts logically bound to each other. Using some of the conceptual tools developed by the thought of difference, this research aims instead at analysing it as a *function*, more specifically as an onto-linguistic one, outlining a procedure for weaving a reality able to compete with the one carried out by the ideas and the *logos*. In so doing, the article also tries to identify, along the lines of the Platonic text, the terms of a series that differs from the traditional one of *episteme-logos-eidos*, and which is engrained in the linguistic mechanism of syntactic combination, in the peculiar ontology outlined by the *chora*, and in the aesthetic nature of this onto-linguistic composition.

Anna Montebugnoli

»Nekaj ostaja neizrečeno«: O metonimični ontologiji platonske *chore*

Ključne besede: Platon, *chora*, metafora, metonimija, ontologija

V Platonovem delu koncept *chore* predstavlja posebno filozofsko zagato. V *Timaju* je uveden kot pojasnilo cikla transformacije elementov, predstavlja pa hibridno naravo, ki združuje pojma prostora in materije. Običajno zagato *chore* rešujejo tako, da prevedejo njen nerazločen značaj v jasno definiran filozofski koncept ali niz med sabo logično povezanih konceptov. S konceptualnimi orodji mišljenja razlike si raziskava namesto tega prizadeva analizirati jo kot *funkcijo*, natančneje rečeno kot onto-lingvistično funkcijo, s katero orišemo proces tkanja realnosti, ki je zmožen konkurirati tistemu, ki ga opravljajo ideje in *logos*. Na ta način želimo v članku sledeč Platonovemu tekstu tudi razbrati člene serije, ki bi se razlikovala od tradicionalne episteme-logos-eidos in bila vpeta v lingvistični mehanizem sintaktične kombinacije, v posebno ontologijo, kot jo oriše *chora*, in v estetsko naravo te onto-lingvistične kompozicije.

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3. Granger, *op. cit.*, str. 31.
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